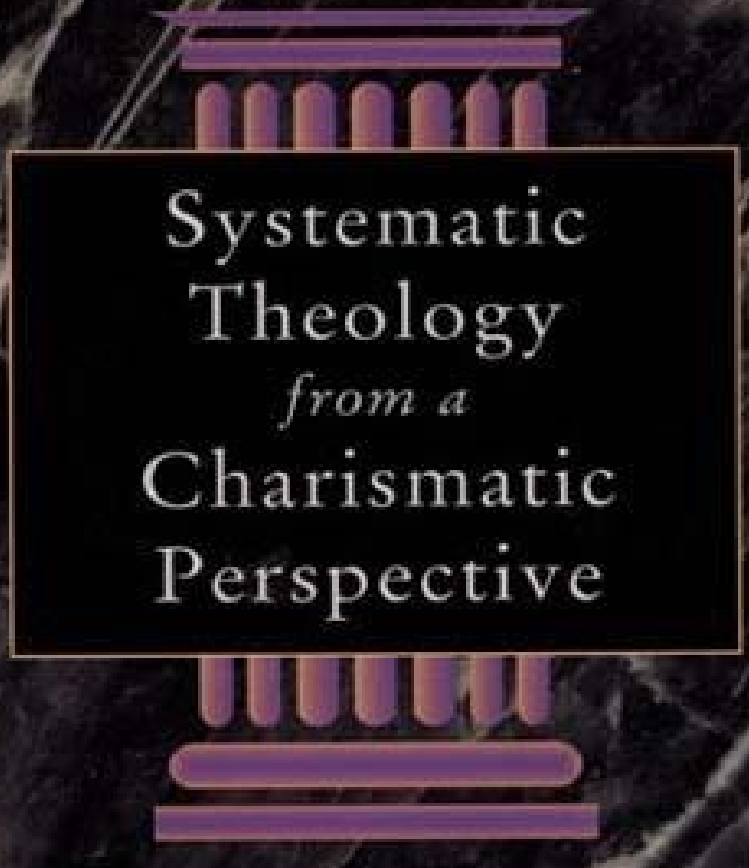
Renewal Theology



Systematic Theology *from a* Charismatic Perspective

Three Volumes in One

J. Rodman Williams

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CONTENTS

Cover
Title Page

Renewal Theology: God, the World, and Redemption
Renewal Theology: Salvation, the Holy Spirit, and Christian Living
Renewal Theology: The Church, the Kingdom, and Last Things

About the Publisher
Share Your Thoughts

Volume One

Renewal Theology

God, the World, and Redemption

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS
PREFACE
1. Introduction
2. The Knowledge of God
3. God
4. The Holy Trinity
5. Creation
6. Providence
7. Miracles
8. Angels
9. Man
10. Sin
11. The Effects of Sin
12. Covenant
13. The Incarnation
14. The Atonement
15. The Exaltation of Christ
BIBLIOGRAPHY

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	*Anchor Bible*
BAGD	Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*
BDB	*Brown, Driver, and Briggs, Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament*
EBC	*Expositor's Bible Commentary*
EDT	*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*
EGT	*Expositor's Greek Testament*
IB	*Interpreter's Bible*
IBC	*International Bible Commentary*
IDB	*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
ISBE	*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised Edition*
JB	Jerusalem Bible
KJV	King James Version
LCC	*Library of Christian Classics*
LXX	Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)
MT	Massoretic Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NBC	*New Bible Commentary*
NEB	New English Bible
NICNT	*New International Commentary of the New Testament*
NICOT	*New International Commentary of the Old Testament*
NIDNTT	*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*
NIGTC	*New International Greek Testament Commentary*
NIV	New International Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TNTC	*Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*

TOTC	*Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*
TWOT	*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UBS	United Bible Societies
WBC	*Word Bible Commentary*
WBE	*Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*
ZPEB	*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*

PREFACE

Renewal Theology is a study in the Christian faith. It deals with such basic matters as God and His relationship to the world, the nature of man and the tragedy of sin and evil, the person and work of Jesus Christ, the way of salvation, the coming of the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, and the Christian walk. These and many other related areas will be carefully considered.

The present volume will climax with the study of the person and work of Christ as set forth in the Incarnation, Atonement, and Exaltation.

The writing of *Renewal Theology* is first of all against the background of teaching theology since 1959 at three institutions: Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Austin, Texas; Melodyland School of Theology in Anaheim, California; and presently Regent University in Virginia Beach, Virginia. In each of these places it has been my responsibility to cover the full round of theology: the basic doctrines of the Christian faith. Accordingly, what is written in *Renewal Theology* comes largely from classroom experience: the regular preparation for teaching, interchange with students, and dialogue with faculty colleagues. In recent years much of the material now found in *Renewal Theology* has been used in classroom instruction and bears the marks, I trust, of living communication.

My concern throughout is to present Christian truth in such a way that it will be conversational—a kind of speaking in writing. In an earlier book entitled *Ten Teachings* (1974), which grew out of both preaching and teaching, I made a much briefer preliminary attempt. It is now my hope that all who read these pages in *Renewal Theology*—whether they are theological students, pastors, or laymen—will recognize this personal address to them.

The other aspect of the background for writing *Renewal Theology* is my participation since 1965 in the spiritual renewal movement in the church early described as “neo-Pentecostal” and more recently as “charismatic.” Many who are involved in this movement today speak of it simply as “the renewal.” In past years I have sought to deal with certain distinctives in the renewal through three books: *The Era of the Spirit* (1971), *The Pentecostal Reality* (1972), and *The Gift of the Holy Spirit Today* (1980). In *Renewal Theology* my concern is much broader, namely, to deal with the full range of Christian truth. It will nonetheless be “renewal theology,” because I write as one positioned within the renewal

context.

Renewal Theology is in one sense an expression of revitalization. When I came into the renewal in 1965, “God is dead” language was abroad in the land. What happened in my case and that of many others was God’s own answer: a powerful self-revelation. In *The Era of the Spirit* I wrote: “He may have seemed absent, distant, even non-existent to many of us before, but now His presence is vividly manifest” (p. 10). John Calvin had long ago declared about God that “the recognition of him consists more in living experience than in vain and high-flown speculation” (.*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.10.2, Battles trans.). Now that there was an enhancement of “living experience” in my life, there came about a fresh zeal for teaching theology in its many facets. As I said later in *Era*, “A new dynamic has been unleashed that has vitalized various theological categories” (p. 41). *Renewal Theology* is an expression of theological revitalization.

In most of the pages that follow there will be little difference from what may be found in many books of theology. This is especially true of the present volume where the topics generally follow traditional patterns. However, what I hope the reader will catch is the underlying excitement and enthusiasm about the reality of the matters discussed. The old being renewed *is* something to get excited about!

But *Renewal Theology* also represents an effort to reclaim certain biblical affirmations that have been largely neglected or given insufficient attention. In line with the setting of this theology within the contemporary renewal, there is also a deep concern to relate relevant renewal emphases to more traditional categories. Since it is my conviction that church tradition and theology have generally failed to treat adequately the aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit that may be called “pentecostal” and “charismatic,” there will be an earnest attempt to bring these matters to light. Volume 2 will deal particularly with this area; however, in many other places in *Renewal Theology* there will be pentecostal/charismatic input.

Finally, the concern of *Renewal Theology* in every area of study is *truth*. This is not an attempt to advance a particular cause but to understand in totality what the Christian faith proclaims. It is not only a matter of individual doctrines but also of the full round of Christian truth. With this in mind, it has been my prayerful desire that “the Spirit of truth” at every point will lead “into all the truth” (John 16:13).

I extend my gratitude to various colleagues on the Regent University faculty who have read the material in whole or in part and have offered many valuable

suggestions. I am especially grateful to Dr. John Rea and Dr. Charles Holman of the Biblical Studies faculty for their help in this regard. I also offer many thanks to Mark Wilson, Regent University assistant, for his initial editing of all the material. Appreciation is likewise extended to graduate assistants Helena O'Flanagan and Cynthia Robinson for reference work and to typists Ruth Dorman and Juanita Helms. In bringing this material to publication I also greatly appreciate the fine, cooperative relationship with Stanley Gundry, Ed van der Maas, and Gerard Terpstra of Zondervan Publishing House.

Most of all, I am profoundly grateful to my wife, Jo, for her encouragement and help throughout the long process of bringing this work to completion.

I close this preface with the challenging words of Paul to Titus: "As for you, teach what befits sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1). By God's grace I trust that what is found in the pages to follow will be "sound doctrine." I have no desire to teach anything else.

1
Introduction

This opening chapter is concerned with the basic matter of theology. What is its nature, function, and method? The relevance of renewal will be touched on; however, the primary emphasis will be the question of theology itself.

I. THE NATURE OF THEOLOGY

A proposed definition: the contents of the Christian faith as set forth in orderly exposition by the Christian community. Various aspects of this definition of theology will be considered in the pages to follow.

A. The Contents of the Christian Faith

Theology sets forth what the Christian faith teaches, affirms, holds to be true: its doctrines.

Christian faith has definite tenets, and the range is wide, e.g., the Triune God, creation, providence, sin, salvation, sanctification, the church, sacraments, "last things." Theology is concerned with what is true in its totality.

From its earliest days the Christian community has been deeply committed to doctrine or teaching. The first thing said about the early Christians was that "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching"[1] (Acts 2:42). Throughout the New Testament there are many references to the importance of doctrine[2] —i.e., of "sound doctrine."[3] Such concern is both for individual doctrines and for "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). This concern continues to the present day. The Christian community is a teaching community.

Theology is concerned with truth. This means, first, a faithful and accurate explication of the contents of Christian faith—hence, to be true to the substance of the faith. It means, second, because of the conviction of Christian faith to be *the* truth about God, man, salvation, etc., theology is concerned with more than accuracy: it is concerned with truth as conformity to ultimate reality.

The focus of theology is God. For although theology deals with the whole round of Christian truth, the focal point is God: *His* relation to the universe and man. The word *theology* derives from *theos* and *logos*, the former meaning "God" and the latter "word," "speaking," "discourse"; hence, "word about God," "speaking about God," "discourse about God." In the narrowest sense, as the etymology suggests, theology deals with nothing but God Himself: His being and attributes. However, as is now commonly the case, the word is used to refer not only to God but also to the whole of His relations to the world and man. In theology we never leave the area of speaking about God: theology is *theocentric* through and through.

It should be added that theology is neither praise nor proclamation, which would be either a speaking to or a speaking from God. Rather, it limits itself to discourse: a speaking about God. Theology accordingly fulfills its task not in the first or second person but in the third person. In discoursing about God, theology presupposes praise and proclamation and exists for the purpose of defining their content. Theology is therefore the servant of the Christian faith.

The word *theology* is also frequently used as an all-inclusive term to refer to

the study of whatever has to do with the Bible, the church, and the Christian life. A “school of theology” is a place where many disciplines are studied: the Bible, church history, practical ministries. None of these studies seeks as such to explicate the content of the Christian faith; yet they are all closely related to one another and to the content of faith. In this broad sense a theologically well-educated and well-trained person is skilled in these related disciplines.

B. In Orderly Exposition

Theology is not just doctrine but the articulation of relationships and connections among various doctrines. The concern is that "the whole counsel of God" be set forth in comprehensive and orderly manner.

The truth of Christian faith is an *architectonic* whole. It makes up a structure, a pattern of interlocking harmony where all the pieces fit together and blend with one another: creation with providence, covenant with salvation, spiritual gifts with eschatology, and so on. Even more, since the background of all theological reflection is the living God in relationship to the living creature, theology seeks to unfold Christian doctrine as a living reality. It is not, therefore, the architecture of inanimate mortar and stones nor the structure of a beautiful but lifeless cathedral; it is rather the articulation of living truth in all of its marvelous variety and unity.

This means also that each doctrine—as a part of the whole—must be set forth as clearly and coherently as possible. This is to be done from many aspects, e.g., its content, background, basic thrust, relevance. The doctrine is to be made as comprehensible as possible. Because all Christian doctrines relate to God who is ultimately beyond our comprehension, there will inevitably be some element of mystery, or transcendence, that cannot be reduced to human understanding. Nonetheless, within these limits the theological effort must be carried on.

Theology is an *intellectual discipline.* It is a "-logy" and thus the reflecting upon and ordering of a certain area of knowledge.[4] It is one way of loving God with all of one's mind (Matt. 22:37) and thus a mental labor of love that seeks to set forth as cogently as possible the ways of God with man. A theologian cannot display or use too much reason, for though his reason cannot fully comprehend or elucidate Christian truth, he is called on to express as clearly as possible what is declared in the mysteries of faith. Theology, accordingly, is "faith seeking understanding."[5]

Since orderly exposition is the way of theology, we may now add that it is *systematic* theology. The word *system* points up the interlocking and interdependent character of all the doctrines that make up theology. In some ways, the expression "systematic theology" is a tautology, for theology is itself orderly explication and thus implies systematic procedure. Nonetheless, the expression has come to be widely used to differentiate it from "biblical theology," "historical theology," and "practical theology." These may be briefly

noted in their relation to systematic theology.

Biblical theology is the orderly arrangement and explication of teachings in the Bible. This may be subdivided into Old Testament theology and New Testament theology, and still further, for example, into Pauline and Johannine theology. Historical theology sets forth in orderly fashion the way the church over the centuries has received and articulated the Christian faith in creeds, confessions, and other formulations. Practical theology is an orderly study of the way Christian faith is practiced: through preaching, teaching, counseling, and the like. Systematic theology is usually placed after biblical and historical theology since the Christian faith, which is rooted in the Bible, has come down through the centuries. And it is placed before practical theology because it provides the content of what is to be put into practice.

The expression "doctrinal theology" is often used to refer to essentially the same area as "systematic theology." Because theology is concerned with the articulation of the contents of the Christian faith (thus the doctrines), it is both systematic and doctrinal. Because the word *systematic* expresses the articulation, and the word *doctrinal* the content, the terms may be used interchangeably.

Another expression, particularly common on the European scene, that needs to be related to systematic theology, is "dogmatic theology." Dogmatic theology (or simply "dogmatics") refers especially to theology as set forth in the dogmas, creeds, and pronouncements of the church. Dogmas have to do with the accepted tenets of the church or a particular church—what is accepted and believed. So dogmatic theology seeks to set these tenets forth as clearly as possible. Dogmatic theology accordingly bears a close relationship to historical theology in that it focuses on historical formulations of faith. It is akin to systematic theology in that it seeks to elucidate and set forth the accepted formulations in orderly fashion for the contemporary church.[6] Systematic theology, while related to historical formulations, operates more freely in relation to them. To conclude: while all dogmatic theology is systematic, not all systematic theology is dogmatic; it may be more biblical, or even more philosophical.[7]

The area of *apologetics* should be mentioned next. It is this theological discipline that presents argumentation and evidences for the validity of the Christian faith. In 1 Peter 3:15 are the words "Always be prepared to make a defense *[apologia]* to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you." Also note 2 Corinthians 10:5: "We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ."[8] The apologist seeks to provide, insofar as possible, a rational defense of the Christian faith. Apologetics is directed to the world of unbelief and attempts

to establish certain aspects of Christian faith—for example, the veracity of Scriptures, the existence of God, the deity and resurrection of Christ, and the immortality of the soul—as true on the basis of rational and empirical evidence only. No appeal is made to faith or Scripture but simply to what a rational and open mind can comprehend. Apologetics, therefore, is not directly theology that sets forth the contents of the faith without argumentation or defense. However, apologetics presupposes that faith, and is quite systematic in its attempts to set forth reasons for it.

Ethics is another area that needs consideration. Ethics, the discipline concerned with moral conduct, may be a wholly secular pursuit—for example, in the study of Aristotelian ethics. Insofar as ethics is Christian ethics, however, there is a vital connection with theology. For the Christian, faith is directed not only to love of God but also to love of the neighbor. Wherever the relation to the neighbor is concerned, one is in the realm of ethics. Christianity has to do with both faith and morals, and one without the other is a truncated theology. In this sense ethics is identical with theology in its moral dimension. But also as Christian ethics becomes more concrete in its application to such contemporary problems as war, race relations, the economic order, sexual behavior, and ecology, it is then an auxiliary to theology. Like apologetics, ethics presupposes the substance of theology and serves as a concrete application of it.

C. By the Christian Community

Theology is a function of the Christian community, which has had many functions since the earliest days. In addition to “the apostles’ teaching,” which we previously noted, the early Christians also devoted themselves to “fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Broadly speaking, the main functions might be described as worship, proclamation, teaching, fellowship, and service. When the Christian community seeks to set forth its basic understanding—its teachings—in orderly fashion, this is theology.

Since theology is a function of the Christian community, it is apparent that theology cannot be an exercise in neutral observation but can be done only by those who are genuinely participants.[9] Of course, many things might be written about God and His ways (and they could even seem to be adequate and true), but without participation there is inadequate grasp of what it is all about. Legitimate theology springs out of the life of the Christian community, thereby probing depths and heights otherwise foreclosed to ordinary understanding.

Finally, it should be added that while theology is a function of the Christian community, it often carries forward its theological work through special assemblies, councils, and commissions that are particularly devoted to the elaboration of the tenets of the Christian faith. Here the role of the theologian as a specialist in doctrinal matters is highly significant. He may be influential through his contribution to an assemblage seeking to define doctrine or simply through his writings that have credence in the Christian community. In any event, whether the work of theology is performed by a large assembly, a small group, or an individual, the matter of participation continues to be of critical importance.

II. THE FUNCTION OF THEOLOGY

Theology has a number of functions. Among these are clarification, integration, correction, declaration, and challenge.

A. Clarification

It is important to set forth as clearly as possible what it is that the Christian community affirms. This is primarily for the benefit of persons in the community who need instruction in the faith. Often there is lack of understanding in various doctrinal areas. Participation in Christian experience is, of course, the primary thing, but this does not automatically bring about full understanding. Much further instruction is needed in order that increasing clarification of truth may occur.[10]

It is a sad fact that many Christians are quite unclear about what they believe. They need—and often want—instruction about the contents of the faith. They are calling out for more adequate teaching. This is the task that theology is called to perform.

B. Integration

Theology should help bring it all together by integrating one truth with another. Theology is not only a matter of clarification of individual doctrines but also the demonstration of how these fit into a total pattern. Earlier I mentioned that the truth of Christian faith is an architectonic whole. In the teaching of theology there is the continuing effort to show how one part relates to another.

The purpose of another discipline, philosophy, has sometimes been described as “to see reality and to see it whole.” This applies all the more to theology, in which reality has not only been seen but also experienced, and therefore may be declared in its totality. Integration is important in all of life, and surely this is true in the area of Christian faith.

For many Christians there is need for integration of their Bible reading and study into a unified picture of truth. The Old and New Testaments in many areas of doctrine are not easy to relate to each other. This is also the case in relating the teaching of individual books to one another. There is also need among many Christians for integrating the truth they have received with various aspects of their own experience. This is true both in relation to their own Christian experience and their day-by-day experience of the world around them. They are largely ignorant of how it all fits together.

C. Correction

Theology serves as a corrective to departures from the truth. By articulating as clearly as possible the various truths of the Christian faith, it indirectly seeks to redress imbalances or errors that may have occurred. It is essential for the health of Christian faith to point away from such deviations.

Unfortunately, participation in Christian faith and experience is no guarantee against heresy creeping in. Indeed, most heresies that have plagued the church have arisen, not from opponents on the outside, but from misunderstandings on the inside. Sometimes this is due to overemphasis on a particular doctrine, thus blowing it out of proportion to its proper significance. Again, a heresy may begin as an honest misapprehension of a certain truth but, by being held over a period of time, it becomes increasingly distorted.[11] Or—and this is much more serious—because of the constant effort of evil forces to seduce the Christian community away from the truth, false teachings embraced may tragically be "doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1).[12]

In all of this the role of theology is of critical importance. There is a "unity of the faith" (Eph. 4:13) that rules out peripheral error. By articulating this more clearly, people will not be "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14) but will grow into full maturity. The urgency of theological teaching to safeguard the faith of Christians can scarcely be overemphasized.

D. Declaration

Another function of theology is to make known publicly what it is that the Christian community stands for. We say to the world, “This is the banner under which we stand; this is the truth that we proclaim for all to hear.”[13] Paul writes that “through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places” (Eph. 3:10). Of course, the church declares the wisdom of God in the preaching of the gospel; but particularly in her theological expression the manifoldness of divine truth is set forth for all to hear.

In order of priorities the primary thrust of theology is to the Christian community itself. The clarification, integration, and correction previously described are obviously related to the benefit and strengthening of those who participate in Christian faith and experience. However, there is this world-oriented function of declaration, the importance of which is not to be overlooked. If nothing more, it represents a kind of public accountability, a *raison d’etre* for the Christian community. And this—whatever the results—is not without some benefit in turn to the Christian community. There is undoubted value, both communal and personal, in taking a public stand.

Finally, although theology is not proclamation to the world, it may serve indirectly as an invitation to further investigation. When Christians firmly declare their stance, and do this in a responsible and articulate manner, the factor of credibility is thereby increased. Moreover, if such theology is written under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, it may all the more prepare the way for the direct witness that leads to life and salvation.

E. Challenge

Theology moves into areas of Christian thought that have often proved confusing, even divisive, and seeks to discover the truth. There are differences of doctrine within various Christian communities, often to the point of separating them from one another. Extremes have developed in the past over such matters as God's sovereignty and human freedom, the divinity and the humanity of Jesus, and the nature of sacraments. Presently, extremes are particularly apparent in the area of eschatology. It is the challenging task of theology to seek to discover where the truth lies and to set it forth clearly and coherently. Some differences may be recognized as largely a matter of semantics; others are much more substantive in character. In any event, theology faces this ever-present challenge.

The challenge may also be viewed in another way, namely, to explore areas of Christian truth that have not yet been sufficiently charted out.[14] In our day, this is especially true of the area of the Holy Spirit. The coming of the Holy Spirit, the spiritual gifts, the place of charismatic renewal in the life of the Christian community—all of this represents an area that has received only minimal theological attention in the past. It is surely paramount among the theological challenges of our time.

III. THE METHOD OF DOING THEOLOGY

How does one go about the task of articulating theology?

A. Seeking the Guidance of the Holy Spirit

It is only through the continuing direction of the Holy Spirit that genuine theological work can be done. “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13). These words of Jesus express the foundational fact that the Holy Spirit is *the* guide into all truth. The Christian community to whom “the Spirit of truth,” the Holy Spirit, has come has the Guide in its midst. This same Spirit “will teach you all things” (John 14:26).

The Holy Spirit, further, was promised not only to be *with* us but also *in* us: “He dwells with you, and will be in you” (John 14:17). Hence, the Christian community has the Guide within, the Teacher, as an indwelling presence. The essential matter, accordingly, is to allow that internal reality, the Holy Spirit, to guide into all truth.

To go deeper: the basic fact of the Holy Spirit’s being the Spirit of truth and dwelling within means that truth is *already* resident within the Christian community. “You have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know” (1 John 2:20).[15] The anointing (or unction) of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, accordingly, means that when the Spirit guides into all truth, it is actually a matter of bringing forth or eliciting what is already known. Spiritual truth is implicit and is made explicit through the internal guidance of the Holy Spirit.

All this signifies that the work of theology, although it is done on the level of reflection, explication, and articulation of Christian truth, is not dealing with truth as foreign or external. The theologian himself, as a part of the Christian community, knows the truth implicitly. Through the immanent Spirit of truth, who guides into all truth, that truth becomes all the more fully searched out. This is the same Spirit who “searches all things, even the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:10 NIV), and who, accordingly, searches out the deep truths of Christian faith. The theologian works from this spiritual base and seeks to apply his best thought and reflection to ordering and setting forth what is given.

This continuing effort to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit by no means implies that truth is inevitably declared. Neither church nor theologian is infallible; to err is human. But the more the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, is sought and followed, the more adequately the work of the theology is carried out.

Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
And lighten with celestial fire;
Thou the anointing Spirit art,
Who dost Thy sevenfold gifts impart.[16]

This ancient prayer to the Holy Spirit might well be the continuing prayer undergirding all theological endeavor.

B. Reliance on the Scriptures

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are inspired by God and are to be fully relied on for the task of theology. They set forth in writing the declaration of divine truth and thus are the objective source and measure for all theological work. The Scriptures throughout provide the material data for Christian doctrine and subsequent theological formulation.

The words of 2 Timothy 3:16–17 are quite apropos: "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching [or "doctrine"], for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." According to this statement, the totality of Scripture is "God-breathed" (the literal meaning of "inspired")[17] and thus immediately given by God.[18] Thus there is an authoritativeness in Scripture that belongs to no human thoughts or words, no matter how much they are guided by the Holy Spirit. Human thoughts and words are not "God-breathed" and thus always need "reproof' and "correction." Hence theology must turn primarily to the Scriptures as it pursues its task.

This inspiration of Scripture refers to both the Old and New Testaments. The words of Paul in 2 Timothy might be viewed as having reference only to the Old Testament since the New Testament was obviously not yet complete. However, that Paul's writings, as well as certain others, were early recognized as Scripture is apparent from the words in 2 Peter 3:15–16 where, after speaking of Paul's letters, reference is made to "the other scriptures."[19]

Hence, the primary question for theology is, "What does the scripture say?"[20] For here alone is the objective rule of Christian truth. To be sure, the Holy Spirit guides into all truth, and the Christian community profoundly knows the things of God through the indwelling Spirit; however, there is the continuing need for the authority of Holy Scripture. Without such, because of human fallibility, truth soon becomes compounded with error. "What does the Scripture say?" is the critical question that must undergird all theological work.

It should be immediately added that there can be no basic difference between the truth the Christian community knows through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and what is set forth in Scripture. Since all Scripture is "God-breathed" (which means "God-Spirited")[21] or Spirit-given, it is the same Holy Spirit at work in both Scripture and community. However, in terms of that which is

authoritative and therefore normative, what is written in Scripture always has the primacy. It tests and judges every affirmation of faith and doctrine.

Several important additional matters should be noted:

1. There is great need for ever-increasing knowledge of the Scriptures—all of them. Ideally, one should have a working knowledge of the original languages. An interlinear translation is valuable especially when used in conjunction with lexicons. Comparing various English translations—such as the King James Version, the Revised Standard Version, the New American Standard Bible, the New English Bible, and the New International Version—is also helpful in getting a fuller perspective.

It is important, further, to learn all that is possible about the background, composition, and literary forms of the Bible; and therefore how better to study and understand it. Matters such as the historical and cultural context, the purpose of a given book, and the style of writing (e.g., history, poetry, parable, allegory) are essential to comprehend for arriving at proper interpretation. Moreover, it is important not to read a given passage in isolation but to view it in its broader setting, and if the meaning is not clear to compare it with other passages that may shed additional light. The whole subject of *hermeneutics*—namely, the principles of biblical interpretation—needs thorough comprehension if solid theological work is to be accomplished.

Most importantly, there should be continuous immersion in the Scripture. Timothy was commended by Paul: "From childhood you have known the sacred writings" (2 Tim. 3:15 NASB). He who would be a "man of God … complete, equipped for every good work" (v. 17), which includes the work of theology, needs to increase in knowledge of all the "sacred writings" throughout life. The words of Jesus Himself are of central importance: "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31–32). Jesus' words are the heart of Scripture, and by continuing in and living in them we know the truth. To be sure, the Holy Spirit is the guide to understanding, but only as we are immersed in the word of the Lord.

2. We are never to go beyond the Scripture in the search after truth. Paul enjoined the Corinthians to "learn not to exceed what is written [i.e., Scripture]" (1 Cor. 4:6).[22] This speaks against any extrabiblical source such as tradition, personal vision, or presumed new truth being put forward as additional or superior to what is inscribed in Holy Scripture. Sound doctrine established by genuine theological work cannot draw on other sources as being primary over Scripture.

Further, we must heed the words of Scripture that warn against private interpretation and distortion of Scripture. In 2 Peter we read, first, that "no

prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation" (1:20). This is an urgent warning against failing to stand under the authority of Scripture—though outward adherence may be claimed—but rather to subject it to one's own interpretation. Truth, however, is severely jeopardized when, though lip service is paid to Scripture, private interpretation prevails, and Scripture is emptied of its true meaning. A similar warning is given by Peter about the letters of Paul and "other Scriptures" which "the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16). The distortion of Scripture, which has often happened in the history of the church, is an even more serious matter than private interpretation, for it takes the truth of God and changes it.

Theology has a crucial role to play in both of these situations. I mentioned previously that one of the functions of theology is correction. Sad but commonplace is the vast number of private interpretations and distortions that parade under the name of "Bible truth." Christian thinking must help to ferret these out, while at the same time earnestly seeking not to fall prey to the same deceit.

3. Finally, there can be no true understanding of Scripture without the internal illumination of the Holy Spirit. Since all Scripture is "God-breathed," it is only when that breath of God, the Spirit of God, moves on the words that its meaning can be truly comprehended. The answer to "What does the Scripture say?" is more than a matter of knowledge of the information contained in it, even that gained by the most careful exegesis, awareness of the historical situation, appreciation of linguistic forms, etc. Scripture can be understood in depth only through the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

This means, accordingly, that the Christian community is the only community finally qualified to understand the Scriptures. Paul wrote to the Corinthians concerning his message: "And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:13).[23] Without the Spirit there is blindness in reading the Scriptures; with the Spirit there is illumination in understanding the things of God.

C. Familiarity With Church History

For theology to do its work adequately, there is also the need for familiarity with the history of the church. This means particularly the affirmations of church councils, creeds, and confessions, which contain the way the church has at various times expressed its tenets. The writings of early church fathers, of recognized theologians (the "doctors" of the church), of outstanding Bible commentators, and hence Christian thought through the ages—all this is grist for the theological mill.

The early church period with its post-apostolic and patristic writings, and also the ecumenical councils representing the whole church, is especially important. The Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Creed of Chalcedon—to mention a few of the great early universal creeds—have done much to set the pattern of orthodox Christian faith down through the centuries. Church confessions growing out of the Reformation, such as the Augsburg (Lutheran) and Westminster (Reformed), though not ecumenical, are also quite important. Roman Catholic formulations such as the Decrees of the Council of Trent and Vatican Councils I and II represent other significant doctrinal formulations. Most Protestant churches have some kind of doctrinal statement, and acquaintance with a number of these can be helpful.

It would be a grievous mistake to overlook almost 2000 years of church history in pursuing the work of theology. We are all the richer for the doctrinal, creedal, and confessional work that has gone on before us. This does not mean that any of these formulations are on the same level of authority as the Scriptures;[24] however, they should be listened to respectfully and allowed their secondary place in theological reflection. If the Holy Spirit has been at work at all in the church through the ages[25] (and we can surely believe this to be true), then we should expect His imprint on much of what has been formulated. Thus we are called to spiritual discernment, recognizing that all such formulations are fallible, but making every possible use of what the Spirit has been saying in the church down through the centuries.

D. Awareness of the Contemporary Scene

The more theology is informed by what is going on in the church and the world the more relevant and timely theological writing will be. There is need, first, to be aware of the communication situation. We live in an age of multimedia communication—television, radio, the printed page—and this calls for increasing expertise in getting a message across. Modern man, whether inside or outside the church, is so assaulted by scattered information, propaganda, sales pitches, etc., that it is not easy to reflect on Christian truth or take time for serious theological reflection. Moreover, theologians have too often been poor communicators, their language is hardly comprehensible, and brevity has seldom been their long suit. There is need for much better, and more contemporary, theological writing.

In a sense, all theological work involves translation. That is to say, the writing should be done so as to make ancient truth comprehensible to the twentieth-century reader. The overuse of Latin and Greek expressions, or archaic terms, of sesquipedalian (!) words scarcely communicates the message well. The theologian wherever possible should seek to put difficult concepts in clear language and even allow the reader to find delight in understanding what is being said! All of this means translation with resulting comprehension.[26]

Second, theology needs to be aware of the mood of the times. For many people today, both inside and outside the church, God is not real. This does not necessarily mean they do not believe in God (the number of those who claim belief remains high on the American scene), but many do not sense His reality. The prevailing mood is one of distance, abstractness, even disappearance:[27] God is nowhere to be found. Or, if there is some contact with God, it seems so occasional and uncertain that life goes on much the same without Him. Now by no means is this true of all persons; however, to the degree that the mood of uncertainty and unreality exists, theology has a critically important role to fulfill.

Also, it has often been said that we live in an “age of anxiety.” There is anxiety about human relations, economic security, health and approaching death, the world situation—and now all capped off by the imminent possibility of nuclear annihilation. Hence, there is much insecurity and deep fear affecting Christians as well as those who make no claim to faith. In addition to anxiety, one may speak of other maladies such as loneliness, stress and strain, confusion, even a sense of the meaninglessness of life for many. If such is the prevailing

mood, or even partially the mood, theology that is worth its salt must address this situation.

Furthermore, for many persons both inside the church and without there is a strong sense of helplessness and impotence. Many feel incapable of handling the forces that come at them; coping has become a critical question. A lack of resources sufficient to meet the demands of life or to be an effective Christian deeply disturbs many. Again, theology must find ways of dealing with this mood of helplessness and impotence. There *are* answers,[28] and it is urgently important to declare what some of them are.

In the third place, there is the need for awareness of what God is doing in our time. On this point we break through some of the mood just described to affirm that many of the "signs of the times"[29] point to God's presence and activity. There is doubtless much that is negative; for example, humanism and atheism, witchcraft and the occult, immorality and bestiality—all are on the increase. Some state that we live in a "post-Christian" civilization. However, along with the dark side there is also a very promising picture of evangelical resurgence, increased missionary activity, and spiritual revival. On the latter point, the charismatic renewal within the wide range of historic churches—Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant—is highly significant.

Let me speak yet more specifically. I am convinced that the contemporary renewal, which has deep roots in the reality of the Holy Spirit, represents a movement of God's Spirit unprecedented since New Testament times. God is sovereignly giving His Spirit in power, and many of His people are receiving this gift. Thus there is coming into being in our time Christian communities of the Spirit that represent a tremendous spiritual force in the world. It is at this point that theology today has a major work to perform: to express to church and world what all this signifies.

E. Growth in Christian Experience

Finally, it is essential that there be continuing growth in Christian experience for theology to perform its task well. We may note several things here.

First, the task of theology requires that everything be done in an attitude of *prayer.* Only in an atmosphere of steadfast communion with God is it really possible to speak about God and His ways. Theology, to be sure, is written in the third person; it is a "speaking *about* God." However, without a continuing "I-thou,"[30] second-person relationship in prayer, theological work becomes cold and impersonal. Prayer "in the Spirit" is particularly important, for thereby, as Paul says, one "utters mysteries in the Spirit" (1 Cor. 14:2),[31] and these mysteries through interpretation of the Spirit can lead to deeper comprehension of the truths set forth in Scripture. The life of prayer, constantly renewed and ever seeking the face of the Lord, is fundamental in meaningful theological work.

Second, there must be a deepening sense of *reverence.* It is of God that theology speaks. He is the subject throughout, whatever else may and must be said about the universe and man. This God is He who is to be worshiped in holy array, whose name is to be hallowed, whose very presence is a consuming fire. Theology, realizing that it speaks of One before whom every mouth must first be stopped, can perform its function only in a spirit of continuing reverence. There is the ever-present danger that in discoursing about holy things, one may become irreverent and casual. If so, the divine reality is profaned, and theology becomes an enterprise that merits only God's judgment and man's disfavor.[32]

Third, there is required an ever-increasing *purity of heart.* This follows from the preceding word about reverence, for the God of theology is a holy and righteous God. To speak of Him and His ways (and to speak truly) requires a heart that is undergoing constant purification. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8) applies with extraordinary weight to the theologian. For he must see to write, and there is no seeing with clouded eye and impure heart.

Fourth, theology must be done in a spirit of growing *love.* The Great Commandment, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37), applies with particular force to the work of theology. Theology, as earlier noted, is a way of loving God with the mind, but it must be done in the context of a total love of God. Theology is

passionate thinking; it is reflection born of devotion. For the Christian community, those who know the love of God in Christ Jesus—"God so loved the world that he gave …" (John 3:16)—this love ever-intensified makes of theology a responsive offering of praise and thanksgiving. Such love toward God is also inseparable from the love of one's neighbor, for the words of the Great Commandment continue: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself' (Matt. 22:39). The more there is love for neighbor, the more there will be desire to meet his needs. In theological work this means expression with such clarity, directness, and concern that the "neighbor" may be edified. Theology, if it is true speaking about God, is the speaking of love.

Fifth, and of greatest importance, all work in theology must be done *for the glory of God.* The Christian community needs constantly to set before itself the goal of glorifying God in all theological endeavors. In the words of Jesus, "he who seeks the glory of him [the Father] who sent him [the Son] is true, and in him there is no falsehood" (John 7:18). Even so, the goal of the community in every theological expression, both corporately and through its specialists, must not be to glorify self but constantly to give glory to God. In such a spirit theology may be a faithful witness to the living God.

[1]Or "doctrine" (as in KJV). The Greek word is didache, usually translated "teaching."

[2]See, e.g., Ephesians 4:14; 1 Timothy 1:3; Titus 2:10. The Greek word is didaskalia.

[3]"Sound doctrine" is spoken of in 1 Timothy 1:10; Titus 1:9; 2:1 (also 2 Tim. 4:3 NIV and NASB).

[4]E.g., "bio-logy" deals with knowledge concerning organic life (bios); "psycho-logy," concerning the mind or soul {psyche); etc.

[5]Anselm (medieval theologian) made this expression the basis of his theological work. His famous Proslogion was originally entitled Faith Seeking Understanding.

[6]Dogmatic theology is more tightly bound to church formulations in the Roman Catholic Church than it is in Protestant churches. For example, the European Protestant theologian, Karl Barth, while entitling his major work Church Dogmatics, speaks of the "non-binding" character of creeds and confessions (see Barth's Dogmatics in Outline, 13). While he views himself as a church theologian in the Reformed tradition and as one who writes in the context of both classical creeds and Reformation

confessional statements, he claims ultimately to be bound by the Word of God in Scripture.

[7]Paul Tillich's Systematic Theology is an example of a systematic theology that is avowedly philosophical in orientation. Its basis is not the Word of God but existentialist philosophy.

[8]Paul speaks similarly of the "bishop" or "overseer" (Gr. episkopos) as being able not only to "give instruction in sound doctrine" but "also to confute those who contradict it" (Titus 1:7, 9).

[9]"Theology may be defined as a study which through participation in and reflection upon a religious faith, seeks to express the content of this faith in the clearest and most coherent language available." John Macquarrie so writes in his Principles of Christian Theology, 1. The role of participation is of critical importance.

[10]The intention of such instruction is that the individual Christian become "a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

[11]Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees and scribes is apropos: "You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men" (Mark 7:8). Cf. Paul's concern about Christians who increasingly submit to "the commandments and teachings of men" (Col. 2:20–23 NASB).

[12]Peter also warns, "There will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies" (2 Peter 2:1). Cf. Paul's similar warning in Romans 16:17 and 1 Timothy 1:3–7. Cf. also Hebrews 13:9.

[13]A pertinent example of this is the Barmen Declaration of 1934 when representatives of the Reformed, Lutheran, and other Protestant churches in Germany declared their faith in the lordship of Jesus Christ over against the rise of the Third Reich and Adolf Hitler. The theologian Karl Barth was in the background of the writing of the Declaration. In this important Declaration these German Protestant churches through several theological statements publicly declared their position in contradistinction to Nazism. This was not a total theological statement, however, but one speaking to a particularly urgent situation.

[14]In one sense this is a matter of "going on to maturity" (see Heb. 6:1). The challenge, accordingly, is to "press on" (NASB) beyond "elementary teaching" (NASB) to the wider range of theological matters.

[15]Or "Ye know all things" as the KJV reads. Ancient manuscripts make possible either reading of the text. In line with John 14:25-26 and 16:13,

the reading “Ye know all things” seems to be preferable. Whichever way the text should be read, the basic message is the same: truth is resident within the community of faith.

[16]The opening stanza of the ninth-century Latin hymn, Veni, Creator Spiritus.

[17]The Greek word is theopneustos, from theos, “God” and pneo, “breathe.” The NIV has “God-breathed.”

[18]This immediacy of inspiration by no means discounts or eliminates the human factor. According to 2 Peter 1:21, “men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” This refers to Old Testament prophets who in their speaking and writing were so moved by God’s Spirit that their words were from God. Hence there is nothing mechanical about inspiration. Scripture is the result of God’s intimate touch-His “moving,” His “breathing”-upon those who set forth His truth.

[19]Or “the rest of the Scriptures” (NASB); the Greek phrase is tas loipas graphas. The question of the canon (the list of books accepted as Holy Scripture) will not be a matter of concern in Renewal Theology. We will be operating on the basis of the sixty-six books (thirty-nine in Old Testament, twenty-seven in New Testament) recognized as authoritative by all churches (this will not include various apocryphal books accepted in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions).

[20]These are the words of Paul in Romans 4:3 and Galatians 4:30.

[21]“Breath” and “spirit” are the same in Greek: pneuma.

[22]This is the NASB translation. The Greek literally is “not [to go] above what has been written.” “What is written” means Scripture, as, e.g., in 1 Corinthians 1:19, 31; and 3:19. The RSV translates “what is written” in 1 Corinthians 4:6 as “scripture.”

[23]The Greek text for “interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit” is pneumatikois pneumatika synkrinontes variously translated as “comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (KJV), “combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words” (NASB), “expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words” (NIV). The NEB reads: “interpreting spiritual truths to those who have the Spirit,” which is quite similar to the reading of the RSV quoted above. It is interesting that both NASB and NIV give marginal readings similar to RSV and NEB: “interpreting spiritual things [“truths” NIV] to spiritual men.” From the Greek text itself, and in the light of these various translations, the basic thrust of Paul’s message seems clear: spiritual truths {pneumatika), such as Paul was writing, can

be understood only by spiritual people (pneumatikois).

[24]I speak here as a Protestant. For Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholics much more authority is invested in creedal formulas. For Roman Catholics, papal pronouncements uttered as dogmas (such as the Dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of the Virgin Mary) claim infallibility; hence they have an authority equal to or above Scripture. The proper attitude, I would urge, is that every doctrinal formulation whether of creed, confession, or theology must be put to the test of the full counsel of God in Holy Scripture.

[25]Unfortunately there are those who view the history of the church as nothing but the history of error. The "dark ages" have persisted throughout. Accordingly we have nothing positive to learn from the past. This attitude is an affront to the Holy Spirit and Christ the Lord of the church.

[26]It should be added that translation does involve two dangers: first, of diluting the message; second, of transforming it into something else. The content, however, must remain the same, neither diluted nor transformed.

[27]The "God is dead" language of the recent past is a tragic symbol obviously not of God's death but of the death of faith for many. Even where such language about God is shunned or even labeled blasphemous, there is often a feeling of such distance from an absent God that it amounts to a feeling that He is dead.

[28]Paul Tillich speaks of systematic theology as "answering theology": "It must answer the questions implied in the general human and the special historical situation" (Systematic Theology, 1:31). I do not agree that theology is only this; however, it must not fail to give answer to human problems.

[29]Matthew 16:3.

[30]The language particularly used by Martin Buber in his little book, Ich und Du (English translation: I and Thou).

[31]Paul actually says in this verse that it is by speaking "in a tongue" that one utters these mysteries. However, as the larger context shows, this is "praying with the spirit" or "praying in the Spirit." For more detailed discussion of this whole area, see Renewal Theology, vol. 2.

[32]True theology is "the teaching which accords with godliness" (1 Tim. 6:3). It is "godly teaching" (NIV), thus stemming from a deep reverence and piety.

2
The Knowledge of God

The primary question in theology is that of the knowledge of God. In theology we talk about God continually. Christian faith claims to have knowledge of God—not fantasy, imagination, or guesswork, but knowledge. What is the basis for such a claim? How is God known?

Here we are dealing with the area of epistemology—the study of the grounds, method, and limits of knowledge. Epistemology is "discourse about knowledge,"[1] and in the theological realm it is discourse about the knowledge of God. We will focus primarily on the way God is known.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS KNOWLEDGE

We must recognize at the outset that the significance of this knowledge cannot be overemphasized. We are here concerned about a matter of ultimate importance.

A. Human Reflection

Throughout the history of the human race people have again and again raised the question about the knowledge of God. The importance of this matter is evidenced by the universal search of mankind in which the knowledge of God has been the ultimate concern. Human reflection invariably turns beyond the question of knowledge of the world and man to the question, How do we know God? Multiple religions, all representing mankind's highest loyalty and commitment, are essentially attempts to find the answer; and many a philosophy has turned toward the knowledge of what is ultimate as the paramount and final pursuit.

So, we repeat, human reflection invariably turns upon the matter of knowledge of God as the ultimate concern. This concern may be hidden for a time amid the many affairs of the world and man's self-centered preoccupations, but the question will not go away. Something in man, it seems, cries out for this supreme knowledge; and unless he is willing to acknowledge and pursue it,[2] life never achieves its fullest satisfaction.

B. The Scriptures

The matter of the knowledge of God is a continuing theme throughout the Bible. From the human side, for example, there is the cry of Job who says, “Oh that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!” (Job 23:3). Or we hear the words of Philip: “Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied” (John 14:8). The cry of the heart is for finding God, beholding Him, coming even into His presence.

From the divine side, the Scriptures depict God as supremely desirous that His people shall know Him. One of the great passages is Jeremiah 9:23–24: “Thus says the LORD: ‘Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories, glory in this, that he understands and knows me.’” To understand and know God—and to glory in this—is the supreme and final thing. Isaiah prophetically declares that the day will come when “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9). This is the consummation of God’s desire and intention: that the whole world shall some day know Him.

Contrariwise, the lack of genuine knowledge of God is shown in the Scriptures to be a tragic matter. In the opening words of Isaiah’s prophecy is this lament: “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken…. The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master’s crib; but Israel does not know, my people does not understand” (1:2–3). As a result of this lack of knowledge, the people of Israel are “laden with iniquity … utterly estranged” (1:4); their “country lies desolate … cities are burned with fire” (1:7). Another great prophet, Hosea, cries forth: “There is … no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and committing adultery…. Therefore the land mourns…. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:1–2, 6). The tragic results of not knowing God are evils of all kinds—and destruction.

What is it that the Lord wants of His people? From Hosea again: “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings” (6:6). And the day will come most surely, the Lord declares through Jeremiah, when “no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.” (Jer. 31:34).

There can be no question but that the knowledge of God is of supreme

importance according to the Scriptures. We should rejoice in it above all things, far above every other glory of earth. Its lack leads to multiplication of sin and iniquity, of estrangement from God, and desolation. But God wills to be known. Some day all will know, and the earth be filled with that glorious knowledge.

II. THE WAY OF KNOWLEDGE

Since it is apparent from both human reflection and the Scriptures that the knowledge of God is a matter of man's ultimate concern as well as God's intention, the critical question now before us is the way of that knowledge. How is God to be known?

A. The Mystery of God

All knowledge must be prefaced by the realization that God Himself cannot be known as other things or persons are. He is altogether veiled from human perception. In this sense He is the God who dwells in "thick darkness" (1 Kings 8:12). God is the *mysterium tremendum*,[3] a vast mystery not possible to comprehend in any ordinary manner. The fact that God is God and not man signifies mystery and the otherness of all knowledge relating to Him.

Thus whatever God does has about it the character of mystery. Paul speaks about "the mystery of his will" (Eph. 1:9), "the mystery of Christ" (3:4), "the mystery of the gospel" (6:19). There is mystery in God Himself and in all of His ways.

When we focus again on the matter of knowledge, it becomes apparent that there are basically two problems in the knowledge of God.

First, and primarily, the problem of the knowledge of God rests in the fact that God is infinite and man is finite. God does not exist in the same manner as a creaturely entity, for all that is creaturely and therefore finite is in some measure ascertainable and specifiable from the human side. But God cannot be discovered, no matter how diligent the effort. Can a man "by searching find out God?"[4] The answer is no, for the search is disproportionate to the seeker. The finite is not capable of the infinite. The highest achievements of the human mind and spirit fall short of arriving at the knowledge of God. God always remains beyond.[5] In the words of Elihu in the book of Job, "The Almighty—we cannot find him" (37:23). The reason given in Isaiah is unmistakable: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (55:8–9). God is God, and not man. And there is a vast difference between knowing the things of this world and the things of the Almighty and Eternal.[6]

Thus it is an incontrovertible fact of human existence: finite man cannot of himself know God. Human wisdom is totally insufficient to achieve this high goal. "The world by wisdom knew not God" (1 Cor. 1:21 KJV), so states the apostle Paul. The world might have an idea of God, many notions of God, even attempts to prove His existence;[7] but all of this belongs to the realm of hypothesis. God remains essentially mysterious and unknown.

Second, the problem of the knowledge of God rests in the fact that God is holy and man is sinful. This is the still deeper problem: man's sins have erected a barrier to the knowledge of God. Man cannot see past them. Or, to put it differently, his sins have so estranged him from God that knowledge is far away. Isaiah speaks of God's "hiding his face from the house of Jacob" (8:17), and this hiding, due, as the context shows, to Israel's sinfulness and estrangement from God, prevents knowledge from occurring. God is all the more mysterious to sinful and estranged man.

Thus because of man's sinful condition, even if human finiteness did not itself pose a problem in knowing God, there is no way that man can know God. Although it is true that the finite is not capable of knowing the infinite One, it is even more poignantly true that sinful man is not able to know the holy and righteous God.

Granted, then, the mystery of God, and the dual facts of human finitude and human sinfulness, what possible way is there to the knowledge of God? How do we proceed? This answer must follow: If there is to be knowledge of God, He Himself must grant it. It must come from His side, out of His mystery, across the chasm of finitude and sin.

B. Revelation

All knowledge of God comes by way of revelation. The knowledge of God is revealed knowledge; it is He who gives it. He bridges the gap and discloses what He wills. God is the source of knowledge about Himself, His ways, His truth. By God alone can God be known. The knowledge of God is truly a mystery made known by revelation.

The word *revelation* means a "removing of the veil."[8] The Greek word is *apokalypsis*, an "uncovering."[9] A good example of revelation is found in the biblical narrative where Simon Peter declares that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The reply of Jesus is "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed[10] this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 16:17). That Jesus is the Son of God is declared to be known by revelation: the veil is removed, the mystery is revealed by God the Father Himself, and knowledge of Jesus as His Son is perceived. The knowledge of Jesus' Sonship was not attained by human means, nor could it have been; it came from God alone.

In popular speech the word *revelation* has come to be used for striking disclosures of many kinds. Some fresh enlightenment has come, perhaps of a surprising or astonishing character ("It was a revelation to me"). A new truth or understanding has dawned, whereas before it was not known at all. Now this obviously bears some parallel to a revelation from God; however, the difference is quite great. The revelation just described might have come some other way than as a striking disclosure; it could have occurred, for example, through study or various human experiences. But *in principle*, the knowledge of God and His truth can come *only* by revelation. For revelation, in this proper sense, is not the breaking through of some new knowledge from the world of man or nature, however striking or startling such a happening may be. It refers rather to God's own manifestation. Revelation in its ultimate meaning is that which comes from God.

Earlier, mention was made of such scriptural expressions as "the mystery of his [God's] will," "the mystery of Christ," and "the mystery of the gospel." Now we may further note that there is a close biblical connection between mystery and revelation. In the Old Testament, for example, "the mystery was revealed to Daniel" (Dan. 2:19); it was only thus that Daniel came to know the truth of God. In the New Testament Paul says, "The mystery was made known to me by

revelation" (Eph. 3:3), and he speaks of "the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest[11] to his saints" (Col. 1:26). Whatever be the mystery of God (and all about God and His ways contains mystery), it is made known by His own revelation or manifestation.

1. General Revelation

It is important to observe that there is a general revelation of God. This means that God everywhere gives knowledge of Himself. Accordingly, this is not limited to any people or time in history.

a. Locus. General revelation occurs, first of all, through the medium of *the heavens and the earth.* In the marvels of the heavens—sun, moon, and stars—and in the wonders of the earth—skies and seas, mountains and forests, seedtime and harvest—God manifests Himself. In terms of the structure of the universe: "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge" (Ps. 19:1–2). And again, "Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature ["the invisible things of him" KJV][12] … has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made" (Rom. 1:20). The picture is indeed variegated. For whether it is the smallest atom or the vastest galaxy, the most minute form of life or the most highly developed, some revelation of God through His works is being set forth. In terms of the blessings of the earth, "he [God] did not leave himself without witness, for he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17). Thus God bears some witness of Himself in the continuing provision for mankind's sustenance and care. The universe as a whole, the macrocosm, both in its structure and in its functioning, is a channel of God's self-disclosure.

Second, in *man himself* God is also revealed. According to Scripture, man is made in the "image" and "likeness" of God: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). Thus man is a mirror or reflection of God. In his high place of dominion over the world; in his capacity to think, imagine, and feel; in his freedom to act, and much else, man is God's unique workmanship. To this should be added the fact of man's sense of right and wrong, the stirrings of conscience within—what the New Testament speaks of as "the law … written on their hearts" (Rom. 2:15). Through this moral sense in man, God again is

revealing something of who He is. Indeed, man's universal religiousness—the creature who worships and prays, who constructs shrines and temples, who seeks after God in manifold ways—once more suggests the touch of God upon his whole existence.

Third, God manifests Himself in the workings of *history*. History has a theological character: all of it bears the imprint of God's activity. God is revealed in history at large principally through the rise and fall of nations and peoples, thus showing that righteousness eventually prevails over unrighteousness.[13] "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord" (Ps. 33:12). The Scriptures first depict God at work in universal history. Genesis 1–11 relates God's dealing with the world at large prior to the call of Abraham and the history of Israel. Thereafter, though Israel is the particular focus, other nations are shown to be under His rule and command. For example, "Did I not bring up … the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir?" (Amos 9:7). The history of all nations represents some disclosure of God at work.

b. Content. The content of this general revelation is God's "invisible things," which are clearly perceived[14] through His visible creation. First, as Paul proceeds to say, God's *eternal power* and *deity* are made manifest. God's vast power in the structure and operation of the whole universe and in the forces at work in man and history is clearly seen. His deity (His "God-ness"), His reality as God, and the fact of His existence shine through all His works. Everything cries out: God! Thus the Almighty God declares Himself in and through everything.

Again, God's *benevolence* and *concern* are shown in His provision of all that man needs for life on earth. "The eyes of all look to thee, and thou givest them their food in due season, thou openest thy hand, thou satisfiest the desire of every living thing" (Ps. 145:15–16). There is Someone who cares, not only in the provision of human wants but also in the maintenance of life itself.

Finally, God's *righteousness* is manifest in the history of peoples and nations and also in the moral conscience of mankind. The fact that "righteousness exalts a nation" (Prov. 14:34) points to the righteousness of God. The fact of conscience, the inner sense of right and wrong, intimates a divine lawgiver. Indeed, says Paul, the actual situation is that men in general "know God's decree" (Rom. 1:32) concerning the just deserts of wickedness. Thus God is revealed generally in the inward knowledge of what is both right and wrong.

c. Reception. The reception of this general revelation is distorted and darkened because of man's sinfulness. There is a tragic kind of retrogression on

man's part. We may note various stages as they are outlined in Romans 1:18ff.

The beginning of this retrogression is the *suppression of truth.* Paul says that "what can be known about God is plain to them [all people], because God has shown it to them" (v. 19). In other words, there is a plain, evident, unmistakable knowledge of God available to all people that God Himself visibly exhibits. However, in the preceding verse Paul declares, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth" (v. 18). People everywhere suppress the truth that is plain to see and given by God. Their unrighteousness is so great that the knowledge of God is suppressed or held down.

The next step is that of *dishonor* and *thanklessness* toward God. "For although they knew God, they did not honor[15] him as God or give thanks to him" (v. 21). People do naturally know God, even if the truth is suppressed; therefore, the dishonor and thanklessness do not stem from ignorance. It is rather a willful and blatant turning away from the truth that has been given when they no longer glorify and honor Him or thank Him for His blessings.

The conclusion is that of *futility in thinking* and *darkness of heart*. "They became futile in their thinking [or reasonings][16] and their senseless hearts[17] were darkened" (v. 21). The tragic result of the suppression of the knowledge of God is that people's thinking, their reasoning power, becomes futile and vain. They are no longer able truly to think about God; they can only indulge in speculation. And their hearts are so darkened that they can no longer truly feel or sense God's presence. Thus because of their vain and futile thinking, they turn to idolatry of many kinds (vv. 22–23). Due to their dull and darkened heart, God gives people over to the lust that now stirs within (vv. 24ff). Human beings, suppressing the glorious truth of God, become idolatrous and lustful.

Now all of this tragic retrogression in the knowledge of God is the result of the fact that people have deliberately "exchanged the truth about God for a lie" (v. 25). They no longer wanted to know God lest knowing Him stand in the way of their wickedness; they "did not see fit to acknowledge God"[18] so they now have a "base [or "depraved" NASB] mind" (v. 28). The human mind accordingly is no longer qualified[19] or fit to think upon God and His truth.

d. Summary. Although God does reveal Himself in nature, humanity, and history and exhibits therein His deity, power, benevolence, and righteousness so that all people basically know God, that knowledge is suppressed. Rather than leading them to glorifying and thanking God—which it would do if mankind had not turned from God—this knowledge is spurned by people so that all their

thinking about God becomes vain and futile. No longer can they know God through His general revelation; their minds are "unqualified," and only confusion remains. Some awareness of God continues, some stirrings of conscience, some mixed-up knowledge—but *nothing positive remains.* The wine of God's knowledge has become the vinegar of human confusion.

Now in all of this people are *without excuse.* They cannot blame their lack of knowledge of God on simple ignorance, or even on their limited abilities.[20] For God continues so plainly to manifest Himself in creation that, as Paul puts it bluntly, "they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). There is ignorance, to be sure, but it is willful ignorance—people not wanting to have God in knowledge. Therefore they are inexcusable. By turning to their own way, their wickedness is the root cause of lack of knowledge. Hence they are guilty and without excuse.

The only hope for people is that God will somehow graciously come to them in a *special revelation,* making known the truth about Himself and His ways. He may thereby light up the knowledge of Himself given in nature, humanity and history; indeed He may even go far beyond that. It is the testimony of Christian faith that God has verily taken this gracious step. He may now truly be known.

EXCURSUS: THE QUESTION OF "NATURAL THEOLOGY"

Natural theology is the effort to build a doctrine concerning the knowledge of God without appeal to the Bible or special revelation by utilizing only the data that may be drawn from nature, human existence, history, etc. Such natural theology may be intended as a substitute for revealed theology (theology grounded in special revelation) or as providing a kind of rational base therefor.[21] In either event, the premise of natural theology is that there is a certain basic and objective knowledge of God that can be explicated, and that any rational person who is willing to think clearly will arrive at this truth. Thus natural theology, while admitting limits in what it can accomplish, claims to have positive value. Especially, so it is said, is this valuable in a world that gives priority to reason over revelation.

In reply, natural theology fails to recognize two basic things. First, as was earlier noted, a person's knowledge at best is disproportionate to the knowledge of God: he may have ideas about God, but they are no more than human constructs extrapolated into infinity. Hence man's knowledge capacity is insufficient to arrive at a full knowledge of God. Second, though there is a general revelation of God in nature, humanity and history, it is so perverted through mankind's sinfulness that people's minds are futile and incapable of discerning what God is disclosing. If people were godly and righteous, then surely what God discloses through general revelation could afford a basis for natural theology. But since they have turned from God, they cannot know God through natural understanding.

It should be added, however, that when God comes to mankind in His special revelation and a person truly receives it, then his eyes are once more opened to the knowledge of God in the universe, human existence, and all of history. It is ultimately only the person who has faith who can cry out, "The heavens are telling the glory of God." Hence Christian theology is not based on natural theology but is based on special revelation, which will include far more than anything that natural theology could ever attempt.

2. Special Revelation

We now come to the consideration of what God has graciously done in His special revelation. God comes to people in their plight and gives forth a special revelation of Himself, His ways, His truth. As one writer puts it, "To save him [man] from the Gadarene madness into which his pride impels him man needs more than a general revelation: God in His mercy has vouchsafed a special revelation of Himself."[22] We will now view this special revelation from various perspectives.

a. Its character. Special revelation is, first of all, *particular.* God reveals Himself to a particular people, the people who make up biblical history. God is known adequately and truly, not by a general study of creation, humanity, and history, but by His dealings with a "chosen" people. These "people of God" are the children of Abraham, whether by natural or spiritual descent. To Old Testament Israel the word was spoken: "The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth" (Deut. 7:6). To the New Testament church a similar word is declared: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people."[23] (1 Peter 2:9). And it is to this Old and New Testament people of God that God gave knowledge of Himself. The words of the psalmist "He [God] made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel" (Ps. 103:7) apply to the people of God under both covenants.

Why this particularity?[24] Does this mean that God confines knowledge of Himself to a particular people? No, since the knowledge of Him has been perverted and darkened by mankind's universal wickedness, He now chooses a people *to* whom and *through* whom He will declare Himself. To Abraham the original word was spoken: "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3).[25] This is the purpose of God in revealing Himself in a particular manner to the children of Abraham: that they will be a channel of blessing to all others. Through them people everywhere will come to know God.

Special revelation, in the second place, is *progressive.* There is an unfolding revelation of God in the witness of biblical history. There is an increasing disclosure of God Himself and His truth in the record of the Old and New Testament. It is the same God throughout, but He accommodates Himself to the place where His people are. This does not mean a movement in special revelation from untruth to truth but from a lesser to a fuller disclosure. God does not change character, so that (as is sometimes suggested) He is holy and wrathful in the Old Testament but loving and merciful in the New Testament. He is revealed as the same holy and loving God throughout, but with an ever

deepening and enlarging declaration of what that holiness and love means. The revelation of the law in the Old Testament is not superseded by the revelation of the gospel but is fulfilled in it. As Paul says, “The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ” (Gal. 3:24 KJV).[26] Thus an “eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (Exod. 21:24) in the Old Testament is not God’s final word, but to it must be added, “Do not resist one who is evil” (Matt. 5:38–39). The latter fulfills the former. Special revelation, therefore, must be understood progressively.

Third, special revelation is *saving.* Through general revelation God gives knowledge of Himself in His creation, in His providential concern, in human conscience, and in His judgment on history, but His saving work is not made manifest. He is revealed as Creator and Judge, but not as Redeemer. General revelation does not have saving power.

Indeed, as we have noted, the basic problem of humanity is that, despite the universal revelation of God and the knowledge people have received, they suppress this truth. Their problem is not mere finiteness but wickedness so deep that all the knowledge of God is darkened and perverted. Hence, if there is to be a special revelation of God that people can receive, it must be one that breaks in upon their sinful condition and begins to bring about a radical change within them. Thus it is that Paul’s discourse on general revelation in Romans 1 leads step by step to a disclosure of God’s work of salvation in Romans 3.[27] It is only as a person’s wickedness is radically altered by Jesus Christ that God can again be truly known.

The special revelation in the Old Testament also contains a deeply redemptive quality. God declares Himself to be the Savior of Israel: “For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (Isa. 43:3). For Israel was a “redeemed” people brought “out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Exod. 20:2). Hence, although the law was important after that, still more significant were the sacrifices. These rites for the atonement of sin pointed the way to Jesus Christ, a redeemer not from the bondage of Egypt but from the bondage of sin.

Special revelation is thus seen to be both progressive and saving. But that it is saving throughout is unmistakable.

Fourth, special revelation is *verbal.* God discloses Himself through His word: He communicates through the voice of living persons. In His general revelation, “day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge”; however, “there is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard” (Ps. 19:2–3). Hence the revelation in creation is wordless and therefore indirect. But when God communicates by His word in special revelation, the general becomes

concrete, the indirect direct, the inaudible audible. Indeed, since people everywhere suppress the knowledge of God in general revelation, they no longer perceive anything clearly. The word of God in special revelation comes, therefore, to people, not to supplement what they already know, but to correct what is distorted and darkened and to bring forth new truth.

The verbal character of special revelation is highly important. There is, to be sure, special revelation that is more than language,[28] but it is never less than that. Language is the medium of communication that God has given mankind, and by language people communicate specifically with other people. God speaks—audibly, directly, concretely—that people may hear and respond.

Hence the word of God goes forth to His people in the Old and the New Testaments. He communicates what He would have them know and do. It is also a word to all peoples, for God is Lord over all the earth.

Fifth, special revelation is *personal.* God not only speaks, but He also discloses Himself. He comes on the scene and makes Himself known. God visited Moses in the burning bush and gave him His name (Exod. 3:1–14); He talked with Moses "face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (33:11); He appeared to Samuel (1 Sam. 3:21). This continued through the Old Testament with many a personal encounter and revelation.

The climax of this personal revelation is Jesus Christ. For in Him "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14). In the person of Jesus Christ, God was confronting people immediately and decisively. Jesus Himself declared, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9), and thus He pronounced the fulfillment of the revelation of God the Father in His own person.[29]

All this, it should be added, goes far beyond general revelation in which, as we have observed, God discloses His invisible power and deity, His benevolence and righteousness. But God remains at a distance, and it all seems rather impersonal. Actually, because of mankind's wickedness, even this general revelation is covered over. God seems still farther away, and the world is viewed by many, not as an arena of God's benevolence, but as an arena of nature "red in tooth and claw." In special revelation God comes personally, and all things again find their right proportion.

b. The medium. The medium of special revelation is, first, the *Old Testament prophets.* A vital feature of this revelation is that it was mediated through particular persons whom God raised up. They were spokesmen for God.[30] The unique position of the prophet is declared by Amos: "Surely the LORD God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7).

The prophets were the God-appointed communicators of His special revelation.

The importance of the prophet is to be observed, for one thing, in that through him the events in Israel's history were seen in divine perspective. What might have been viewed by an outsider as only events in human history—for example, the possession of the Promised Land, the establishment of the kingship, the captivity in Assyria and Babylon—are all interpreted by the prophets as special revelations of God's promise, His rule, His judgment, and the like. Without the prophets, God would of course still have been acting in all such events, but there would have been no knowledge or understanding. It was only in the combination of event and interpretation[31] that the special revelation was disclosed. Thus the unique role of the Old Testament prophet is unmistakable.

But did not God also reveal Himself through others besides Old Testament prophets—for example, Moses the lawgiver and David the king? To be sure, but since the word *prophet* may be used more broadly to include all who declare God's word,[32] this may refer to the wider range of Old Testament witness. So whether it was a Moses speaking the divine command in terms of law and ordinances, a David proclaiming the divine name in the beauty of song and poetry, or an Isaiah declaring the divine majesty and compassion, through their voices the word of God rang forth.

This means too that the prophet is not only an interpreter of events in Israel's history but also one who declares God's word in multiple ways and through multiple forms. Whether in law, history, poetry, parable, wisdom literature or in the so-called major and minor prophets, the word of God is being proclaimed.

But, finally, special revelation through the Old Testament prophets is only preparatory for the greater revelation to come in Jesus Christ. Even when prophetic utterance looks forward to this, there is about it a lack of clarity and some indefiniteness. There are dimensions of height and depth and breadth still not sounded. There is *the* Word of God yet to come.

The medium of special revelation is, second, *Jesus Christ.* "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb. 1:1–2). Here is special revelation at its zenith: God speaking, not through the words of prophets, but verily through His own Son.

God was now addressing people *immediately* in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament prophet at most could speak distantly for God; with them it was "Thus says the Lord." With Jesus it was "I say to you." In Jesus' own words people were being confronted directly with the words of the living God. "No man ever spoke like this man!" (John 7:46), for the words rang with the assurance of

God's immediate presence.

God was now addressing people *decisively* in Jesus Christ. The word of the Old Testament prophet was preparatory, sometimes partial and transient. The word of Jesus Christ was definitive and authoritative. "You have heard that it was said to the men of old…. But I say to you" (Matt. 5:21–22).[33] Because Jesus is the fulfillment of law and prophets, God henceforth is to be understood decisively only in and through Him.

God was now addressing people *fully* in Jesus Christ—through His speech, His deeds, His presence. He was *the* Teacher with "a wisdom which is perfect in all its parts."[34] His deeds exemplified His words; what He said, He did. If it was "Love your enemies," He loved to the bitter end. If it was to pray, "Thy will be done," He prayed that prayer continually. If it was to "deny self," He so denied Himself as to give up life on the cross. His very presence was such that He not only said the truth and did the truth; people came to know that He *was* the truth. Indeed He proclaimed, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Speech and deed flowed from the reality of a presence so rich and full that people saw in Him the very Word of God incarnate.

God has now revealed Himself immediately, decisively, and fully: this He has done in the person of Jesus Christ.

The medium of special revelation is, third, the *apostles*. The Word that "became flesh" in Jesus Christ, though immediate, decisive, and total, was not the final revelation without the apostolic witness. Since the coming of Christ included His life, death, and resurrection, it was reserved for the apostles to make known the meaning of the event and by so doing to complete the divine revelation.

Furthermore, additional things such as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the formation of the church, the gifts of the Spirit, and the inclusion of Gentiles with Jews all represent a period subsequent to the historic revelation in Christ. On the matter of Jew and Gentile, Paul speaks of this as a mystery given by revelation: "the mystery … not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets[35] by the Spirit; that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs" (Eph. 3:4–6). This is indeed an important revelation of God, declaring that the people of God are no longer confined to one nation but include all who are united in Jesus Christ.

To conclude, God's special revelation, which focuses on Jesus Christ, was rounded out and given final shape only through the apostolic witness. It was now possible to declare "the whole counsel of God" in a way that neither Old Testament prophets nor even Christ Himself could proclaim. Because the

apostles were given the revelation of the deeper understanding of God's purpose in Christ, they could set forth the truth in its ultimate dimensions and final meaning.

c. Content. The content of special revelation is primarily *God Himself.* Special revelation is a removal of the veil so that God gives Himself to be known. It is, first of all, God's own self-manifestation.

In the Old Testament many such manifestations occur; for example, God to Abraham: "The LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am God Almighty'" (Gen. 17:1). God appeared to Jacob at Bethel with the result that Jacob later built an altar because "there God had revealed himself to him" (35:7). God revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush saying, "'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God" (Exod. 3:6). Thereafter God declared Himself to be the great "I AM WHO I AM" (v. 14). In all these instances the infinite God, the *mysterium tremendum,* is revealing Himself to finite people.

Let me quickly add that mystery remains even in God's self-revelation. God does not fully unveil Himself to any person, for such would be the destruction of mortal man. Thus God later said to Moses, "You cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live" (Exod. 33:20). But He does show Himself to the degree that a person is able to receive His self-revelation. Yet in all of this He remains the God of ineffable mystery—the great "I AM WHO I AM."

The marvel of special revelation is that the divine manifestations (or theophanies) of the Old Testament climax in the coming of Jesus Christ as God's personal self-revelation. For the Word who was "with God," the Word who "was God," "became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" with the amazing result: "We have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:1, 14). How true the words of Jesus to His disciples: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

Even in the climax of the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, the wonder, even mystery, of God by no means disappears. This is demonstrated with particular vividness on the mount where Jesus "was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light," and the disciples "fell on their faces" (Matt. 17:2, 6). God remains God—awesome, mysterious, glorious—in His self-revelation through His Son.

For the apostle Paul, the revelation of God was also primarily His self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Paul writes that God "was pleased to reveal his Son to me" (Gal. 1:16); and in the account of that revelation "suddenly a light from heaven flashed" and a voice said, "I am Jesus" (Acts 9:3, 5). It was against the

background of this self-revelation of God in Jesus that later revelations of God would come.

It is evident that the heart of special revelation is God's own self-disclosure: He reveals Himself.

Special revelation, in the second place, contains the disclosure of *divine truth.* It is the declaration of truth about God, His nature and ways, and His dealings with the world and people. Indeed, special revelation includes any truth that God would have people know. In sum, special revelation from this perspective is revealed truth.

The divine revelation, accordingly, is meaningful self-disclosure.[36] God does not come in unintelligible mystery, but enlightens the mind and heart to understand and communicates His truth.[37] This is true in all the instances previously given of God's self-revelation to Abraham, Jacob, and Moses: God also revealed things He would have them know. Another clear illustration of this is found in the words concerning Samuel: "And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel by the word of the LORD" (1 Sam. 3:21). There is both God's self-revelation ("the LORD appeared") and the revelation in words ("by the word of the LORD"). One further instance is this interesting statement in Isaiah: "The LORD of hosts has revealed himself in my ears" (Isa. 22:14), followed by a message from God. Special revelation is also the revelation of God's truth.

It is also apparent that the law in the Old Testament is declared to be the special revelation of God. It is so much His self-revelation of righteousness that it came in the context of a divine theophany on Mount Sinai—" … the Lord descended upon it in fire" (Exod. 19:18)—after which the law was given (20:1–17). It is the expression of God Himself; it is His truth for all to hear and receive; it is intensely revelatory. With some variation, the gospel is the ultimate self-revelation of God's grace in Jesus Christ. As Paul says, "For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:12). The truth of God's righteousness and love are finally disclosed in the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In sum, special revelation is not only God's own self-disclosure; it is also the truth of God, whatever form it may take.

The content of special revelation, finally, is the declaration of God's *ultimate purpose.* God wants people to know His plan for the world—the end toward which everything moves. There are limits, of course, both because of man's finite comprehension and capacities and God's own ways that are far beyond human comprehension. Nonetheless, God does draw back the veil and points

unmistakably to the final consummation.

The revelation of God through the language of Paul in Ephesians contains a splendid declaration of God's ultimate purpose. According to Paul, "The mystery of his [God's] will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ" is "a plan for the fulness of time, to unite[38] all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (1:9–10). How God intends to accomplish this summing up of all things in Christ is shown in many other New Testament Scriptures. The important thing to stress at this juncture is that God is moving all things toward that ultimate goal, and He wants His people to know what is intended.

Special revelation is climactically the message of God about the final fulfillment of all things. To God be the glory!

3. Subordinate Revelation

In addition to the special revelation that is completed with the apostolic witness, God reveals Himself to those who are in the Christian community. This revelation is subordinate or secondary to the special revelation attested to in the Scriptures.

For one thing, God desires to give the Christian believer an enlarged revelation of His Son. Paul prays for the Ephesians that "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give [them] a spirit of wisdom[39] and of revelation in the [full] knowledge[40] of him" (Eph. 1:17). Hence, it is through this "spirit of wisdom and revelation," graciously given, that deep and full knowledge will be received.[41] This is the gift "of the Father of glory," who out of the riches of His glory reveals this knowledge of His Son. Such a revelation makes more glorious the believer's walk in Christ.

Also, God gives revelation to an individual for the upbuilding of the Christian community. Paul says in his first letter to the Corinthian church: "When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification" (14:26).

Thus he affirms the ongoing place of revelation. This relates particularly (as Paul proceeds to show) to prophecy, a gift of the Holy Spirit (12:10), in that prophecy in the Christian community occurs through divine revelation.[42] Revelation, accordingly, is the background of prophetic utterance.

God, the living God, is the God of revelation. He is ready to grant through His Spirit a spirit of revelation and wisdom for a deeper knowledge of Christ and also through revelation and prophecy to speak to His people. God has not

changed in His desire to communicate directly with those who belong to Him.

Now, I must strongly emphasize that all such revelation is wholly subordinate to special revelation. Special revelation was given through the Old Testament prophets, Jesus Christ, and the early apostles. This revelation," centered in the Word made flesh, was prepared by the ancient prophets and completed by the early apostles. There is *nothing more to be added:* God's truth has been fully declared. Accordingly, what occurs in revelation within the Christian community is *not* new truth that goes beyond the special revelation (if so, it is spurious and not of God). It is only a deeper appreciation of what has already been revealed, or a disclosure of some message for the contemporary situation that adds nothing essentially to what He has before made known.

But that there is subordinate revelation must never be denied. By such revelation God wants both to open up for His people wider ranges of Christian experience and to strengthen the life of the Christian community. It is one way whereby God through His Spirit leads us into an evergrowing comprehension of His grace and truth.

C. Faith

God makes Himself known to those who receive His revelation in faith. Faith is the instrument by which this knowledge occurs. In the words of the Book of Hebrews: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction[43] of things not seen" (11:1). God Himself, His ways, and His purposes belong in the category of "things not seen," but through faith there is conviction and certainty.

This is important to stress in reflecting on the knowledge of God. For even though God steps out of His mystery and reveals Himself, if there is no recipient, knowledge is nonexistent. Faith may be thought of as the antenna by which the revelation of God is received. If the antenna is not in place or is not functioning, the revelation that goes forth, whether in the universe at large or in God's special deeds, cannot be known. When faith is present, the things of God become manifest.

What, then, is faith? A few statements relating to what has been previously said may help to suggest an answer. Faith is more than a matter of acknowledging God and His works; it is such a response to the divine revelation as to accept it without hesitation or reservation. Faith is entirely the opposite of suppressing the truth; it is the glad recognition of it. Faith is quite the contrary of dishonoring God and being ungrateful to Him; it is rather glorifying and thanking God for His manifestation. Faith is totally different from exchanging the truth of God for a lie; it is the wholehearted affirmation of God's self-disclosure. Faith is saying yes to God in all that He is and does.

This means, therefore, responding in total affirmation to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Man in his sinfulness and estrangement from God has become blind to God's revelation in the world at large, in human life and history. Jesus is "*the* way and *the* truth and *the* life" (John 14:6); hence only by a person's commitment of faith in Him can God now be truly known. When this happens, there is glad recognition of God, a glorifying and thanking Him, so that His revelation in all of creation is once again perceived. Accordingly, knowledge is achieved as a result of the fact that God's mighty act of grace in the redemption of the world through Jesus Christ has been received in faith. Thus it is by faith, and by faith alone, that God is known as both Creator and Redeemer.

Finally, any revelation of God—whether in creation, redemption, or in the life of the Christian community—is made known to those who have faith. "Without faith it is impossible to please him" (Heb. 11:6), but to those with faith God is

pleased to make Himself known in all the wonder of His majesty and grace.

[1]From episteme, “knowledge,” and logos, “discourse.”

[2]John Calvin writes that “all those who do not direct the whole thoughts and actions of their lives to this end [the knowledge of God] fail to fulfill the law of their being” (Institutes, 1.6.3, Beveridge trans.).

[3]Rudolf Otto’s expression for God in his book, The Idea of the Holy.

[4]"Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?” (Job 11:7, KJV).

[5]The words of Cale Young Rice in his poem “The Mystic” express this vividly:

“I have ridden the wind,
I have ridden the sea,
I have ridden the moon and stars,
I have set my feet in the stirrup seat
Of a comet coursing Mars.
And everywhere,
Thro’ earth and air
My thought speeds, lightning-shod,
It comes to a place where checking pace
It cries, ‘Beyond lies God.’”

[6]Kierkegaard, nineteenth-century Danish philosopher, speaks of “the infinite qualitative distinction between time and eternity.” (See James C. Livingston, Modem Christian Thought From the Enlightenment to Vatican II, 322.) Although this expression relates to a temporal difference, it also suggests the overall distance between God and man.

[7]For example, the fivefold “proof’ of medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas. His “proofs”: from motion to First Mover, from causation to First Efficient Cause, from contingency to Necessary Being, from degrees of goodness to Absolute Goodness, and from design in things to Supreme Intelligence. These may be found in his Summa Theologica, Bk. I.

[8]“Veil” in Latin is velum, the root of the English word “re-vel-ation.”

[9]Apokalypsis derives from apo, “away” and kalyptein, “cover”; hence, a removal of the covering.

[10]Greek apekalypsen.

[11]The word here is ephanerothe, “was manifested,” hence, “was revealed.”

[12]The KJV is closer to the Greek original than the RSV reading of “his invisible nature” or the NASB and NEB: “his invisible attributes.” The Greek text refers simply to His aorata, literally, “invisible things.” “Invisible things” include both His nature as deity and His attribute of power.

[13]J. A. Froude, a noted historian, writes, “One lesson and one only, history may be said to repeat with distinctness: that the world is built somehow on moral foundations; that in the long run it is well with the good; in the long run it is ill with the wicked.” See George Seldes, ed., The Great Quotations, 264. This very fact suggests that history is a manifestation of something about God’s nature.

[14]The aorata (“invisible things”) are kathoratai (“clearly perceived”). Note the play on words here. Perhaps a translation to show this would be “the imperceptible things are clearly perceived.”

[15]Or “glorify” Him as in KJV. The Greek verb edoxasan (from doxazo) is often translated “glorify” or “praise.”

[16]The Greek word is dialogismois.

[17]Instead of “minds” as in RSV. The Greek word is kardia, literally “heart,” though a secondary translation as “mind” is possible.

[18]The Greek phrase is ton theon echein en epignosei; literally, “to have God in knowledge.”

[19]The word translated “depraved” or “base” above is adokimon, which more literally means “unqualified.”

[20]Man’s natural limitations as finite were earlier discussed, on pages 31-32.

[21]As, for example, in the theological system of Thomas Aquinas and, accordingly, in traditional Roman Catholic theology.

[22]Alan Richardson in his book Christian Apologetics, 129.

[23]The Greek phrase is laos eis peripoiesin, literally, “a people of possession.”

[24]It has sometimes been called “the scandal of particularity.”

[25]The RSV reads “shall bless themselves”; however, the margin reads “shall be blessed.” The marginal reading (so NASB and NIV) is preferable.

[26]The word translated “schoolmaster” is paidagogos. “Tutor” is found in NASB and NEB. The analogy is that of a teacher, guide, and guardian (“custodian” in RSV) to supervise and direct a child until he comes to maturity.

[27]This work of salvation is the manifestation of God (Rom. 3:21) even as

creation was a manifestation of Himself (1:19). The same verb, phanerōo, is used in both verses.

[28]See the next discussion on special revelation as personal.

[29]William Temple writes, “For two reasons the event in which the fullness of revelation is given must be the life of a person: the first is that the revelation is to persons who can fully understand only what is personal; the second is that the revelation is of a personal being, who cannot be revealed in anything other than personality” (Nature, Man, and God, 319).

[30]The word prophet is taken from two Greek words, pro, “for,” and phemi, “speak,” thus to “speak for.” The prophets “spoke for” God. The Hebrew word for “prophet,” *nāḇî*, is similarly derived from a verb meaning “to speak.”

[31]Emil Brunner speaks of this as “revealing act and revealing word” in his Revelation and Reason, 85. This is a helpful statement that protects against any idea that the event might be only a natural one that takes on revelatory character through the prophet’s word. The revelation is both in act and word.

[32]Moses speaks of himself as a prophet in Deuteronomy 18:15: “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me.”

[33]Also note Matthew 5:27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, and 43-44.

[34]Calvin, Institutes, II. 15.2, Beveridge trans.

[35]“Apostles and prophets” suggests that the medium of this revelation was more than apostles. This was surely the case, for there were others (including a number of New Testament writers) who were not apostles who brought the special revelation to completion. I have used the word *apostle* both because the name designates the original group entrusted with the gospel and because it can also signify a larger circle of “sent ones.”

[36]Carl F. H. Henry in his God, Revelation, and Authority, vol. 2, (Thesis 10) writes, “God’s revelation is rational communication conveyed in intelligible ideas and meaningful words, that is, in conceptual-verbal form” (italics his), p. 12. Henry is concerned to emphasize that whereas revelation is 44uniquely personal” (Thesis 6), it is also intelligible and meaningful. Although I am hesitant to use the expression “rational communication,” I believe Henry is entirely correct in describing revelation also as meaningful. God’s special revelation is not only His

revealing Himself but also whatever truths he would have people know.

[37]Mysticism in some of its forms holds that the relation of its devotees to God is so intense that there can be no communication. The intelligible is transcended in the unity between God and people; thus there is nothing to say or declare. This kind of mysticism is contrary to the idea of revelation as disclosure of divine truth.

[38]The verb is anakephalaiosasthai, literally to “to head up” or “sum up.”

[39]The word spirit could also be rendered “Spirit” (as in NIV), hence not the human spirit but the Holy Spirit. Paul may indeed be referring to the Holy Spirit, who does bring about wisdom (e.g., “word of wisdom” is a gift of the Holy Spirit [1 Cor. 12:8 KJV]) and revelation (e.g., of the “deep things of God” [1 Cor. 2:10 KJV]). I am staying with “spirit” (as in RSV), but not without a strong sense of the Holy Spirit’s being involved.

[40]The Greek work is epignosei. According to the Expositor’s Greek Testament, in this passage the word epignosis “means a knowledge that is true, accurate, thorough, and so might be rendered ‘full knowledge’ “ (3:274). The Amplified New Testament reads “deep and intimate knowledge.”

[41]Michael Harper writes of such a moment in his life: “Wisdom and understanding poured into my mind…. I was forced on more than one occasion to ask God to stop; I had reached saturation point.” See his autobiography, None Can Guess, 21.

[42]Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 14:29-30: “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting by, let the first be silent.”

[43]The Greek word is elenchos, “conviction,” “certainty,” even “proof.”

3
God

I. THE REALITY OF GOD

The reality of God is the fundamental fact. *God is.* This is the basis for everything else. The existence of God is the primary affirmation of Christian theology.

A. The Biblical Record

It is apparent that the reality of God is attested throughout the Scriptures. From “In the beginning God” (Gen. 1:1) to “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20), the record is that of God’s being and activity. It is never a question of whether God exists[1] but of who He is and what He does. The Bible is primarily the account of God’s mighty acts: creation, redemption, glorification. The reality of God is the undoubted presupposition of all scriptural testimony. God may be questioned, His justice may be disputed, one may feel God-forsaken, but the fact of His existence is never really doubted.

The people of God, in the Old Testament and in the New, understood themselves as deriving their whole existence from God. It is not that they were a peculiarly religious, “God-prone” people but they knew their whole reason for existence lay in the reality and action of God. Indeed, they might well have doubted their own existence more readily than to have doubted the existence of God.

Thus the biblical record everywhere is bedrock testimony to the reality of God.

B. The Conviction of Faith

The reality of God is an affirmation of faith, for, according to Hebrews 11:6, “whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” By believing that God exists and seeking Him earnestly, one draws near to God and to a conviction of His reality.

There is a deep yearning and hunger in all persons that can be satisfied only by the actuality of God. In St. Augustine’s famous words: “Thou madest us for thyself, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.”[2] Hence, faith is not, as is sometimes suggested, wishful thinking, but the result of God’s responding to the searching heart. Faith is not sight but, recalling Hebrews, it is “the conviction of things not seen” (11:1). The “things” of God—His reality, His deeds, His purpose—are not seen unless He illumines them and thereby brings about faith. Faith, accordingly, is not a “leap in the dark,” a kind of believing against the evidence, but it is God’s gift to the hungry human heart.

I must also emphasize that faith is the response to God’s prior action. God is ever seeking man, even when man would like to turn away from Him. So the psalmist cries, “Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?” (Ps. 139:7). There is no escape.[3] When a person submits, faith is born.

C. The Testimony of the Holy Spirit

The inward testimony of the Holy Spirit grants further assurance of the reality of God. The Christian is one who has said yes to God's action in Jesus Christ: God has wrought faith in him. Thus he believes. Whereupon God acts to send the Holy Spirit into the believer's heart. Paul writes, "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts" (Gal. 4:6). The result is that the Spirit cries, "Abba! Father!" (4:6, cf. Rom. 8:15). Accordingly, the believer is all the more assured of the reality of God, because what he or she has is more than a conviction of faith: it has become a testimony of the Holy Spirit within. This is what may be called the "full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:22) given by the Holy Spirit.

To allude briefly to the contemporary scene: one of the most significant features of the present spiritual renewal is a heightened sense of the reality of God. For many, God previously seemed distant, His presence little experienced; but now through the inward activity of the Holy Spirit, there has been a fresh opening up of spiritual communication—an "Abba! Father!" deeply expressed. That God is real is the primary testimony of the present-day renewal.[4]

II. THE IDENTITY OF GOD

We come now to the question of *who* God is. How does He identify Himself in His revelation? What do the Scriptures declare about Him? Here we may note three things: He is the living God, He is altogether personal, and His nature is spirit.

A. God Is Living

God is the living God. This is a theme frequently set forth in the Scriptures. For example, Israel hears "the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of fire" (Deut. 5:26), and "as the Lord lives" is a common Old Testament expression for an oath (1 Sam. 14:39, 45, et al.), thus showing the strong sense of God as the living God. In the New Testament, Simon Peter's great confession about Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16), shows the continuing sense of God as living. Other examples could be multiplied: "We are the temple of the living God" (2 Cor. 6:16), Mount Zion is called "the city of the living God" (Heb. 12:22), and an angel in heaven bears "the seal of the living God" (Rev. 7:2).

God as the living God, first, is One who stands in opposition to all idolatry and graven images. Idols of any kind, because they are inanimate—"they cannot speak, they have to be carried, for they cannot walk" (Jer. 10:5)—stand over against the living God. "But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King" (Jer. 10:10). Thus to worship an idol is to worship a dead object and to profane the living God. Indeed, any graven image (Exod. 20:4), even if it be an attempt to portray the true God, is also an abomination because the living God cannot be reduced to a lifeless image of Himself.

We move on to note, second, that the action of God in the whole drama of creation, redemption, and glorification is that of One who, as living, gives life and breath to all things, brings life back to that which is dead, and constantly renews with life what has been restored. Moreover, the goal toward which all things move is the final consummation in which there is life eternal. It is God, the living God, who brings all this to pass.

To say that God is the living God does not, however, mean that He is identical with life. It is a false equation to say that God = Life, or to assume that God is a kind of life-force operative in the universe. Whatever life there is in the world or in man is of God, but it is not God. Nor is God to be understood as the ground or matrix of life, so that only symbolically could one say that God lives. Rather, God is the very essence of life and, as such, brings forth life elsewhere. It would also be a mistake to assume that the living God is little more than a fantasy of human imagination, a kind of projection of man's own life to an ultimate dimension in which the infinite is invested with living reality. It is not because man lives that God is granted life; it is rather because God lives that man has any

life at all. Because God lives, man may live also.

As the living God, He has life in Himself,[5] His life did not come from another source. There is no nonlife, no primitive seed from which the divine life emerged. Nor is God the generator of His own life, as if there were some vast inanimate entity that somehow conjured up its own living being. The life of the world is not essential to His own life. Further, God is not in process,[6] a growing divinity as it were, who with every increment of life in the universe finds His own life increased thereby. God, having life in Himself, neither has nor needs supplementation. All that is of process and growth in the universe is due to the life that God increasingly brings forth.

Again, God is the living God in that He is the possessor of abundance. God lives not only in the sense of the fullness of animate existence but also in that His life is one of richness and vitality. It is not that God has this life to the highest possible degree, for such is a quantitative measurement and wholly inapplicable. Rather, the divine life is immeasurable, boundless, overflowing. His life is a veritable river continuously pouring forth streams of living water. Life abundant is not only the life of God but also the life of all that comes from Him.[8]

The fact that God is the living God means also that He is the contemporaneous God. His life is not that of a past event, as if He lived in some other age but has now ceased to be. Whoever perchance asserts the death of God[9] thereby pronounces his own deadness and confesses that he is no longer able to see and know Him who is the very essence of life. God is intensely and intensively alive —now!

Further, all attitudes that explicitly or implicitly suggest that God’s living encounter with people belongs to a time long gone or that His mighty works wrought in biblical times cannot occur today are far from the truth. Such attitudes, not far removed from “death of God” thinking, seek to lock God in the past.

Likewise, contrary to God as living are all forms of adoration that have become largely mechanical and dead; all affirmations of belief that are little more than empty, repetitious words; all service of Him that is dull, monotonous, routine. The living, contemporaneous God is to be honored in living worship and obedience.

B. God Is Personal

God in His revelation declares Himself to be the personal God. He wills to be known by personal names; He shows Himself to be One who enters into personal relations with man; He is revealed uniquely in the person of Jesus Christ; and His character is deeply personal.

God is, first of all, personal in that He has personal names and titles. He does not will to be called "God" only, but to be known also, for example, as "Yahweh" or "the LORD."[10] This is His personal self-designation as He prepares to lead His people from their bondage in Egypt. God is also variously "king" (e.g., 1 Sam. 12:12), "judge" (e.g., Judges 11:27), "shepherd" (e.g., Ps. 80:1), and "husband" (e.g., Jer. 31:32)—all personal epithets. The climactic designation, however, is that of "Father," an intensely personal term, and the people of God are viewed as His children.

It would be an error to assume that such personal names and titles are merely accommodations to man's condition, whereas God Himself is actually beyond the personal. Sometimes it is suggested that God may be much more adequately depicted as the nameless one, the bottomless abyss, the dark ground, or even perhaps as nonbeing or the Nothing. God is then understood in His godhead (wherein presumably rests His real divinity) to be other than personal. However, one must reply, any view of God as impersonal or nonpersonal is a distortion. It is far better to say simply that God is personal, and in correspondence with that (by no means as a matter of accommodation) that He gives Himself personal designations. The variety of these designations serves to declare that God is so fully personal that no one name or title can suffice.

Again, God is personal in that He is shown to be One who enters into personal relations with people. He has communion with human beings from the day of man's creation; His speech to people is that of an "I," not an "it"; He enters into covenant with people treating them as His partners. In all such relations God is altogether the personal God.

Hence, any view of God that sees Him as an impersonal idea or absolute beyond human beings, or perhaps as some principle or law to which man is bound, badly misunderstands the identity of God. It would be hard to say which is farther from the truth: God as disinterested Absolute with no trace of the personal about *itself* or God as coercive law that constantly chafes mankind with *its* cold, impersonal restrictions. To be sure, there are laws and absolutes, but

they are always the expressions of God's personal will, and He is more than they. God as personal, without being false to Himself, may alter His path, go beyond His own laws. Indeed, the realm of the miraculous is largely this realm of the personal God who appears as a nonconformist to His own accepted ways!

Briefly a word should be added about the so-called anthropomorphisms frequently occurring in the Scriptures. Not only is God depicted in the Bible as One who thinks, feels, and wills (all very humanlike activities); as one who laughs, gets angry, rejoices, sorrows (perhaps even more humanlike); but also references are made to His "face," His "arm," His "feet," even His "back"—references that seem perhaps to go too far in the human direction in that God is described also as having bodily characteristics. Two things, however, should be said in reply. First, God, though being spirit (see next section), is not formless[11]—for this would mean chaos, disorganization, and anarchy; hence the anthropomorphisms express that God has particular being. Second, the frequent references to physical traits are vivid expressions of the biblical understanding that God is personal. On this latter point the writers of Scripture know full well that God has no literal body, but they also attest that God is fully personal: He beholds human persons, He reaches out to them, and He counsels them; in these ways He has "eyes" and "hands" and "feet." To avoid anthropomorphisms would be to fail to depict God in His living and personal reality.

God shows Himself to be personal uniquely by His self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Since God has incarnated Himself in the person of Jesus Christ, this affirms that personal reality is the true expression of the divine being. God does not come to man primarily through the speech of Christ, nor even through His action, but through the totality of His person. In the ministry of Jesus Christ His every contact with people was extremely personal. His was a life of entering into fellowship, meeting people in their deepest needs, identifying Himself with them even to His death on the cross. Furthermore, Jesus instructed His disciples to call God "Father" and depicted His and their relation to God as that of sons. Thus God is personal in Himself and toward others.

We should also note that God is One whose unity is that of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[12] Among other things this unmistakably affirms that God is richly personal—even thrice-personal. He cannot be described simply as Father; He is also Son and Holy Spirit. If "Spirit" sounds less personal, let us immediately observe that, especially in the New Testament, the Spirit is referred to frequently in personal terms—as an "I" or a "He."[13] God the Lord therefore is the fullness of personhood.

There is no suggestion in God's Word that He is personal by virtue of man's

designation of Him as such. It is always just the opposite: man is personal by God's decision. God is not personified reality; He is rather the personalizing One. The name Father, for example, is not a fanciful projection by which people seek to make God human;[14] rather, the name Father is that which enables men to be called father and to establish families on earth. "Personal God," therefore, is not a symbolic term for One who may be more accurately described perchance as the ground of being;[15] rather, His very essence is personal through and through. He is the One God who *is* Father, Son, and Spirit. Behind these personal differentiations lies no hidden, impersonal being.

Finally, God is personal in that the central aspect of His character is love. Love is an empty and meaningless term if it is not understood as proceeding from one who is personal. Love is not a neutral entity, a kind of abstract term for a certain relationship even though it be the highest and finest imaginable. It is rather a word that is wholly and deeply personal; it expresses as no other word the inner meaning of personal reality. He who loves completely is completely personal. Since God *is* love, He is *Person.*

This understanding of God as personal is exceedingly relevant today. For one thing, people are much concerned to know whether ultimate reality, however defined, is really personal. If there is a God, is He anything more than a kind of impersonal energy or blind fate? Does God actually "hear" prayer? (Energy or fate surely would not.) Is He truly a God who has personal interest in His creation? Such questions express the deep, often anxious, concerns of many people; hence it is important to be able to affirm clearly and convincingly the personal reality of God. For another thing, the understanding of God as personal is important in a world wherein human existence is becoming more and more depersonalized. An individual person has often become a faceless name, a cog in a machine, a number on a punch card. His relations are increasingly to things—machines, tools, the material world—and only secondarily to people. Hence he in turn tends to treat others not as persons but as things—things to be manipulated, used, and abused for his own ends. Thus there is desperate need to recover the dimension of the personal. The answer ultimately lies in God's becoming understood again as personal, for it is in personal relationship with Him that all relationships are personalized. To know God as personal is to discover afresh the wonder of personal existence—in communion with God, in fellowship with one's neighbor, and within one's own being.

C. God Is Spirit

"God is spirit" (John 4:24).[16] As such He is incorporeal; He is the acting God; He is the Lord of freedom.

God as spirit is, first of all, incorporeal. He is not "flesh and blood."[17] This means several things. First, the being of God is nonmaterial: His reality is totally spiritual. Hence, His personal form (see above) is not material,[18] for materiality is an aspect of creaturehood; rather, God is personal spirit. All biblical anthropomorphisms, therefore, are to be understood only as giving particularity and specificity to Him whose being is spiritual. Since God is spirit, His being is not some kind of rarefied matter, or, as it were, some form of energy. Spirit is not God's substance, for spirit is not substance or matter but God's reality. God is not material, regardless of how refined or in what form such matter may be. God *is* spirit.

It follows that God who is incorporeal is also invisible.[19] He is One whom "no man has ever seen or can see" (1 Tim. 6:16). He does not have the bodily visibility of man. Since God's being is not formless, His form may be seen through His own self-revelation.

However, His form is invisible except to the eyes of faith, and God in His essential reality (His "face") can be seen by no man. So to behold God is impossible while man is in his present corporeal state; indeed, it would be his destruction.[20] To behold God's "face" is reserved for the final order of existence in the new heaven and the new earth.[21] In this present life God remains the invisible God.

Since God is incorporeal, His being is also simple, undivided, uncompounded. God is not composed of parts so that He is partly in heaven and partly on earth, or so that one part of His being is Father, another Son, another Holy Spirit, or that He has a body of various parts. The scriptural references to God's "eyes," "hands," "feet," etc., which affirm God's personal being, by no means intend to suggest that He is a composite reality. If in the Scriptures God's "back" only is seen[22] or His "form" but not His "face," it is not that man beholds a part of God. It is rather that God cannot be seen fully by any human. What a person does behold in faith is the total God who in His self-revelation is still the hidden God. God is spirit.

Second, God as spirit is the acting God. God is not a being who also acts but

is One whose being is that of action. For spirit is that which is totally dynamic. Nor is God one who speaks and also wills; rather, His speech is one with the deed:[23] He is the word in action. It is pointless, therefore, to think that behind God's action there is some other, presumably profounder, depth of being. God is who He is in His activity.

To illustrate, if God acts to create a world, He is totally in that action. He is the Creator God, and there is no God above, alongside, or in addition to Him who creates. The act of creation is God in action. Of course, what God creates-the world and human beings—is not God, or any part of Him. However, it does not follow that because of the distinction between the act of creation and what is created there is a difference between God and His act. God as spirit, the acting Lord, is the Creator, and there is no deity somehow standing outside or beyond what is done.

Let me quickly add that this identity of being and act does not mean that if God did not create or redeem or renew there would be no God. Such a view would make God's reality dependent on the totality of His deeds. But that would reverse the picture, for it is not that act is God but that God is act. Therefore, although He is totally in every action, He is still the Lord over what He does, and He may act in other ways than those He has made known.

Third, God as spirit is free. Spirit is unbound, untrammeled, uncoerced; God knows no limits of any kind. He is free, first, to do as He wills. There is no obstacle or hindrance of any kind within Himself. God is hampered by no internal struggle, driven by no inner necessity. He is free to express Himself, free to love, free to carry forward His purpose. His being is utter spontaneity, and He is completely self-determining.

The Spirit of God the Lord is the spirit of freedom.[24]

God is free again in relation to the universe He has created. It is not as if God has made a world and was now bound by it—by its laws, its structures, and its limits. God as spirit moves freely within the created order. And if He desires, He may move beyond it. God, accordingly, is not in any way limited by His own creation. Quite the contrary, because it is His creation, it serves not to constrain but to implement His will. God the free Lord is not bound.

God is free also in His dealings with mankind. He cannot be coerced into some particular activity by the human situation. If, for example, He acts creatively or redemptively, it is not because He must, but because He wills to do so. If He deals generously with people, it is not because people compel it or deserve it, but because God wills it: grace is free grace. This does not mean that God's actions are arbitrary, for He is the holy, loving, and truthful God.

Therefore, He will act in a corresponding manner. God will not act differently from what He is; He is altogether dependable. But His actions are uncoerced. God is the free Lord.

All that has been said about God as spiritual, whether in terms of His incorporeal being, His being in action, or His essential freedom, is important for man's understanding of both God and himself. If God is spirit, He may be worshiped only in the spirit[25] He has given man. He can be served only by a life of dedicated activity, not by withdrawal from engagement. And He can be embodied only in those who live in complete freedom. When people truly understand God as spirit and act accordingly, life takes on richer and fuller meaning.

III. THE TRANSCENDENCE OF GOD

Our concern is next with affirmations about God that point to His transcendence. These are attributes that belong to God as God. In no way are they shared by man, nor are they comparable with anything in the world. They are sometimes described as "incommunicable attributes."[26] In any event they are attributes of the transcendent God.

A. God Is Infinite

God is unlimited, unbounded. Human beings are finite, confined in space. With God there is no confinement, no limitation. He transcends everything in His creation.

The biblical picture of God's infinity is frequently that of His exaltation. He is the Lord "high and lifted up" (Isa. 6:1). He is exalted above everything earthly and human. His throne is beyond the highest heaven. In the language of King Solomon: "Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee" (1 Kings 8:27). God is "God Most High" (Gen. 14:18–22).[27] The spatial imagery of height obviously is inadequate, since God transcends all that is, but it does suggest that God is infinitely far removed from everything finite.

One extraordinary passage in the Book of Job depicts the limitlessness of God in terms of height, depth, and breadth. Zophar questions Job, "Can you find out the deep things[28] of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? It is higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know? Its measure is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea" (11:7–9). Not only is God higher than the heights, He is also deeper than the depths. He exceeds the profoundest levels of existence, the basic structure of the universe. God is not to be thought of as the "world-spirit" or "world-soul," for such is to view Him as somehow a depth dimension of creaturely existence. Nor is God to be understood in terms of breadth, for He is broader than the breadth of all that is. Such is the vastness of God. Nothing, in whatever its dimension of height or depth or breadth, approximates the divine reality. God is as far away from the ultimate dimensions of creaturely existence as He is from its more obvious and immediate aspects.

It is sometimes assumed that God may be attained through the upsurge of human aspirations or through the probing of the depths of existence, or by pursuing life in its multifaceted breadth. People sometimes imagine that if one can only reach high enough through some form of religious ecstasy, or dig deep enough through meditation into the inner realm of spirit, or reach far enough out to embrace life in its fullest expression, God will at last be come upon. In other words, human effort can finally lead into the vicinity of the divine so that one is close enough to break through himself or, if not that, for God to move in. Such an assumption grievously errs, for however high, deep, or wide the journey, one remains within the creaturely realm: God is no closer than before. Great effort,

often painstaking and protracted, may be undertaken, but God remains beyond.

God Himself is infinite. He submits to no finite measure, however extended, nor is any aspect of Him to be identified with the finite. Views of God that see Him as infinite-finite (the infinite God who embodies the finite within Himself), or as the finite in certain aspects of His being, or as the finite moving toward infinity, are equally far from the truth. Wherever there is the finite, there is God's creation—but not God Himself. God would be as fully God if the finite did not exist: He is the Infinite Lord.

Returning to the imagery of exaltation—God "high and lifted up"—let us note, first, that His exaltation calls for the response of true worship. God is likewise to be exalted through the praises of His people: "Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let thy glory be over all the earth!" (Ps. 57:5). Even then, God's name is beyond all earthly praise: "Blessed be thy glorious name which is exalted above all blessing and praise" (Neh. 9:5). Nonetheless, the heart of worship is blessing and praise, for by it the people of God proclaim the exaltation of their God. As they magnify His name together, He is worthily honored. Moreover, it is only as people exalt God and His name that they are kept from falling into the self-destructive tendencies of worship of the things of the world and their own selves. When God truly is exalted, all things fit together in perfect harmony.

It also follows, secondly, from the recognition that God alone is to be exalted that the proper attitude of man is humility. Boasting is in order only when it is boasting of the Lord ("My soul makes its boast in the LORD" [Ps. 34:2]); otherwise man is called upon to walk in humility. He who would exalt himself—and thus seek to play the role of God—will surely be cast down. "The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the pride of men shall be humbled; and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day" (Isa. 2:11). Contrariwise, he who seeks to live in such a way that God's name is exalted is the person whom God lifts up: "And whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matt. 23:12). Such is the strange paradox of true Christian living.

B. God Is Eternal

God is the everlasting God.[29] He is without beginning or ending. Human beings are temporal creatures whose days on earth are limited in number. With God there is no such limitation. Thus again does God transcend everything in His creation.

God is the great "I AM." He speaks to Moses: "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM[30] has sent me to you'" (Exod. 3:14). God is the eternal contemporary, the everlasting now.[31] Similar words are spoken by Jesus the Son of God: "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). Not "before Abraham was, I was," but "I am." Hence, the Son of God, like the Father, dwells, so to speak, in an eternity that overarches time.

God is the one and only reality that is without beginning, middle, or end. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God" (Ps. 90:2)—not "from past to future thou art God," but "from everlasting to everlasting." There is no temporal progression: not "thou wert" or "thou wilt be," but "thou art."[32] There is neither beginning of days nor end of years: *God is.*

To say that "God is" does not mean that He dwells in the present. For such a word as "present" is temporal language and necessarily points to a preceding past and a coming future. God transcends time; hence He transcends the present as well as the past and the future. He is not confined by the time order in which we live. "God is" (or His own statement, "I AM") means basically, "I am the eternal one."[33]

Thus God lives eternally. He is "the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity" (Isa. 57:15). That is to say, His being is not only exalted and therefore transcends all space but also eternal and transcends all time. To "inhabit" or "dwell in" eternity is not to speak of some eternal place, but to point to His mode of existence as beyond anything temporal. God is—eternally.

From the perspective of time, however, we may speak of the God who is as pretemporal, supratemporal, and posttemporal. Here the language of Revelation 4:8 is quite relevant: "… the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" *Before* anything else, God was. Jesus prayed to God the Father: "Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made" (John 17:5). Thus Father and Son existed before there was

a world with its dimensions of space and time. This does not mean that there was a time before time when God existed, but that God is eternal. God exists *above* the temporal. God is He who "sits above the circle of the earth" (Isa. 40:22), hence above all temporal affairs of men and nations. Since God is supratemporal, there is no inner progression in Him from past to future and He beholds the end from the beginning. "For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night" (Ps. 90:4). God will be *after* time. When time is no more and the present heavens and the earth pass away, God will continue to be. Again, in some beautiful words of the psalmist: "Of old thou didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They will perish, but thou dost endure; they will wear out like a garment. Thou changest them like raiment, and they pass away; but thou art the same, and thy years have no end" (102:25–27).

None of this intends to suggest that God has no relation to time. Quite the contrary, since God made the world of space and time and loves His creation, He is much concerned about all temporal affairs. He does not hold Himself aloof in eternity but is constantly acting in all human occasions. By no means is He the God of deistic thought—namely, one who exists in splendid isolation and supreme indifference. Indeed the very heart of Christian faith is that God in the person of His Son actually entered our time and lived for some thirty-three years on the earth He had created. Time is not merely a passing shadow of eternity, hence unreal to God. Rather, He has come in the fullness of time and lived it out to the fullest.

To say that God is eternal and the world is temporal might seem to imply that God is static and inactive, whereas the world is active and moving. That is far from true; since God is eternally the living God, there is continuing activity even if it is not temporal. There is the eternal begetting of the Son, the eternal procession of the Spirit, eternal movement within the Godhead.[34] Indeed there is a richness and abundance within this eternal activity that our finite and limited activity cannot begin to approximate.

Finally, the knowledge that God is eternal gives to those who trust in Him a great sense of God's unlimited, unending existence. These words of Scripture take on vivid meaning: "The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deut. 33:27). Time may carry us on with seemingly ever-increasing rapidity; but those who know the eternal God dwell in Him, and they have His support and strength. Even more, since the eternal God has entered our time and space in Jesus Christ, He has brought His own eternity into our hearts. We *have* everlasting life. When time is no more, we will continue to live with Him forever.

C. God Is Unchanging

God is One who does not change. The universe is constantly undergoing a transition from one stage to another, and human existence is marked by continuing alteration. With God there is no such mutability. "For I the LORD do not change" (Mai. 3:6). Thus, once more does God transcend everything in His creation.

God is the Rock.[35] He does not fluctuate from one event to the next. There is constancy and stability in all that He is and does. Hence, He is not evolving from one stage to another. There is no movement from some "primordial" nature to a "consequent"[36] nature in any aspect of His being. God is not a becoming God, a growing God: God does not change. He is "the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change [literally "with whom … change has no place"]" (James 1:17). Likewise, the New Testament declares that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Heb. 13:8). God, whether Father or Son or Spirit, is One who changes not.

In God there is dependability and constancy in His being, acts, and purposes. The Old Testament sometimes speaks of God as "repenting" or changing His mind (e.g., Exod. 32:14). From the overall picture,[37] the outward "repentance" does not signify a change in God's activity, but only His dependable response to man's behavior. God invariably acts the same: when man is obedient, God blesses; when man disobeys, God punishes; when man confesses his sin, God forgives. He "repents"; that is, He turns in the other direction.

Hence, God's "repentance" is not really a change in God, but it is His bringing to bear on the human situation some other aspect of His being and nature. God remains the same throughout.

It is important *not* to view God's changelessness as that of hard, impersonal immobility. God is not like a statue, fixed and cold, but, quite the contrary, He relates to people. He is not the "unmoved Mover"[38] but constantly moves upon and among men and nations. The flux and flow of life are not far away and far beneath Him. Indeed, He freely involved Himself in the life of a fickle and inconstant people to work out His purpose, and in the Incarnation He plunged totally into the maelstrom of human events. God in His own changelessness has experienced all the vicissitudes of human existence. This is the God—far from immobile and distant—who does not change.

This truth about God is greatly important in a world where people are often overwhelmed by continual changes, the turbulence of events, the instability of life. Truly “here we have no lasting [or “continuing” KJV] city” (Heb. 13:14). Everything seems to come and go, to be here one moment and pass away the next. There is much need for realizing that in the midst of it all God abides unchanging, and that in Him and Him alone there is steadfastness and strength. “Change and decay in all around I see; O Thou who changest not, abide with me.”[39] In that attitude of prayer and assurance all of life takes on stability and confidence. God is the Rock of our salvation, the strength in all our passing years.

God is the God who does not change.

IV. THE CHARACTER OF GOD

What is God like? We have observed His identity and His transcendence. Now we need to reflect upon His character, that is to say, His moral nature. This consideration of God’s character stands at the very heart of the doctrine of God.

A. God Is Holy

God is primarily the God of holiness; this is the fundamental fact about God. "For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. 43:3). This declaration through the Old Testament prophet sounds forth constantly in the biblical witness. God is holy, indeed thrice holy: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts" (Isa. 6:3). Holiness is the foundation of God's nature;[40] it is the background for everything else we may say about God. God is "the Holy One."[41]

It is significant to note that when God declared Himself personally to Israel as Yahweh (the LORD), the preparation for this was the revelation of His holiness. He spoke first to Moses from the burning bush: "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Exod. 3:5). Only when Moses was first made aware of the holiness of God did God announce His personal identity (vv. 13–15). Later at Mount Sinai, preparatory to the giving of the Law, "the LORD descended upon it in fire … and the whole mountain quaked greatly" (19:18). No one except Moses and his brother Aaron was allowed to climb the mountain to "come up to the LORD, lest he break out against them" (v. 24). Thus, deeply and forcefully all Israel was impressed with the holiness of God. God is a personal God, but never is He to be treated casually, for He is the awesome and holy God.

The God who is revealed in Jesus Christ is the same God of holiness. While His disciples and the multitudes were not readily aware of this, the demons with their supernatural perception did not hesitate to cry out immediately: "Ah! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God" (Luke 4:34). Later, Peter could say for himself and others: "We have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:69). Jesus is God in person, the Holy Lord.

It is sometimes assumed that the Old Testament depicts a God of holiness, whereas the New Testament depicts a God of love. This is an unfortunate misapprehension, for the God of the New Testament is the same holy God. "I am holy" is the language of both Leviticus 11:44 and 1 Peter 1:16. Also, Jesus' apostles were "holy apostles" (Eph. 3:5), the Christian calling is a "holy calling" (2 Tim. 1:9), and the new Jerusalem is "the holy city" (Rev. 21:2). In one of the New Testament's most vivid passages (Heb. 12:18–29), a connection is made between Israelites standing before the holy God at Mount Sinai and Christians

standing symbolically before Mount Zion, “the city of the living God” (v. 22), with the climactic statement being that “our God is a consuming fire.” There is no difference between the God of Sinai and the God of Zion: He is throughout a “consuming fire.” Indeed, further depths of the divine holiness are shown in the New Testament. The whole marvel of redemption, which is the heart of the gospel, can be understood only against the background of the holy God who is not able to tolerate sin. The death of Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God’s holiness in its consuming fire against the aggregate of the world’s unholiness and evil.

Let us now look more closely at the significance of the holiness of God. Basically it points to God’s awesomeness and majesty. God is God and not man. His whole being is so totally other,[42] so awesome, so majestic as to overwhelm man. Jacob in a dream beheld the Lord and the angels of God ascending and descending a ladder between heaven and earth and awakened to cry: “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven” (Gen. 28:17). Joshua fell on his face and worshiped as he heard the same word that earlier came to Moses: “Put off your shoes from your feet; for the place where you stand is holy” (Josh. 5:15). John on the isle of Patmos beheld the majestic Lord: “His face was like the sun shining in full strength…. I fell at his feet as though dead” (Rev. 1:16–17). Such accounts as these set forth God’s utter majesty and the response of total awe evoked in His presence.

The “fear of the Lord,” a frequent biblical expression, points in the direction of the proper attitude before the Lord. “Fear” in these contexts is not related to fright or apprehension, that is, being afraid of God, but to the attitude of profound reverence and awe before God. Fear of the Lord is not an attitude befitting only the sinner, an attitude that will disappear when salvation occurs. Rather, this fear is to continue throughout life. Paul speaks of the fear of the Lord in his own life: “Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Cor. 5:11), and he tells believers to “work out” their salvation “with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). Indeed, beyond this life the saints in glory sing forth: “Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O Lord? For thou alone art holy” (Rev. 15:4). Truly, the fear of the Lord is man’s rightful attitude both now and forever.

The holiness of God also points to the divine purity. God Himself is “of purer eyes than to behold evil” (Hab. 1:13). At the heart of the divine majesty is the white and brilliant light of His utter purity. There is in God utterly no taint of anything unclean or impure. In the Old Testament tabernacle the ark of the covenant, representing the divine presence, was overlaid with pure gold—both the mercy seat and the cherubim. It was from above the mercy seat and between

the cherubim that God spoke His commandments to Moses (Exod. 25:10–22). The pure gold symbolized the presence of the pure and holy God of Israel. Later Solomon built the temple, its holy place being overlaid with pure gold and its lampstand, basins, and other furnishings also made of gold (2 Chron. 3–4). Earlier, the Israelites had been given many rites and ceremonies of purification for priests and people (e.g., see the Holiness Code of Lev. 17–26). Anything that defiled a person, whether outwardly or inwardly, prevented him from approaching God and His dwelling place. All of this was to demonstrate that the pure and holy God of Israel was calling for His people to show forth His own total purity. One further thing should be mentioned: the Passover lamb was to be without blemish (Exod. 12:5). This carried over into the New Testament where Christ "our Passover lamb" (1 Cor. 5:7 NIV) was sacrificed; He was "a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Peter 1:19). All of this sets forth in ever-increasing manner the purity and holiness of God.

God's people, then, are to be a pure and holy people.[43] However, it must be much more than external purity. Indeed, Jesus spoke out strongly against those who "cleanse the outside of the cup" but inwardly were filled with "all manner of uncleanness" (Matt. 23:25–26). Jesus came proclaiming that what God wanted was purity of heart: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (5:8). And it is the blood of Jesus, finally, that so purifies from evil within that people may again behold the pure and holy God.

Next, and in close conjunction with the holiness of God, is His *righteousness.* First, this refers to what God is in Himself. God is a God of total integrity and uprightness. "Good and upright is the Lord" (Ps. 25:8). The divine nature is that of absolute rectitude. Wrongdoing is foreign to His life and action. "Righteousness will go before him, and make his footsteps a way" (85:13). Hence, righteousness is an aspect of His holiness that highlights the moral dimension.

Second, righteousness applies to the way in which God relates to man. God expects His people to demonstrate uprightness; indeed "righteousness guards him whose way is upright" (Prov. 13:6). So that His people may know what His righteousness entails, He gave them His laws and ordinances.[44] When they depart from His way, punishment must follow, for God's righteousness cannot tolerate any unrighteousness in man. The supreme demonstration of God's righteousness lies in the Cross where the righteous anger of God was poured out on all the evil of mankind vicariously borne by Jesus Christ in His death.

Since God is righteous, God's people are those who continue to seek righteousness: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," for

truly “they shall be satisfied” (Matt. 5:6). This call to righteousness far exceeds the keeping of the Old Testament law; it has become the way of internal righteousness as summarized in the Sermon on the Mount. Ultimately the call is: “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). God desires no less of His people.

Finally, we have to consider God’s *justice*. How closely connected this is with righteousness may be noted in the affirmation “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of thy throne” (Ps. 89:14; 97:2). If God is enthroned in holiness, then the foundation of that throne is righteousness and justice. Justice emerges from righteousness,[45] not as describing God in Himself (as righteousness does in part), but in His relationship to man whereby He is, first of all, fair and equitable in all His ways. With God there is evenhandedness in His relationship to all peoples. Paul, speaking of how God deals equally with both Jew and Greek, adds, “God shows no partiality” (Rom. 2:11). The Israelites, to be sure, were God’s chosen people, but this did not mean that He “played favorites” with them. Indeed, they were designated by Him to be examples of His justice before all peoples: “You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality; and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous. Justice, and only justice, you shall follow …” (Deut. 16:19–20). The just and impartial God calls for justice in every practice.

Moreover, God in His justice renders to each person according to his works. God is “the Judge of all the earth” (Gen. 18:25),[46] and accordingly metes out both penalties and rewards: “To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury” (Rom. 2:7–8). Paul calls this the “righteous judgment” of God (v. 5). Truly salvation is through faith, but judgment is according to works. Accordingly, there will be a Judgment Day when all peoples will stand before the throne of God and receive according to what they have done. But in everything, there will be total justice, for God is just and His Son Jesus, who has borne our judgment, will Himself be the Judge.

In addition, God in His justice is particularly concerned about the abused and downtrodden of earth: “The LORD maintains the cause of the afflicted, and executes justice for the needy” (Ps. 140:12). Those whose rights are violated by the powerful of earth find in God their champion. The Lord is the Vindicator; He “works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed” (Ps. 103:6). For it is His will, as One who is just and righteous in everything, to see that all people share in the good things He provides and are treated as brothers and sisters of

one another. Likewise God calls upon His people to share His concern for all mankind. In the majestic words spoken through the prophet Amos: “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream” (Amos 5:24).

The foundational fact about God’s character is that He is holy, righteous, and just in Himself and in all His ways.

B. God Is Love

God is centrally the God of love. Love is the very essence of the divine nature: "God is love" (1 John 4:8). The God who revealed Himself to prophets and apostles, and supremely in Jesus Christ, is the God of love.

In the Old Testament the love of God is early declared in His choice of Israel to be His own people and in His deliverance of them from bondage in Egypt. For His choosing Israel there is no explanation given outside of God's love: "The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because the LORD loves you …" (Deut. 7:6–8). To this is added that God is honoring the oath He swore to their fathers.[47] But the central and inexplicable fact is the love of God. It is evident too that this love of God was not based on anything merit-worthy in Israel: they were "the fewest," and to this might be added, they were surely not more righteous than others. God loved because His nature is love, not because Israel was a people who peculiarly deserved it.

This love of God, accordingly, is the background for the deliverance of God's people from Egypt. The passage above continues: "[because the LORD loves you] … the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage" (Deut. 7:8). In another place the Lord spoke through Moses to the Israelites: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself' (Exod. 19:4). The love and tender care of God for Israel is herein set forth beautifully and memorably. Later in Israel's history God spoke through the prophet Isaiah: "Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life" (Isa. 43:4).[48] Finally, one of the most moving passages is in Hosea: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son … it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms … I led them with cords of compassion, with the bands of love" (11:1, 3–4). Then the Lord cried in the midst of Israel's idolatry and impending judgment: "How can I give you up, O Ephraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel!" (v. 8).

In the New Testament this love of God that is not based on anything of merit is further heightened and intensified in the person and work of Jesus Christ. As in the Old Testament record, there is a special love of Jesus for those whom He

has chosen. In the Upper Room Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, for "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (John 13:1). Later He added, in referring to His near death, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). None of the disciples deserved this love, but Jesus went right on loving even to His death on the cross. However, the greatness of this love cannot be measured only by Jesus' willingness to die for His "friends," for this could mean no more than that He died a martyr's death. The love of God in Jesus far exceeds this. As the New Testament proclaims in so many ways, it was a death for undeserving sinners: "Christ died for the ungodly … God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6, 8). The full dimensions of that love, however, can be appreciated only in the knowledge that in His death for sinners He was also vicariously bearing the total weight of their punishment. In love He trod the winepress of the wrath of the Holy God poured out in judgment on the sins of the whole world. Yet, in love, He went all the way. So vast, so immeasurable,[49] so unimaginable is the love of God in Jesus Christ!

It is apparent, then, that the content of the affirmation that God is love can be apprehended only in the light of this final revelation in the cross of Christ. Indeed, shortly after the statement in 1 John that "God is love," the passage continues: "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (4:10). The love of God for the people of Israel pointed in this direction, but until the death of God's Son on Calvary the fullness of his love could not have been known.

The love of God is active, seeking, self-giving—totally unrelated to either the merit or the response of those He loves. It goes all the way in caring, bearing, suffering. As the life of Jesus demonstrates, it is a love, a compassion, that reaches out to every person: the poor, the maimed, the blind. "I have compassion on the multitude" (Matt. 15:32 KJV)—indeed not as a mass of people but as individuals who were laden with needs. He even taught people to love their enemies and to pray for those who persecuted them (5:44). In His own life and death Jesus vividly demonstrated this. While suffering and dying on the cross, He prayed for His torturers: "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34).

The love of God, *agapë* in the New Testament, is totally different from the love that seeks its own fulfillment. The Greeks had another word for the latter—namely, *eros. Eros* (never used in the New Testament) is primarily a passionate love that desires another person; it seeks fulfillment in the other. *Eros* may rise beyond the sensual level to a passion for many things such as music, art, and beauty. In some mystical thinking it is the impulsion of the soul beyond the world of sense and reason to seek the ultimately real. But in every case *eros* is

the love that gives itself only because it finds fulfillment or value in that which is loved. There is nothing as such wrong with *eros;* it is natural love on many levels. But it is totally different from *agape:* the love that loves, seeking no self-fulfillment; the love that is not based on the worthiness of the object; the love that loves the unlovely, the unbeautiful, even the repulsive; the love that gets nothing in return except crucifixion-the amazing, astounding love of God![50]

Now it is important to add that the love of God in Christ expands from a particular love to love for the whole world. Although in the Old Testament it is evident that God had a concern for all nations,[51] His love was focused on Israel. The word *love* is never used of God in the Old Testament for any others than Israel.[52] But in the New Testament all this expands universally; the love of God is clearly directed to all mankind. The key verse, of course, is "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The focus has become "the world," and, with an intensity far beyond anything regarding Israel, God loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son.

Let us now seek to summarize some aspects of the love of God. First, it is the nature of God to love. One does not need to go behind some loving action and ask why God did it. Since God is love, love is His self-expression. We have noted that God is holy, even thrice holy; yet it is never said that God is holiness. Love is the very essence of God. It is not that love is God (which is an idolatrous statement), but that God is love.

Second, the love of God is spontaneous. God loves because love is His very nature; the world does not necessitate that love. For God in Himself is love eternally—the mutuality of love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus He does not need a world to express that love. He did not create the world and man in order to have some necessary outlet for expressing His love. God is love—with or without a world. His love is spontaneous and free.

Third, and this logically follows, God's love is never self-seeking but always self-giving. He does not love a particular people or mankind at large because He "gets something out of it." It is totally a love that, regardless of the worth or response of the object, keeps on giving itself.

Fourth, the content of the divine love can be apprehended only in God's action. It is not a love that can be understood abstractly through many definitions and calculations. The content is to be taken from the action, supremely what God did in Jesus Christ. "In *this* is love" (1 John 4:10).

Fifth, the love of God is unfathomable. When all has been said about God's love, we are still left with its unfathomable quality. Paul, after praying that the

Ephesians might be “grounded in love” and that they might “have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,” adds, “and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge” (Eph. 3:17–19). The vast extent of God’s love and its knowledge-surpassing character in Jesus Christ points up the limitless, unfathomable nature of the divine love.

This leads us now to some other terms that are expressions of the love of God. The first of these is *grace.* In the Old Testament God declared Himself to be a gracious God by saying to Moses, “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious” (Exod. 33:19). Later, on Mount Sinai, where Moses again received the commandments, God further spoke of Himself: “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious” (Exod. 34:6). Often thereafter the Lord is described as “gracious and merciful.”[53] However, the word *grace* itself is especially connected with the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament the word first appears in the prologue of the Gospel of John:[54] “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth…. And from his fulness have we all received, grace upon grace” (John 1:14, 16). In the Book of Acts and the remainder of the New Testament the word occurs over 120 times. Frequently it is “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” (e.g., Rom. 16:20), or “grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord” (e.g., 1 Tim. 1:2). Thus, “grace upon grace” is particularly associated with Jesus Christ and points both to His manner of life and His sacrificial death.

The word *grace* speaks of the way in which God in Christ has condescended to us. It highlights that aspect of God’s love that refers to His self-giving regardless of merit. Accordingly, it points up the way wherein God in His love has gone beyond His revelation of the law to Moses to bring salvation in Jesus Christ. “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). The law given through Moses, for all its moral majesty in setting forth God’s will for His people, was not kept by Israel. Israel did not have a “heart” for it; they continually disobeyed and finally went into captivity. In Jesus Christ came that “grace upon grace” by which God brought hope and salvation to all men in their disobedience and lostness. “By grace you have been saved” (Eph. 2:8) is a glorious New Testament declaration.

Mercy is closely connected with grace. This has already been noted in the Old Testament and in the New Testament expression “grace, mercy, and peace.” Mercy embodies within itself especially compassion, forbearance, and forgiveness. God is one who in mercy delivers His people from their enemies, provides for their needs, and is longsuffering in His relationship with them.[55] He remembers His covenant with His people and comes to their succor in many a

situation. Jesus often showed mercy by healing the sick, feeding the hungry, even raising the dead. But at the heart of mercy is forgiveness (e.g., see Matt. 18:23–35) and God's gift of salvation. "But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ" (Eph. 2:4–5). With the psalmist we can surely cry, "Great is thy mercy, O Lord" (Ps. 119:156).

Next, we may note the *lovingkindness* of God. In the Old Testament God is frequently spoken of as one who "abounds in lovingkindness." The words of God to Moses that begin, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious" continue with "slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness[56] and faithfulness, keeping lovingkindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." (Exod. 34:6–7). This lovingkindness of God is particularly related to God's entering into covenant with His people. He speaks in the Ten Commandments of "showing lovingkindness to thousands of those" who love Him and keep His commandments (Exod. 20:6; Deut. 5:10). These words "the LORD, the LORD" are spoken when God again gave the tables of the Law. God is "the faithful God who keeps covenant and lovingkindness with those who love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations" (Deut. 7:9). Hence, this lovingkindness of the Lord is steadfast, unshakable, enduring for those who respond in love and obedience to His commandments. In all of this a mutuality of relationship between God and His people is presupposed. The most ringing affirmation of this lovingkindness, this steadfast love, is found in the refrain of each verse of Psalm 136. Beginning with God Himself, then His wonders in creation, and finally the redemption of His people, the psalmist concludes: "O give thanks to the God of heaven, for His lovingkindness endures for ever" (v. 26).

This lovingkindness of God carries over into the New Testament with such a statement as "when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us" (Titus 3:4). This again is connected with God's covenant: it was "to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant" (Luke 1:72). The word *mercy* in this context conveys the note of God's steadfast love and kindness to His people. In Jesus Christ the people of God find this continuing, enduring love both now and for eternity.

The final word to express the love of God is *goodness*.[57] That God is good is the ringing affirmation of the biblical witness throughout: "O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good" (Ps. 118:1). "Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good" (Ps. 135:3). The Lord is good in Himself. Moreover, His goodness is constantly manifested to His creatures. The LORD is good to all, and His compassion is over

all that He has made" (Ps. 145:9). Thus as the expression of His innate goodness, He overflows in outward goodness, or benevolence, to all creation.

The goodness of God is clearly related to His grace, mercy, and lovingkindness. Concerning grace, the psalmist cries, "Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing to his name, for he is gracious" (Ps. 135:3). Concerning mercy as forgiveness, he says, "For thou, O Lord, art good and forgiving" (Ps. 86:5). Concerning lovingkindness, he proclaims, "For the LORD is good; his lovingkindness endures for ever" (Ps. 100:5). The "goodness of God" is a simple but moving expression that gathers up many facets of the nature of God.

Jesus Himself is to the highest degree the embodiment of the divine goodness. This is set forth particularly in the imagery of the shepherd. According to the Shepherd Psalm, "surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" (23:6). This goodness and mercy is found supremely in Jesus, for He says, "I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me … and I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:14–15). What great goodness: to know personally and intimately those who belong to Him. What great mercy: to lay down His life for those who have strayed far away! Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is the incarnation of the Father's goodness.

This goodness of God is to be affirmed against any view that would suggest some evil in God Himself or that He is the author or cause of evil. There is not some dark side of God, some shadowy quality that precipitates ways or acts of violence, or some demonic force within that grips Him at times. For whatever there is of evil in the universe (and truly there is much in multiple forms and expressions) cannot come from the God who is totally good. There must be other explanations.[58] We may trust totally in the goodness of God.

Indeed, one of the great affirmations of the New Testament is that "in everything God works for good with those who love him" (Rom. 8:28). Hence whatever of misfortune, suffering, or loss, whatever kinds of evil may come against the believer, God is working for good through it all. The goodness of God, regardless of outward circumstance, *will* prevail!

Thus we may appropriately close this discussion of God's love with the beautiful words of the psalmist: "O taste and see that the LORD is good!" (Ps. 34:8). The goodness of the Lord is a delight to be enjoyed—both now and always.

C. God Is a God of Truth

We come finally to the recognition that God is the God of truth.[59] He is the only true God; He is One of complete integrity, dependability, and faithfulness; and He bids all mankind to walk in His truth.

God is, in the first place, the only true God. There are many so-called gods, but there is only one "living and true God." Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: "You turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9). The Old Testament is quite emphatic that "the LORD is the true God" (Jer. 10:10); and in the New Testament Jesus prayed to God the Father as "the only true God" (John 17:3). There are indeed "many 'gods' and many iords'—yet for us there is one God, the Father" (1 Cor. 8:5–6). This is a strong affirmation of biblical and Christian faith.

The true God has been fully revealed in Jesus Christ and nowhere else. The Word that became flesh was "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). At every moment in His life and ministry, Jesus was disclosing the fullness of truth. Thus He could say, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6). Jesus Christ is the incarnation of the true and living God.

Hence, we dare not turn in the slightest degree from the God revealed in the Old Testament as LORD and made flesh in Jesus Christ. There is no other living and true God. To view the "gods" of the world religions as being identical with God is quite erroneous. "For all the gods of the peoples are idols" (Ps. 96:5). The God of Christian faith is the only true God.

God as the God of truth is, in the second place, the God of complete integrity. Because He is the very fountain of truth, there can be in Him nothing of untruth. He is true in His being, actions, and words; there is absolutely no deception or falsehood.

What is disclosed in His general revelation is truth, however much people suppress it.[60] Further, what He sets forth in His special revelation through His word is true: "The word of the LORD is true" (Ps. 141:6). God does nothing that is false; a lie is impossible to His nature. "God is not man, that he should lie" (Num. 23:19); again, "Let God be true though every man be false [literally, "a liar"]" (Rom. 3:4). With God there is no dissimulation, no shading of the truth, no understatement or overstatement; in everything there is total integrity.

Accordingly, God calls His people to the same kind of integrity and honesty.

There is to be no deceit, no hypocrisy, no dissimulation in any of their words and actions. Carelessness in words and exaggeration of facts do not belong to the Christian walk. “Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil” (Matt. 5:37). Slander, gossip, and bearing false witness are ruled out for anyone who serves the God of total integrity. In a world of propaganda, deceptive advertising, and undercover actions, it is difficult for the Christian church and the individual to live with integrity. But God has called the church to be “the pillar and bulwark of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). The God of truth expects nothing less.

The God of truth is, in the third place, the God of complete dependability. The world that He has made with its regular revolution around the sun, its laws and structures, its days and seasons, is a dependable and sure world. One can rely on it because God is a dependable God. His word is sure; everything in it is trustworthy and reliable. Moreover, His promises are likewise sure; not one can fail. They may not always be fulfilled as expected; they may be long in coming to fruition, but their future is certain. God can invariably be counted on.

Closely connected with dependability is a fourth quality—faithfulness. One of the great themes of the Bible is the faithfulness of God. We have noted the memorable words of God to Moses that begin, “The LORD, the LORD“ and include “abounding in lovingkindness and faithfulness” (Exod. 34:6–7).[61] The faithfulness of God, while related to His lovingkindness (or “steadfast love”), conveys the note of God’s unwavering commitment to maintain His relation to His people: to stay with them through “thick and thin.” Because of God’s faithfulness and truth, He will not break His covenant relationship. He will never leave His people nor forsake them. He may bring punishment and suffering on them for their sins; He may even seem to desert them totally at times, but through it all God remains faithful and true. One of the great testimonies to God’s faithfulness is found in the Book of Lamentations, the book of sorrows and griefs over the desolation of Jerusalem. Jeremiah had cried out in agony, “Remember my affliction and my bitterness, the wormwood and the gall!” (Lam. 3:19). Then the prophet added, “But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: the lovingkindness [or “steadfast love”] of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness” (3:21–23). Great *is* Thy faithfulness!

In the New Testament the same kind of faithfulness is seen. God has established a new covenant in Jesus Christ, who, says Paul, “will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful” (1 Cor. 1:8–9). The marvel is that whatever our faithlessness, He does not renege on us. “If we are faithless, he remains faithful” (2 Tim. 2:13). In Jesus Christ we have a

faithful God; in Him we have this sure promise: “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:20 KJV).

In all of this, God’s faithfulness is an aspect of His being the God of truth. The statement quoted above from 2 Timothy concludes, “For he cannot deny himself’ (2:13). God is true to His covenant, true to His promises, true to His people; else He would be denying Himself as the God of truth. The true God remains faithful in everything and forever. In this we may greatly rejoice![62]

God is truth, and He bids us all to walk in His truth. God is our Light: “come, let us walk in the light of the LORD“ (Isa. 2:5). Jesus Christ is “the light of life” (John 8:12); let us walk in His light and His truth. Finally, the Holy Spirit is “the Spirit of truth” whom Jesus promises “will guide [us] into all the truth” (John 16:13).

God is the God of truth.

V. THE PERFECTIONS OF GOD

In this section we will consider God's omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence—or God as almighty, all-wise, and everywhere present. These attributes of God may be spoken of as His perfections in that they represent the perfection or totality of what man knows and experiences in himself. Man is limited in his power, wisdom, and presence; God is not. These three attributes accordingly represent divine perfections.[63]

A. God Is Omnipotent

God is all-powerful. Throughout Scripture there is the continuing attestation to God as the God of all power and might. He shows Himself as mighty in His creation: "Ah Lord GOD! It is thou who hast made the heavens and the earth by thy great power …" (Jer. 32:17). He is mighty in His providential activity wherein He sustains the universe, "upholding the universe by his word of power" (Heb. 1:3). He is mighty in His redemption of Israel: "Thy right hand, O LORD, glorious in power, thy right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy" (Exod. 15:6). He is mighty in the salvation of believers by the gospel: "It is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith" (Rom. 1:16). He is mighty in the life of the believer. Paul speaks of "the immeasurable greatness of his power in us[64] who believe" (Eph. 1:19). He is mighty in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ: "… the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places" (1:19–20). He will be mighty in the coming age: "'I am the Alpha and Omega,' says the LORD God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8).

It is significant that the word *Almighty* occurs frequently in the books of Genesis and Revelation[65] —the beginning of God's dealings with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the climax of all things in bringing this age to its consummation. The disclosure in Genesis of God as almighty has to do with the Abrahamic covenant: "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you" (17:1–2).[66] Thus God is all-powerful to fulfill His covenant of blessing; it will surely be accomplished. In the Book of Revelation the God who reigns over all history and in whose hands the future is certain is the Lord God Almighty. The most frequent use of the term *Almighty*, however, is in the Book of Job[67] wherein God in His awesome power is shown to be far beyond Job's comprehension.[68]

For God as the all-powerful One, nothing is too difficult to accomplish; nothing is beyond His capability. God declares about Himself: "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (Gen. 18:14). Job, after his long and arduous encounter with the Almighty, said to the Lord, "I know that thou canst do all things" (Job 42:2). Jeremiah the prophet said to the Lord, "Nothing is too hard for thee" (Jer. 32:17). The angel Gabriel declared to Mary, "For with God nothing will be impossible"

(Luke 1:37). And Jesus Himself said to His disciples, “With God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26). God verily is the God of omnipotence—both in actuality and in possibility.

But here I must be quick to add that this is not omnipotence in the sense of sheer power. For the God who is Almighty is the God whose character is holiness, love, and truth.[69] Therefore, He does, and will do, only those things that are in harmony with who He is. To say it is impossible for God to do wrong or evil does not limit His omnipotence anymore than, for example, to say it is impossible for God to will His own nonexistence. These are moral and logical contradictions to the very being and nature of Almighty God. In the Scriptures, over and over, God’s omnipotence is associated with His character. To illustrate: the Almighty will not act unjustly. “Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right?” (Job 8:3). The Almighty is a compassionate refuge for His faithful ones, for he “who abides in the shadow of the Almighty” (Ps. 91:1) will know God’s protection. Again in the Book of Revelation, the Almighty God is the all-holy God: “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty” (4:8); “Yea, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are thy judgments” (16:7).[70] In this last book of the Bible the name of God as Almighty may be associated with wrath and destruction—e.g., “the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty” (19:15). But this is by no means unprincipled destructive power; it is the thrice-holy God, the God of truth and justice, whose fury is ready to break forth. The God who can do all things is the God of holiness, love, and truth.

There is another matter that should be emphasized: God’s omnipotence is not to be identified with omnicausality. Because God *can* do all things does not mean that He *does* do all things, to the exclusion of lesser expressions of power. In a pantheistic view God is ultimately the sole actor so that all energy and action are His own. From a biblical perspective, however, the world is God’s creation, not His expression, and as such it has genuine, God-given power of its own. Indeed, the power both latent and active in the universe is vast—in the hugeness of innumerable galaxies and stars and in the minuteness of countless atoms and molecules. In man himself, while finite and limited, there are powers that continue to unfold as he images God in increasing sovereignty over the world God has made.

Any view of God, let me add, that sees Him as having limited power is totally wrong. This means, on the one hand, that there is no barrier within God Himself to a total expression of His power and might. He is not simply all-loving, but lacking in power, so that although He fully wills man’s good, He is not fully able to have it accomplished. Nor, on the other hand, is there any obstacle outside

God that can thwart His free expression. There is a Satan, to be sure, who is "the god [small g] of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4), but his domain and activity in no way circumscribe or hinder God's overarching power.[71] There is the vastness and complexity of a universe outside God that is laden with power and energy, but all is subordinate to the controlling power of God. In the words of the psalmist, "Power belongs to God" (62:11). There is utterly no limitation with Him; He has all power.

A further word: God the omnipotent One is the God of *miracles.* Whereas His great power is manifest, as we have seen, in the works of creation and providence, salvation and consummation, that same power is at work in other wondrous ways. God is fully able to go beyond His ordinary working in nature to perform the extraordinary, the supernatural. He can cause a sea to be opened up so that people walk through on dry ground (Exod. 14:22), a day to be lengthened beyond the usual twenty-four hours (Josh. 10:12–14), fire to come down from heaven to consume a burnt offering (1 Kings 18:38), a physically dead person to be restored to life (2 Kings 4:18–36 and elsewhere), a barren womb and a virgin womb to be able to conceive (Luke 1 and 2), "incurable" diseases and infirmities to be immediately healed (Luke 5:22–26 and elsewhere), and on and on.[72] God is God Almighty for whom nothing is impossible that He wills to do.

The omnipotence of God has much bearing on the life of faith. First, there is the assurance that nothing is beyond the power and control of Almighty God. If it is a fact that "in God we trust," then we need have no fear of anything else, for he "who abides in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the LORD, 'My refuge and my fortress'" (Ps. 91:1–2). For the believer God is a shield and an impregnable fortress that no other power in heaven or on earth can begin to overcome. Second, no matter how weary or distraught we may become, God's vast power is always available to those who look to Him. In the striking words of Isaiah, "He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength … they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength … they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (40:29, 31). When we look to the Lord, what vast power is available to us! Third, since believers have experienced the mighty power of God in the new birth, formerly "dead through our trespasses" but now "made … alive together with Christ" (Eph. 2:5), we can with great anticipation look daily to God for victory over the remnants of sin and the flesh in our life. Fourth, the most extraordinary fact about believers is that Almighty God has taken up residence within them. Hence there is latent power impossible to fully comprehend or measure. Paul declares that "by the power at

work within us [God] is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). The Christian (God help us to realize it!) is a dynamo of divine possibility. Fifth, we can expect God to be powerfully at work not only in the ordinary events of daily life but also in the performing of mighty works. By the gift of His Holy Spirit to those who believe and receive it, there is entrance into the whole sphere of the mighty works of God. "Power from on high" (Luke 24:49) is available to every Christian: the power of Almighty God to bring people to salvation, to perform miracles of healing and deliverance, to destroy every force that comes against the work of God.

We may fittingly close this section on God's omnipotence with the memorable prayer of David:

> Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all (1 Chron. 29:11).

B. Omniscience

God is all-knowing. In many ways the Scriptures attest to God's omniscience. His knowledge is universal: "he knows everything" (1 John 3:20). His knowledge is perfect: He is "perfect in knowledge" (Job 37:16). There is no limit: "his understanding is beyond measure" (Ps. 147:5). Truly "the LORD is a God of knowledge" (1 Sam. 2:3)—all-knowledge.

God's knowledge is that of immediacy. He *beholds* all things: "The eyes of the LORD are in every place" (Prov. 15:3). God's knowledge is not that acquired through reasoning and reflection, nor accumulated through experience and verification. God is not a learner. The prophet inquires rhetorically: "And who … taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?" (Isa. 40:14). The answer is obviously "No one." It is not that God is self-taught, but rather that His mind encompasses all knowledge. Moreover, since God is the creator of all things in the universe—from the minutest particle in an atom to the largest star, from the smallest thing alive to human beings made in His image, He knows every aspect of His creation. He beholds all, as the One who has brought all things into existence and knows immediately and directly their total activity.

The divine omniscience includes the future. God *foreknows* whatever is yet to happen. Through the prophet Isaiah God declared, "Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them" (Isa. 42:9). The "new things," the future things, God can declare now because He sees them all before they happen. God foreknows our human existence—our very words, our life, our days. This is set forth in the beautiful declaration of the psalmist: "Even before a word is on my tongue, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether…. Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance; in thy book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them" (139:4, 16). What an extraordinary affirmation! The divine foreknowledge is exhibited, therefore, both in events of history[73] and in human life.[74] God knows *all* things, including the future.[75]

Returning to the present, it is apparent that God's omniscience relates quite significantly to the good and evil in the world. The statement "the eyes of the LORD are in every place" concludes with "keeping watch on the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). According to Hebrews, "before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do"

(4:13). God knows our total existence in every aspect of good and evil. Hiding from the Lord, as Adam and Eve tried to do after eating the forbidden fruit, is impossible. Isaiah says to his people: "Why do you say, …'My way is hid from the LORD'?" (Isa. 40:27). Such is impossible, for God's "understanding is unsearchable" (v. 28). Since, in the words of Jesus, "on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter" (Matt. 12:36), every word now spoken is vividly present to God.

It is not only a matter of God's beholding outward actions and words uttered; He also looks deeply into mind and heart. "I the LORD search the mind and try the heart" (Jer. 17:10). These words were spoken in reference to the heart being "deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt" (v. 9). God cannot be deceived. Again, to iniquitous people God said, "O house of Israel … I know the things that come into your mind" (Ezek. 11:5). God does not have to wait until some action occurs; He knows already what is transpiring in the mind. How different God is from man! The Lord spoke to Samuel who was searching for a successor to Saul: "The LORD sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).[76] God verily knows every thought of the mind, every feeling of the heart.

This divine omniscience may seem threatening (from some of the things said above), but from another perspective it can be a marvel and a blessing. Psalm 139 (briefly quoted above) begins: "O LORD, thou hast searched me and known me! Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up; thou discernest my thoughts from afar" (vv. 1–2). For the psalmist, God's moment-by-moment and penetrating knowledge is a matter of marvel (v. 6) and later of praise and thanksgiving: "How precious to me are thy thoughts, O God!" (v. 17). All of this denotes both wonder at God's total knowledge and the blessedness derived from such divine intimacy.

God's all-encompassing knowledge can also be a source of comfort and assurance. Moses reminded the Israelites at the conclusion of their forty years of wandering in the wilderness: "For the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands; he knows your going through this great wilderness; these forty years the LORD has been with you; you have lacked nothing" (Deut. 2:7). The Lord "knows your going," bespeaking God's knowledge of every single step of the way over a long and hazardous journey, is indeed a message of comfort. Job, in the midst of his great pain and suffering, affirmed of God: "But he knows the way that I take;[77] when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). This realization that God "knows the way" of a person's life, no matter how difficult the circumstances, can but bring about a deep inner calm and

assurance.

Jesus Himself laid much stress on the importance of living with a constant recognition of God's personal knowledge of His children. He teaches in the Sermon on the Mount that we are to have no anxiety about food, drink, and clothing, adding, "For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them" (Matt. 6:32 NIV). To be aware that God our Father knows our every need and will surely provide is to be delivered from much anxiety. It means that we do not have to "run after" these earthly things, as essential as they are for existence. Rather, we can "seek first his kingdom" knowing that "all these things will be given … as well" (v. 33 NIV). Later Jesus affirmed in memorable words the particularity of God's concern in saying, "But even the hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matt. 10:30).[78] With such intimate, personal knowledge that God the Father has, how can there ever be anxiety or concern?

Now also we may observe that the divine omniscience is a challenge to righteous living. The psalmist declares, "I keep thy precepts and testimonies, for all my ways are before thee" (119:168). Since God is by no means a distant, unseeing God, but much rather beholds all our ways, we should be all the more concerned to do those things He has commanded. In this connection the words of David to Solomon are apropos: "And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your Father, and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every plan and thought" (1 Chron. 28:9). If it is true that the Lord so searches and understands, not just a Solomon but "*all* hearts" and "*every* plan and thought," then we should constantly devote ourselves to fulfilling His will and purpose.

Before concluding this section on God's knowledge, I should add a word about His *wisdom.* Wisdom is not a separate perfection of God; rather, it may be viewed as a corollary to knowledge.[79] For example, both wisdom and knowledge are declared together in this exclamation of Paul: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (Rom. 11:33). Wisdom and knowledge belong together; nonetheless, it is helpful also to look briefly at the biblical witness to the divine wisdom.

Especially do the Scriptures declare the wisdom of God in the works of creation. For example, "The LORD by wisdom founded the earth" (Prov. 3:19) and "It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom" (Jer. 10:12; 51.15).[80] One of the most vivid and memorable pictures of God's work in creation, both in His making and sustaining all things, is that

found in Psalm 104. In verse after verse, God's making the heavens and earth, the mountains and valleys, and the plants and trees and providing for all His creatures is set forth. The climax comes in verse 24: "O LORD, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all!" One further extraordinary passage about the divine wisdom is Proverbs 8:22–31, where wisdom is portrayed as being personally present with God before creation: "Ages ago[81] I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth" (v. 23), and at creation: "When he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him like a master workman"[82] (vv. 29–30). By this personification[83] of wisdom the primacy of wisdom in God's creation of all things is strikingly declared.

The wisdom of God is also displayed in the ongoing tide of history. Daniel praises God thus: "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings … he reveals deep and mysterious things" (Dan. 2:20–22). The wisdom of God is particularly highlighted in the whole drama of the history of redemption whose beginnings reach back before creation itself. Paul wrote in this connection of "a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification" (1 Cor. 2:7). Moreover, it is God's purpose that "through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known" (Eph. 3:10). The wisdom of God—mysterious in its depth, manifold in its operation—is displayed in the whole of history but especially in relation to the history of salvation.

Here let me add with emphasis that the height of the divine wisdom is shown forth neither in the marvels of creation nor in the superintending of history but in the cross of Christ, which is the ultimate disclosure. It ts not so much that the divine wisdom is *beyond* comprehension (though it is this too) as it is *other* than man's natural comprehension. For this wisdom in the eyes of the world at large is folly, foolishness. In Paul's words, "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Cor. 1:23). That the death of a person on a cross makes for the salvation of the world is utter foolishness and nonsense to the wisdom of the natural mind. But here "the foolishness of God is wiser than men" (v. 25): it is the "foolishness" that redeems a lost world. No wise man could ever have dreamed it up; it is the supreme wisdom.

We may fittingly close with the words of Paul in his letter to the Romans: "To the only wise God be glory for evermore through Jesus Christ! Amen" (16:27).

God the all-knowing is God the all-wise.

C. God Is Omnipresent

God is everywhere present. The last of the "omni's" points to the presence of God in every place and to every person.

First of all, God is present in the whole of the created universe. According to Isaiah, God declares, "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool" (66:1).[84] This bespeaks the presence of God as extending from heaven to earth. Earlier Isaiah testified, "I saw the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train[85] filled the temple" (6:1). Thus in slightly different words the presence of God in both heaven and earth is declared. The presence of God is also set forth through Jeremiah. Just after the question, "Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him?" the Lord further asks, "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" (23:24).[86] This latter declaration in Jeremiah particularly emphasizes the presence of God in the whole universe: God, the Lord, fills heaven and earth.

Omnipresence signifies that God is totally present everywhere in creation. Hence we are not to understand God as spatially spread throughout the universe, so that a part of Him is here, another part there.[87] God's filling heaven and earth means rather that He is totally and equally present everywhere. He is as much present to a single atom as to the most distant star, to a single seed as to all the plants and trees of the world.[88] There is no place where God is not; He is everywhere.[89]

Second, it follows that God is immediately present to every human being. In the words of Paul, "Yet he is not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'" (Acts 17:27–28).[90] It is *not* that God has His being in us,[91] but that our whole life and activity, our very existence, is "in Him." At every moment and in every situation we are inextricably involved with God. A person may be turned away from God; he may be spiritually far away from God and therefore God from him. But even a great spiritual distance does not obviate the fact that God is always immediately at hand.

Surely no passage of Scripture more graphically exhibits the omnipresence of God with man than Psalm 139:7–12. Let us recount the opening words:

> Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?

Or whither shall I flee from
thy presence?
If I ascend to heaven,
thou art there!
If I make my bed in Sheol,
thou art there!
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts
of the sea,
even there thy hand shall
lead me… .

There is no possible flight from God; there is no height or depth where He is not present; there is no faraway place[92] where His hand is not outstretched.

Third, the presence of God takes on a new dimension of meaning for the Christian believer. The God who is omnipresent has come in human flesh so that in the Incarnation He was "God with us"—Emmanuel (Isa. 7:14; 8:8).[93] The God who is everywhere present, but who by no means is always so recognized, came in Jesus Christ to reveal Himself more totally. He was not as such omnipresent in the Incarnation, but was "with" people personally and definitively. However, after the Resurrection the presence of God through Jesus Christ has become further intensified. For one thing, Christ's presence is no longer limited to those who knew Him in the flesh but is with all who belong to Him: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matt. 28:20). This does not mean that through Christ God is more fully present now (such would be impossible, since He is omnipresent), but with the blinders of sin removed by Christ's work of redemption, His continuing presence through the Holy Spirit[94] may be deeply experienced. Thus the presence of God has increased meaning for all who are truly Christian.

Indeed, we need to go one step further in recognizing that the omnipresent God is uniquely present through the Spirit's indwelling of people of faith. Jesus said about the Holy Spirit, "He dwells with you, and will be in you" (John 14:17). Paul later attested that both Gentiles ("having no hope and without God in the world") and Jews through faith in Christ have become "a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:12, 22). The indwelling of the Spirit of God both in the believing community and in persons[95] of faith is a wondrous fact known in Christian experience. Omnipresence thereby becomes vivid presence; "no hope

and without God," in the sense of being blind to God's presence, is changed to fullness of hope and the experience of God's compelling reality.

The omnipresence of God is a fact: God is everywhere and is present to every person. But the personal knowledge of that fact and the experience of that presence[96] is what finally really counts.

EPILOGUE: THE GLORY OF GOD

The final word to be spoken about God is that He is the God of glory.[97] The Scriptures abound with their declaration of the glory of God. In the Psalms are found, for example, such expressions as these: His glory is "above the heavens" (8:1); "the heavens declare the glory of God" (19:1 KJV); "the LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory!" (24:10); "be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let thy glory be over all the earth!" (57:5); "the LORD … will appear in his glory" (102:16); "his glory is above earth and heaven" (148:13). But this is only a beginning; God's glory is attested throughout Scripture.

What then, is the glory of God? Perhaps the best answer is that the divine glory is the *radiant splendor and awesome majesty* of God Himself. Glory is not so much a particular attribute belonging to His identity, transcendence, character, or perfections,[98] but the effulgence of splendor and majesty that shines through in every aspect of God's being and action.

First, in regard to God's being, the glory of God is like an aureole emanating from and surrounding Him. The prophet Ezekiel in his initial vision of God on a throne speaks of "a radiance around Him." Then he adds: "As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD" (Ezek. 1:27–28 NASB). John on Patmos, carried in the Spirit to heaven, likewise beholds One on a throne and adds: "He who sat there appeared like jasper and carnelian, and round the throne was a rainbow that looked like an emerald" (Rev. 4:3). A rainbow surrounding the throne, a divine aureole of radiance and beauty—such is the appearance of the glory of God. Yet all this is but a "likeness"; the reality is far, far greater. Words falter in their attempt to describe the ineffable. God is infinitely glorious.

Second, God is glorious in His action so that in all that He does, His glory is made manifest. For example, after God's deliverance of Israel from Pharaoh, Moses and the Israelites sang, "Thy right hand, O LORD, glorious[99] in power, thy right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy. In the greatness of thy majesty thou overthrowest thy adversaries" (Exod. 15:6–7). God is glorious in power. Through God's demonstration of great power, glory and majesty shine forth. The song proceeds with these words: "Who is like you—majestic in holiness,

awesome in glory, working wonders?" (v. 11 NIV). The emphasis shifts to holiness, but it is God's majesty and His awesomeness that shine through. So God is both glorious in power and glorious (or majestic) in holiness. The radiant splendor and awesome majesty of God pervades all."[100]

The glory of God, accordingly, is the focus of highest praise. So David summoned his people to give glory to God: "Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name; worship the LORD in holy array" (Ps. 29:1–2; cf. 1 Chron. 16:28–29). Later in the same psalm are these words: "In his temple all cry, 'Glory'!" (v. 9). In the New Testament a company of angels at the birth of Jesus cried out, "Glory to God in the highest!" (Luke 2:14). Paul praises God saying, "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever" (Rom. 11:36). Multitudes in heaven sing forth, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory" (Rev. 19:6–7). The praise of God's glory is the highest possible praise, for through such praise God is magnified in the splendor and majesty of His being and action.

Furthermore, and marvelous to relate, it is God's intention that His glory shall fill the earth. Although He will share His glory with no one else[100] (for none other is God), He intends that creation shall manifest that glory. Thus did God speak to Moses: "But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD" (Num. 14:21 KJV).[101] This is a vast promise—that God's splendor and majesty will be manifest throughout the earth. We may be absolutely sure that it will be accomplished.[102]

Man, it should now be added, finds his highest fulfillment in relation to the divine glory. There is a deep desire in human nature to break through the limitations of finitude and to behold God as He is in Himself.[103] Moses on one occasion cried out to God, "I pray thee, show me thy glory" (Exod. 33:18). Despite all that Moses had seen of God,[104] he yearned to go yet higher and further. When Christ came to earth, says the fourth Gospel, "we … beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14). Paul declared that God "has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). So for the Christian there is more than Moses was able to receive during his life. But even for those who know Christ in this life, there is yet the consummation of glory in the world to come. For there at long last, the profoundest yearning of mankind to see God Himself will be gloriously fulfilled: "they shall see his face" (Rev. 22:4) throughout eternity!

God is the God of glory. Let us ever live to the praise of that glory.

[1]The only suggestion in the Bible of the possible nonexistence of God is that of "the fool." "The fool says in his heart, There is no God'" (Pss. 14:1; 53:1; cf. 10:4).

[2]Confessions, Book 1.1.

[3]Francis Thompson's poem "The Hound of Heaven" depicts this vividly: "I fled Him, down the nights and down the days; I fled Him, down the arches of the years … From those strong Feet that followed, followed after." But the Hound keeps following "with unhurrying chase and unperturbed pace, deliberate speed, majestic instancy… ." There is no escape.

[4]My book *The Era of the Spirit*, part 1, chapter 1 begins with these words: "Let us speak first of this renewed sense of the reality of God. He may have seemed absent, distant, even nonexistent to many of us before, but now His presence is vividly manifest. Suddenly, God is not there in the sense of a vague omnipresence but of a compelling presence…. It is as if one knows for the first time the wonder of an atmosphere so laden with the divine Reality that everything around becomes glorious with the sense of God's ineffable presence" (p. 10).

[5]"The Father has life in himself' (John 5:26). So also does the Son, but His life is from the Father: "So he has granted the Son also to have life in himself' (John 5:26). A fuller discussion of the relation between Father and Son will be found in the next chapter on "The Holy Trinity."

[6]As in process philosophy and theology. For a helpful critique of process thinking see Carl F. H. Henry, "A Critique of Process Theology," in Millard J. Erickson, ed., The Living God.

[7]So does the Son, who also has "life in himself," give abundant life to others: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

[8]As did Friedrich Nietzsche in the nineteenth century and the "death of God" theologians of the twentieth.

[9]God, who declared Himself to Moses as the great "I AM WHO I AM," added: "Say this to the people of Israel, The LORD [YHWH or Yahweh], the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': this is my name forever, and thus am I to be remembered throughout all generations" (Exod. 3:14-15). The name Yahweh, or LORD, occurs 6,823 times in the Old Testament.

[10]Concerning Moses God says, "With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly,

and not in dark speech; and he beholds the form of the LORD" (Num. 12:8; cf. Ps. 17:15; Ezek. 1:26; John 5:37).

[11]See the next chapter on "The Holy Trinity."

[12]See the following chapter, "The Holy Trinity," for further elaboration.

[13]As Freud viewed it, "At bottom God is nothing other than an exalted father" (Totem and Taboo, 147).

[14],4Paul Tillich speaks of God as "the ground of being" (e.g., see his Systematic Theology, 1:235). "'Personal God,'" Tillich later adds, "is a confusing symbol" (ibid., 245).

[15]"God is spirit" (rather than "a Spirit" KJV) is the translation also in NIV, NASB, and NEB. The Greek text reads: pneuma ho theos.

[16]" … for a spirit has not flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39).

[17]"And seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness as it were of a human form" (Ezek. 1:26). In Ezekiel's vision the form of God is seen. It is like a human form, but it is clearly not a human form.

[18]"To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Tim. 1:17).

[19]God said to Moses, "You cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live" (Exod. 33:20).

[20]Revelation 22:4: "They shall see his face."

[21]Again God said to Moses, "And you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen" (Exod. 33:23).

[22]E.g., in the act of creation: "And God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light" (Gen. 1:4). God's speech (or word) did not precede the deed; it was one with the deed.

[23]"And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor. 3:17).

[24]"God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

[25]For example, see L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, VI, "The Incommunicable Attributes," 57-63; also H. Bavinck, Our Reasonable Faith, 50-51. An "incommunicable attribute" is one "to which there is nothing analogous in the creature" (Berkhof, 55). Other names sometimes given to these attributes are "absolute" and "immanent," in that they belong to God alone and to His being God. They are attributes totally and solely of deity.

[26]The Hebrew is 9el 'elyôn, a name for God ("El") appearing a number of times in the Old Testament.

[27]Or “depths” (NASB). Keil and Delitzsch comment in loco: “The nature of God may be sought after, but cannot be found out; and the end of God is unattainable, for He is both: the Perfect One, absolutus, and the Endless One, infinitus.” Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 4, Job.

[28]Another of the names of the LORD in the Old Testament is ‘el ‘ôlam, “God the everlasting One,” or “the God of eternity.” At Beersheba Abraham “called … on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God [*el *ôlam]” (Gen. 21:33).

[29]“I AM” (or “I AM WHO I AM”-the preceding words), which is related to the name of God, YHWH, or Yahweh, and rendered “LORD” in most English translations, is derived from the Hebrew verb hayä, 44to be.”

[30]The repetition of the “I AM”-“I AM WHO I AM”-44suggests the idea of uninterrupted continuance and boundless duration” (Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament, 1:442-43).

[31]This is from the eternal perspective. We will shortly note that from the perspective of time, Scripture does speak of God in past, present, and future tense.

[32]It can also mean “I am the present one,” referring particularly to Yahweh’s presence in covenant relationship to Israel. Another possible translation, “I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE” (as in RSV, NIV, NEB margins of Exod. 3:14), less adequately conveys the note of God’s present and ever-living reality.

[33]See discussion in the next chapter.

[34]Deuteronomy 32:4 and elsewhere.

[35]The language of A. N. Whitehead in Process and Reality.

[36]E.g., see Numbers 23:19: “God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should repent.”

[37]Aristotle’s designation for deity.

[38]Words from the hymn, “Abide With Me,” by Henry F. Lyte.

[39]According to Gustav Aulèn, “holiness is the foundation on which the whole conception of God rests.” See his book The Faith of the Christian Church, 103.

[40]Some thirty times God is so designated in the prophecy of Isaiah.

[41]The basic connotation of holy and holiness in the Old Testament is that of separation/apartness from the common, mundane, profane things of everyday life. This is true of God in His total otherness, also of persons and things set apart for Him and His service.

[42]The church, the “bride” of Christ, is intended to be “holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27).

[43]How closely holiness and righteousness are related is evidenced in the account of God’s holiness on Mount Sinai with the warnings to Israel not to set foot on the mount (Exod. 19) and the giving of the Ten Commandments and the ordinances after that (chs. 20-23). Holiness overflows in righteousness.

[44]Luther once described it as “a furnace and blaze of such love that it fills heaven and earth” (as quoted in E. Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 185, from Luther, *Works*, 36, 424).

[45]Justice may be spoken of as the execution of righteousness.

[46]Note the words of Abraham: “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

[47]But even the oath sworn to them came out of God’s elective love as Deuteronomy later says: “Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it; yet the LORD set his heart in love upon your fathers” (10:14-15). Note also the continuation of this love in the words that follow: “and chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as at this day” (v. 15).

[48]Also see Isaiah 63:7-9 (especially v. 9).

[49]See Anders Nygren’s book Agape and Eros for a comprehensive exposition of how these two loves are related. On a more popular level, see C. S. Lewis’ Four Loves. Lewis discusses love in terms of affection, friendship, eros, and charity.

[50]For example, in the initial call of Abraham God promised a blessing not only upon Abraham but through him upon “all the families of the earth” (Gen. 12:3).

[51]One possible exception to this is Isaiah 48:14: “The LORD loves him.” The context may suggest Cyrus, the Persian king; however, the words could also refer to Israel (see v. 12).

[52]E.g., see Psalms 103:8; 145:8.

[53]It is not found in the synoptic Gospels or elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel.

[54]Mercy may be spoken of as grace in action.

[55]Here (and in verses to follow) I have substituted for “steadfast love” (RSV) “lovingkindness” as in the KJV and NASB. However, “steadfast love” is a quite possible translation of the Hebrew word hesed, and will be noted as conveying an important aspect of God’s lovingkindness. The

word hesed; is by far the most commonly used term for love in the Old Testament. A form of the statement “The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness” is often repeated. See Numbers 14:18; Psalms 86:15; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2.

[56]In some theological treatments the goodness of God is viewed as the generic attribute of God that includes love, grace, and mercy. Although such an arrangement is possible, it seems difficult to consider love a subcategory of goodness. The Scriptures affirm that God is love (never that God is goodness); hence it would seem better to view goodness under the heading of love, even as the final summing up statement.

[57]These will be considered in a later chapter.

[58]E.g., see Isaiah 65:16-“the God of truth.”

[59]It will be recalled that men “by their wickedness suppress the truth” (Rom. 1:18) of God’s revelation in creation; nonetheless, what God reveals is true.

[60]The KJV has “truth.” God’s faithfulness, as we are noting, is an aspect of His truth. God is true to His people; He will continue with them.

[61]Berkhof says it well: “The faithfulness of God is of the utmost practical significance to the people of God. It is the ground of their confidence, the foundation of their hope, and the cause of their rejoicing. It saves them from the despair to which their own unfaithfulness might easily lead, gives them courage to carry on in spite of their failure, and fills their hearts with joyful anticipations, even when they are deeply conscious they have forfeited all the blessings of God” (L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, 70).

[62]Of course, God is also perfect in His character-His holiness, love, and truth. I am using the term perfections to refer not to character but to attributes of a nonmoral quality. In a sense they are also attributes of transcendence like infinity, eternity, and unchangingness. However, unlike those attributes, they represent a totality of what man has in part-namely, power, wisdom, and spatial presence (he does not share in infinity, eternity, and unchangingness). If the expression did not seem awkward, one might refer to the three “omni’s” as the totalities of God. We will stay with “perfections” as probably the most helpful term to use.

[63]Or “toward us” (NASB), Greek eis hëmas.

[64]Six times in Genesis, nine times in Revelation. The Hebrew expression in Genesis is ‘el šadday, “God Almighty.” (“Almighty” is the common

translation although recently there has arisen the interpretation among many of šadday as “mountain,” hence “God of the mountain” [see TWOT, 2:907]. I do not believe the evidence warrants such a translation). In Revelation the word translated “Almighty” is pantokrator (also elsewhere in the New Testament).

[65]These words spoken to Abraham contain the first reference to God as ‘el šadday. For Isaac, see Genesis 28:3; for Jacob, Genesis 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; 49:25. God later said to Moses, “‘I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty’“ (Exod. 6:3).

[66]Thirty-one out of forty-eight times in the Old Testament. “Almighty” is found in the New Testament ten times, 2 Corinthians being the only instance outside of Revelation.

[67]“The Almighty” is the common expression in Job. It is the name used by Job as well as his friends-Eliphaz (5:17), Bildad (8:3), Zophar (11:7), and Elihu (32:8). The name is last spoken by God Himself: “Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty?” (40:2).

[68]Recall the preceding section.

[69]Cf. Revelation 15:3: “Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are thy ways.”

[70]In the narrative of Job God says to Satan, “Behold, all that he [Job] has is in your power” (Job 1:12). But this is clearly delegated power, for whatever havoc Satan wreaks upon Job, God is controlling the whole situation. Recall Job’s final words to God: “I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted” (42:2).

[71]See chapter 7, “Miracles.”

[72]For particular events in the Old Testament two, among many, may be adduced: 1 Samuel 23:1-14 and Jeremiah 38:14-23. In the former case David was given information by the Lord concerning a future victory over the Philistines and also specifically what “the men of Keilah” would do. In the latter, Jeremiah, speaking for the Lord, told King Zedekiah that if he would surrender to the king of Babylon, his life would be spared and the city saved. Otherwise there would be total loss and destruction.

[73]In relation to human life the divine foreknowledge, especially in the New Testament, has particular reference to salvation: “For those whom he [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29). Peter speaks of those “who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Peter 1:1-2 NASB). (For the

relationship of foreknowledge to predestination, see vol. 2, chapter 1, "Calling.")

[74]A further quotation from Isaiah regarding God's foreknowledge could be added: "I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done … I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass" (46:9-11). Since God declares "the end from the beginning," He sees every moment in history-past, present, and future-with equal clarity and directness. Foreknowledge, therefore, is not really foreknowing but knowledge unlimited by time, which is God's creation.

[75]Peter later spoke of God as One "who knows the heart [literally, "the heart-knower"]" (Acts 15:8).

[76]Even to the numbering of steps, as Job later says in a question: "Does he not see my ways, and number all my steps?" (31:4).

[77]This goes beyond the "numbering" of steps (fn. 76) to even the very hairs of one's head!

[78]Berkhof in his Systematic Theology, 69, calls it "that perfection of God whereby He applies His knowledge to the attainment of His ends in a way which glorifies Him most" (italics Berkhofs).

[79]In the quotations from both Proverbs and Jeremiah, the passage continues with the declaration that "by his understanding" the heavens were "established" or "stretched out." Hence, insofar as understanding is equivalent to knowledge, the inseparability of wisdom and knowledge is again to be recognized.

[80]Or, "from everlasting" (KJV, NASB), "from eternity" (NIV), Heb. më eôlâm.

[81]Or "craftsman" (NIV), Heb. *amon.

[82]"Personification" may not be the best word in light of the later New Testament revelation of Christ as the incarnate wisdom of God. Cf. the verses in Proverbs with 1 Corinthians 1:24: "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (Also recall the prologue of John about Christ as the eternal Word and as the One through whom all things were made [1:1-3]). Christ is seen to be not so much a personification of wisdom as One who eternally embodies wisdom (along with power).

[83]Cf. Acts 7:49, where Stephen repeats these words.

[84]"The train of his robe" (NASB, NIV).

[85]Incidentally, we may here observe a close connection between

omniscience and omnipresence.

[86]The imagery of “throne” and “footstool,” of “throne” and “train,” should not be pressed so as to infer that a part of God is in heaven where His throne is and another part on earth.

[87]One may recall the dictum “God is a circle whose center is everywhere, and circumference nowhere. ‘ ‘

[88]Of course, this affirmation is not to be identified with pantheism. In that view God is not only everywhere, He is also identical with all that is; i.e., the world is God or an extension of God. Such a view merges Creator with creation, and actually denies omnipresence.

[89]The latter part of Paul’s statement is usually attributed to the Greek poet Epimenides. The quotation is followed in Acts by Paul’s words “as even some of your poets have said.”

[90]This would be pantheism.

[91]Jonah had to learn this. He took a ship “to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD” (Jonah 1:3). It was to no avail, as the Lord personally dealt with him in the events that followed.

[92]The Hebrew word is *‘inmānû’* el.

[93]Since Christ is now exalted “at the right hand” (Acts 2:33) of the Father, He is present through the Holy Spirit.

[94]The community is the primary thrust of Ephesians 2. Paul also speaks, and quite specifically, of the Holy Spirit as indwelling individuals: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?” (1 Cor. 6:19).

[95]We might say, “the practice of that presence.” Brother Lawrence’s famous little treatise with the title, The Practice of the Presence of God, comes to mind.

[96]The expression, “the God of glory,” was used by Stephen thus: “The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham” (Acts 7:2).

[97]As discussed in the preceding sections.

[98]Or “majestic” (NASB, NIV, NEB).

[99]“God is also glorious in name: “this glorious and awesome name” (Deut. 28:58 NIV; cf. 1 Chron. 29:13; Neh. 9:5; Ps. 72:19; Isa. 63:14); in presence: “his glorious presence” (Isa. 3:8); his house, habitation, and throne are glorious: “my glorious house” (Isa. 60:7), “thy holy and glorious habitation” (Isa. 63:15), “a glorious throne set on high” (Jer. 17:12); his grace is glorious: “the praise of his glorious grace” (Eph. 1:6).

[100]Isaiah 48:11: “My glory I will not give to another.”

[101]NIV translates thus: “Nevertheless as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth. …” This translation shifts the emphasis from future to present and would correspond to Isaiah 6:3: “the whole earth is full of his glory.” However, there is also the future emphasis in Psalm 57:5: “Let thy glory be over all the earth!” and Psalm 72:19: “Blessed be his glorious name for ever; may his glory fill the whole earth! Amen and Amen!”

[102]A discussion of this belongs to the “Last Things.”

[103]“Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” This answer given to the first question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism (“What is the chief end of man?”) contains profound truth. That many-or most-people do not live to this end is a denial of their true humanity and a failure to know life’s highest fulfillment.

[104]Recall the earlier references to the victory over Pharaoh in which Moses and all Israel beheld God “glorious in power” and “majestic in holiness.” Also God had spoken to Moses “face to face” (Exod. 33:11) as to no other man.

4
The Holy Trinity

We come now to the central mystery of the Christian faith—the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, or the doctrine of the Triune God. Here our consideration is of God as Trinity or Triune—"three-in-one" or "one God in three persons." The latter is the language of many Christian confessions and hymns of the church. The Christian faith is faith in the Triune God.

I. ONE GOD

Christian faith holds unequivocally to belief in one God and one God alone. This needs strong emphasis, for whatever else may be said about God's triunity or His existing in "three persons," the oneness or unity cannot be affirmed too vigorously.

In the midst of a world that worshiped many gods, Israel proclaimed a radical monotheism. Moses said to the Israelites as they prepared to enter the Promised Land: "Know therefore this day, and lay it to your heart, that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other" (Deut. 4:39). Shortly thereafter, Moses again declared: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deut. 6:4).[1] This vigorous affirmation of God's oneness, along with the words that follow, came to be called the Shema ("Hear") and was recited twice a day. Thus, day-by-day Israel declared her strong monotheistic faith. This continued throughout the Old Testament, especially standing out in some of the prophecies of Isaiah: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god" (Isa. 44:6); "I am the LORD, and there is no other" (45:5, 6). Over against a pagan world with its many gods, Israel—whatever the lapses of the people into idolatry and polytheism—proclaimed its radical monotheism.

The New Testament is no less emphatic. Jesus Himself reaffirmed the oneness of God in the language of the Old Testament: "'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one'" (Mark 12:29). We should also note the prayer of Jesus in which He addressed the Father as "the only true God" (John 17:3). Nor does this change in the rest of the New Testament, for example: "For us there is one God, the Father" (1 Cor. 8:6); "God is one" (Gal. 3:20); "one God and Father of us all" (Eph. 4:6); "the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God" (1 Tim. 1:17). Many other references could be cited.

Whatever else may and must be said about God's triunity (His being "three persons"), it is important to underscore the biblical and Christian affirmation of the oneness of God. It is sometimes thought that Christian faith is a dilution of the radical monotheism of Israel, or that today Judaism singularly bears witness to the one God, the one Lord. However, this is by no means the case. With Judaism, Christianity stands firmly planted on the ground of a radical monotheism.

Indeed, it might be added that here also there is a basic similarity with the Muslim faith. The first and foremost belief of Islam is in the oneness of God, "Allah." The simple Confession of Faith, or Watchword, repeated daily by every faithful Muslim is: "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah." Hence, for all their differences, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam stand together in affirming the oneness of God. That the three great religions of the Western world are united at this point over against all polytheism is a highly important fact for our time.

The oneness of God has great significance for the life of man. In terms of worship, this means that attention and devotion can be focused at one point. In the continuing words of the Shema: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5). If worship is offered to various deities, there can be no centering of devotion. It is as impossible to give "all" one's heart, soul, or strength to more than one God as, on the human level, to more than one other person. Also, in terms of practical significance, the recognition of one God, and one only, makes for a unity in both personal and community life. The person for whom the one God, the one Lord, is the central focus has within himself a force that can unify all of life in its multiplicity of relationships and activities. Likewise, a nation that claims to exist "under God" or that affirms "In God we trust" has a dynamic principle of unity that helps to hold it together as one nation. In the Scriptures the statement that there is "one God and Father of us all" is completed with the words, "who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:6). Hence, in relation to the people of God, the one God who is above, through, and in all things is the bond of their essential unity.[2] The oneness of God thus has much significance for the full range of human life.

II. IN THREE PERSONS

As the witness in Scripture increasingly unfolds, it is apparent that God is revealed as existing in three persons—namely, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Calvin speaks of this as “a more intimate knowledge of his nature” for “while he proclaims his unity, he distinctly sets it before us as existing in three persons.”[3] The full understanding of God is greatly enriched by understanding His tripersonal reality.

A. Each Is a Person

In the Old Testament there is no distinct reference to God as existing in three persons. Hints of it, however, may be found, first, in the name of God as *Elohim.* "In the beginning God *[Elohim]* created …" (Gen. 1:1). *Elohim* is a plural noun, and though no clear statement of a trinity is contained, a plurality of persons may well be implied.[4] Also the wording of Genesis 1:26, "Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness," even more strongly suggests a plurality within God. Note also the similar words of Genesis 3:22: "Behold, the man has become like one of *us*"; and Genesis 11:7: "Come, let *us* go down." No trinity of persons as such is declared, but the idea of plurality seems to be definitely suggested.

Clearer indications of a distinction of persons are found in accounts where "the angel of the LORD" is both distinguished from the LORD and identified with Him. The story of Hagar (Gen. 16) is noteworthy on this point. Also relevant is the story of Abraham's visit from three men who turned out to be two angels and the LORD (Gen. 18–19). Perhaps this latter account comes closest to hinting at a divine trinity. Other passages in the Old Testament suggest two divine personages, for example, Psalm 45:6–7: "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever … therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" (KJV).[5] Also note in Psalm 110:1: "The LORD says to my lord: 'Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool.' "[6] There are also places in the Old Testament where the word of God or the wisdom of God is personified (e.g., see Ps. 33:4, 6 and Prov. 8:22–31); hence there is the suggestion of a second alongside God. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, two passages in Isaiah clearly contain reference to three persons or entities: "And now the LORD God has sent me [the Messiah] and his Spirit" (48:16); also "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me [the Messiah], because the LORD has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted" (61:1).[7] Although these passages do not specifically depict one God in three persons, they point in that direction.

In turning to the New Testament, we observe that the grouping of three is all the more pronounced, specifically in the names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and that each is a Person. Let us note several passages. In preparation for ministry, Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, and immediately thereafter "he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove; and a

voice came from heaven, 'Thou art my beloved Son'" (Mark 1:10-II).[8] Three are involved: One who speaks from heaven, One who comes like a dove, and One upon whom the dove comes and who hears the voice speak. Spirit and Son are both mentioned specifically, and the voice is unmistakably that of the Father. Father and Son are patently persons. However, the Spirit (or Holy Spirit) is not here said to be a person, though it can be inferred from the imagery of "descending like a dove."[9] The personhood of the Holy Spirit is, however, clearly affirmed in the fourth Gospel where Jesus says, "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, *he*[10] will teach you all things" (John 14:26), and thereafter adds that "the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me" (15:26). Thus with the personhood of the Spirit declared, all three persons now stand forth clearly: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Many other passages in the New Testament speak variously of three persons. For example, "Go therefore … baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). Also Paul writes that "there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord;[11] and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God …" (1 Cor. 12:4–6). In his threefold benediction Paul says, "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).

Let us give some further consideration to the personhood of the Holy Spirit. There are many other references in the New Testament that depict the Holy Spirit functioning as a person. A few may be mentioned: "The Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13:2); "the Spirit himself intercedes for us …" (Rom. 8:26); "do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (Eph. 4:30); and "the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come'" (Rev. 22:17). There are many other similar references that portray the Holy Spirit as a person. Hence it is important *not* to think of the Holy Spirit as merely an attribute of God, such as power. There are passages that might suggest the Spirit to be God's power in creation (e.g., Gen. 1:2), or in regeneration (e.g., John 3:5), or at Pentecost where the Holy Spirit is promised and the disciples receive power for their witness and ministry (Acts 1–2).

The fact that they were "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4; cf. 4:31) might sound more like being filled with energy than with a person. However, in all these instances the important thing to recognize is not that the Spirit equals power, but that where the Spirit of God is there *is* power. Moreover, we are to understand that to be "filled with the Holy Spirit" is not simply to be filled with a substance or force but to be fully possessed by the Holy Spirit, the personal

Spirit of God.

Finally, the personhood of the Holy Spirit is not only a matter of biblical record but is also confirmed in Christian experience. For one who has known the Holy Spirit's crying within his heart, "Abba! Father!" (Gal. 4:6), or interceding "with sighs too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26), or being manifest in one of His gifts such as prophecy or tongues (1 Cor. 12, 14), there is no question about the Holy Spirit's being a real person. In the spiritual (or "charismatic") renewal of our time, one of the most outstanding testimonies is that of how real and personal the Holy Spirit has become to many individuals. Thus, deepening Christian experience marvelously confirms the biblical record.

B. Each Person Is God

It is the Christian claim that all three of these persons are God. Let us look at each in turn.

There can be no question, first, about "the Father" being God. In the Old Testament the prophet Isaiah cries: "O LORD, thou art our Father" (Isa. 64:8). The designation of Father, as such, is rare in the Old Testament; however, it is frequently implied in such statements as "Thus says the LORD, Israel is my first-born son" (Exod. 4:22), and "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (Hosea 11:1).

However, it is with the advent of Jesus that the understanding of God as Father becomes primary. Jesus spoke of God as His Father, frequently used the phrase "your Father who is in heaven" (e.g., Matt. 5:45) in addressing the multitudes, told His disciples to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven" (Matt. 6:9), and on and on. In many sayings and parables Jesus depicted God's paternal care. But, more than this, the disciples came to experience God as Father through their sharing with Jesus His trust, assurance, and confidence in the Father's will. It was increasingly a life caught up in the reality of God as Father.

Likewise, the rest of the New Testament bears frequent witness to God as Father. There is no need to give scriptural indications, so many are they. However, one verse may be particularly mentioned: "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Gal. 4:6). The intimate knowledge of God as Father arises in the believer's heart through the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, it is important to note that "Father" is not just a name for God. It bespeaks a reality of relationship. To be a father means to be one who begets another; else there is no fatherhood. God as Father consequently takes on much new meaning in the New Testament in two ways. First, He is said to be in a unique sense the Father of Jesus Christ: "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor. 1:3; and elsewhere). This is understood not simply in a temporal sense, but as an eternal relationship (e.g., see John 17:1–4). Second, He is also "God our Father" (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; and elsewhere), a designation signifying that by virtue of our being "born anew" we are His sons and adopted into His family. To repeat, "God the Father" is not just one possible name among many: it is uniquely the designation that declares His relationship both to Jesus Christ and to all who have come to life in Him.

Next we note the biblical witness to the Son's being God. In the Old Testament the most direct reference to the Son is found in Psalm 2:7: "I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee" (KJV). This is quoted several times in the New Testament as referring to Christ. Against the background of the Son's superiority to angels are these words: "For to what angel did God ever say, 'Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee'?" (Heb. 1:5).[12] These verses do not as such affirm that the Son is God; however in verses 11–12 of the same psalm we read: "Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way" (KJV). This unquestionably implies divinity for the Son.[13] This is even more emphatically the case in Hebrews where the text reads, "But of the Son he says, 'Thy throne, O God[14] is for ever and ever … God, thy God, has anointed thee with the oil of gladness beyond thy comrades'" (vv. 8–9). The Son indisputably is called "God." The last quotation is taken from Psalm 45, which, though the address is to "the king" (v. 1) and the Son is not as such mentioned, is a messianic psalm pointing likewise to the Son (again, cf. Ps. 2). This the New Testament makes abundantly clear. Outside the Psalms, in the Book of Isaiah the most prominent Old Testament reference to the Son as God is found in the familiar words "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given … and his name will be called 'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God'" (9:6). The Son will be "Mighty God."

In the New Testament Jesus Christ is frequently designated "the Son of God." From the introduction of Mark 1:1, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," on through the Gospels and the Epistles, this is a recurring phrase. In addition to His designation as "the Son of God," many verses speak of Him directly as God. The prologue of John's Gospel opens with these words: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (1:1).[15] The Word thus identified with God is further on spoken of as the Son: "And the Word became flesh … we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (v. 14). Hence, the Son, the incarnate Word, is God. This comes out again a few verses later: "No one has ever seen God; the only begotten God[16] who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (v. 18). The "only begotten," here called God, is the Son, as specified in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" (KJV). The Son is God. This, as we have earlier noted, is also affirmed in Hebrews 1:8: "But of the Son he says, 'Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.' "

There are many other texts that without directly using the terminology of "the Son" speak of Jesus Christ as God. For example, "Christ came, who is over all,

God blessed for ever" (Rom. 9:5 KJV);[17] "the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13);[18] "the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:1).[19] Jesus Christ as "God over all" and as "God and Savior" points clearly to His being God. To these texts can be added John 20:28, where Thomas said to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" and Philippians 2:6, where it is said of the preincarnate Christ that "he was in the form of God." There can be little question that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, is recognized as God in the New Testament.

But what now needs to be added is that this biblical fact was essentially a matter of revelation and personal experience. What is stated in the opening verse of Mark's Gospel and in the prologue of John grew out of the encounter of the first disciples with Jesus. We must remember that the early disciples were all Jews with a radically monotheistic faith (as earlier described), and therefore almost rigidly set against any idea that God is other than the exalted Lord. But as they fellowshiped with Jesus, they began to realize that however human Jesus was (of that they had no doubt), there was something mysterious about Him, something that human categories could not contain. Jesus did things only God could do or had any right to do. He forgave sins; He stilled the waves of the seas; He raised the dead. The disciples found themselves (the shock of this is hard for us to imagine), orthodox Jews, addressing Jesus as Lord,[20] falling down before Him in worship,[21] and becoming convinced of His resurrection after He had been put to death.[22] They came to know Him as Savior as well, for they received His gracious forgiveness after a terrible night of betrayal and denial and found new life in His name. How could they doubt it? Here truly was God in one who called Himself "the Son of man"; was He not also verily the Son of God—even God?

That Jesus Christ the Son is God continues to this day to be the affirmation of genuine Christian faith. The Bible, to be sure, bears witness to this fact, but what countless people have found through personal experience is that Jesus proves Himself to be all the Scriptures claim. They know He has wrought salvation in their hearts, and none but God can do that. Thus He is both Savior and God. They have also turned over their total lives to Him, and He continues to lead them in victory. Thus He is both Lord and God. That the Son is God is an ultimate truth.

The Holy Spirit also is God. In the Old Testament the expression "the Holy Spirit" is never found. The closest to it is the expression "Thy Holy Spirit" (Ps. 51:11 NASB) and "His Holy Spirit" (Isa. 63:10, 11 NASB). However, such terminology as "the Spirit of God," "the Spirit of the LORD," or simply "the

Spirit" is commonplace. Genesis declares that "the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters" (1:2). The Spirit of the LORD came often upon God-appointed leaders (judges, prophets, kings, and others). It was prophesied that the Spirit would rest upon the coming Messiah (Isa. 11:2 and elsewhere). It is the same Holy Spirit, whatever these varied designations.

In the New Testament, the Old Testament variations—"Spirit," "Spirit of God," "Spirit of the Lord"—continue. However, in addition, there is the "Spirit of your Father" (Matt. 10:20), "Spirit of Jesus" (Acts 16:7), "Spirit of Christ" (Rom. 8:9), "Spirit of his Son" (Gal. 4:6), and "Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:19). All of these are gathered up in the expression, "the Holy Spirit," which occurs throughout the New Testament. And in all of these instances He is "the Holy Spirit of God" (Eph. 4:30).

But do these Old and New Testament references clearly demonstrate that the Holy Spirit *is* God? We have noted that the Holy Spirit is personal. Could the Spirit then not be simply a personal manifestation of God? No, for, as the biblical revelation unfolds, it becomes increasingly apparent that the Holy Spirit is God. The "Spirit of your Father" is the "Spirit of truth" proceeding from the Father (John 15:26) and is God; the "Spirit of Christ" is the Spirit "poured out" (Acts 2:33) through Christ and is God. When in the early church Ananias was said to have lied "to the Holy Spirit," Peter pronounced: "You have not lied to men but to God" (Acts 5:3–4). The Holy Spirit is God in the person of the Spirit.

It is important to stress that the Holy Spirit as God was very much an experiential fact for the early church. Having known the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and living day-by-day in the midst of "the Acts of the Holy Spirit" (as the Book of Acts records), they were affirming an almost overwhelming existential reality. Men were often described as "full of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:3, 5; 7:55; 11:24); missionaries were commissioned by the Holy Spirit (e.g., Acts 13:lff.); the apostles and elders could say, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us …" (Acts 15:28); the Holy Spirit changed Paul's itinerary in Asia (Acts 16:6–8); and a prophet declared, "Thus says the Holy Spirit" (Acts 21:11). All in all, the Holy Spirit was the directing, pervading reality in the apostolic church. The early Christians *knew* He was God in an almost overwhelming fashion.

In the contemporary spiritual renewal there has been a like sense of God's presence and power in the Holy Spirit. For many, a fresh Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit has occurred in their lives, so that what may have been quite nebulous before has taken on vivid reality. The statement "The Holy Ghost is a 'ghost' no longer!"[23] represents what many have come to experience. The Holy Spirit *is* the real God in His dynamic personal presence and activity.

III. ONE GOD IN THREE PERSONS

Now that we have discussed the fact that there is one God, and one alone, yet also three persons, each of whom is God, the question emerges: How is this to be understood? How can there be one God in three persons? It is here that we confront the mystery of the Triune God. Although we try, we cannot expect full understanding.

The church in the early centuries especially wrestled with the problem of how to declare this and finally came to certain affirmations. At best it was an effort for the church not only to clarify its own understanding but also to rule out deviations—that is, heresies—that would damage or even destroy the true faith.

Let us try to set forth reverently and in an orderly manner the faith of the Christian community that there is one God in three Persons. We shall do this primarily from the biblical witness, but not without drawing secondarily on the church's reflection and experience thereafter.

A. All the Persons of the Godhead Are God

The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. Hence, there is one being, one reality. There are not three Gods, but only one. Christian faith is not tri-theistic. The Father is the one and only God, so likewise are the Son and Holy Spirit. Thus the Father is totally God, the Son is totally God, and the Holy Spirit is totally God: there is no depth, width, or breadth of the divine reality that is not fully Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Godhead, accordingly, is not something lying behind (or out of which comes) the being of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Hence, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the same essence. To use the language of the Nicene Creed (A.D. 325), they are *homoousios*.[24] Thus Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while differing personally, do not differ essentially.[25] The whole undivided essence belongs to each of the three persons. To use the Latin expression, they are *una substantia*, "one substance"; they are "consubstantial." There is some danger that such terms as *essence* and *substance* imply that God is impersonal. However, the intention is simply to say that the concrete being of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the same: they are identical in being.

Hence, whatever may be said about the Father begetting the Son and the Spirit proceeding from the Father is not to be understood as if the Son and Spirit receive their essence or being from the Father. What is begotten and proceeds is not essence but personhood. The begetting and proceeding are eternal; hence the relationship is one that inheres within the one divine reality. This is sometimes referred to as the *perichoresis* (or "coinherence") of the persons, so that the three persons are said to be in and to interpenetrate one another. Each of the persons accordingly contains the whole of the Godhead and is the one undivided God.

Another way to describe this oneness of the Triune God is to understand it as a superpersonal union of three Divine persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—of such an intense kind that there is only one God. Since love is the essential nature of God, and love *(iagape*) means self-giving to another, then God is within Himself such a totality of self-giving that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are united as one God. As one writer has put it: "God is within Himself not sheer unity but a complex and manifold being, the union and communion of three Divine persons."[26] Hence, the technical language of *perichoresis* takes on living significance in the supernatural union of love.

Since Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the same in essence or being, they are

each to be worshiped and honored as the one God. The Creed of Constantinople (A.D. 381), which affirmed the full deity of the Holy Spirit (Nicea had already done this in relation to Jesus Christ), speaks of "the Holy Spirit … who is worshiped and glorified together with the Father and the Son." Also they have the same attributes. Whatever is said of God—for example, that He is infinite, eternal, holy, loving, all-powerful, all-knowing—applies alike to Father, Son,[27] and Holy Spirit. Finally, they are one in works: the one and same God is at work in creation, redemption, and empowerment. What the Father does, the Son does, and the Holy Spirit does. Or, to put it a bit differently, there are no works of the Father that are not also works of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. All the works of the Triune God are indivisible.[28]

This is highly significant for the Christian life. For example, in worshiping the Son or Holy Spirit we are not thereby worshiping Someone less than God or only part of God, nor are we dishonoring Another. If we pray, "Lord Jesus, I adore you," while attention is being directed to the person of the Son, it is not as if God in His totality is being disregarded. If we look to the Holy Spirit for power to witness and to move in the gifts of the Spirit, we are counting on the whole of God (also Father and Son) to be involved.[29] If we talk about God the Father's work in creation, we do not thereby disregard the Son and Spirit,[30] because each is fully involved. Nor can we view the Father as somehow more holy than the Son, or the Son more loving than the Father,[31] or the Spirit more concerned than either about the Christian walk. In everything in the Christian life we give praise to and acknowledge the one God in each person. It is good to know that in all our relations to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit we are dealing with the one and only true God.

B. The Persons of the Godhead Are Distinct

The Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Holy Spirit. Indeed, no one of the three is another: there are three persons. The Father is a distinct person, as is Son and Holy Spirit. The three persons eternally exist; the terms *Father, Son*, and *Holy Spirit* are not mere figures of speech or titles (hence changeable and temporary), nor are they expressions for various ways God has revealed Himself. Christian faith is not modalistic; that is to say, it does not hold that these terms are simply names given to the different modes of action of the one divine being (the modes thus having no ontological existence).[32] The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are and eternally remain distinct persons.

To use the more technical language developed by the early church, there are three "subsistences" or "hypostases" within the one divine essence. By this is meant that there are permanent distinctions (not divisions) within the Godhead. Each subsistence (or hypostasis) is the whole essence, and yet each retains its own distinction. The "threeness" is not thereby removed in the "oneness": Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have been, are, and forever will be distinct subsistences or persons[33] within the unity of the Godhead.

All this is important to stress over against any idea that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are merely manifestations of the one God. The Trinity is not only one of manifestation; it is also one of essence. God as God, regardless of any outward manifestation, is one being in three permanent hypostases—one God in three persons.

Next we note that there is a distinction of personal "properties" within the divine being. The term *properties* signifies distinctives that belong to the three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and accordingly are unique to each. We will consider these in sequence.

The property of God the Father is *generation*. The Father who is "unbegotten" eternally "begets" the Son.[34] This is not a work of the Father's will but a property of His nature. Hence, this eternal begetting is not a work of creation (the Son is not created), but of generation. God would not be God without this eternal generation. The property of the Son is *filiation.* He receives His personal subsistence, but not His divine essence, from the Father and is eternally the Son. Thus He is subordinate to the Father, not in being but in relationship. The property of the Holy Spirit is *procession.* The Holy Spirit eternally proceeds

from the Father.[35] There never was a time when this procession was not occurring; the Holy Spirit accordingly does not exist by God's will but, like the Son, is a property of His nature.

All of this—too vast and mysterious for us to comprehend—may be described as a life process in which the Father evermore objectifies Himself in the Son and gives forth of His fullness in the Holy Spirit. To use more biblical language, one may view the internal relations as the Father eternally glorifying Himself in the Son[36] and the Holy Spirit eternally searching out the depths of the Godhead.[37] Finally, since God is love, we may view the whole—the properties of generation, filiation, and procession—as the internal workings of love. Love is not love without an object (the Father loves the Son), nor without its overflow (the procession of the Spirit). All imagery finally breaks down, however, in attempting to elucidate the internal properties and relations of Him who is the mysterious one God—who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In addition to the internal properties of the Triune God, there are also the external *acts*. These are mighty acts in which God reaches out beyond Himself. The first act is that of *creation* by God the Father. The Father is the fountain and source of creation (even as of the personhood of the Son). From Him all that exists outside Himself has come. This does not mean that Son and Spirit do not also participate in the act of creation (as earlier noted), for the Father creates through the Son and Spirit. However, the Father is in a special sense the Creator; it was He who brought all things into being.[38] The second act is that of the *incarnation* of the Son. The eternal Son, the Word of God, became flesh. Without ceasing to be God He became man. The Father and the Holy Spirit also participated in the Incarnation: the Father gave the Son, and the Son was conceived in flesh by the Holy Spirit. However, it was the Son (not the Father or the Spirit) who became a human being. The third act is that of the *coming* of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, third Person of the Trinity, came upon[39] people. The Spirit, who proceeds eternally within the Godhead, was sent by the Father through the Son. Hence, although He was the Spirit of the Father and the Son, it was the Holy Spirit who personally came. Creation by the Father, the incarnation of the Son, and the coming of the Holy Spirit: each is a unique act of a divine Person; but all belong to the mighty acts of the one and only God!

Now that we have stated these various things about the Triune God, we must confess that throughout we have been dealing with the realm of mystery. There is no possible way that we human beings can adequately comprehend the meaning of one God in three persons. We do well to end therefore, not in reflection, but in devotion, and join in voicing from our hearts some of the words

of Reginald Heber’s hymn:

> Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
> Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;
> Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!
> God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

[1]"Or “The LORD is our God, the LORD is one” (NASB, NIV, the NIV gives the RSV rendering as a first alternate). The literal Hebrew is YHWH ‘ èlôhenû YHWH ‘ ehad, literally, “Yahweh, our God, Yahweh, one.”

[2]It is obvious that there is much disunity in the church; however, this does not invalidate its essential God-given unity.

[3]Institutes, 1.13.2 (Beveridge translation).

[4]The name ‘ëlôhîm is sometimes viewed as a “plural of majesty” or an “intensive plural.” This could suggest that all the fullness of godhead is concentrated in Him.

[5]In the Book of Hebrews it is stated that the first of these references to God pertains to the Son: “But of the Son he says, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever’ “ (1:8).

[6]Jesus quoted these words as referring in part to Himself (Mark 12:35-37).

[7]Jesus quoted these words at the beginning of His ministry (Luke 4:18).

[8]For parallels, see Matthew 3:16-17; Luke 3:21-22; and John 1:33-34.

[9]The next verse, beginning “The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness” (v. 12), strongly implies the personhood of the Spirit.

[10]It is significant to observe that though “the Holy Spirit” is neuter in the Greek *(to pneuma to hagiou*), the word translated “he” *(ekeinos)* is masculine.

[11]“Lord” here unmistakably refers to Jesus, for Paul had just spoken of Jesus as Lord: “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3).

[12]Also note Acts 13:33 and Hebrews 5:5.

[13]To “kiss the Son” is to “do homage to the Son” (as NASB translates), implying the same veneration as to “the LORD.”

[14]The RSV has as a marginal reading “God is thy throne.” F. F. Bruce calls such a reading “quite unconvincing” (Hebrews, NICNT, in loco).

[15]Not “a god” as found in the New World Translation of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. The Greek word is simply theo s without an article, hence superficially could be translated “a God.” However, theos, meaning simply “God,” is found without the article in many verses therafter-e.g., v. 6: “There was a man sent from God [para theou]”; v. 12: “children of God” [tekna theou]”; v. 18: “No one has ever seen God” [simply theon]. “A god” totally misses the meaning of John 1:1.

[16]NASB translation. The Greek in both the Nestle and UBS texts is monogenes theos, literally “only begotten God.” The KJV and RSV read “only begotten” and “only Son.” The NIV, similar to NASB, reads, “God the only Son.” The manuscript evidence favors NASB and NIV renderings of the text.

[17]Similarly, NASB and NIV. The NIV, I believe, misses the best rendering of the Greek text.

[18]Here the KJV may mislead, translating “the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.” NASB, NIV, and NEB all read essentially the same as RSV.

[19]Again the KJV follows the previous pattern reading “the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ.” The NASB, NIV and NEB correspond to RSV.

[20]See Luke 5:8.

[21]E.g., Matthew 14:33.

[22]Actually it was not until after Jesus’ resurrection that the full conviction of His deity broke through (cf. John 20:28).

[23]The words of a personal testimony.

[24]Homo = “same”; ousios = “essence.’

[25]Although homoousios is used in the Nicene Creed only for Christ in relation to the Father (“the same essence as the Father”), it came later to be applied to the Holy Spirit as well. The Nicene Creed affirmed the full deity of Christ but did not speak in this connection concerning the Holy Spirit.

[26]Charles Lowry, The Trinity and Christian Devotion, 104. Lowry warns against a view of unity or oneness conceived of in terms of mathematical abstraction. The better model is “the analogy of a complex organism, animated by a single organizing principle or center but constituted out of

diverse elements," 102.

[27]We are not speaking here of the incarnate Son for whom there was limitation in essence of some of these attributes (see chapter 13, "Incarnation," for fuller discussion).

[28]The Latin expression traditionally used for this is omnia opera trinitatis indivisa sunt.

[29]On the gifts this is beautifully set forth in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6.

[30]This will be noted in more detail in the next chapter on Creation.

[31]As, for example, in some views of the atonement that depict the "holy Father" demanding punishment and the "loving Jesus" as interposing Himself between the Father and us. Both Father and Son are holy and loving. We will discuss this in more detail in chapter 14, "Atonement."

[32]This was the error of Sabellius (3rd century), an error that is repeated today by "Oneness" Pentecostals.

[33]The word subsistence, despite its highly technical flavor, may help to prevent any idea that the three are persons in our ordinary sense of the term. For us "persons" normally means three separate individuals, no matter how closely they may be related to one another; hence, using the term for God could suggest three Gods, or tri-theism. However, while "subsistences" (or "hypostases") may better avoid tri-theistic tendencies, there is the other perhaps greater danger of attenuating the personal aspect. I believe that both the technical term and the personal are needed.

[34]Jesus is spoken of as "only begotten" (KJV and NASB) at various places in John's writing: He is "the only begotten of the Father" (John 1:14), "His only begotten Son," (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9), "the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). The word for "only begotten" is monogenes, translated simply as "only" in RSV, NEB, and NIV (NIV has "only begotten" each time in the margin). According to TDNT, wherever monogenes is found in the New Testament, "it means 'only-begotten' " and in Jesus' case signifies an "eternal begetting" (see vol. 4, 739-41). This eternal begetting is also pointed to in the language of John 1:18-"the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father" (NASB). (The "only- begotten God" reading has come increasingly to be accepted, having the better manuscript support. See, e.g., Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John, NICNT, 113; F. F. Bruce, The Gospel of John, 44-45.) Of course, the "eternal begetting" does not refer to a begetting in eternity so that there was a time when the Son did not exist. He, as Son to the Father, always was, is, and will be the Son of God.

[35]In the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father” (15:26). The immediate background of these words is that of Jesus’ sending the Spirit: “But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth. …” Jesus is mediator; however, the original source is the Father-” … who proceeds from the Father.” Although it could be argued that Jesus is not talking about an eternal procession, such would seem to be implied. Indeed, in line with this, the orthodox church formulation of the Constantinopolitan Creed declares: “We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver, Who proceeds from the Father” (The Council of Toledo in A.D. 589 added “and the Son” [filioque]. This filioque clause seems inappropriate in that, while the sending is from the Son [and the Father-see John 14:26], the procession, as John 15:26 states, is from the Father alone.) The eternal procession of the Spirit has continued to be affirmed by the church at large to the present day.

[36]Words in the prayer of Jesus point up this eternal glorification: “Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made” (John 17:5).

[37]” … the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God” (1 Cor. 2:10).

[38]The Apostles’ Creed says it well: “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.”

[39]We might add “and comes upon” because the coming of the Holy Spirit is a recurrent coming. This will be discussed in Renewal Theology, vol. 2.

5
Creation

In the doctrine of creation we stand at the beginning of the mighty acts of God that relate to the constituted universe and man. “In the beginning God created… .”

I. BASIS

The basis of the doctrine of creation is *divine revelation.* Creation is a vast mystery incomprehensible to the mind of man. Hence, it is a truth made known by God Himself. In the special revelation to the people of God in both Old and New Testament the truth is set forth. The creation belongs—with other such great mysteries as election, redemption, and the final consummation—to God's own self-disclosure.

In actual order of disclosure, God's act of creation must have been second to His act of election.[1] In the Old Testament God first of all revealed Himself to the patriarchs and to Israel as the One who had called and chosen them for a special mission. He was the Lord to whom Israel owed its very existence. Then again He was Israel's Redeemer from bondage in Egypt. Hence, this revelation of God as Lord and Redeemer was prior to the disclosure of Him as Creator. Indeed, the former prepared the way for the latter. He who was Israel's absolute Lord was also the Creator of all things. He could not be Lord of one people were He not Sovereign over all people—even from the beginning of the human race. He could not have turned back the waters of the Red Sea were He not the Lord of all seas (and everything else in creation)—even from the beginning of the world. Because God is absolute Lord, besides whom there is no other, He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. Hence, while creation is logically prior to Israel's election, the revelation and apprehension of its truth follows that of election.

The truth of creation accordingly belongs in the arena of *faith.* It was disclosed to a line of people who for all their faults and failures were a people of faith. For example, recall the words in Hebrews 11: "By faith the people crossed the Red Sea …" (v. 29). Above them towered such a giant of faith as Moses (vv. 23–28), to whom quite likely was unfolded the whole drama of creation, Genesis being traditionally called "the first book of Moses."

It is, accordingly, quite significant to recall the prior words about creation in Hebrews 11: "By faith we understand that the universe[2] was created[3] by the word of God" (v. 3). Thereafter, that faith is illustrated by reference to many such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, and the people of Israel themselves (as we just noted). But since the Book of Hebrews was written for Christians, it means that by faith we also understand that the universe had a divine Creator.

How does the Christian believer know this? He understands in much the same way as the Israelites did, namely, by virtue of God's call and election, and His action as Lord and Savior. However, it is on a much deeper level than anything in the Old Testament, for in Jesus Christ the believer, and therefore the Christian community, knows a far greater miracle than redemption from Egypt. In faith the Christian has heard the Word of God, received life out of death, and found a new Lord. He derives his whole Christian existence from God. If Christ, the Living Word of God, has brought forth a new creation in the believer's life through faith, the believer is prepared to understand the fact that all of creation has come from that same Word. Again, in the language of Hebrews: "By faith we [the Christian believing community] understand that the universe was created by the word of God." The person who in faith has experienced the miracle of a new creation understands by that same faith that all creation stems from God and His Word.

One other meaningful verse of Scripture may be noted here. Paul, in a beautiful passage on faith, speaks of God as one "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Rom. 4:17). It is the same God who raises from death to life who brought the universe from nonexistence into existence. Although the latter is chronologically prior to the former, it is he who in faith has been born anew who can understand the birth or creation of all things by the same miracle-working God.

All of this is quite important to emphasize in dealing with the doctrine of creation. Without the eyes of faith—the faith wherein new creation is a reality—and the illumination of the Spirit, there is no way of truly understanding the creation of all things. Hence Genesis 1 and 2, as all else in the Scriptures, must be read from the perspective of faith. It simply will not do to read with the natural understanding, as if it were a treatise on creation to be read and perceived by believer and nonbeliever alike. Consequently, to seek to interpret the doctrine of creation to the unbeliever is also of little avail. "A natural man … cannot understand …" (1 Cor. 2:14 NASB); there must be eyes of faith illuminated by the Holy Spirit. This applies just as much to the doctrine of creation as to any other area of Christian faith.

The final basis for the doctrine of creation is the *Scripture*. If it seems surprising that Scripture is mentioned in the third place, this is by no means to disparage the Bible's significance, for the Scriptures are normative and authoritative throughout. The point, however, is that without an appreciation of revelation and faith and a participation in faith, the Scriptures are a closed book. It is even possible to frame a doctrine of creation that seeks throughout to be totally guided by scriptural texts, and yet be without life and understanding. *But*

wherever there is revelation and faith (as it has been described), then all the relevant Scriptures take on new meaning.

The Scriptures, accordingly, for all their importance, are not the primary reason for believing in creation or God's act of creation. Revelation and faith precede.[4] Hence, the affirmation that one believes in the miracle of creation "because the Bible says so," though it may be a valid and true statement, needs the deeper undergirding of faith. Prior to the statement that "by faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God" are the words: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction[5] of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). Faith contains the conviction of creation—"things not seen." Without such conviction and faith, the doctrine of creation lacks solidity and depth.

The importance of Scripture is that therein we have an authoritative and normative record of creation that will give direction and guidance. Faith, though it contains conviction, even certainty, is not a sure guide. The Bible, within the context of revelation and faith, is the only infallible rule for all our understanding of the doctrine of creation.

II. APPROACH

The primary approach to the doctrine of creation is one of *blessing* and *praise.* Perhaps the best place to begin is with the psalmist, who commences a beautiful and lengthy meditation on creation with the words: "Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, thou art very great!" (Ps. 104:1). Thereafter he addresses God: "Thou … hast stretched out the heavens like a tent…. Thou didst set the earth on its foundations, so that it should never be shaken. Thou didst cover it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. At thy rebuke they fled … O LORD, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all" (vv. 1–2, 5–7, 24). And then the climax: "I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being" (v. 33). These words express the primary approach to creation, namely, rejoicing at what God has made and giving Him blessing and thanksgiving for it all.

Another beautiful instance is Psalm 148, where the psalmist this time does not offer the praise himself but calls on God's creation to return praise to Him. "Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the LORD! For he commanded and they were created" (vv. 3–5). After hailing the heavenly host to praise the Lord, the psalmist next calls on the things of earth: "Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost… Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! Beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!" (vv. 7–10).

The important feature in all of this is that creation is something to be rejoiced in by all God's creatures, who thereby return to their Maker praise and blessing. It is not *how* God created, but *that* He did. We need to recognize that the whole vast panorama of the universe, indeed everything in it, should resound with praise to the Creator.

Another, and closely related, approach to the doctrine of creation is that of *marvel* and *wonder.* He who has had his eyes opened by faith now begins to appreciate all the more the wonder of what God has done in creation. The psalmist cries forth: "On the glorious splendor of thy majesty, and on thy wondrous works, I will meditate" (Ps. 145:5). The more one meditates on the mystery and miracle of creation, the more there is a growing sense of wonder at

what God has done.

"In the beginning God created"—just these opening words of the Bible stagger the imagination. There was nothing outside of God Himself—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and then God projected a universe. Who can but marvel at it all! Moreover, we are privileged to be a part of it and to behold creation in all of its reflection of God's glory. Truly "the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1 KJV).

Hence, to approach the doctrine of creation with a sense of wonder at the marvel of what God has wrought is altogether right and fitting. It is not a matter of seeking understanding but of allowing the greatness of God's creative action more and more to fill one's being. O God, how great Thou art!

A third approach to the doctrine of creation—an approach that grows out of the other two—is that of *deep humility.* In the presence of the great creative act of God, we can but realize how little our minds are capable of apprehending and how much we need to be taught by God, His Word, and His Spirit. The words in Job are appropriate:

> Hear this, O Job; stop and consider the wondrous works of God. Do you know how God lays his command upon them, and causes the lightning of his cloud to shine? Do you know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge? (37:14–16).

In the presence of the mighty deed of creation, for all that we may endeavor to understand, we can grasp very little of the mystery of it all. We need, therefore, humbly to allow God to teach us through His own revelation what He would have us know.

III. DEFINITION

Creation may be defined as the bringing of the universe into existence by God. It is a calling into being that which did not exist before. In the language of Hebrews 11:3, just following the statement about the universe being created by the word of God, are the words "so that what is seen is not made out of what is visible" (NIV), that is to say, out of any préexistent reality.

Creation, accordingly, is *absolute origination.* What was created by God did not come from preexisting material. It is *creatio ex nihilo*, "creation out of nothing." "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"—so reads Genesis 1:1. There is no statement about any material or source that God drew upon. What is pointed to here is without analogy[6] in human experience, because human creative activity always involves some shaping of material that is already in existence. With God, however, it is totally different: He alone truly creates—from nothing. The Hebrew word for create, *bara*, as in Genesis 1:1, is a word that is never used in the Scriptures with anyone other than God as the subject, and it refers essentially to creation out of nothing[7] —that is, absolute origination.

Incidentally, the biblical affirmation of *creatio ex nihilo* was totally foreign to ancient philosophical and religious understanding. For example, in the philosophy of Plato the world was viewed as having been formed out of some kind of primal matter. The "demiurge," Plato's "Maker," shaped the world out of what was already there, but he did not create it.[8] It would have been nonsense to suppose that the world came from nothing, for "out of nothing nothing comes."[9] In Babylonian mythology, which contains the highest creation picture of the ancient world, the god Marduk struggled against Tiamat, the monster of chaos, and slew her, and the world was composed out of fragments of her carcass. Here again it is not creation out of nothing, but out of something. It is a *making* of the world but not a creation of it. Any such view is utterly contrary to the biblical picture, namely, that the whole movement of creation is not from the préexistent to the existent, but from nothingness into existence.[10]

In this same context it may be pointed out that *creatio ex nihilo* indirectly denies both metaphysical dualism and pantheism. *Dualism* in various ways views the world, or some other reality (as in Plato's philosophy and Babylonian

mythology), as eternally existing alongside God, or even struggling against Him.[11] From the biblical perspective this denies God both as Creator and as Lord. For if something always has been outside of and alongside God, He is obviously not the Creator; if it affords some eternal opposition[12] to Him, He is not the Lord of all. Pantheism in whatever form,[13] wherein God and the world are somehow identified, also is a denial of creation. Pantheism is essentially a *monism* in which God and the world are eternally one: they are inseparable from each other. All philosophies of emanation, wherein the world is viewed as eternally flowing out of God (and perhaps returning to Him), are likewise pantheistic and contrary to creation. The world no more is made out of God than out of preexisting matter. God is the Lord!

It is urgent to affirm that the universe is God's creation. It *has not always existed.* In the beautiful words of the psalmist: "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God" (Ps. 90:2). "In the beginning," accordingly, is not a statement about God, as if in His beginning the world was created (for such a statement again leads back to mistaken philosophical and mythological views). "The beginning" refers rather to the beginning of space and time—the whole spatio-temporal universe (or the space-time-matter continuum)—which God infinitely transcends. God was there before and beyond the beginning: God is the Creator of space and time, and anything there is outside Himself.

Creation is not only absolute origination; it is also a *completed work* of God. "In the beginning God created," and the word "created" refers to something that has been completed. This does not mean that everything was done at once, for Genesis 1 depicts creation as continuing over a period of time. Moreover, the final word is Genesis 2:1—"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them."[14] There were six "days" in which all of this was accomplished. Furthermore, the word "created" (*bar*a') is used not only in Genesis 1:1 but also in 1:21 (referring to the fifth day) and in 1:27 (referring to the sixth day). However, with the final act of creation, it has now all been done. God accordingly does not continue to create the universe or new things within it. It is not *creatio continua* ("continuing creation"), though, of course, there are strikingly different aspects, formations, and activities in the vastness of the heavens and earth that seem new. However, God has finished His work of creation: all has been given—time, space, energy, life, man—that there ever will be in this present universe.[15]

This understanding of the universe, incidentally, is contrary to so-called

steady-state views of the universe that hold that there is a continuous creation of new matter (hydrogen atoms) throughout space. This newly created matter condenses thereafter to form new heavenly bodies (stars, galaxies, etc.) within the old; thus there is a steady state or constant spatial density. In this view, now increasingly outmoded, the universe is without beginning and end. It is continually creating itself afresh.

Also, the understanding of creation as completed is quite distinct from the philosophical-religious view that sees in creation only an expression of the relationship between God and the world. Schleiermacher,[16] for example, held that the doctrine of creation is an expression of man's absolute dependence on God. The doctrine in no way points to the actual beginning of the universe (which, in Schleiermacher's view, may be a concern of science or philosophy, but has no relation to the sphere of religion), but to the fact of a relationship between God and man that is the heart of everything in the world. Such a view, again, is foreign to the biblical perspective of creation as an event that has happened in the past. Of course, relationship between God and man is at the heart of faith; however, that very relationship *presupposes* a prior act of creation.[17] Creation is the absolute and completed origination of the universe by the act of God.

IV. SOURCE

We turn next to a consideration of the source of creation.

A. The Source of Creation Is God

"In the beginning *God* created." Or to use the words of Genesis 2:4, the source is "the LORD God": "in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens." God is *Elohim*, the LORD God is *Yahweh Elohim.*

This says at least two things. First, the majestic, all-powerful God, namely *Elohim*, who is sovereign over all things, is the creator of the universe.

He is called "God Most High *[El Ely on]*, maker of heaven and earth" in Genesis 14:19, 22. Second, the one who creates is also *Yahweh*, the LORD, the peculiarly personal, covenantal name for God (later to be revealed in its full meaning to Moses [Exod. 3:15]). Genesis 1 depicts *Elohim*, majestic and august, but almost distant and impersonal, creator of the universe and man; Genesis 2 shows *Yahweh* God, in His personal planting of a garden, breathing into man the breath of life, making a covenant with him, and forming man and woman for each other. Thus the creation of all things by *Elohim* (or *El Elyon)* and *Yahweh Elohim* is a magnificent picture of God, both as almighty and majestic and as personal and covenanting. It is *this* God who is the Creator of all things.

Since the source of creation is God, this rules out several mistaken views. It means, for one thing, that the universe is not a chance incident or accident; it did not just happen. Again, the world is not the work of some artificer less than God (as, e.g., Plato's "demiurge"). Further, the universe has not always been here (as in a "steady-state" view of the universe or an "oscillating" one in which the universe is viewed as forever expanding and contracting in a multibillion-year cycle). Once more, the universe is not self-existent, as if by some kind of spontaneous generation it came to be or keeps coming into being.

B. The Source of Creation Is the Triune God

The name of God as *Elohim* contains not only the idea of the majestic, all powerful deity, but also that the One who creates is a plurality within Himself. "*Elohim*" is sometimes called a "plural of majesty," but it may better be described as a peculiar plural that contains inner differentiation. *Elohim* could be called 4'the Godhead";[18] thus it is the Godhead that speaks in Genesis 1:26 —"Let *us* make man… ." And although there is no explicit Trinitarian reference[19] in Genesis 1, there are intimations that point the way to the being of Elohim, the Godhead, as Triune. This is further intimated in Genesis 1 by the operation of three forces: God, His spoken word, and the Spirit. There is *Elohim* who creates (v. 1), the Spirit of God that moves "over the face of the waters" (v. 2), and the word spoken: "And God said … and there was" (v. 3 and several times thereafter). The word spoken in Genesis may sound little like a personal reality; however, in the New Testament it is patent that it is the Word (capital "W"), the eternal Son, through whom God created all things (John 1:1; Heb. 1:2). Thus we may now look at the source of creation, reading Genesis 1 in the light of the New Testament, as the Triune God.

1. God the Father

God the Father is peculiarly the Creator. In the Old Testament, though the name of "Father" for God is not frequent, there is one clear reference to God as a Father who created: "Is not he your father, who created[20] you, who made you and established you?" (Deut. 32:6; cf. Mal. 2:10). A New Testament example is this statement: "For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things …" (1 Cor. 8:6).

God the Father is He "from whom" all things come. Accordingly, He is the *fountainhead* (the *fons et origo)* of creation.[21] It belongs to Him peculiarly to be the Creator; it is His external act.[22] So reads the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth."

Thus creation derives not from some impersonal source, but from one who is Father. The very title "Father" suggests one who cares, one who is intimately concerned about His creation and all His creatures. This is an important truth to

know and affirm in light of the question often raised, “Is there Someone ’up there’ who cares?” Did He, perhaps, in deistic fashion, make the universe, and leave it to go on its own? No, God the Creator is Father. The universe is the creation of One who is far more concerned than any earthly father about His child or children.

2. God the Son

God the Son is the *instrument* of creation. It was through the Son, the eternal Word of God, that the universe came to be. Using the language of Genesis, “And God said … and there was,” it is evident that *God spoke the universe into being.* Thus it was through the word of God that the universe and everything in it was made. This is also beautifully portrayed by the psalmist: “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made…. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth” (Ps. 33:6, 9). The word is the instrument or agent of creation.

This, of course, is all the more apparent in the New Testament. In the magnificent prologue of John’s Gospel we read: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God … all things were made *through*[23] him” (1:1, 3). Also, we may now continue with the passage previously quoted that began, “For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things,” by noting the words “and one Lord, Jesus Christ, *through* whom are all things and for whom we exist” (1 Cor. 8:6). One further Scripture that is quite relevant is this: “In him [Christ] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible … all things were created *through* him and for him” (Col. 1:16). The Son is the instrument—note: “through him”—of all creation.

It is popular but misleading language to speak of the Son as One who made the world. For example, the Living Bible paraphrases John 1:3—“He [the Word] created everything there is—nothing exists that he didn’t make.” But this is to give to the Son the role or activity that belongs to God the Father. Surely, since the Son is also God, and God is the Creator, He is totally involved in creation. *But* His function is not that of being the fountainhead of creation. Rather, He is the medium or instrument through whom God the Father does His creative work.

Now, having made this important refinement, we can rightly rejoice in the fact that everything comes through the Son. This means that the same One who has redeemed us was the channel through whom all things came into being. Thus we can all the more rejoice that whatever is distorted and broken in the universe

(and much has been spoiled through the work of Satan and the entail of sin and evil) is subject to His redemptive care. Hence, since the Son is both Redeemer and the channel of creation, it is God's purpose and plan (hear this!) "through Him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Col. 1:20).

One further reflection on the creation of all things through the Word may be relevant. Since "Word" by definition signifies rational utterance, creation through the Word also suggests that the universe God has made is a place of order and meaning. The universe, accordingly, has "Logos-structure"; it is a place of pattern and coherence, of direction and purposefulness. With the word spoken, that which is without form and void (Gen. 1:2) takes on structure: light, firmament, dry land, etc. (1:3ff.). All moves from chaos to cosmos,[24] from primeval formlessness to increasing form and complexity. Creation through the Word points up the amazing orderliness and meaningfulness that essentially holds together the universe in all of its components. It is possible that the New Testament refers to the same thing in saying of the Son: "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17).[25] The Word of God is what makes it all a *universe:* a single vast system of forces, of atoms and molecules, that is essentially one.

3. God the Holy Spirit

God the Spirit is the *energizer* of creation. This means, on the one hand, that all of creation occurs by His dynamic activity. In the Book of Job are these words: "The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life" (33:4 NASB). Similar words are found in the Psalms: "When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they [referring particularly to all living creatures] are created" (104:30). One further verse, closely linking word and Spirit (often translated "breath" or "wind"), may be noted: "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth" (Ps. 33:6). From such Scriptures as these, it is apparent that the operation of the Spirit is in close contact with what is being created, not simply a word spoken from afar but an immediate, divine breath that brings the universe into being and activates it. Thus, throughout the universe the immense forces that are at work in suns, stars, and galaxies are energized by the Spirit of God. All energy and power are there by virtue of the divine Spirit.

A second comment follows, namely, that the Holy Spirit is also the energizer

of everything on earth. This is to be noted particularly in the Genesis creation narrative. Just after the opening statement about creation (v. 1) is this statement: "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving ["brooding" or "hovering"][26] over the face of the waters" (1:2). Hence, at the outset of creation when, after the initial creation, the earth was still a formless, empty, and dark mass,[27] the Spirit of God began to move, to hover over the waters. This suggests that before God spoke and the earth took on form and meaning, the divine Spirit was already at work upon the stuff of creation. He was present energizing the vast potencies that lay hidden in the primeval watery waste.[28] Nothing was present but a chaos of lifeless matter. Over this mass, then, the Spirit of God moved, leavening the original chaos, quickening it with an inner vitality, and preparing it for that higher moment when the word spoken by God would bring it all to fruition.[29]

Finally, the Holy Spirit is the life-giver in creation. Now we may note again the words in Job 33:4 (NASB): "The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life." We may believe, then, that the Spirit hovering over the face of the waters was preparing the earth for the life that was later on to break forth. It would not be by accident that plant life, life in sea and sky, animal life, and then human life would appear. The climax would be that beautiful moment of man's creation, as recorded in Genesis 2, when "God formed man … and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (v. 7). The Spirit of God, the divine Breath, is the life-giver[30] in all creation.

We may summarize this section on the Triune God and creation by saying that creation is *from* the Father, *through* the Son, and *by*[31] the Holy Spirit. Thus does the one God in three persons perform the mighty work of creation.

V. METHOD

The question to which we now turn is the method whereby God accomplishes the work of creation. How does God bring it about?

A. Series of Creative Actions

We may focus first on the narrative in Genesis 1 in which the acts of creation are set forth. The word create *(bara')* occurs in relation to the universe, to living creatures, and finally to man. We will note these in sequence.

1. *The Universe—*"*the heavens and the earth*"

The first creative action of God relates to *the totality of the physical universe.* We have already noted that this creative act of God was one of absolute origination; it was *creatio ex nihilo.* Also it occurred at a certain moment: the universe has not always been in existence.

It is quite significant that this is one area where the overwhelming evidence of science agrees with the biblical affirmation of a beginning. Views of the universe as infinite and eternal (such as "steady-state" and "oscillating" theories) have been more and more superseded by the concept of a finite and temporal universe that had a specific beginning. It is now generally recognized by physicists and astronomers that we live in an expanding universe with all the galaxies moving farther away from one another at an enormous and ever-increasing speed. By calculating back from this expansion, the evidence points to a definite moment (variously calculated at from 15 to 20 billion years ago) when the universe was packed into a dense mass, almost equal to nothing. At that near-zero point of time and space, there was a stupendous explosion (often called the "Big Bang") like a cosmic hydrogen bomb, but with temperatures of many trillions of degrees. As one astro-physicist puts it: "The dazzling brilliance of the radiation in this dense, hot universe must have been beyond description."[32] Immediately following this enormous flash of light and energy, all that constitutes the universe (atoms, stars, galaxies) was ejected in every direction and continues to expand through the billions of years since that time.

This astounding picture of the beginning of the universe, if generally true,[33] surely brings science right up to Genesis 1. *There was a beginning of the universe.* But science can go no further. The questions of where that primordial fireball came from, what caused it, and for what purpose are totally outside its sphere. Cause and effect can be investigated and traced back to an originating cause—the vast explosion—but what lies behind it is scientifically and philosophically unascertainable. The answer of biblical and Christian faith is: GOD.[34]

God brought forth the universe *ex nihilo.* It was an utterly incredible act: "in

the beginning." From that act came the whole physical universe, including the earth on which we dwell.[35]

Genesis 1 next records a number of things before the next creative act of God. The earth, as earlier mentioned, was for a time in a formless and empty condition as a vast watery waste.[36] Then occurred four days of God's activity—the calling forth of light, making of the firmament, appearance of vegetation, and the heavenly luminaries (see below, pp. 109–10).

2. The Living Creatures

The second creative act of God relates to the *living creatures.* "So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind" (Gen. 1:21). Here is a totally new act of God: the creation of *animal life.* The word *bara* is used for the second time. Before this, much on the earth had been called forth (light and vegetation) and made (the firmament and the luminaries), but nothing was created since the initial creation of the universe. Now God took another huge step ahead, something that had never happened before. He created the first level of animal life. This signifies the dawn of conscious existence—living, moving creatures—which far transcends everything that God had done after the original creation of the heavens and the earth. We may note that after this new creation of sea creatures and birds, God made (not created) the creatures of earth—beasts, cattle, and creeping things (1:25). But for all their importance, the utterly new was the coming to be of the first creatures that lived and moved.[37]

Indeed, the whole world of living creatures is a marvel to contemplate. For here is a new creation on earth that, while less vast and spectacular than the creation of the universe, is an amazing miracle. The psalmist cries, "O LORD, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all; the earth is full of thy creatures" (104:24). Many of God's creatures are mentioned in this psalm: the wild asses, the birds of the air, cattle, wild goats, young lions, the fish of the sea, and the great Leviathan. Surely we can agree with the psalmist's praise, for what a different world it would be without the presence and life of the vast array of God's living creatures.

3. Man

The third and final creative act of God is *man.* “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). In this act of God, the word “created” *(bara)* is used three times (the emphasis could hardly be stronger), all relating to man or mankind. Here again is a totally new act of God (almost incredible to ponder), bringing into being a creature made *in His own image.*

There is obviously a large gap between the creation of animal life and the forming of all that preceded it, but here is something even greater: a creature made in the image and likeness of God. Man, in this high position, is to have dominion over all the animal world that has preceded him. We may now note the words of Genesis 1:26, spoken just prior to man’s creation: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” God, who has dominion over all things, has given man this subdominion. Thus his stature and place in all the universe is unique.

The miracle of man’s creation from one perspective seems minor compared to the miracle of the creation of the heavens and the earth. As the psalmist puts it: “When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast established; what is man …?” (8:3–4). Man seems quite insignificant before the vastness of all God’s creation. “Yet”—and here the psalmist proceeds to say it—“thou hast made him little less than God,[38] and dost crown him with glory and honor. Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea” (vv. 5–8). Man, created in God’s image, has been given dominion over everything God has made. Thus is he the pinnacle in God’s creation of the heavens and the earth.

B. Stages in Creation

It is apparent that creation did not all occur at once. As we have noted, there were three successive creative acts. Also as mentioned (and now we need to observe this more closely), there were various intervening actions in which God called forth or made other things. Thus not everything happened simultaneously, but rather there was a succession of acts. Hence, we may speak of the *process of creation.* There is differentiation and progression, with God active at every point along the way.

1. The Six Days

According to Genesis 1:1–2:4, the process of creation occurred over a six-day period. Two matters need to be dealt with: first, the length of time involved; second, the content of the days.

a. Length of time. The most obvious understanding of the days would be that of six or seven 24-hour periods, in other words, what we know as the 24-hour calendar day. Such a reading is possible but, upon careful scrutiny, rather unlikely. The word "day" itself is used in several different ways in the Genesis 1:1—2:4 passage. First, it refers to the light that was separated from darkness: "God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night" (1:5). Second, it refers to light and darkness together: "And there was evening and there was morning, one day" (also 1:5). Third, it refers to all the days together: "These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens" (2:4 KJV). This last statement is a summary of the "generations" (literally, "begettings"), which seems to refer to all that has preceded over the six days, hence the word "day" in this case covers the whole process of creation.[39] That the word "day" does not refer to a 24-hour calendar day also seems apparent from the account of the sun and moon not being made until the fourth day. How could there be calendar days, which equal solar days, when the sun is not yet present to mark them out? Finally, attention may be called to the New Testament statement that "with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8).

From the evidence above it seems quite likely that “day” represents a period of time, however short or long, in which God was accomplishing something.[40] This seems to accord best also with reflection upon the content of many of the six “days.” Although God, of course, could accomplish such acts as making all the plants and trees in one calendar day, all the luminaries in the heavens on another, all the fish and birds on another, all the beasts and man on still another, it hardly seems likely, nor even like God, who often works slowly over long periods of time. Hence, in light of the internal evidence the preferable interpretation is to view the six days of creation as periods of time, even ages, in which God was bringing the process of creation to its climax in man.[41]

Here we may look again in the scientific direction, and note that geological and biological data say much the same thing. It is now generally recognized that prior to man’s arrival on the scene there were lengthy periods of time. For example, vegetable life appeared long before animal life, and animal life long before human life. Each of these “days” could have been thousands or multiples of thousand years (recall 2 Peter); the exact length is unimportant. The important thing is that God completed a work during that period. Its completion therefore is the completion of a day.[42]

b. Content of the days. Genesis 1 relates what happened in each of the six days. Hence, we need not spend much time in going over the details. Briefly, however, we may note that the six days may be divided into two groups of three each, each beginning with the theme of light and variously paralleling the other.

1. Light
2. Firmament, separating sea and sky
3. Earth, putting forth vegetation
4. Lights (sun, moon and stars)
5. Fish of sea and birds of sky
6. Beasts of earth, then man

It is quite interesting to observe that the sequence of the third, fifth, and sixth days is generally confirmed today by research in paleontology and biology. Vegetable life first appeared, followed by aquatic and aerial life, and thereafter came mammalian and human life. Throughout, it is the simpler forms that appeared first, and the increasingly complex later, with man the latest and highest arrival in the whole process. This may even surprise some Bible students who have long been told that there is a conflict here between the Bible and science.[43] Of course, the Bible, and Genesis in particular, is not a scientific

treatise; however, what it says here—to repeat—is essentially the same that modern scientific research has discovered.

The other days (first, second, and fourth) pose more difficulty. The most obvious is that of the appearance of the sun, moon, and stars on the fourth day. How, for example, could there have been light before the appearance of the sun? I would suggest this answer: the light mentioned is "cosmic" light, not coming from the *sun* but from the *Son.* The light of the original creation of the world came into being through God's Word, namely, the Son of God. This was fitting, for He is "the light of the world" (John 9:5). While the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the dark waters, activating and energizing, the Word of God brought forth light to drive back the darkness. Note again a parallel with the New Testament: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not [or "did not" NASB] overcome it" (John 1:5). There is both life and light[44] now beginning to stir on the first day of creation! Thus the world at the beginning of creation did not need the light of sun[45] any more than will the final creation (the "new heavens and the new earth"): "the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk" (Rev. 21:23–24). In the beginning there was no need of sun and moon, for this "cosmic" light[46] radiated directly from the *Son,* and all creation was illumined by it.[47]

This would also provide an answer to a question sometimes asked: "How could there be vegetation on the third day before the appearance of the sun and moon on the fourth day?" This question overlooks the difference between "*the* light" (Gen. 1:4) and "lights in the firmament" (v. 14). *The* light was altogether sufficient for the nurture of vegetation and plant life prior to the appearance of lights in the firmament. It is significant to note also that the appearance of lights in the firmament on the fourth day belongs to the second cycle of creation, leading to the creation of animal and human life. The purpose of sun and moon is both "for signs and for seasons" and "to give light upon the earth" (vv. 14–15). This would provide in a special way for an earth populated by living creatures and man.

Another kind of question may be asked: Does not the account in Genesis declare, contrary to modern scientific understanding, that the earth preceded the formation of the sun, moon, and stars? In reply, let me say that the appearance of the lights in the firmament is *not* said to be an act of creation. It has already been noted that the word "create" *(bara")* is not used until the next day of creation (the animal world). What is said about the "lights" is: "Let there be lights [or "luminaries"] in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night

… And God *made* the two great lights … the stars also" (Gen. 1:14, 16). This could signify the shaping and completing of what is already there,[48] but also the bringing forth of a new phase of creation—the material at hand taking on a new formation.[49] Now what this can mean is simply this: when God created the heavens and the earth, all was there in elemental form, including both earth in its formlessness ("the earth … without form and void") and the heavens yet to be formed into sun, moon, and stars. Like the earth that had passed through various stages of shaping and forming (as shown in the first three days of creation) until it became fully the earth (land and sea separated, vegetation coming forth), so it was with the luminaries in the heavens.[50] Both the heavenly luminaries and the earth went through a process of formation; therefore, it is not so much a question of one existing before another, but of each moving from its elemental formlessness to its full formation. All of this is a process of "making" from beyond the originally created stuff to the fully formed reality.[51] From such a perspective as this, we can but marvel at God's wondrous ways of working all things together!

The sequence of the first three days might next be commented on. Questions usually focus on the second day. What is the firmament that God made and the separation of waters below from waters above? In order to understand, let me mention again that the earth in its primeval condition was formless and void, an unrelieved watery waste of darkness. Now as the Spirit began to move across this waste, energizing and activating it, and the Word called forth light, separating light from the darkness, the next step of God was a further separation, this time of the waters themselves. But where could they go? (Light can relieve darkness with no need for darkness to "go" somewhere.) How could this happen? The answer is that God made the firmament, or perhaps better, the "expanse,"[52] or even "the sky," or "the heavens." For example, the psalmist cries, "Bless the LORD, O my soul! … Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment, who hast stretched out the heavens like a tent" (104:1-2).[53] The "heavens stretched out" is the "expanse" (or "firmament"): so Genesis 1:8: "And God called the expanse heaven" (NASB). The purpose of the expanse is to separate the waters into a "below" and an "above." This signifies God's establishment of the sky (heavens) and clouds, which contain the waters above. Probably this was a thick vapor caused by the light now shining on the earth and causing it to rise above the expanse of the sky. There it was to stand, not yet as rain for the earth, but as a protective vapor cloud thus filtering heat from the cosmic light.[54] Hence, the marvelous and beautiful connection between the first, second, and third days of creation can be seen. On the third day the waters still

covering the earth—although the firmament or expanse has separated much of them—are further pulled back, so that the dry land can now appear and vegetation begin to flourish. Then it was, according to Genesis 2, that since "the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth … a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground" (vv. 5–6). God's handling of the waters is beautiful to behold!

2. Fixity and Progression

Finally, let us observe that everything in the world of plants and animals was made "according to its kind" (or "their kinds").[55] Vegetation, plants, and fruit trees put forth, yield seed, bear fruit, "each according to its kind" (Gen. 1:11). God created sea monsters, fish, birds, each "according to its kind" (v. 21). God also made wild animals, cattle, reptiles, each "according to its kind" (v. 25). There is a fixity in each species that God made.[56] Each is free to multiply and to develop within its own "kind," bringing about marvelous varieties and complexities; but it cannot go beyond what the Word of God has fixed.[57]

This biblical truth, incidentally, stands in total opposition to the theory of evolution that holds to the development of one species into another by a process of "natural selection" and through "the survival of the fittest." According to this view, variations that occur are inherited, and gradually a new species is formed. Thus the whole line of life from amoeba to man is the result of a long and complex evolutionary process wherein new species have emerged over countless ages of time. However, there is *no* adequate evidence to justify this claim. There is the absence of intergrading forms in plants and animals and no proven evidence of species transformation.[58]

Genesis says nothing about man being made according to "his kind." This means, simply, that however man may be related to what has preceded him in creation, he is unique. He was not made "according to his kind" but "according to God's image"! There is no conceivable permutation of the highest of the living creatures into man, not only because of the inviolability of species but also because man is not simply a higher species. He is the one reality in all creation that is made in God's likeness and after God's image.

There is also a beautiful progression throughout the whole saga of creation. Although there is a fixity in species, it is marvelous to behold how all things God has created or made are related to one another. Man is composed of the same elements physically as all the rest of the world; and since his creation was last, it

is proper to say that God has been preparing the way for man's final arrival on the scene.

It is quite important, however, to emphasize that the whole pattern of progression is determined throughout by God's activity. There is something akin to magic in the evolutionist's idea that spontaneously new and higher life forms occur.[59] This contradicts common sense, the biblical record, and genuine scientific procedure. The law of entropy speaks of a tendency in all things to uniform inertness, toward running down. Events occur in such a way that order gradually disappears. How can there be *uphill* evolution? The following statement is to the point:

> Theories of evolution … while paying lip service to science … postulate something opposed to the basic principle of all scientific thought —they postulate the creation, spontaneously, magically, in complete absence of observers, of radically new types of organization: the actual reversal of the law of morpholysis ["losing form, breaking down"].[60]

The only possible way of understanding the upward and forward movement—the occurrence of new and higher forms—is to recognize that they originated in the word and action of God. From the "Let there be light" to the "Let us make man" God was the only sufficient cause of all that came into existence. The pattern of progression was wholly from God the Creator.

VI. QUALITY

We turn now from the method of creation to observe its quality. Here the Genesis record speaks quite loudly: it was *all good,* indeed *very good.* From the first day of creation, when God "saw that the light was good" (1:4), to the sixth day, when God made the living creatures, there is the recurring statement "God saw that it was good" (1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25). Then when all the work of creation was finished, "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (1:31). Hence each thing God made in turn was good, and everything viewed together at the climax was very good.[61]

Accordingly, every step along the way was a good step, and everything made was good. Whether it was light or dry land or vegetation or the heavenly luminaries, or living creatures—from fish to birds to animals—or finally man, it was all good. Therefore, it would be a serious mistake to view any stage of creation as faulty or destructive. If there were lengthy ages preceding the creation of man,[62] it was not as if the earth were a place of great convulsions in nature and of animals wild and rapacious.[63] The popular picture of a prehistoric world of violent earthly disturbances and predatory birds and beasts is far removed from the biblical account. Rather, there was neither fault in nature nor destruction among the living creatures. All was in harmony, all was at peace—for everything that God had made was good, yes, very good.

It follows that the world and all it contains is basically a good world. As Genesis 2 further unfolds the picture, God caused a mist to water the earth, He created man from dust, breathing into him His own breath; He planted a beautiful garden with trees "good for food"; and He made woman to share life with man. In all of this there was not a trace of evil: everything from the hand of God was good.

This basic goodness of all that God made is important to emphasize. *Nothing* in this world is intrinsically bad. This affirmation is contrary to any view that depicts matter as evil, the created world as a sphere of darkness, and man's body as corrupt because of its earthly composition.[64] The fact that evil—with all its dire effects—will soon emerge on the scene (Gen. 3–4) should by no means be allowed to distort the fact that the world God made is essentially good. The

world is God’s good creation.

Practically speaking, for one thing, this means the positive affirmation of what God has given in creation. Paul spoke vehemently against “the pretensions of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and enjoin abstinence from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving…. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving; for then it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer” (1 Tim. 4:2–5). To reject what God has given—His blessings of all kinds of food and the institution of marriage—is a lie against God’s good provision.

Finally, the goodness of God in creation should again and again awaken us to joy and celebration. The psalmist declares, “They shall pour forth [“celebrate” NIV] the fame of thy abundant goodness…. The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made” (145:7, 9). Verily, the whole creation exhibits the “abundant goodness” of the Lord. Let us speak forth our glad testimony!

VII. PURPOSE

Finally, we come to the matter of the purpose of creation. Why did God create the universe, the heavens and the earth, and finally man? For what end have all things been made?

In one sense the basic answer is that creation occurred because God *willed* it so. According to the Book of Revelation, the twenty-four elders cast their crowns before the throne of God and sing, "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of thy will[65] they existed, and were created" (4:11 NASB). The will of God was the ultimate reason for creation: it was simply, and profoundly, God's will to create.[66] Genesis declares that "in the beginning God created": God willed it—He created—nothing else is said. *That* He did it, and then *how* He did it are both stated, but *why* He did it is totally undeclared. Hence, one must exercise much restraint in proceeding further to posit the reason or purpose.

Here a demurrer should be inteijected regarding a view sometimes expressed, namely, that God created the world out of some inward necessity. For instance, prior to creation God needed a reality outside Himself through which He might find self-expression and fulfillment. Since God was alone, He made a world, especially man, that He might have someone to fellowship with. Creation, accordingly, was basically for God's own self-fulfillment. Put somewhat differently, since God is love, love demands an object; otherwise love is frustrated. Thus, again, creation was necessary.

To reply: any notion that God created out of inner need is wholly contrary to the fact that God in Himself contains all fullness. Prior to creation God was not alone, for in Himself He was—and is—the fellowship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is in every way complete without creation. Here the words of Paul spoken to the Athenians are quite apropos: "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, *as though he needed anything*, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything" (Acts 17:24–25). God does not need anything: He did not create to receive but to give.

The preceding statement that God created to give takes us further along in the purpose of creation. We have already observed that God's will is the ultimate

cause of creation; hence we must not seek a reason beyond that. However, the will of God is not some separate faculty or compartment of His being, but it is rather His total being in action beyond Himself. Therefore, creation was an expression of God's glory, since the glory of God is the effulgence of splendor and majesty that shines through in every aspect of His being and action.[67] Thus creation, as the expression of God's will, was the manifestation of His glory.

Accordingly, we may now speak of the manifestation of the glory of God as the purpose of God's creating all things. In showing forth His glory God willed to have a creation to which that glory would be manifest. It was to be the manifestation of His holiness, His love, His truth, His power, His wisdom, His goodness[68] —indeed all that God is in Himself. God willed to have a creation to whom He could communicate His glory, a world to show forth the glory of His eternal being and nature. God did not create the world for His own satisfaction or self-fulfillment, but to allow all creation to share the richness, the wonder, the glory of Himself.

Creation, accordingly, is the arena of God's glory. The mighty angels around the throne of God cry forth, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa. 6:3). The earth, the world, is suffused with the glory of Him who created all things. We may not always see this as the angels do because of the sin and evil that have entered God's good creation, but the glory is still here and will some day be totally manifest. For God Himself has also testified: "As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD" (Num. 14:21 KJV).

Finally, since the purpose of God's creating was to show forth His glory, all of creation is most blessed when its response is to glorify God. God does not need to receive glory any more than He needs to receive love—or anything else from His creatures—but it is in offering up of praise and thanksgiving that the circle is complete. The creation that has received the riches of God's glory now fulfills its highest purpose in the glorifying of God.

With the elders around the throne of God, let us also sing, "Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for thou didst create all things… ." For it is in such an offering of praise to God the Creator that all creation knows its highest blessedness.

[1]For a discussion of "Election," see vol. 2, chapter 1, "Calling.'

[2]I have substituted "universe" (as in NIV and NEB) for "world." The Greek word is aionas (literally, "ages"); however, as F. F. Bruce says, "the

universe of space and time is meant" (Hebrews, NICNT, in loco).

[3]The Greek word is katertisthai. It is translated in KJV as "framed," in NEB as "fashioned," and in NIV as "formed." Any of these, as well as "created," is possible. However, I believe "create" (as in RSV) is the essential idea, but not without a sense of continuation of being such as the other translations suggest. Weymouth in his New Testament in Modern Speech translates: "the worlds came into being and still exist," and adds in a footnote: "the whole of this is expressed by one Greek word in the perfect tense [katertisthai] "

[4]On the other hand, reading the Scriptures may also evoke faith (cf. Rom. 10:17).

[5]The Greek word is elenchos, translated "evidence" in KJV. The NIV translates the verse: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." The idea of certainty is well-founded and emphasizes that the affirmation of creation belongs to the certitude of faith.

[6]This is "utterly beyond all understanding … what we know as creation is always the shaping of some given material" (E. Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, 11). This is a "creative activity which in principle is without analogy" (G. von Rad, Genesis, 47).

[7]'Bara' … is never connected with a statement of the material" (ibid.). This does not necessarily mean that no material is involved; for example, God who created man (see hereafter) did it by using dust (clay). However, God brings something totally new into the situation. "The primary emphasis of the word bara ' is on the newness of the created object" (TWOT, 1:127). Erickson writes that bara' "never appears with an accusative which denotes an object upon which the Creator works to form something new" (Christian Theology, 368).

[8]See Plato's Timaeus.

[9]Ex nihilo nihil fit-the philosophical expression usually set over against creatio ex nihilo. Some contemporary philosophy speaks of God as creating out of "non-being" (for example, Berdyaev and Tillich) where "non-being" is viewed as having a kind of semi-real status. However, this is still contrary to the biblical picture of absolute origination. "Nothing" is not "something," no matter how refined or defined.

[10]The basic movement of creation is "not from unformed matter to formed object, but from the non-existent to the existent" (L. Gilkey, Maker of Heaven and Earth, 53). Gilkey also speaks of this as "absolute

origination.”

[11]"Aristotle spoke of the eternal coexistence of the world and God. In the Zoroastrian religion the great god Mazda, the god of light, has as his eternal counterpart Ahriman, the god of darkness. Mazda eternally struggles against Ahriman to overcome him.

[12]Satan, in biblical and Christian faith, is not an eternal adversary. He is a creature, albeit fallen, and his doom is sure.

[13]This includes a modified form of pantheism called panentheism, which views God as partly identical with the world. Philosophies that depict God as at the same time both infinite and finite are panentheistic: God identical with the “all” {pan) but also “in” (en) the all.

[14]Some commentators have viewed “the host” to signify angels. Thus, in addition to the heavens and earth, God made “the host of angels.” However true it is that the angels are God’s creatures and thus made by Him, Genesis 2:1 seems rather to point to the total sphere of the physical universe, hence the heavens and the earth and everything in them (as outlined in Gen. 1). In Deuteronomy 4:19 Moses warns Israel: “And beware lest you lift up your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and worship them and serve them.” “The host” in this place clearly refers to the totality of the universe visible to man, and not to angels (cf. also Deut. 17:3; Ps. 33:6). It seems that Genesis 2:1 is pointing to the same thing.

[15]In scientific terminology this is the law of mass conservation, namely, that although matter may be changed in size, state, and form, the total mass remains the same. This means that no creation or destruction of matter or energy is happening anywhere in the universe.

[16]An early nineteenth-century German theologian. See in his chief work, The Christian Faith, ihe section on “Creation.”

[17]“Creation speaks primarily of a basis which is beyond this relationship and makes it possible; of a unique, free creation of heaven and earth by the will and act of God” (Barth, Church Dogmatics, 3.1.14).

[18]According to the Old Testament scholar W. Eichrodt, ‘élôhîm is “an abstract plural … [that] corresponds to our word ‘Godhead’ “ (Theology of the Old Testament, 1:185).

[19]Refer back to the discussion of this in chapter 4, “The Holy Trinity,” pages 84-85.

[20]NASB has “bought” instead of “created.” Whatever may be the best translation, the verse (as NASB also shows) continues with the theme of creation: “who has made you and established you.”

[21]Even as He, prior to all creation, is the fountainhead in the Trinity: the Son eternally being begotten and the Spirit eternally proceeding from Him.

[22]See chapter 4, “The Holy Trinity,” pages 93-94.

[23]The Greek word is dia. The KJV and NASB translate dia as “by,” which is misleading. “By” suggests that the Son is the Creator Himself. In the two passages above that follow-1 Corinthians 8:6 and Colossians 1:16-where RSV (as quoted) reads “through,” KJV and NASB again have “by” (NIV has “through” in 1 Cor. 8:6 and “by” in Col. 1:16). Since the Greek word is dia in each case, the better translation is “through.”

[24]“The theological thought of ch. 1 moves not so much between the poles of nothingness and creation as between the poles of chaos and cosmos” (von Rad, Genesis, 49). Von Rad is by no means denying creatio ex nihilo, to which he refers in commenting on verse 1; but with creation out of nothingness as a given, the rest of the narration beginning with verse 2 moves from chaos, or formlessness, to cosmos, or order.

[25]Better than KJV, which reads “consist.” The NIV, NASB, and NEB agree with RSV reading above.

[26]The Niv, NEB and NASB have “hovering” as an alternate reading. L. Kohler (in his Old Testament Theology, 88) translates: “hovered trembling.” “Brooding” is “the literal meaning” (IB, in loco).

[27]This state of formlessness, emptiness, and darkness has sometimes been interpreted as due to a primeval “fall,” perhaps of Lucifer and his angels, so that the earth was reduced to this condition. I agree with von Rad’s statement: “The assumption … of a cosmic Luciferlike plunge of the creation from its initial splendor is linguistically and objectively quite impossible” (Genesis, 48).

[28]This could include the activation of gravitational forces, as formless and static matter are brought into form and motion.

[29]B. B. Warfield, commenting on the Spirit’s role in relation to the word, puts it vividly: “To the voice of God in heaven saying, Let there be light! the energy of the Spirit of God brooding upon the face of the waters responded, and lo! there was light … God’s thought and will and word take effect in the world, because God is not only over the world, thinking

and willing and commanding, but also in the world as the principle of all activity, executing" (Biblical and Theological Studies, 134).

[30]The affirmation in the Creed of Constantinople (popularly known as the Nicene Creed) concerning the Holy Spirit is quite apropos: "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and the Life-giver."

[31]The Holy Spirit is sometimes called "the executive of the Godhead" (e.g., Warfield, Biblical and Theological Studies, 131).

[32]Robert Jastrow, director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, in his book, God and the Astronomers, 13.

[33]Jastrow claims: "Science has proven that the universe exploded into being at a certain moment" (ibid., 114). His statement has few reputable challengers today.

[34]It is important to stress that no scientific view of the origin of the universe necessitates belief in God. (As a case in point, Jastrow claims to be an agnostic-"I am an agnostic in religious matters" [ibid., 11].) Christian faith holds that God created all things, and this conviction is in no way based on scientific evidence. However, we may rejoice that prevailing scientific opinion recognizes a beginning of our present universe. Both the Bible and contemporary science are concerned about what happened "in the beginning." This is surely a matter of extraordinary importance.

[35]Scientists generally hold that earth is a recently late arrival on the scene: approximately 4 Vi billion years ago. However that may be, earth is definitely included in the creative act of God wherein the physical universe was made.

[36]The picture is not too far distant from the scientific view that the earth began in a gaseous state and then evolved into a liquid state; later it became solid. See "Beginnings of Earth's History," Encyclopaedia Britannica, Macropaedia, 6:10.

[37]The land creatures represent a development of living creatures: the further organization and advancement of what already existed. The consciousness of land creatures may be higher than that of sea creatures and birds, but there is no qualitative difference (as there is between the lowest form of animal life and preceding vegetable life).

[38]Or "the heavenly beings" as in NIV. The KJV has "the angels," which accords with Hebrews 2:7 (quoting from the LXX of Psalm 8:6). The Hebrew word is 'ëlôhîm, which, though primarily meaning "God," can also be "gods"-i.e., "heavenly beings" or "angels." (See ch. 9, "Man," for

fuller discussion.) In any event, man's place in the earthly world is unique.

[39]In the same vein Gleason L. Archer, Jr., says: "Since the stages in creating heaven and earth have just been described, it is legitimate to infer that the 'day' here must refer to the whole process from day one through day six" (A Survey of Old Testament Introduction, 186). Incidentally, another relevant Scripture is Numbers 3:1, which reads in KJV: "in the day that the LORD spake with Moses in mount Sinai." That "day" lasted forty calendar days and nights!

[40]This would fit, for example, many apocalyptic passages in the Bible that speak of a coming "day of the Lord" in which a great number of events will occur. There is little or no suggestion that everything will occur in twenty-four hours.

[41]In any event the question is not how long did it take God to create the world? But how long did God take to create it?

[42]My statements above that the days of Genesis 1 are best viewed as lengthy periods of time is at variance with so-called "scientific creationism" that affirms a literal six-day period. The Institute for Creation Research (San Diego, California), founded by Henry M. Morris, is the main center for actively promoting this viewpoint. I much appreciate the arduous efforts of the Institute against evolutionism but find it regrettable that the battle is waged from a "young earth," six-day perspective. Surely there is room for another creationist perspective that perhaps better understands Genesis 1 as well as the scientific evidence. See, e.g., Davis A. Young, Christianity and the Age of the Earth.

[43]"Now for the student of the Bible it is surprising that the building plan of the creation which is shown us by palaeontological research agrees in all essential respects with what is said in Genesis about the third, fifth, and sixth days of creation." So writes Karl Heim in his book The World: Its Creation and Consummation, 36.

[44]Against the background of the Spirit brooding or hovering and thereby energizing life, the Word now brings forth light.

[45]Calvin interestingly writes, "The sun and the moon supply us with light; and, according to our notions, we so include this power to give light in them, that if they were taken away from the world, it would seem impossible for any light to remain. Therefore, the Lord, by the very order of creation, bears witness that he holds in his hand the light, which he is able to impart to us without the sun and the moon" (*Commentary on*

Genesis, in loco).

[46]I have not attempted to describe “cosmic” light above, but have only spoken of it as coming directly from the Word or Son. However, “cosmic” light has been described as consisting of ether waves produced by energetic electrons. Another way of putting it is to think in terms of electromagnetic forces that were activated by the Word, thus calling light out of darkness. In any event this would not refer to the sun but to the word: “Let there be light.”

[47]Carl F. H. Henry writes, “The light that shattered darkness on the first day of creation was not light emitted by heavenly luminaries (these were created on the fourth day, 1:14- 19); it was, rather, the light mandated by Elohim to negate the darkness of chaos …” (God, Revelation, and Authority, vol. 6, pt. 2, p. 136). Henry also speaks of this light as “cosmic” light and relates it to the “big-bang theory”: “Recent abandonment of steady- state cosmology and predilection for the big-bang theory have focused on the existence of universal cosmic light before sunlight and moonlight” (p. 135).

[48]The word for “made,” *asa, unlike bara , relates specifically to given materials. “Its primary emphasis is on the shaping or forming of the object involved” (TWOT, 1:396).

[49]Bara’, on the other hand, as an act of creation always specifies the absolute priority of the new. There may be, and often is, the use of existing materials, but only as a means of the new coming into being. (See also previous fn. 7.)

[50]After the “big bang” in which all the basic stuff of the universe was possibly created, there followed much extended time before the first stars came into formation. It was probably from prestellar matter at high density (a kind of vast expanding gas cloud) that the stars were constituted.

[51]I find this statement helpful: “The primary material, not only of the earth, but also of the heaven and the heavenly bodies, was created in the beginning. If, therefore, the heavenly bodies were first made or created on the fourth day, as lights for the earth … the words can have no other meaning than that their creation was completed [italics mine] on the fourth day, just as the creative formation of our globe was finished on the third; that the creation of the heavenly bodies therefore proceeded side by side, and probably by similar stages, with that of the earth” (Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament, 1:59).

[52]So in NASB and NIV. The Hebrew word râqîa' indicates something a bit more nebulous than "firmament."

[53]Note also that the sequence of light and then the stretching out the heavens is the same as in Genesis 1:3 and 1:6. Also cf. Isaiah 44:24; 45:12; 51:13; Jeremiah 10:12; Zechariah 12:1.

[54]Some scholars hold that this vapor cloud (or "envelope") contributed to a subtropical climate across the earth, pole to pole, many years ago. Also there are those who believe that at the time of the Flood, condensation of the vapor cloud occurred, and thus rain fell continuously for forty days and nights, the waters thereby once again covering the face of the earth.

[55]The Hebrew word translated "kind" is mîn, which, according to TWOT, "can be classified according to modern biologists and zoologists as sometimes species, sometimes genus, sometimes family or order." In the following pages I use "species" but with no thought of ruling out other ways of classifying "kind" and "kinds."

[56]Cf. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15. He says that "God gives … to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is alike, but there is one kind for men, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish" (vv. 38-39).

[57]This fact has been graphically confirmed in our day by the discovery of the DNA molecule, the "molecule of heredity." According to a recent writer, "the modern understanding of the extreme complexities of the so-called DNA molecule and the genetic code contained in it has reinforced the biblical teaching of the stability of kinds. Each type of organization has its own unique structure of the DNA and can only specify the reproduction of the same kind" (H. M. Morris, The Genesis Record, 63).

[58]T. H. Morgan, an evolutionist of the early twentieth century, admitted this: "Within the period of human history we do not know of a single instance of the transformation of one species into another" (Evolution and Adaptation, 43). The situation has not changed up to the present. There is no assured evidence of cross-species mutations. Instead, there is a stubborn persistence of species, whatever the variations within each species.

[59]The popular physicist Carl Sagan writes in his book Cosmos: "Perhaps the origin and evolution of life is, given enough time, a cosmic inevitability" (p. 24). One must ask, Why? How can life rise from nonlife? How can the lower produce the higher? "Given enough time" is meaningless, and "cosmic inevitability" is absurd.

[60]Robert E. D. Clark, Christianity Today (May 11, 1959), 5. We might add that “theistic evolution,” held by some who try to see God as involved in the evolutionary process, while perhaps a better view than mechanical causation or natural selection, is nonetheless an inadequate position to hold. “Evolution” is an unfortunate term, however used, suggesting no fixity in species and a process guided by natural selection. It is far better to speak of creation as a process or stages in which God is the active initiator and worker all the way.

[61]Calvin interestingly comments: “In the very order of events, we ought diligently to ponder on the paternal goodness of God toward the human race, in not creating Adam until he had liberally enriched the earth with all good things. Had he placed him on the earth barren and unfurnished; had He given life before light, he might have seemed to pay little regard to his interest. But now that he has arranged the motions of the sun and stars for man’s use, has replenished the air, earth, and water, with living creatures, and produced all kinds of fruit in abundance for the supply of food … he has shown his wondrous goodness to us” CInstitutes 1.14.2 Beveridge translation).

[62]As I have suggested earlier, understanding the six days as ages.

[63]Two comments are in order here. First, it is noteworthy that in Genesis 1 the animals are not described as carnivorous. God declared, “To every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth … I have given every green plant for food” (v. 30). Second, according to Genesis 2, after man was created, all the animals-cattle, birds, and beasts-were brought to him for naming (v. 19). There is no suggestion that any of them were violent in nature.

[64]Gnosticism, an early Christian heresy, essentially held this viewpoint.

[65]The Greek for “because of thy will” is dia to thelema sou. The RSV, NIV, and NEB translate dia as “by.” However, dia may also mean “because of’ or “on account of,” which here, I believe, is the better translation. Weymouth’s New Testament in Modern Speech reads “because it was thy will.” Also EBC, in loco, renders as “because of’ (and adds bluntly, “not ‘by’ “). The KJV rendering, “for thy pleasure,” is quite misleading, for this suggests that God created the world for His own enjoyment. To be sure, God may take pleasure in what He has made, but this is scarcely the reason for His creating.

[66]Calvin wrote about the will of God: “When … one asks why God has so done, we must reply: because he has willed it. But if you proceed further

to ask why he so willed, you are seeking something greater and higher than God's will, which cannot be found" (3.16.2 Battles translation). Although Calvin stated this in relation to predestination, his point applies equally well to creation.

[67]Recall chapter 3,"Epilogue: The Glory of God," pages 79-81.

[68]The chapter on "Creation" (IV) in the Westminster Confession of Faith begins: "It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create or make of nothing the world, and all things therein. …" This is, indeed, a splendid portrayal of God's purpose in creating.

6
Providence

In theology the doctrine of providence follows directly upon the doctrine of creation. For the God who creates is also the God who provides for His creation.[1] Accordingly, we will observe various aspects of this provision, and in close connection with them we will consider such related matters as the problem of human suffering, the working of God in extraordinary providence (or miracles), and the significant role of God's angelic messengers.[2] The doctrine of providence thus covers a wide and highly important area, and the knowledge of providence and a belief in the God who provides for all of His creatures has great significance for the life of man.[3]

I. DEFINITION

Providence may be defined as the overseeing care and guardianship of God for all His creation. So vital is this activity that God is sometimes spoken of as Providence.[4] In the Scriptures an early designation of a place name is "the LORD will provide," for there it was that God provided a ram for Abraham in place of the sacrifice of his son Isaac.[5] God's constant care and guardianship in a multiplicity of ways stands at the heart of the doctrine of providence.

God, therefore, is understood in providence as One who is intimately concerned with His creation. He did not create a world and then leave it on its own.[6] The Scriptures say that on the seventh day God "rested" from His work of creation, but the rest of God does not mean indifference or indolence thereafter. Quite the contrary, the God attested in Scripture is He who sustains what He has made, who is involved in the affairs of people and nations, and who is guiding all things to their final fulfillment.

Providence is much more than just a general care that God has for His creation. To be sure, it is proper to say that God has a benevolent concern for all His creatures. However, of deeper significance is His particular care for each and every one of them. For truly, as Jesus declares, regarding even the sparrows, "not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father" (Matt. 10:29 NASB), and concerning human beings "… even the hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matt. 10:30). God in His providence is concerned with the least of His creation.

The doctrine of providence is not a doctrine of superficial optimism. It is not a looking at the world through rose-colored glasses as if there were no problems, no pain, no evil. It is not saying that because God provides, life is nothing but serenity and ease. "God's in His heaven; all's right with the world"[7] is scarcely a biblical understanding of the plight of the world or of God's relationship to it. The doctrine of providence is far removed from fatuous optimism; it seeks to recognize the complexity of the world God has made, the trial and travail in it, and to speak realistically of God's way of acting. It is a doctrine of profound realism.

One further comment: we are moving again in the realm of revelation and faith.[8] The doctrine of providence is by no means based on a large-scale

observation of nature and history. There are indeed traces of divine providence in the general benevolence of God for all His creatures. As Paul says, “He [God] did not leave himself without witness, for he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons” (Acts 14:17). However, the world as seen by the natural eye may also be viewed as a world in which either fate or fortune reigns supreme. In the former case, rather than being under God’s providential care and guardianship, everything happens by virtue of an overruling, all-determining fate or necessity;[9] in the latter, whatever happens is a matter of fortuity or chance.[10] Such speculative philosophy, in which God has no significant role (or is nonexistent), is far removed from the doctrine of providence. However, the doctrine itself does not stem from any human viewpoint, either speculative or empirical, about nature and history. It is grounded in the divine revelation attested in Scripture and confirmed in many ways by the experience of faith.

II. ASPECTS

Now we will look at various aspects of providence. For more detailed examination, these will be grouped under the headings of preservation, accompaniment, and direction. God preserves, accompanies, and directs His creation.

A. Preservation

God in His providence preserves His creation. He preserves, sustains, upholds. This relates particularly to the *being* of what He has made.

The world is preserved in being by Almighty God. All creation stands momentarily under the threat of dissolution. Its outward solidity is nothing more than the movement of countless atoms that maintain regularity and order through some external force. Structures and laws are but continuing sequences that would break down immediately without a power that restrains them. The revolution of the earth around the sun, the earth's turning on its axis, the oxygen level in the atmosphere—whatever exists by God's creative act—would break apart, dissolve, go back into chaos if God did not sustain and preserve.[11] Through God's Word they were made; by it they came into being; and accordingly "in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17).[12] Truly, He "upholds all things by the word of His power" (Heb. 1:3 NASB).[13] The universe,[14] the world—all things—are sustained by the power of God. So may we praise God in the words of Ezra: "Thou art the LORD, thou alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and thou preservest all of them" (Neh. 9:6). God the creator of all things preserves all that He has made.

It follows that this preserving and sustaining is true also in regard to creaturely existence, especially human existence. The psalmist declares to God: "O LORD, thou preservest man and beast" (Ps. 36:6 KJV). Again, "O bless our God … [who] holdest our soul in life" (Ps. 66:8–9 KJV). In the Book of Job there is this declaration: "If he [God] should take back his spirit to himself, and gather to himself his breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust" (34:14–15). Such Scriptures attest that physical life is continuously and vigorously maintained and sustained by the mighty power of God.

We need to pause a moment to reflect on the marvel of our continuing physical existence. The regular beating of our heart, the circulation of blood through the body, the literal carrying of life in the blood stream—all of this goes on moment-by-moment without any effort or direction on our part. Truly it is a marvel that we stay alive. And there can be but one ultimate source: the living God, who keeps "our soul in life," who sustains the breath in our nostrils, who enables our hearts to keep up their life beat.[15] We should never cease to bless

God for the marvel and wonder of life itself.

Next we call to mind the wonder of God's continuing preservation of His creatures by His regular provision for their needs. In the beginning of creation God provided food for His creatures: "And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food" (Gen. 1:30). Also for man "the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food" (2:9). Thus did God bounteously preserve what He had made. Even when man sinned and the ground was cursed so that he had to sweat and toil in tilling it, God still provided (see 3:17–18). Even when evil grew to such proportions that God sent a flood to blot out all living creatures—except for Noah, his family, and the pairs and sevens of animals—God afterward declared: "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease" (8:22). All of this is a demonstration of God's gracious preservation.[16]

This continuing preservation of God's creation is beautifully expressed in the words of the psalmist: "The eyes of all look to thee, and thou givest them their food in due season. Thou openest thy hand, thou satisfiest the desire of every living thing" (Ps. 145:15–16). Regarding mankind at large, Jesus declared: "Your Father who is in heaven … makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). God providentially sustains all. Similarly, Paul said to a pagan audience: "He [God] did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17). The providence of God to all people continues through all generations.

Such an understanding of God's unfailing preservation should make for a life of freedom from anxiety, especially for those who know Him as Father. In a number of memorable statements in the Sermon on the Mount about life, food and drink, and clothing (Matt. 6:25–34), Jesus stressed that God the Father knows all our needs and will surely provide for them. If He takes care of the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, will He not much more provide for us? For "your heavenly Father knows that you need them all" (v. 32). The important thing is to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. Therefore do not be anxious …" (vv. 33–34). We do well to reflect on the significance of this teaching especially for the Christian life. Those who have experienced God's saving work in Jesus Christ and thus know the abundance of God's grace should all the more be aware of God's goodness in providence. If God provided this great salvation to us sinners and has given us freely to partake of His bounty, how much more fully than others should we be

able to rejoice in His common grace? We know what He has done spiritually for us in Christ; how then can we ever again be anxious about physical needs? Truly, as Paul puts it, “my God will supply every need … according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19).

Finally, there is the marvelous reality of God’s preservation of our being in the midst of the perils and dangers of life. On the one hand, there is God’s assured protection for those who dwell in His presence. The whole of Psalm 91 is a striking portrayal of the situation of one who “dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty” (v. 1). There is deliverance from “the pestilence … no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent. For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways…. You will tread on the lion and the adder…. I will protect him, because he knows my name” (vv. 6, 10—11, 13–14). These extraordinary promises of divine protection from physical danger are clearly made to persons who truly look to the Lord. On the other hand, there is also the assurance of God’s deliverance from the attacks of one’s enemies. In the words of Psalm 138: “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou dost preserve my life; thou dost stretch out thy hand against the wrath of my enemies, and thy right hand delivers me” (v. 7). This confidence of deliverance is given to one who spoke forth: “I give thee thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing thy praise” (v. 1). God the Lord is the protector of those who rejoice in His presence.

In the New Testament the most signal note of preservation has to do with the divine protection of those who belong to Christ, keeping them from all evil. In the great prayer of John 17 to God the Father, Jesus says, “I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one” (v. 15).[17] Similarly, Jesus taught His disciples to pray to the Father: “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matt. 6:13).[18] Jesus’ prayer and His disciples’ prayers are essentially the same: intercession to God the Father for His safekeeping and deliverance. We may be sure that such prayers (of believers plus Christ’s!) are heard and that God will surely protect. Paul’s words to the Thessalonians are a further emphasis of this fact: “The Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from evil” (2 Thess. 3:3). The protection of believers from evil (or the Evil One) is a deeply meaningful truth of the Christian faith.

B. Accompaniment

God in His providence accompanies His creation. He is present and involved with it. This relates particularly to the *activity* of God's creation.

From the beginning God has revealed Himself to be involved with His creation. As the Spirit of God, He moved powerfully upon the face of the waters, thereby bringing forth life and order (Gen. 1:2).'[19] And when man was made, God "formed … [him] of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Gen. *2:7).*™ This close, even intimate, involvement of God with His creatures from the beginning was not a momentary matter. In regard to the creation at large He continued to shape it and mold it, to water it and provide for it (Gen. 1:2–3:6). With man He continued His active presence, placing him in a garden and Himself walking in it,[20] bringing man the living creatures for naming, and taking a rib out of the man to form a woman (2:8–25). Thus was God present from the beginning with His creation and actively involved in it.

Even after man's sin, God provided "garments of skins" (Gen. 3:21) for Adam and his wife. When Eve conceived and bore her first child, Cain, it was "with the help of the LORD" (4:1). Although the man and the woman were banished from Eden and from close fellowship with God, God did not forsake them. Indeed, even after Cain murdered his brother Abel and was punished by the Lord, thereafter to be a fugitive and wanderer, "the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him" (4:15) Cain then "went away from the presence of the LORD," but not from beyond the reach of God's providential care and concern.

These early narratives in many and various ways depict the divine involvement and presence. Tragically, through the sin of man, there was a forsaking of God's presence and the ensuing punishment of banishment, but God never ceased to be involved with man. Just before the flood God declared, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh" (Gen. 6:3 NASB). Nonetheless, although man's lifespan was to be shortened and a flood was sent by God to wipe out the human race except for Noah and his family, God did not give up: He continues to work with His creation.

We need not go on in any detail, for the biblical narrative—Old Testament and New—is the continuing story of God's involvement with man. God's concern throughout is for the whole human race. When God called Abraham and promised that he would become a great nation, it was for the sake of *all*

mankind: “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3 NASB). Thus it was not that God has no dealings with other nations, for He did so throughout history; but He worked particularly with one people that He might bring all back to Himself.

The divine presence, accordingly, was known in a particular way by Israel. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob often experienced God’s presence, as did Joseph and Moses later. The Israelites themselves in their wilderness wanderings, despite their many failings, knew God’s accompanying presence. The pillar of cloud by day, the pillar of fire by night, the theophany of God on Mount Sinai, the ark of the covenant in the midst of the camp—all signified God’s awesome presence. So does the story continue… .

Just to pick up one much later account of the time of Israel’s captivity in Babylon: it is beautiful to note God’s presence with the three Israelites bound and thrown by King Nebuchadnezzar into the fiery furnace. The king, upon hearing that they were still alive, looked into the furnace and with vast astonishment declared: “But I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods” (Dan. 3:25).[21] Even in the fiery furnace God has not forsaken His people.

Here we may recall the words of the psalmist: “Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!” (Ps. 139:7–8). Also the words in Isaiah come to mind: “When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you” (43:2). Words such as these, in psalm and prophecy, declare the wondrous reality of God’s accompanying presence.

And surely the New Testament sets forth even more vividly a picture of the divine accompaniment. For the Incarnation itself is the miracle of Emmanuel —“God with us”—in human flesh. Here was God’s presence through Christ in a manner far more intense, direct, and personal than ever before in human history or in the history of Israel. Moreover, it was not just God’s being with people; it was a deep sharing of their life, their existence, their sin, their guilt and despair —going all the way to the cross to work out human salvation. Truly God in Christ accompanied His desolate creatures into the final depths of lostness that He might bring them forth into the light of glory.

Nor did God forsake His own thereafter. Jesus declared to His disciples: “Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matt. 28:20). He sent the Holy Spirit to be the concrete reality of God’s continuing presence. God with us—indeed Christ with us—until the end of the world!

But now let me emphasize: the reality of God's presence in Christian life and experience does not mean that He is distant from other people. As the apostle Paul said to the Athenians: "He [God] is not far from each one of us"; and then, quoting one of their poets, Paul added, "'In him we live and move and have our being'" (Acts 17:27). God is indeed near at hand, since we have our being in Him (as noted, man exists by "the breath" of God), and thus He cares for all people and ever seeks to bring them into truth. These are "the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience" with the intention to "lead … to repentance" (Rom. 2:4).

This concern relates to all people everywhere.

God does not forsake His creation; He is present and involved with all He has made.

C. Direction

God in His providence directs His creation. He guides and governs all things. This relates particularly to the *purpose* the creation is to fulfill.

From the beginning God has been directing His creation. He not only preserves and accompanies His creatures, but also rules and guides them. He does not allow anything to get out of hand. All things fulfill His intention and end.

The opening narrative in Genesis shows that in spite of God's providential goodness in Eden, man disobeyed God's commandment, and so was condemned to die. However, there is no suggestion that this frustrated God's purpose, because immediately after man's disobedience God declared that the serpent who had brought the temptation would ultimately have his head "crushed,"[22] and thus God's saving purpose would be fulfilled. Accordingly, the fall of man will be used to bring about the destruction of Satan, and—as becomes increasingly apparent in the unfolding narrative of the Bible—the Fall will highlight the wonder of God's glory and grace.

This means, for one thing, that God is the Lord of history. It is a long and complex story: the increasing evil of mankind to the Flood; a new beginning with Noah; the dispersion of mankind after the tower of Babel; the call of Abraham; the serfdom in Egypt; the formation of Israel to be God's special people; the giving of the law and the commandments; the rule of judges and kings; the exile in Assyria and Babylonia; the coming of the Messiah; His life, death, and resurrection; the victory over Satan; the establishment of the church; the proclamation of the gospel; the final consummation at the end of the world. In all of this God is overruling and directing to fulfill His purposes.

It is apparent that God is concerned with the life and history of all mankind. Indeed, as the apostle Paul puts it, the "Lord of heaven and earth … made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation" (Acts 17:24, 26). Hence, it is not by happenstance that nations and peoples have spread over the face of the earth: God has marked out their times and their boundaries. And the purpose? In the continuing words of Paul, it is "that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him" (v. 27). It is God's concern that all nations and peoples shall come to know Him.

We cannot overemphasize God's universal concern and purpose. According to

the Old Testament record, God confused the language of mankind and spread the nations abroad,[23] but this by no means was to exclude them from His purpose. Rather it was to hold in check their overweening pride and lust for power, to cause them to continue to seek after Him, and to prepare the way through the choice of one people, Israel. Yet God continues to work with all nations. One vivid touch of this is to be found in the later words of God through Amos: “Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir?” (Amos 9:7). To be sure, the Old Testament focus is on God’s direction of Israel’s history, but He is God of all the nations—the Philistines, the Syrians, and all others—and likewise directs their destiny.

It is also significant that God often uses other nations or people to fulfill His purposes. Here we may call to mind an extraordinary passage in Isaiah:

… I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, “My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,” calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed and I will do it (46:9–11).

Thus is the history of Israel intertwined with that of her foes. God will fulfill His purpose by directing “a bird of prey” and “a man of my counsel from a far country” to carry forward His intention with His chosen people.

This further means that God makes use of evil intentions to fulfill His will. In the above case it was the Babylonians who intended nothing but pillage, destruction, and captivity. Certainly they had no idea that their actions were subserving a divine intention, but God was at work directing their action, “calling a bird of prey.” A much earlier instance of this is to be found in the case of Joseph who was sold into Egypt by his brothers. Although Joseph’s brothers committed a ruthlessly evil act, it made possible the preservation of Israel: “As for you [Joseph said to his brothers], you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive” (Gen. 50:20).

All of this demonstrates that God providentially directs the history of people and nations. This denies neither the freedom of their actions nor the evil of their intentions. God fulfills His purpose through all. Both God’s predetermining will in every detail and their own totally free exercise of action are underscored. Never was this more vividly demonstrated (as we now move to the New Testament) than in the action of the Jewish nation in putting Jesus to death. Hear the words of Peter on the day of Pentecost to the Jewish people: “This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite [or “predetermined” NASB] plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men”

(Acts 2:23). In a later prayer by the young Christian community this is further underscored: “Truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus … both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place” (Acts 4:27-28). In the crucifixion of Jesus there was both the carrying out of God’s “definite” and “predestined” plan and the action of “lawless” men (both Gentiles and Jews). The latter acted both freely and evilly—indeed, far more evilly than any other recorded action in all history—for they cruelly put to death the Son of God; therefore their guilt was horrendous beyond all imagination. Yet they also were freely fulfilling God’s plan and purpose: it was no mere happenstance. Thus do we behold the incomprehensible mystery of the divine purpose being fulfilled in and through human events.

The Christian life itself is a continuing paradox of God’s direction and government on the one hand and the free activity of His creatures on the other. There is both “election” and human response: God chose before the foundation of the world, but there is also the response of faith. On viewing it first from the human side, we are told by Paul, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”—surely a call to intense human activity—but then the apostle adds, “for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12–13). What a paradox! This does not apply only to salvation, for in another place Paul says, “We know that in everything God works for good[24] with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

As we move toward the final consummation of all things, God continues to work everything together. Particularly highlighted in the Book of Revelation are the machinations of evil forces that bring about persecution and death to believers, but the evil forces are always under the control of God. For example, repeated several times is the refrain “it was allowed”[25] that the two evil beasts fulfill their diabolic roles. On another occasion the wording concerning “ten kings” is that “God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and giving over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled” (Rev. 17:17).

We may close this section by looking briefly at God’s final intention in history. His purpose was never more powerfully set forth than in the words of Paul: “For he has made known to us all in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:9–10). That amazing plan includes all the checkered and unimaginably complex details of history—all of which are in the hands of One “who

accomplishes *all things* according to the counsel of his will" (Eph. 1:11). *Everything y* therefore, moves to the glorious fulfillment in Jesus Christ and the unity of all things in Him. To God be the glory for ever and ever!

III. SUFFERING

In the doctrine of providence, we now come to a consideration of the matter of human suffering. The question is usually, *Why?* Why is there suffering and pain in the world? Why do the righteous suffer? Why do some people, seemingly no more sinful than others, go through so much pain? Why does God cause or permit such things to happen? An earthquake occurs, and thousands suffer and die; a hurricane sweeps in, bringing devastation and death; a flood destroys homes and lands, and many lives are lost. Why does this happen to some and *not* to others? If such occurrences are "acts of God"—as frequently designated—why does God act in this manner? What of the suffering and pain endured by many in personal catastrophe and debilitating illness? Why is this so frequent? These are some of the questions that grip vast numbers of people.

We have been affirming that God in His providence cares for and guards His creatures. But how does this providential concern square with the fact of human suffering? We should recognize at the outset that in fact the Christian view of providence does not immediately seem to offer help. If God is really present to preserve, accompany, and govern His creatures (as we have said), why is there suffering and pain on every hand?

Such questions have sometimes led people either to doubt the existence of God or to question His ability. In the former instance, there is the uncertainty as to how there can be a good and gracious God when the world is filled with so much suffering, grief, and misery. Perhaps it makes more sense to view the universe as a product of blind chance and random occurrence than to claim that a benevolent God is superintending it. Atheism, or at best agnosticism, may seem more in line with the way things are than is belief in God. In the second instance, there may be the question of God's ability, His competence, to cope with all that happens. God may truly be good and kind, even intimately concerned about His creatures, but perhaps He is not able to accomplish all His will. Thus we should view God in a more limited manner.[26] It is apparent that a very careful approach to the Christian view of suffering is needed. We do affirm divine providence—whatever the difficulties that seem to exist. Moreover, to say *divine* providence means *God's* providence, the providence of a God who is compassionate and kind, yet also infinite and almighty. Why then—the question comes back

insistently—in the light of God's nature and concern is there the undeniable reality of human suffering?[27]

Surely we are not to assume that there are simple answers, ready at hand, for the problem of human suffering.[28] The Book of Job, if nothing else, is sufficient evidence of the complexity of the problem.[29] We will proceed with care, seeking the guidance of God's Word and Spirit. Three statements may be set forth.

A. Suffering Is Due, in Part, to the Kind of World God Made

We begin with the recognition that God placed people in a world over which they are to rule. The first word of God addressed to man—man and woman—in Genesis 1 was, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (v. 28). Filling the earth and subduing it cannot be less than an arduous task, involving both the perpetuation of the human race and the bringing under control of all aspects of earthly existence. The fact that this calls for much vigorous activity implies the possibility of suffering, not as a negative consequence, but as a positive ingredient.

Let us look at this more closely. In Genesis 2, man is shown as being placed in a garden with the responsibility for tilling it and caring for it: “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it” (v. 15). Such tilling and keeping represents the beginning of the God-given task of subduing—a task that by God’s intention is to include the whole earth. Since to subdue means to bring under control and to dominate, there is inevitably the possibility of suffering and pain. In a world of finite entities—whether animate or inanimate—the occurrence of pain may be a beneficent sign of limit of capabilities: a kind of boundary marker to go so far and no farther. Something as small as the aching of a muscle is a positive warning against overdoing in labor and thus is a pointer to proper and balanced action. The pain felt is by no means a punishment of God for wrong activity but a positive signal of human limitations.

Indeed, this is a world established in law as, for example, the law of gravity. Any action—such as stepping off a high place—that disregards this law will invariably result in pain. But again, the pain is an aspect of God’s good creation in its demarcation of limits within which all living creatures must operate. There are laws relating to health. In the human digestive system, if there is improper eating, stomach pains can result. This is a God-given warning for future, more proper handling of food. Again, fire is one of the original ingredients of the world God made. It has been a continuing source of heat and light, but man has had early to learn (and often painfully) that it can produce severe burns. Hence, the pain and suffering caused by exposure to fire is a blessing and a directive as to how to cope with an integral aspect of God’s creation. In sum, the possibility

of suffering belongs to the very world God has made.[30]

We need further to recognize that to man *and* woman has been given the task of subduing the earth. Man has the basic responsibility, but not without woman as his companion (Gen. 2:18). This means that functioning in close relationship, especially as man and wife, they are to fulfill their God-given task. Accordingly, they need a high degree of sensitivity one to the other, and the learning of how to fulfill their allotted roles both individually and corporately. Again, such sensitivity and learning cannot occur without the boundary markers of pain. There are, therefore, "growing pains" within an intimate human relationship, for genuine growth often stems from learning what it is that causes hurt to the other person.

Pain and suffering in this regard are not necessarily evil; rather, they can be a positive inducement and incentive to deeper levels of understanding and thereby of responsible living.

The matter of two people becoming "one flesh"[31] —the most intimate of all human relationships—inevitably will involve many adjustments. The husband needs to learn what true headship is, and the wife true subjection,[32] but they must do so in the mutuality of God-given equality and unity. There will be pains involved in the ongoing process of adjustment, but the beauty is that these very pains and sufferings, rather than being detrimental, can be aspects of an enlarging and deepening relationship.

Also, we now add, man and woman together in the task of subduing the earth have a vast challenge before them. To "have dominion over the fish … birds … every living thing," while bespeaking mankind's high position under God, is also a process to be accomplished.[33] This process (like their own growing mutual relationship) will call for much effort—doubtless experimentation, adjustment, and persistence—with its full complement of difficulties, trials, and pains.

Let us go one step further. We may well understand that pain is not only a kind of warning and limiting factor[34] within this process of achieving dominion, but also it may be a positive challenge to further activity. Human beings are presented by their Maker with a world that invites challenge and adventure. There is a broad earth to be explored, seas to be sailed, even skies to be navigated. This will call for much effort, at times hardship,—yes, even suffering. But the very suffering and pain, in turn, can become a part of the warp and woof of heroic and adventuresome living. To suffer and yet overcome, to know hardship and yet triumph, makes for true and lasting greatness.[35]

This leads us to the additional fact that suffering, its possibility and actuality, belongs to human existence in the world. It is highly significant that God made

man with the capacity to feel pain and suffering. Man has a nervous system sensitized to both pleasure and pain. He has tear ducts from which fluid expressions of both joy and grief may pour forth. He has a heart that may feel deeply and suffer much. Now it is not as if the feeling of pain and grief, of sorrow and suffering, were contrary to God's nature; for God Himself is One who can know grief and suffering. We are told that God's Spirit may be grieved: "They [Israel] rebelled and grieved his holy Spirit" (Isa. 63:10)[36] So likewise Jesus; He was "grieved at their [the Pharisees] hardness of heart" (Mark 3:5). This means that God Himself has the capacity to suffer and know sorrow. Again, Jesus demonstrates this in that He was to be "a man of sorrows [or "pains"],[37] and acquainted with grief' (Isa. 53:3). He wept at the grave of Lazarus (John 11:35) and over the city of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). And "in the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears" (Heb. 5:7). If man did not have the capacity for pain and sorrow and the experience of them, he would be other than the image of God.[38] But truly he has that capacity, as his whole nature shows forth.

Further, the very capacity for suffering is inseparable from the reality of love and compassion. Surely this is true of God Himself, whose love for mankind can ultimately be measured only by the suffering of a cross. To love much meant for God to suffer much. Can it be less true of the creatures He has made? Man is created to show love,[39] and at the heart of love is compassion, meaning literally a "suffering with." Such suffering, therefore, rather than being a negative factor in human life, is verily one of the signs of genuine humanness.

Although I will need to say more about suffering in the pages to follow, this much by now is apparent: suffering has an important place in the world God made. It is an important aspect of God's providential order. However, since many people suffer much and seemingly without rhyme or reason—there is often the cry of anguish for God somehow to remove it. I know of no finer answer than in the following words:

> The cry of earth's anguish went up unto God,
> "Lord, take away pain" … .
> Then answered the Lord to the world He had made,
> "Shall I take away pain?
> And with it the power of the soul to endure
> Made strong by the strain?
> Shall I take away pity that knits heart to heart

And sacrifice high?
Will ye lose all your heroes who lift from the flame
white brows to the sky?
Shall I take away love that redeems
with a price And smiles through the loss,—
Can ye spare from your lives that would climb unto minez
The Christ on His Cross?”[40]

B. Suffering Is Also the Grim Result of Sin and Evil

Now we move on to the recognition that suffering often occurs as a result of sin and evil in the world and in human life. Suffering, in such a case, is not due to the kind of world God has made,[41] but is a punishment for sin. It is one of the sad effects of the operation of sin and evil.[42]

Here we turn first to the Genesis 3 account of what sin entails. After the pronouncement of a curse on the serpent (vv. 14–15), God declared to the woman: "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (v. 16). On the one hand, the punishment of woman is in relation to the bearing of children—multiplied pain; on the other hand, it is in relation to her husband—her desire plus his domination.[43] There is immediate physical pain in childbearing, not by nature[44] but as a result of the Fall. There is also the more general situation of woman's relation to her husband that will bring about suffering in many ways, emotional and mental as well as physical. Womankind will know the suffering of painful childbearing as well as domination by her husband.[45]

In the case of man God declared, "Cursed is the ground because of you;

in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you…. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground" (Gen. 3:17–19). On the one hand, the ground was cursed because of man's sin so that it will bring forth "thorns and thistles"; on the other—and because of this curse—man will "toil" and in the sweat of his face labor to produce bread for daily living.[46] The punishment was not *work*—for man had before been commissioned to cultivate the garden—but *labor, toil, pain.*[47]

So from these ancient accounts it is apparent that pain and suffering are described as a punishment for sin. Both woman and man are punished in the most vital areas of their existence,[48] and thenceforward the resulting pain and travail has affected all humanity.

It is also significant that because of man's sin and God's curse the earth itself has likewise been in travail. Paul wrote that "the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption[49] …. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until

now” (Rom. 8:20–22). Not only is there the combination of “thorns and thistles,” but throughout nature there is universal bondage to corruption along with continuous travail and groaning. This situation can also account for such disparate elements as ferocity in the animal world and the turbulence manifest in such upheavals of nature as earthquakes, hurricanes, and floods.[50] The travail of creation at large thus is profoundly related to human sin and suffering.

All of this points to a universal context of suffering that is the result of mankind’s fallen and sinful condition. Life would be brought forth with pain; existence would be an arduous struggle; and the earth itself would have continuing travail. Such is the world that the human race has known since the primordial Fall. This by no means signifies that there are no blessings, that the good earth is nothing but a place of misery, and that mankind experiences only pain. Such belies the fact of God’s continuing grace; the world remains *His* world. Indeed, there is often blessing in childbirth[51] and joy in work on the earth, whether in the strict sense of cultivating the soil or in the sphere of work at large. Further, the realm of nature, whatever its wildness and turbulence, has many a touch of beauty and delight. But having said this about blessings in childbirth, man’s work, and nature at large there is the continuing note of pain that pervades all. Such is the reality of suffering in a world that remains in sin and its resultant evil.

That sin brings suffering is the ongoing witness of the Bible. The first child, Cain, born to man and woman murdered his younger brother, Abel, and as a result experienced not only the pain of a completely unresponsive earth but also that of being a fugitive and wanderer: “When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength; you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth” (Gen. 4:12). The universal suffering and destruction of the Flood is due to one thing only: sin. “And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt…. And God said to Noah, ‘I have determined to make an end of all flesh’” (Gen. 6:12–13). The people of Israel suffered often because of their faithlessness to God—for example, forty years in a harsh wilderness: [52]And your children shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and shall suffer for your faithlessness” (Num. 14:33). On a later occasion the psalmist cried, “Thou hast made the land to quake, thou hast rent it open…. Thou hast made thy people suffer hard things” (60:2–3). When at last Judah had gone into captivity and Jerusalem was ravaged, Jeremiah declared, “Her foes have become the head, her enemies prosper, because the LORD has made her suffer for the multitude of her transgressions” (Lam. 1:5). In a climactic picture of God’s judgment upon all the earth, Isaiah spoke forth: “The earth mourns and withers…. The earth lies polluted under its

inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left" (Isa. 24:4–6).[53] Sin brings about suffering—the suffering of an individual, a people, indeed, the whole earth.

Now let me emphasize this in a personal way. Whereas it is true that we are born into a human race that by its fallenness knows suffering, it is also a fact that our own sin and evil are the root of much pain and anguish. Surely the preceding quotations underscore this. The words of Paul also come to mind: "Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Gal. 6:7). Hence, much of the suffering people endure is due to their own behavior. Ailments of many kinds affecting body, mind, and spirit are often the result of a sinful manner of life. The psalmist declares that "some were sick[54] through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities suffered affliction" (107:17). The pain and anguish that many people experience has its root in sins against God, other people, even their own selves. Rebellion against God and His laws, bitterness in human relations, improper health care—all such as this is misdoing (i.e., sin), and suffering frequently results.

Sometimes one hears the complaint "I don't know why God permits me to suffer so," as if the fault were God's. And yet for years there has been disorder in human relations, perhaps malice or an unforgiving spirit; there has been continual submitting to the desires of the flesh and self-indulgence; there has been little or no concern about the living God, who is the very source of life and health. Anxiety, emotional confusion, multiple ailments—all may result, and the suffering become all the more intense. Let us be quite clear: yes, God does permit such suffering to happen, but the fault lies wholly on the human side. This suffering, to be sure, is from God; and, we need to add, not only as just retribution but also as warning to bring about change.

Here we observe again God's providential concern. Suffering so described undoubtedly represents divine punishment and judgment, but such can lead to righteousness. Isaiah declares, "For when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness" (26:9). The judgments of God may make for widespread and intense suffering, but as a summons to repentance and renewal, they may well be instruments of divine providence.

But now a word of caution should be stated. By no means ought we to view suffering as simply proportionate to sin and evil; that is, the more suffering a person endures, the more evil he himself must be or the more wrongdoings he must have committed. As earlier observed, there is some suffering and pain

involved in the very nature of human existence.[55] Moreover, as we have just noted, in a world of fallen people and nature there is often painful labor and travail. This suffering can vary greatly, with no simple correspondence between evil and suffering.

One of the discourses of Jesus (Luke 13:1–5) relates to the mistake in such a one-to-one correspondence. Concerning some Galileans who had been tortured and slain by Pilate, Jesus asked, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus?" And concerning a number of persons who had been killed by the falling of a tower, He inquired: "Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem?" Jesus' reply in both cases was the same: "I tell you, No; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." Jesus by no means suggests that either the Galileans or the eighteen persons were innocent.[56] Rather, they had suffered and died without repentance; hence they received their just desert. *But* this did not mean they were more sinful than others to whom such disaster had not come. Rather, it should serve as a warning to others to repent before it is too late. The discourse of Jesus also does not speak to the question, "Why is there suffering here, and not there?" but it gets to the truly critical matter, namely, that all such suffering and tragedy should be a call for turning to God in genuine repentance for sin.

On the basis of Jesus' discourse, we have direction and a reply to one of the most anguishing problems about human suffering. In the situation Jesus described, the question is not, "Why do innocent people suffer," for since the fall of man there are no innocent people,[57] but in the light of such suffering and tragedy, the appropriate question is, "Will you not hear this as a call to repentance before it is too late?" Yes, earthquakes occur, and people die; plagues strike, and people are ravaged; debilitating illness comes, and people suffer anguish. The heart of the matter is that all such are a summons to repentance both to those involved[58] and to others. They are warnings of the precariousness of life and the ultimate judgment of God that will some day fall upon all who are unrepentant.[59] The warning, as to Israel in Ezekiel's day, is "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?" (Ezek. 33:11 KJV).

C. Suffering Is an Accompaniment of the Life of Faith

One of the most significant things about the life of faith is that suffering is very much a part of it. Here I do not make reference to the suffering that is a result of sin.[60] but to that which invariably accompanies the walk of faith and obedience. We may view this under three aspects.

1. Suffering as a Means of the Believer's Growth

We begin with the recognition that suffering can be a testing or proving of faith. When suffering of whatever kind comes along, will the believer waver in his faith? Will he or she stand the test? Peter, who himself had experienced much suffering in his service of Christ, writes, "Now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:6–7). Suffering, says Peter, is a testing "by fire"; it is a proving process, and those who go through it demonstrate the genuineness of their faith—a faith that will result in praise and honor when Christ is revealed.

This testing by the fire of suffering is hardly a pleasant experience. Indeed, often believers, especially new ones, will wonder why they are undergoing suffering—especially if unbelievers around them seem to be doing quite well. So the psalmist at first complains about the wicked: "They have no pangs; their bodies are sound and sleek … they are not stricken like other men," whereas "all the day long I have been stricken, and chastened every morning" (73:4–5, 14). Yet it is by such suffering that the mettle of faith is tested.

Suffering can also be a means of growth in character. By the affirmative endurance of suffering—neither complaining nor blaming—strong character develops. In this connection Paul even speaks of rejoicing about sufferings: "We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character" (Rom. 5:3–4).[61] Hence, not only does suffering test faith, as fire tests metal (to use Peter's analogy), but it may also be the forge on which character is hammered out. By learning to endure, to hold on to faith regardless of whatever trials and sufferings may come, one grows strong in character.

Surely Paul knew whereof he spoke regarding suffering, endurance, and character. For the great apostle was a man of sterling character, as all his life and writings demonstrate, and in obvious connection with his character is the fact that he had suffered much. The Lord Jesus, even before Paul was commissioned as an apostle, declared, “He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” (Acts 9:15–16). And suffer Paul did—greatly.[62] Did such suffering ever before produce so strong a character?

Again suffering may be the means of deepening obedience. Here we turn from Peter and Paul to Jesus Himself, for He is the primary example of the affirmative relationship between suffering and obedience. Two statements in Hebrews stand out. The first is in regard to suffering: “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death” (5:7). The second is in regard to obedience: “Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered” (5:8). The agony of Jesus —the “loud cries and tears”—in Gethsemane where everything in Him cried out, “Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me” and “his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground” (Luke 22:42, 44), occasioned the final and ultimate test of obedience. Through this great suffering He, the Son of God, “learned obedience,” so that He was able to say, “Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.”

Verily, the way of obedience continues to be the way of suffering. Obedience —the hallmark of genuine faith—scarcely deepens when the path is easy and when saying yes to God’s will causes little or no pain. But when it costs greatly to do God’s bidding, when the temptation to go another way seems almost overwhelming, and when in that situation one can still say from the heart, “Not my will, but thine, be done”—this is the learning of obedience. It is also to walk the way of death to self and to give all glory to God.

And we may add: suffering is the way of victory over sin. Note this profound statement in 1 Peter 4:1–2: “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same thought,[63] for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer by human passions but by the will of God.” If one is “armed” with the same thought or temper of mind as Christ when He suffered in the flesh (from Gethsemane to Golgotha), this is to cease from sin.[64] There is little or no place for sin in a life that, in the midst of great and increasing suffering, does not veer from God’s will. If we are armed with Christ’s attitude, though our suffering will never approximate His, we will live victoriously in the will of God.

2. Suffering as an Expected Aspect of the Walk in Faith

One of the surest teachings of the Bible is that the walk in faith inevitably involves suffering because such a walk is contrary to the way of the world. Paul writes bluntly to Timothy: “All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). Not “may be” but “will be,” for the world finds intolerable a truly godly life. Suffering in the sense of persecution is part and parcel of truly following Jesus Christ.

Indeed, Jesus declared to His disciples: “If they [the world] persecuted me, they will persecute you” (John 15:20). This happened to Jesus’ disciples as the record in Acts and early church history show: they were all persecuted and most died a martyr’s death.[65] Suffering was simply a result of bearing witness to Christ. Paul writes, “For this gospel I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, and *therefore* I suffer as I do” (2 Tim. 1:11—12).[66] But Paul also includes other believers as those who “patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer” (2 Cor. 1:6). For since the world is dominated by a spirit that is wholly contrary to the Spirit of Christ, the true disciple lives at cross purposes with it. Unless he compromises his faith, the suffering of persecution is sure to occur.

But now we observe a striking thing in the New Testament, namely, that such suffering is viewed as a blessing and a call for rejoicing. The last two beatitudes proclaimed by Jesus are both pronouncements of blessings upon the persecuted: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,” and “Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account” (Matt. 5:10–11). Persecution for His sake is such a great blessing that we are to “rejoice, and be exceeding glad” (v. 12 KJV).[67] When the apostles were beaten by the Jewish council for testifying of Jesus, “they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” (Acts 5:41). What a statement that is: “rejoicing” to be “counted worthy to suffer dishonor”! The note of joy and blessedness in suffering is later declared by Peter, who himself had suffered much: “But rejoice in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you” (1 Peter 4:13–14). Such is the rich heritage of all who suffer for Christ’s sake.

One further fact: this kind of suffering is a gracious gift from God. Hear the extraordinary words of Paul: “For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in

the same conflict which you saw and now hear to be mine" (Phil. 1:29–30). Granted—to suffer!

We began this section by observing that the walk in faith, because of its being contrary to the way of the world, involves suffering. Now we need to add that since "the god of this world"[68] is Satan, the suffering of believers is often rooted in him. Peter writes about Satan: "Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Then Peter adds, "Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering[69] is required of your brotherhood throughout the world" (v. 9). Such suffering, undergone by all believers, comes from the adversary, the devil—Satan himself.

Here we might pause to look far back into the Old Testament to the story of Job. Although Job was not a believer in the Christian sense, of course, he was declared by God to be a righteous and God-fearing man. God said as much to Satan: "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" (Job 1:8). Satan thereupon accused Job before God, saying that Job had so many benefits in life that if they were removed, Job would curse God to His face. God then granted Satan, the adversary,[70] permission to subject Job to one experience of suffering after another: the devastation of his property by fire, the death of his children by a mighty wind that collapsed the house in which they were gathered, and finally the debilitation of Job's body by terrible sores from head to foot (Job 1:13–*2:1).*[71] None of this was deserved by Job, but God allowed it to happen at the hand of Satan who was determined to destroy Job's faith. Thus the attacks by Satan on Job were not unlike what the Christian believer goes through: suffering that results, not from sin and evil in the person, but as a test of the walk in faith. Further, at the conclusion of his long travail, Job was much closer to God than ever before: "I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee" (42:5). So also it is with the Christian believer who does not give up regardless of the suffering and travail received from the attacks of the adversary. The true believer comes out all the stronger and with a keener sense of the presence and reality of God.

In the Book of Revelation, Satan is also vividly depicted as the believer's adversary. As in Job and 1 Peter, he is shown to bring suffering. In one of the messages to the seven churches Christ declares, "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested" (Rev. 2:10). Satan is portrayed as the agent behind the martyrdom

of believers.[72] After the "two witnesses" have completed their testimony, "the beast that ascends from the bottomless pit[73] will make war upon them and conquer them and kill them" (11:7). Thereafter, Satan is spoken of as "the accuser of our brethren" (12:10),[74] and through the first and second "beasts"—Satan's representatives—permission is given to conquer (13:7) and to kill (v. 15). All the way to the end it is Satan who is constantly on the attack against those who belong to Christ.

In conclusion, suffering undoubtedly will happen to everyone who walks the way of faith. Jesus assured His disciples of this, for both the world and Satan, its overlord, are radically opposed to all Christ stands for. Yet there is great blessing and joy in such opposition, even if it means suffering and death. Remember that Peter spoke of the "spirit of glory and of God" (1 Peter 4:14) resting upon those who suffer reproach for the name of Christ. Surely this is true, for whatever may come, God will be glorified.

3. Suffering as a deepening experience of knowing Christ, of being a blessing to others, and of preparation for the glory to come.

We may observe, first, that through suffering a believer draws closer to Christ. Peter writes, "For to this you have been called,[75] because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). Hence, by walking the way of suffering, the Christian realizes that such is to walk in Christ's own way; there is the sense of His being near at hand. Even more, it is to know Christ's close fellowship. Paul spoke of "the fellowship of his sufferings" (Phil. 3:10 KJV),[76] a fellowship of shared suffering in which there is an increasingly deeper relationship between the believer and his Lord. Paul had earlier spoken of "the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" and to that end had "suffered the loss of all things" (v. 8). So it was that by the fellowship of sharing Christ's sufferings Paul entered into that deeper knowledge. So it is with all who suffer for Christ's sake: there can but be a profounder sense of His presence.

Second, one who suffers is able thereby to be a comfort and help to others. Paul writes, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too" (2

Cor. 1:3–5). Against the background of God's comfort for us in affliction,[77] we are likewise enabled to reach out in comfort to others. Indeed the more we share Christ's sufferings, the more we can through Christ reach out to others in their pain and affliction.

We should emphasize the importance of this deep comfort for others, comfort that can come only from those who have known similar suffering in their own lives. This is the actual meaning of compassion—a shared suffering[78] —wherein there is profound empathy with the other. Surely this makes suffering because of Christ all the more meaningful when it can be an avenue of reaching out to another person who is going through much trial and tribulation. How beautiful it is that the more fully we share in the sufferings of Christ, the more abundantly we can reach out in comfort to others!

Third, and climactically, it is through suffering with Christ—even possibly unto death—that we also may share richly in Christ's resurrection glory. Just after Paul mentioned the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, he added, "becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:10–11). In a similar vein Paul wrote elsewhere that we are "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided[79] we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him" (Rom. 8:17). The way of suffering *with* Christ is the way to the glory that lies beyond.

All of this adds an important final note about suffering. Suffering for Christ's sake is not only to know Christ more profoundly in this life, as significant as that is. It is also to move with Him through death into resurrection; it is to share with Him in the inheritance to come.[80] Suffering, accordingly, may be rejoiced in all the more. It is by no means something to groan under but to be received with gladness as preparation for the coming glory.

[1]Creation is ex nihilo; providence concerns the relation of God to what He has brought into existence.

[2]The latter two: miracles and angels will be treated in Chapters 7 and 8 respectively.

[3]Calvin puts it strongly: 44 …the ignorance of Providence is the greatest of all miseries, and the knowledge of it the highest happiness" (Institutes, 1.17.11, Beveridge trans.).

[4]In American history the early Pilgrims' sense of God's providence is enshrined in the town they named Providence, a town that later became the capital of the state of Rhode Island.

[5]"So Abraham called the name of that place The LORD will provide [YHWHyir'eh]; as it is said to this day, On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided' " (Gen. 22:14).

[6]The view of deism. The doctrine of providence runs counter to any view of a distant, disinterested God who, having set the world going under its own unvarying laws and inherent powers, has neither need nor intention to be involved in it.

[7]Lines from Browning's "Pippa Passes."

[8]As likewise in the doctrine of creation (see comments in chapter 5, section I).

[9]As in Stoicism.

[10]As in Epicureanism.

[11]'Many physicists today refer to "the strong force," which is said to be a vast power that holds together the atomic nucleus. It is described as neither gravity nor electromagnetism, but a primal power holding proton to neutron and connecting bits of matter called "quarks." If it were not for "the strong force," all atoms, and therefore the universe, would collapse.

[12]This is said of Christ. The background words are: "all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together." (The KJV translation as "all things consist" is possible; however, "hold together" [as also NASB, NIV, and NEB] is more likely. See sunistemi in BAGD .) God through Christ, the eternal Word, holds all things together.

[13]Again this is spoken of Christ, He who "is the radiance of His [God's] glory and the exact representation of His nature" (NASB), who "upholds all things."

[14]The "all things" mentioned in Hebrews 1:3 is translated in RSV as "the universe." Recall the words of Paul in Colossians 1:16-"In him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible." It is the vast creation, extending even beyond the visible universe, that God preserves in being.

[15]One must guard against any view that would identify God with the life of man (or the world, as previously described). God is not the soul of man (or the structure of the world) though He providentially sustains all. The doctrine of providence, while stressing the divine immanence (over against deism; see above, pp. 117-18), does not identify God with His

creation in any aspect as does pantheism. Incidentally, a doctrine of creation without a doctrine of providence readily becomes deism; a doctrine of providence without creation easily slips into pantheism.

[16]Sometimes this is called God's common grace, that is, a grace experienced in common by all God's creatures. In regard to people, this grace is conferred on sinner and believer alike.

[17]Or "from evil" (RSV mg.). The Greek is ek tou ponerou.

[18]Or "from the evil one" (RSV mg.). The Greek is apo tou ponerou.

[19]See the discussion in the preceding chapter on "Creation."

[20]See the later chapter on "Man" for further discussion of this act of God.

[21]This is stated in Genesis 3:8-"They [the man and woman] heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day."

[22]Referring to God's presence in angelic form. Nebuchadnezzar later added that "God. . sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him" (v. 28).

[23]The offspring of woman, God said to the serpent, "will crush your head" (Gen. 3:15 NIV).

[24]" … there [at Babel] the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth" (Gen. 11:9).

[25]Or "God causes all things to work together for good …" (NASB).

[26]Revelation 13:5, 7, 14, 15.

[27]As, for example, in "process philosophy." In a more popular vein the widely read book by Rabbi Harold S. Kushner, When Bad Things Happen to Good People, may be mentioned. See the chapter entitled "God Can't Do Everything."

[28]This may be said to relate to the question of theodicy. Theodicy is the attempt to justify God's providential rule in the light of human suffering and evil. Theodicy is derived from theos, God, and dike, justification. Although "justifying" God seems presumptuous (and many theodicies have proved themselves presumptuous), there can be little question that theodicy points toward a profound problem. See, for example, chapter 8, "The Problem of Theodicy," in G. C. Berkouwer, The Providence of God.

[29]"Mankind's most common, most persistent, and most puzzling problem is suffering." So reads the opening statement in the book, The Meaning of Human Suffering. This book consists of a number of addresses delivered

at “The First International, Ecumenical Congress on the Meaning of Human Suffering” held at the University of Notre Dame, April 22-26, 1979.

[30]See below (pp. 136-37) for a discussion of Job.

[31]C. S. Lewis says it well: “Try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and the existence of free-wills involve, and you will find that you have excluded life itself’ (The Problem of Pain, 22).

[32]44 … they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24 NASB).

[33]In the language of Paul, 4The husband is the head of the wife” and wives are to 44be subject in everything to their husbands” (Eph. 5:23-24). This calls for much love and understanding.

[34]It is interesting that the psalmist declares concerning man: 44Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen. ..the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea” (Ps. 8:6-8). The Book of Hebrews, after quoting a portion of these words, adds: 44Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he [God] left nothing outside his control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him” (2:8).

[35]As previously described.

[36]We may think back to the Pilgrims and their stormy trips across the sea, the cold and bitter winters, the ravages of foes and the threat of starvation. Here were those whose very sufferings turned out to be the birthpangs of a new nation. Through suffering there came true greatness.

[37]Cf. Ephesians 4:30-“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.”

[38]In the margins of RSV and NASB.

[39]See chapter 9, “Man.”

[40]See ibid.

[41]See James S. Stewart, The Strong Name, 156. I am not sure whether the author of the poem is Stewart himself or another person. He does not specify.

[42]Discussed in the preceding section.

[43]There will be a fuller discussion of sin and evil in later chapters. Here we touch on it only in relation to suffering.

[44]“The phrase your desire shall be for your husband (RSV), with the reciprocating he shall rule over you, portrays a marriage relation in which control has slipped from the fully personal realm to that of instinctive urges passive and active. ‘To love and to cherish’ becomes ‘To desire and

to dominate' " (Derek Kidner, Genesis, TOTC, 71).

[45]It is possible to read the text "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing" as implying some pain regardless of woman's sin and fall. How can one "multiply" what was not there before? However, the words following, "in pain shall you bring forth children," seem clearly to say that pain itself in childbearing is a result of the Fall. In other words, the pain will not be little but much-greatly multiplied. For "greatly multiply" see also Genesis 16:10.

[46]Woman was made to be man's "helper" (Gen. 2:18), thus she occupies an auxiliary role. As earlier observed, the man is in the position of headship over the woman ("the head of a woman is her husband" 1 Cor. 11:3). But neither her auxiliary role nor his headship calls for domination. Domination and rule are the result of the Fall. Through Christ this domination is ended, and man and woman discover their true God-given relationship.

[47]Cf. also Genesis 5:29. Lamech, father of Noah, spoke of "the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed" (NIV).

[48]It is quite significant that the same Hebrew word is usually translated "pain" in regard to woman, and "toil" in relation to man. The common idea is that *labor* will be the lot of both, whether labor in childbearing or labor in working the earth.

[49]"The woman's punishment struck at the deepest root of her being as wife and mother, the man's strikes at the innermost nerve of his life: his work, his activity, and provision for sustenance" (G. von Rad, Genesis: A Commentary, 91).

[50]So KJV, NASB (RSV has "decay"). " The bondage of corruption' is the bondage which consists in corruption and, since it is not ethical in character, must be taken in the sense of the decay and death apparent in non-rational creation." So writes John Murray in The Epistle to the Romans, NICNT, 304. Murray also, in connection with the creation's being "subject to futility," writes that "in relation to this earth this is surely Paul's commentary on Gen. 3:17, 18" (ibid., 303). I have interpreted it similarly.

[51]Earlier reference was made to the common designation of many such upheavals and turbulences as "acts of God." The reason for such terminology is that in most cases no human cause can be assigned. However, it may be more accurate to recognize that such violent

activities are actually demonstrations of a creation “subjected to futility” and signs of its “groaning in travail.”

[52]Eve’s words at the birth of her first child, “I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD “ (Gen. 4:1), may well express, in spite of the pain, her amazement, even delight, in the birth of Cain. The NEB translation, “With the help of the LORD I have brought a man into being,” further suggests this. To this day childbirth continues to be generally an admixture of pain and joy.

[53]The Book of Revelation elaborates this theme, particularly in the outpouring of God’s “bowls” of wrath (Rev. 16); for example, “the sun … was allowed to scorch men with fire; men were scorched by the fierce heat” (vv. 8-9). The suffering for sin and evil is intense.

[54]“Fools” is the more common translation (as in KJV, NASB, NIV, NEB). However, the words that follow, “they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death,” clearly depict sickness. Also note verse 20: “He sent forth his word, and healed them.”

[55]Recall the preceding section.

[56]Then the issue would be, Why do such righteous people suffer? (This question will be addressed in the next section.)

[57]Hence, the title of the book earlier mentioned, When Bad Things Happen to Good People, is inadequate. There are no “good people.”

[58]The Book of Revelation is laden with catastrophes-earthquakes, plagues, manifold torments-all of which are divine judgments that should lead to the repentance of those who suffer them. See, e.g., 9:20-21; 16:8-11.

[59]We will discuss in the next section suffering that likewise may come upon the repentant-i.e., those who have turned to God in true repentance and faith. Their sufferings, while not unrelated to a call for continuing repentance, are basically for another purpose.

[60]As I did in the preceding section.

[61]The Greek word dokimën means 44 ‘the quality of being approved,’ hence character” (BAGD). The NASB translates it as “proven character.”

[62]See, e.g., Paul’s chronicle of personal sufferings in 2 Corinthians 11:23-27: “countless beatings … often near death … beaten with rods … stoned,” on and on. See also fn. 66 below.

[63]The Greek word ennoian can be translated “mind” (KJV), “purpose” (NASB), “attitude” (NIV), or “temper of mind” (NEB). “Temper of mind” expresses the meaning particularly well.

[64]This might seem at variance with the fact that sin is still present in even the finest of Christian lives. The response to this could be that none of us totally arms himself with the mind of Christ. However, any approximation thereto means dying to sin and living according to God's will.

[65]Tradition holds that all Jesus' immediate disciples except John paid the ultimate price.

[66]Paul wrote elsewhere of "the affliction we experienced … [in which] we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself' (2 Cor. 1:8). After that, he spoke of his "afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, watching, hunger" (2 Cor. 6:4-5). He later added, "Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods, once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked … in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure" (2 Cor. 11:24-25, 27). It is indeed hard to comprehend the vastness of the sufferings that Paul endured for the sake of the gospel.

[67]The NEB reads: "Accept it with gladness and exultation"(!).

[68]This is Paul's expression in 2 Corinthians 4:4.

[69]Or "same kind of sufferings" (NIV). The Greek is literally "the same of sufferings," ta auta ton pathèmatôn."

[70]Such is the meaning of the Hebrew word. Satan is shown as the adversary in both Job and 1 Peter. Another interesting note: Satan is depicted as constantly moving around on the earth: "going to and fro on the earth and … walking up and down on it" (Job 1:7; 2:2) and as one who "prowls around [literally "walks about," Greek peripatei]" (1 Peter 5:8). It is the same adversary who brings suffering to those who seek to walk in faith and righteousness.

[71]Satan's direct involvement in this last instance reads: "So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD, and afflicted Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head" (Job 2:7).

[72]In the account of Job Satan was allowed to devastate Job's property, family, and his body but not to take Job's life. For "the LORD said to Satan, 'Behold, he is in your power; only spare his life' " (Job 2:6). This limitation, however, is not set in relation to Christian believers.

[73]The context suggests that this "beast" is Satan himself. The other two

beasts in Revelation 13 who are mouthpieces of Satan (the dragon) come "out of the sea" (v. 1) and "out of the earth" (v. 11), not out of "the bottomless pit."

[74]"The accuser of our brethren … who accuses them day and night before our God." Recall the similar picture of Satan before God accusing Job.

[75]The immediately preceding words are " … when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God's approval" (v. 20).

[76]Also NASB. The NIV has "the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings." The Greek is ten koinonian ton pathëmatôn autou.

[77]This doubtless refers to the affliction or suffering the believer knows in the fellowship of Christ and in which God mercifully reaches out to bring comfort and consolation.

[78]"Compassion" derives from two Latin words: cum, "with," and passio, "suffering."

[79]Or "if indeed" (NASB, NIV).

[80]This does not mean that by suffering we achieve the resurrection and future inheritance. Such a view would contradict the grace of God in Christ, by whom death has been overcome and through whom we know life eternal. But it does mean-to quote again other words of Paul-"All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). If there is no persecution or suffering, there is surely a question of whether one truly belongs to Christ and is therefore prepared to share with Him in the glory to come. Paul speaks of attaining the resurrection, not achieving it-and the difference is vast indeed.

7
Miracles

In our consideration of the doctrine of providence we come next to a study of miracles. Miracles may appropriately be viewed as aspects of God's "extraordinary providence,"[1] hence their inclusion under the doctrine of providence.

I. DEFINITION

A miracle may be defined as an event manifesting divine activity that is other than the ordinary processes of nature. As such, a miracle is an act of God's extraordinary providence. In performing a miracle, God, who oversees and governs all things, acts in a supernatural manner; He goes beyond ordinary sequences in nature as He relates to His creation.

In the Scriptures there are frequent references to miracles. In the Old Testament they stand out in the accounts of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt—for example, the plagues on Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the provision of manna in the wilderness. They are also dramatically shown in many of the narratives relating to the prophets Elijah and Elisha—for example, fire falling on Mount Carmel, the raising of the dead, and the floating of an axe head. The New Testament records many miracles performed by Jesus, such as turning water into wine, healing the hopelessly disabled, multiplying fish and loaves, walking on the sea, stilling the storm, and raising the dead. Also, His disciples performed miracles such as healing the sick, casting out demons, and raising the dead. Examples could be multiplied; however, the point is that in all such events a supernatural activity of God is involved, and through these events God's providential concern is exhibited.

Miracles, accordingly, are events that cannot be explained in terms of the usual workings of nature. Ordinarily the waters of a sea do not divide, manna does not fall from heaven, axe heads do not float, water does not turn into wine, a storm is not stilled by a word, and the dead are not raised. All such events are foreign to "natural law," namely, the regularly observed sequences in nature. Such laws or sequences may be said to belong to the "Logos structure"[2] of the universe: they are in place through God's creative work and are basic to order and stability. But—and this is the critical matter—God is by no means bound to His created order, though He regularly maintains and upholds it; nor is He confined by laws in nature, since they are only His ordinary expression.[3] As the sovereign Lord, He may operate in ways that are other than the usual and customary. He may, and sometimes does, move in an extraordinary way to fulfill His purpose.

I might add that a difficulty some people have with miracles stems from a

view of the universe as a closed system. From this perspective, all things have natural causes, and natural law is all-inclusive. Hence, there is no opening or room for any other kind of activity. A truly scientific view of the universe, it is said, calls for the recognition that there is no place for miracles, for the universe is self-contained and man is self-subsistent.[4] To reply: the idea of the universe as a closed system with natural law all-inclusive (a kind of pancausalism) is no longer an acceptable scientific viewpoint. Indeed, the universe and our world in it are not viewed today as a closed mechanistic-materialistic system (as was formerly the case) but as an open universe with multiple dynamic actualities and possibilities. Rigid law and determinism have been replaced by a recognition of indeterminacy;[5] matter itself, unlike the proverbial solid billiard ball, is now understood as energy and light; the absoluteness of space and time is now radically questioned by the theory of relativity; and human nature is increasingly seen to be a many-leveled unity that cannot be subsumed under categories of natural science. All in all, the universe and what it contains is viewed in a far more open way. While this by no means validates miracles, it does at least suggest that miracles need no longer seem so contrary to the kind of world in which we live.

But now let us return to the matter of God's operating in other than a usual and customary manner. One way of describing this is to say that God may act not only mediately but also *immediately*, not only with means but also *without* means. The former in each case is ordinary providence, the latter extraordinary providence. When God acts mediately, He makes use of an agent, sometimes called a second cause[6] —that is, a cause within the natural order. When He acts immediately, as in the case of a miracle, He does the work Himself without making use of an agent. This does not mean that God acts in contradiction to the way He operates through an agent or second cause, for then He would be in contradiction to Himself.[7] He may, and surely does, work without means, but not against them, lest He violate His own expression in creaturely reality.[8] A miracle, accordingly, is not a violation of a law of nature,[9] or an interference in nature,[10] but an operation of God in which, without making use of means, He acts directly.

Biblical illustrations of God's working immediately, without means or secondary agents, includes such miracles as manna from heaven, an axe head floating, and the changing of water into wine. God, so to speak, intervenes directly; no secondary agent or cause is involved. There is no natural source of heavenly manna, no property of an axe head that would cause it to float, no ingredient in water that would of itself produce wine. God sovereignly causes

such miracles to happen without using any creaturely means.

It is also possible that God may make use of means but in a supernatural way. He may not only work without means (as discussed); He may also work *above* them. Hence, God may employ something from the natural realm in the working of a miracle, and yet the miracle transcends the natural. A second cause, so to speak, is used, but the cause is insufficient to bring about the result. In this case God is working both mediately and immediately—and in that order. An example is the miracle of the Red Sea crossing. First, a strong east wind blew all night and turned the sea bed into dry land. Then the waters became a wall on the right and on the left hand as Israel passed through. The wind causing the dry land was a natural means—a second cause—though divinely brought about. But the waters standing as a wall cannot be explained by what preceded: this was an immediate, supernatural act of God. In the case of the feeding of the multitude, Jesus took what was at hand—a few loaves and fish. Hence means were employed, but He went far beyond what was there to feed thousands of people.

We scarcely need to seek further to place various miracles in “without means” and “above means” categories. It is often difficult to tell from the biblical accounts. The important point, however, is not such categorization but the recognition that every miracle goes beyond the natural into the supernatural realm of God’s immediate activity.

II. BASIS

The basis of miracles rests in God: His freedom, His love, His power. To believe in the God of the Bible, the God of Christian faith, is to believe that miracles are possible.[11] He is God, and not man! Against the background of His freedom, love, and power, miracles may be better understood.

First, let us consider the *freedom* of God. God is the sovereignly free Lord. Although He has created the world and daily sustains it, He is not bound by it. He is not subject to its structures and laws; they are subject to Him. He may act supernaturally because He is not a God of nature only. He is a God who is beyond, and therefore He can bring to bear other ways of producing results. Ordinarily God works through the laws of nature, but He is free to go beyond them. In a real sense, to believe in miracles is to affirm the freedom of God.[12]

Opposition to the reality of miracles may be rooted in inadequate views of God.[13] For example, this opposition may stem from pantheism, which does not really view God as free. God is understood as being identical with the world. All things in nature, including its laws and operations, are aspects of His own being and action.[14] Since the God of pantheism in no way transcends the universe, nature, or man, He is not free to act in relation to it, for it is His own being. His action is identical with natural causality; hence God and ordinary means are inseparable. Miracles, as actions of a free God, therefore do not, indeed cannot, occur.[15]

Over against such a view it is important to recognize that while God is *in* the world, He is not (as pantheism holds) identical with it in whole or in part. God, as Scripture maintains, is the world's creator; His being is utterly distinct from that of His creation, hence He is free to move in relation to it. The laws of the universe are not binding on Him (though He made them and ordinarily operates through them), since they do not belong to His essence. Thus at any time He may freely and voluntarily work in miraculous fashion without suspending any natural law.[16]

God is sovereignly free. As the Lord of Creation, He will in no way arbitrarily act against what He has made—its forms and structures, its dynamic operations. Indeed without a basic continuity and regularity, all would be chaos. (Imagine

what would happen in a very brief time if the earth ceased to orbit the sun.) Yet in His sovereignty and freedom God may move in ways other than the normal and expected—and with nothing in any way out of control. A free and sovereign Lord will be, when He desires, a miracle-working God.

Second, let us reflect on the *love* of God in relation to miracles. For God is not only sovereignly free, He is also a God of love and compassion. He does not perform miracles as arbitrary actions, i.e., to show that He is free to do so, but as demonstrations of His love. In the Old Testament the miracle of the Red Sea occurred through love for His people. Moses, reflecting on what had happened, said to Israel: "The LORD set his love upon you and chose you … the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (Deut. 7:7–8). Other miracles in the wilderness wanderings such as manna from heaven (Exod. 16:14–36), water from the rock (Exod. 17:1–6), and clothes and sandals not wearing out over forty years (Deut. 29:5) are also manifestations of the love and mercy of God. Many of the miracles that occur later in the account of Elijah and Elisha are remarkable demonstrations of mercy and love: Elijah's being fed by ravens (1 Kings 17:1–6), the raising of a widow's son from death (vv. 17–24), the increase of the widow's oil (2 Kings 4:1–7), the enemy struck blind through Elisha's prayers (6:18–19). We might mention among many others two of the stories in Daniel: the three Hebrew young men preserved in the midst of a fiery furnace (Dan. 3:16–27) and Daniel delivered from the mouth of lions (6:16–24). These are clearly miracles, and all are manifestations of God's mercy in time of great need.

Particularly in the New Testament do we behold the love and mercy of God manifested in miraculous ways. Jesus' first miracle, the turning of water into wine (John 2:1–11), blesses a wedding feast; the second brings healing to an official's son (4:46–54). Often the word "compassion"[17] occurs in relation to Jesus' miracles. "He had compassion on them, and healed their sick" (Matt. 14:14). Before the miraculous feeding of a multitude Jesus said, "I have compassion on the crowd … and I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way" (15:32). In regard to two blind men, "moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they received their sight" (20:34 NASB). A leper cried out to Jesus, and Jesus, "moved with compassion … stretched out His hand and touched him…. And immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed" (Mark 1:41–42 NASB). Before Jesus raised to life a widow's son, "he had compassion on her" (Luke 7:13–14). These instances where the word "compassion" appears are only illustrative of the fact that Jesus' miracles again and again were done out of deep love and concern. In the Book of

Acts the word “grace” is used in relation to the miracles done by Stephen: “And Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs[18] among the people” (6:8). In the case of Paul and Barnabas, “the Lord … bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders[19] to be done by their hands” (14:3). Hence love (compassion, grace, mercy) is the wellspring of one miracle after another.

A God of love and mercy is a God of miracles. At this juncture we should mention how different this is from any idea of God that sees Him as being aloof and dispassionate. Here I refer to another view[20] of God that opposes miracles, namely deism. According to deistic thinking, God is the creator who is other than the world.[21] He has made all things, including the laws by which they operate, but is uninvolved in and unconcerned about the world’s ongoing life and activity. As a far-distant deity, He is not a God of providence (the world is self-sustaining by virtue of the way God originally made it)[22] much less of “extraordinary providence,” i.e., miracles. Miracles are simply unimaginable in a world made self-sufficient by God. Moreover, from the deistic point of view, miracles are also an affront to reason because they emphasize a mysterious interaction between God and the world.[23] God has left the world to its own devices; He is not a miraculously acting God.[24] In sum, the God of deism is not understood as One who interacts with His creation in terms of love and compassion.

The free and sovereign God, accordingly, is also the God of love. As such, He has performed the mightiest miracle of all, the miracle of the Incarnation: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son” (John 3:16). Here truly is the incomprehensible mystery, the incomparable marvel of the eternal God through His Son taking on human flesh. It is the ultimate miracle from the great God of love and compassion—and to that love all other miracles bear witness.

A further word here: Because God is both a free and a loving God, miracles are to be expected. In His sovereign freedom He acts in ways beyond the ordinary—the ongoing course of the world—and in His great love He is ever desirous of reaching out to human need. Hence, whereas miracles are by no means God’s usual procedure (since He has established a world with regular laws and sequences), He may now and then act in an extraordinary manner. A sovereign, free, and loving God can but be a God of miracles.

Third, we now turn to the *power* of tíod. Every miracle is in some way also a demonstration of divine power.[25] When the psalmist reviewed the “wonderful works” of God done in Egypt, he declared that this was done that God “might make known his mighty power” (106:7–8). It is interesting that in describing

God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the Bible often uses the vivid terminology of God's "hand" or "arm." So Moses and the people of Israel, just after the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, sang: "Thy right hand, O LORD, glorious in power, thy right hand,[26] O LORD, shatters the enemy" (Exod. 15:6). Later Moses said to God, "Thou didst bring them out by thy great power and by thy outstretched arm" (Deut. 9:29). So whether by "right hand" or "outstretched arm," it is a matter of God's great power that wrought Israel's miraculous deliverance.

Hence, in addition to the freedom of God and love of God that are basic for divine miracles, there is also this important matter of power. Thus in relation to the deliverance from Egypt, God in His freedom might have decided to follow a different course than the ordinary and in His love He might have felt a strong compulsion to redeem His people, but without power to execute His plan, no miracle could have occurred. We have spoken before of God's sovereign freedom and love, and it is the word *sovereign* that points to His mighty power. God is Lord—the Lord God Almighty!

Let us focus for a moment on the remarkable demonstration of God's power in the miracle of the virgin birth of Christ. The angel said to Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Luke 1:35). The finite procreative power of man will be transcended by the infinite creative power of the Most High God, and the great and awesome miracle will occur, namely, the birth of the Son of God in a virgin's womb. "For," as the angel added in verse 37, "with God nothing will be impossible."[27]

In this stupendous miracle we behold again the concomitance of freedom, love, and power. God in His untrammeled freedom chose to transcend the usual biological process that includes both female and male; in His abundant love He decided to take on human flesh to redeem mankind; and in His vast power He enabled the womb of a virgin to bear the eternal Son of God. What marvel and wonder it all is!

Other miracles of the Old and New Testaments are also, of course, demonstrations of the power of God. We will note this in more detail later under the heading of miracles as "powers." For now, let me close this section by referring to one climactic, great miracle—the Resurrection. There were those in Jesus' days who questioned a future resurrection, and to them Jesus replied, "You know neither the scriptures nor the power of God" (Matt. 22:29). By the power of Almighty God, Jesus was saying, the miracle will happen that will cause even those whose bodies have long decayed to some day be raised from the dead. The assurance of this, we should add, lies in the fact of Jesus' own

resurrection, a mighty act of power. It is “the working of his [God’s] great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead” (Eph. 1:19–20). Already God’s great power has been manifest in the miracle of Christ’s resurrection; it will be manifest finally throughout creation when all who have died will be raised at the end of history.

III. DESCRIPTION

In now coming to a description of miracles, we may begin by speaking of a miracle as a *wonder.* The English word *miracle* in its etymology suggests something that causes wonder.[28] A happening or an event that seems to have no adequate explanation is an object of wonder. So we may begin there in describing them, for wherever miracles are said to occur in Scripture or elsewhere, they are matters of wonderment, astonishment, amazement, and even perplexity.[29] There seems to be no adequate explanation for the event that occurred.

Miracles, accordingly, are wonders. In the Old Testament the miracles of the Exodus from Egypt are often called "wonders"—God's wonders. God said to Moses, "I will stretch out my hand and smite Egypt with all the wonders which I will do in it" (Exod. 3:20). Thereafter, in reference to the plagues God sent, the Scripture reads: "Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh" (11:10). After the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, Moses and the people of Israel sang forth: "Who is like thee, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like thee, majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?" (15:11). When Joshua forty years later was preparing to lead Israel across the Jordan, he said to the people: "Sanctify yourselves; for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you" (Josh. 3:5). The next day the Jordan River parted, even as the Red Sea had done in the previous generation. The psalmist later sang, "I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD, yea, I will remember thy wonders of old" (77:11). But it is not just the wonders of the past, for the psalmist shortly thereafter added, "Thou art the God who workest wonders" (v. 14). God is a wonder-working God—a God of miracles.[30]

In the New Testament "wonders"[31] is always used in connection with "signs."[32] The conjunction of the two terms[33] suggests that the wonders are signs that point to something else—indeed, to supernatural activity. For example, "Barnabas and Paul … related what signs and wonders God had done through them" (Acts 15:12). The wonders and signs, while done through men, were from God.

Let us look further at the designation of a miracle as a *sign.* While in the

Scripture the word “sign” may refer to a distinguishing mark or token of a nonmiraculous kind,[34] in many cases reference is made to an event that is other than the ordinary course of nature. We have already observed the close connection of “signs” with “wonders”; however, frequently when “signs” (or “sign”) is used alone,[35] there is unmistakably a sense of the wondrous, the miraculous about it. The plagues in Egypt are referred to as signs (Exod. 4:8–9), as are the numerous miracles of the wilderness period (Num. 14:11), the moving back of the shadow of the sun ten steps (2 Kings 20:8–11), and many others. In the case of the sun’s shadow, this was a sign assuring King Hezekiah of a divine healing: “This is the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that he has promised” (v. 9). Hence, all the Old Testament signs, like those mentioned, point beyond themselves to God and His action.

In the Gospels the word “sign” is frequently used to signify miracles. The scribes and Pharisees came to Jesus saying, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you” (Matt. 12:38)—in other words a miracle of some kind that would presumably validate His authority. The Pharisees and Sadducees later similarly “asked him to show them a sign from heaven” (Matt. 16:1). A “sign from heaven” would, of course, be a miracle. King Herod, when Jesus was brought on trial to him, was pleased “because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him” (Luke 23:8). In the Synoptics the only sign Jesus spoke of in regard to Himself was “the sign of the prophet Jonah,” for, as He said, “an evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah” (Matt. 12:39). This one sign to be given to an unbelieving and sinful generation will parallel Jonah’s confinement in the belly of the whale and his emergence from it: Jesus’ own burial in the earth and His subsequent resurrection. This was the great miracle of the Resurrection. In addition to this one sign regarding Himself, Jesus also spoke of signs by false Christs and false prophets before His return: “For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect” (Matt. 24:24; cf. Mark 13:22). Miracles, therefore, may be from evil forces. Also, according to Mark 16:17–18 (RSV mg.)[36] Jesus said: “And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick; and they will recover.” The last words of the chapter read: “And they [the Eleven] went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it” (v. 20). Interestingly, it may be added, in the Synoptics the word “sign” or

"signs" in any of its usages[37] is never applied to the miracles of Jesus, either by the Gospel writers or by Jesus Himself.[38] This is also the case with the conjunction of "signs" and "wonders"[39] : they do not relate to Jesus Himself.[40] It could be that there was hesitation to apply language to Jesus that also would fit the false prophets. Further, as noted, Jesus Himself never sought to do miracles to impress unbelievers (such as the scribes and Pharisees).

In the Fourth Gospel there are many references to signs. According to this Gospel, the first and second miracles of Jesus in Galilee—the turning of water into wine at Cana and the healing of a Capernaum official's son—are called "signs": "the first of his signs[41] Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory" (John 2:11). In regard to the latter miracle, "this was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee" (4:54). Thus, unlike the Synoptics, John uses the word "sign" to refer to Jesus' miracles. This is true also in several other instances. For example, "many believed in his name when they saw the signs which he did" (2:23); Nicodemus said to Jesus, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him" (3:2). Again, after the miraculous feeding of the multitude, "when the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!'" (6:14); and, following the raising of Lazarus, "the crowd [those carrying palm branches, crying 'Hosanna,' and calling Him 'the King of Israel'] went to meet him … [because] they heard he had done this sign" (12:18). Yet the Jews at large did not believe despite His "signs": "Though he had done so many signs before them, yet they did not believe in him" (12:37). In two summary verses the Fourth Gospel reads, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (20:30–31).[42]

In the Book of Acts the word "signs" also frequently occurs. On one occasion —the day of Pentecost—Peter made reference to Jesus Himself when he told the gathered crowd, "Jesus of Nazareth [is] a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him[43] in your midst, as you yourselves know" (2:22). On the same day, after thousands turned to the Lord and the Christian community began to be formed, the text reads that "fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles" (2:43).[44] Shortly after Pentecost, Peter and John healed a crippled man through the name of Jesus, and afterwards bore witness about Jesus and the gospel to many amazed Jews and later to the Jewish High Council before whom they were brought. The healing was perforce recognized by the Council as "a

notable sign" (4:16);[45] it was a "sign [or "miracle"] of healing" (4:22). As a result of the apostles' witness to Christ, they were warned not to speak or teach further in His name. It is noteworthy that not long after that the Christian community prayed to the Lord for boldness to continued witnessing, adding, "while thou streichest out thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant Jesus" (4:30). Later on Stephen "did great wonders and signs among the people" (6:8) and eventually gave a testimony that led to his martyrdom. Then there is Philip,[46] about whom the Scripture says, "And the multitudes [in Samaria] with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs which he did" (8:6). Paul and Barnabas in Iconium spoke "boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands" (14:3). These quotations bear evidence of the widespread occurrence of "signs" in the early Christian testimony.

Moving on to the Epistles we first observe that in Paul's letter to the Romans he spoke of signs and wonders in his own ministry: "… what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that … I have fully preached the gospel of Christ" (15:18–19). Also Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "The signs of a true apostle[47] were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works" (2 Cor. 12:12).[48] In a letter to the Thessalonians Paul speaks of deceptive signs and wonders that will be done by "the lawless one" just prior to the return of Christ: "The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders" (2 Thess. 2:9).[49] Finally, in Hebrews the writer speaks of signs (and wonders) thus: The good news of salvation "was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders …" (2:3–4).

In the Book of Revelation signs are depicted as occurring only through evil forces. The second beast (the beast "out of the earth," also called "the false prophet") "works great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of men" (13:13), so that by this and other signs earth dwellers are deceived. Again, out of the mouths of an evil triumvirate of dragon, (first) beast, and false prophet come "demonic spirits, performing signs" (16:14) that gather the kings of earth for the great battle of Armageddon. All are therefore signs of deception, lying signs. Finally, reference is made to the destruction of the beast and of the false prophet who "had worked the signs by which he deceived" (19:20). These are all deceptive (not true) signs or miracles, for they come from

Satan, not from God.

Let us reflect on the preceding biblical testimony concerning miracles as signs.

1. It is clear that miracles point beyond themselves to the extraordinary, the supernatural activity of God.

2. In Jesus' ministry He was very much concerned, as the Synoptic Gospels emphasize, not to produce miracles "on demand." He would not perform miracles to prove who He was, He condemned all miracle seeking, and He made clear that the only miracle that would be given to unbelievers would be that of His Resurrection. Jesus declared that the way of miracle working to gain a following would be the way of false Christs and false prophets. Hence, He did not wish to be known as a doer of "signs and wonders." Accordingly, the expression is not used about Jesus in any of the four Gospels.

3. Nonetheless Jesus definitely performed miracles. And by their being called "signs" (in the terminology of the fourth Gospel), they did point to His hidden glory. Jesus' miracles led some to faith in Him, and yet that very faith in Him [as "the prophet," "the King of Israel"] did not necessarily run very deep. Many would soon after that call for His crucifixion. On the whole, His miracles, despite their multiplicity, did not lead to lasting faith. Despite that fact, Jesus' miracles continue to be a call to recognition of who He is; they do not compel faith, but they are a stimulation and invitation to faith.

4. In the early church it is apparent, both at Pentecost and shortly after, that miraculous occurrence is the backdrop for proclaiming Christ. As we noted, the initial proclamation of the gospel was to a large assembled crowd already aware of the many miracles Jesus had done ("as you yourselves know" [Acts 2:22]). There was also no longer any hesitation (as in the Gospels) about speaking of Jesus' miracles as "signs and wonders"; indeed, they were pointed to as God's attestation of His Son and therefore became the backdrop for proclaiming the message of salvation. Just after Pentecost it was a miracle of healing on the part of two apostles that initially aroused the attention of many other people, including the Jewish High Council, and so prepared the way for gospel proclamation.

5. It is clear that miraculous events were not limited to Christ and His apostles, for after Pentecost the whole Christian community prayed both for boldness to witness and for miracles to be performed. There is no suggestion that such miracles were to be done only by the apostles: it is a community prayer for the future activity of the church. The prayer consequently is in accordance with the words of Mark 16:17—"And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons… ." Believers in general would perform

miracles.

6. It is significant that after Pentecost many miracles are said to have been performed by two members of the community who were not apostles. In one case miracles preceded, in the other miracles accompanied the witness. Miracles, accordingly, were inseparable from gospel proclamation.

7. In the missionary outreach of early apostles (Paul and Barnabas), God bore witness to the gospel by working miracles at their hands. It is further evident (from Paul) that obedience to the gospel was brought about not only by the word preached and the deed done (that is by preaching Christ and variously meeting human needs) but also by miracles—"the power of signs and wonders"—wherein the gospel was *fully* preached. This accords with the words in Hebrews about God's bearing witness to the gospel by signs and wonders. Further, these are clear demonstrations of the truth in the final words of the Gospel of Mark that as the preaching went forth, God confirmed the message by the attending miraculous signs. All of this emphasizes the vital connection between proclamation of the gospel and the attestation of miracles in declaring the living reality of Christ[50] and in bringing about faith and obedience.

8. The marks of a true apostle include miracles. By this Paul does not mean that only an apostle can work miracles but that such miracles definitely differentiate him from a pseudo or false apostle.

9. The working of deceptive miracles by demonic forces—false Christs, false prophets, etc.—will intensify at the time of the end. Christians must be on guard lest they, along with the world at large, be deceived by such miracles.

10. On the positive side, there is the continuing New Testament promise that miracles—true, not false or deceptive—will accompany believers. Thus there will remain the witness to the validity of the gospel by genuine miracles of confirmation down through the ages, even to the end.

A further designation of a miracle is that it is a *power*, or that miracles are *powers*. In the New Testament the word is *dynamis* (plural *dynameis).* In addition to being translated "power," it is variously rendered as "mighty work," "miraculous power," or simply "miracle."

Let us begin with Jesus' own ministry. We observe that after His testing in the wilderness, Jesus returned "in the power of the Spirit[51] into Galilee" (Luke 4:14), and not long after His return "the power of the Lord was with him to heal" (Luke 5:17). Hence, this power enabled Jesus to heal; in that sense it was a miracle-working power. It is interesting to note, in this connection, that when a woman touched Jesus' garment and was immediately healed, Jesus perceived in Himself "that power had gone forth from him" (Mark 5:30). This miracle

working power (*dynamis*) became identified with the miracle itself, so that "a power" or "powers" (however translated) simply equals "a miracle" or "miracles."

An early illustration of this is to be found in the reaction of many people in Jesus' home town of Nazareth: "What mighty works[52] are wrought by his hands!" (Mark 6:2). However, a little later the Scripture adds that Jesus "could do no mighty work there … because of their unbelief' (6:5–6). The "mighty work"—"power" *(dynamis)*—is a miracle.

Looking further on in the Gospels, we observe Jesus speaking of His own *dynamis:* "Woe to you, Chorazin! woe to you, Beth-saida! for if the mighty works[53] done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago" (Luke 10:13).[54] On still another occasion Jesus spoke affirmatively of a person not following Him, yet casting out demons in His name: "Do not forbid him; for no one who does a mighty work[55] in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me" (Mark 9:39). It is also interesting to note that Herod spoke of the "powers[56] … at work" (Matt. 14:2) in Jesus, hence, again, miracles. Likewise, we read that at Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem "the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works[57] that they had seen" (Luke 19:37). We may finally observe a word of Jesus in reference to the coming Day of the Lord when He will say to many persons: "I never knew you" (Matt. 7:23). They will expostulate, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do mighty works[58] in your name?" (v. 22).

To sum up thus far, Jesus undoubtedly is shown in the Gospels to be a worker of miracles. As background there is the power of the Spirit (or of the Lord). His miracles were recognized by His home-town people, affirmed by a king, and rejoiced in by the multitude of His disciples. Jesus' miracles alone should have been enough to bring whole cities to repentance, but they did not turn. Moreover, despite the recognition of His miracles by His own people, they did not really believe and because of their unbelief Jesus could do no miracles. Miracles could also be wrought by those who acted in Jesus' name even though they were not truly His disciples. The performance of miracles, accordingly, was no sure proof of true discipleship.

In the Book of Acts, as we have previously noted, Peter spoke of Jesus as "a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs" (2:22). These "mighty works" *(dyñaméis)* are, of course, miracles.[59] We have also earlier observed that Philip in his evangelistic activity performed many "signs";

now we note the further word *dynameis:* "And seeing signs and great miracles[60] performed, he [Simon the magician] was amazed" (8:13). The climactic statement about *dynameis* in Acts relates to Paul: "And God did extraordinary[61] miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them" (19:11–12). It is quite interesting that in Acts we move from "miracles" to "great miracles" to "extraordinary miracles"!

Turning to the Epistles, we find miracles referred to initially in 1 Corinthians. Paul in speaking about the gifts of the Holy Spirit to various believers and after mentioning the utterance of wisdom and knowledge, faith, and gifts of healing, adds, "to another the working of miracles"[62] (12:10). Further on, Paul speaks of various appointments in the church: "And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles"[63] (12:28). Shortly after that, Paul asks rhetorically, "Do all work miracles?" (12:29). Second, in 2 Corinthians 12:12 we have already observed that Paul speaks of miracles (or "mighty works") as being among the signs of a true apostle. Next, turning to Galatians, we read Paul's words: "Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles[64] among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?" (3:5). Finally in Hebrews, first in 2:3–4 (partly quoted before), not only are signs and wonders mentioned but also "manifold"[65] miracles: "God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by distributions[66] of the Holy Spirit according to His own will." Although these miracles or powers (i*dynameis)* are mentioned here only in connection with the initial proclamation of the gospel, it is significant to note, second, that in Hebrews 6:5 reference is made to persons who "have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers [*dynameis*] of the age to come."[67] Such persons in a later time have likewise experienced miracles.

In a brief summary of Acts and the Epistles it is apparent, first, that *dynameis* by no means cease with Jesus' ministry. We have earlier observed in Acts the frequency of the word "sign(s)" or the words "signs and wonders," which also refer to miracles, and although *dynameis* is less frequent, the impact is quite strong, since in two instances the expression (as noted) is not simply "miracles" but "great miracles" and "extraordinary miracles." Thus there seems to be an acceleration of miracles in the early church. Second, we observe that not only do miracles occur in the outreach ministries of Philip and Paul, but also Paul speaks of miracles as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit within the fellowship of the local church. Not all in the Christian community work miracles, but some do—and that by divine appointment. This is by no means limited to the Corinthian

church, for Paul also speaks of miracles as a continuing occurrence in the Galatian community. Third, manifold miracles—miracles in abundance—were at the first preaching of the gospel of salvation confirmatory of its truth. But also they are manifest thereafter as "powers of the age to come." Thus miracles continue—or should continue—throughout the whole gospel era.

Now that we have discussed "signs," "wonders," and "powers" (or "mighty works")—*semeia, terata,* and *dynameis*—it is apparent that while each term actually can be translated "miracles," it is both in their singularity and totality that the comprehensive meaning of miracles stands forth. A miracle is a sign pointing beyond itself to the realm of the supernatural; it is a wonder that causes amazement and astonishment; it is a power that brings about results that go beyond natural capabilities. No one word will quite suffice, but in the diversity and unity of the three the meaning of miracle clearly stands forth.

But there is also one other word that, although it does not invariably refer to miracles, may have that significance. It is the word *"works," erga,*[68] as it is used mainly in the Fourth Gospel. First, however, let us observe one particularly significant passage in the Synoptics. It begins, "Now when John in prison heard of the works[69] of Christ, he sent word by his disciples, and said to Him, 'Are You the Coming One, or shall we look for someone else?'" (Matt. 11:2–3 NASB). That these "works" were miracles, or at least included miracles, is clear from Jesus' reply: "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up …" (11:4–5).

Now coming to the Fourth Gospel, we find several references to "works," all of which undoubtedly signify miracles. [70] Shortly after the healing of a man crippled for many years, Jesus said, "For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing; and greater works[71] than these will he show him, that you may marvel" (5:20). In this Gospel this is Jesus' third recorded miracle; the prior two were the turning of water into wine (John 2) and the healing of the official's son (John 4).[72] Hence "greater works" will go beyond what has already occurred. In reference to John the Baptist Jesus declared, "But the testimony which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has granted me to accomplish … bear me witness that the father has sent me" (5:36). Concerning a man born blind whom Jesus was about to heal, He said, 'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him" (9:3). Again on another occasion Jesus said, "Even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (10:38). Similar are

the words of 14:11: “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves.” Then comes an amazing statement: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father” (14:12). Thus the miracles Jesus did, and even greater ones, will be done by those who believe in Him.

The last passage quoted (John 14:12) is startling, first of all, against the background of Jesus’ own “greater works.” For, according to John 5:20 (as we have observed), Jesus would be doing “greater works” in His own ministry than He had done previously, works that already included the turning of water into wine, the healing of an official’s son by simply speaking a word, and the curing of a man long crippled and helpless. “Greater works” were to follow! Among these greater works that occurred after this were the feeding of the five thousand (John 6), the healing of a man who had been born blind (John 9), and climactically the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11).

In John 14:12 Jesus said two most extraordinary things. First, *those who believe in Him will also do the works* (i.e., the miracles) *that He did*. Such patently would include everything from turning water into wine to raising the physically dead—and all in between (as recorded not only in the Fourth Gospel but also in the Synoptics). Hence, Jesus’ own lesser works as well as His “greater works” will be included. Now this, to say the least, is a startling promise by Christ: those who believe in Him *will do* (not may do or may possibly do) His works, His miracles. All miracles that Christ did in His earthly ministry will be done by those who believe in Him.

Second, and far more startling, is the further declaration that *those who believe in Him will also do greater works than Christ did.* This unmistakably means works beyond everything mentioned in the Gospels, works beyond even His own “greater works”! Whatever miracles Jesus did on earth will be transcended by the miraculous works of those who believe in Him. How is such an astonishing thing possible? The answer is given in Jesus’ own words: “because I go to the Father.” Jesus in heaven will have power and authority far beyond what He had during His earthly ministry,[73] and thereby He will enable those who believe in Him to do greater works than even the greatest that He had done within the confines of His own earthly existence.

Still a question may remain: How can this come about, since Jesus is in heaven (with the Father) and believers are on earth? How does His going “to the Father” and receiving all power and authority bring about greater earthly miracles? The answer is found in Jesus’ further words in John 14:16–17, namely, that from heaven the Holy Spirit would come to make all this possible: “I will

ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper,[74] that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth … He abides with you, and will be in you" (NASB). But this was not to happen until Jesus went to the Father, for as Jesus said later, "If I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you" (16:7 NASB). Hence when the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit, the Helper, would come from heaven, the connection between heaven and earth would be made, and believers would do greater works than Christ did when He was on earth!

In summary: not only will miracles continue after Jesus' earthly ministry, but they will be even greater. And they will be done not only by apostles, prophets, and the like, but also by others who believe in Him. This accords well with Mark 16:7 (earlier quoted) that begins: "And these signs [i.e., miracles] will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues… ." Those who believe will do—by the Holy Spirit, the Helper—Christ's earthly works and even more, through the entire age of the proclamation of the gospel.

EXCURSUS: ON THE CESSATION OF MIRACLES

A striking feature in many Protestant circles is the view that miracles ceased with the end of the New Testament period. No true miracles have occurred since then—nor are they to be expected.

This view goes back to the sixteenth-century Reformation leaders, Martin Luther and John Calvin. Let us begin there and briefly note the viewpoint of each man.

Luther, in commenting on the works that Jesus promised His disciples they would perform, said, "We see nothing special that they do beyond what others do, especially since *the day of miracles is past* [italics added]."[75] Luther's view, however, was that although the miracles Jesus did no longer happen, we have something spiritually far more significant. After speaking about "great miracles before God, such as raising the dead, driving out devils, making the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lepers clean, the dumb to speak," Luther added, "Though these things may not happen in a bodily way, yet they happen spiritually in the soul, where the miracles are even greater. Christ says, in John xiv, 'He that believeth on me shall do the works that I do and greater works.' "[76] These spiritual miracles occur through the believer's witness to the gospel whereby the word enters a person and brings forth new life. Luther still made use of the word *miracles* but clearly removed from it any physical reference: such miracles belong to the "past."

Luther strongly emphasized, further, that the way of victory over Satan was not by miraculous power and might but by suffering and death. In a significant paraphrase of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane Luther wrote, "Let it come to pass since the Father wants the devil to be defeated and weakened, *not by might and power and magnificent miracles,* as has happened heretofore through Me, but by obedience and humility in the utmost weakness, by cross and death, by My submission to Him, and by surrendering My right and might"[77] (italics added). The implication is that even as Jesus, in order to defeat Satan, moved on from miracles to the way of the cross so should we as believers surrender any thought of miraculous power and go the weak way of suffering and death.

One further word on Luther: he also held that in the early stages of Christianity God caused visible miracles to happen to foster belief in the gospel,

but when this was no longer necessary, He simply removed them. By their removal, the whole emphasis thenceforth could be on far greater invisible miracles wrought by the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It might be added: to this day Lutheran emphasis largely spurns any miraculous activity beyond that which occurs through word and sacrament.

John Calvin—to whom we now turn—found himself early attacked by the Roman Catholic Church as the producer of new doctrine and as a result under the demand that he produce a miracle to confirm his teaching.[78] In his preface to the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin replied: "In demanding miracles from us, they act dishonestly; for we have not coined some new gospel, but retain the very one the truth of which is confirmed by all the miracles which Christ and the apostles ever wrought."[79] Calvin's emphasis was that since his gospel was nothing new, but indeed was simply that of the New Testament, the only confirmation needed had long before been given, namely through the miracles of Christ and His apostles. Calvin shortly thereafter added: "We … have no lack of miracles, sure miracles, that cannot be gainsaid; but those to which our opponents lay claim are mere delusions of Satan, inasmuch as they draw off the people from the true worship of God to vanity."[80] For Calvin these "sure miracles" are found in the New Testament.[81]

Later in the *Institutes* where Calvin was discussing the laying on of hands by the apostles, he wrote, "But those miraculous powers and manifest workings, which were dispensed by the laying on of hands, have ceased; and they have *rightly lasted* only for a time. For it was fitting that the new preaching of the gospel and the new Kingdom of Christ should be illumined and magnified by unheard-of and extraordinary miracles. When *the Lord ceased from these*, he did not utterly forsake his church, but declared that the magnificence of his Kingdom and the dignity of his word had been excellently enough disclosed"[82] (italics added). Calvin's position here is clear: miracles occurred in New Testament times to adorn the gospel—to illuminate it and magnify it; hence when that early period was finished, the Lord no longer worked miracles. Miracles "rightly lasted" only through the early proclamation.

It is quite interesting that Calvin in his commentary on Acts[83] related miracles to receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit and then added that though we may receive the gift today, it is for "a better use." In discussing Acts 2:38—"You shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"—Calvin first mentioned "the diversity of tongues" that occurred when the gift was received. Then he added, "This doth not properly appertain unto us. For because Christ meant to set forth the beginning of his kingdom with those miracles, they lasted but for a time."

However, the promise of the gift of the Spirit "doth *in some respect* appertain unto all the whole Church" (italics added). Then this significant statement follows: "For although we do not receive it [the gift of the Spirit], that we may speak with tongues, that we may be prophets, that we may cure the sick, that we may work miracles; yet it is given us for a better use, that we may believe in the heart unto righteousness, that our tongues may be framed unto true confession (Rom. 10:10), that we pass from death to life (John 5:24)… ." Quite striking is Calvin's differentiation between the proper and the better: the "proper" relating to tongues, prophecy, healing, and miracles, the "better" to salvation! In any event, Calvin seemed to view miracles as having long ago ceased. Again, it is apparent that the cessation of miracles was the Lord's doing: "Christ meant to set forth the beginning of his kingdom."

There is, however, another passage in Calvin's commentary, namely on Mark 16:17,[84] that begins, "and these signs will accompany those who believe," where Calvin injected a note of probability. He had just written about the "divine power of Christ" as a gift to believers; then Calvin added, "Though Christ does not expressly state whether he intends the gift to be temporary, or to remain perpetually in the Church, yet it is *more probable* that miracles were promised only for a time, in order to give lustre to the gospel, while it was new and in a state of obscurity" (italics added). This matter of giving "lustre to the gospel" is similar to what we have already observed, except that here Calvin did not speak with quite the same note of assurance and finality. Then Calvin immediately added a new possibility: "It is possible, no doubt, that the world may have been deprived of this honour through the guilt of its own ingratitude." If that is the case, then the cessation of miracles was not God's doing because the gospel had been given sufficient lustre but because the human factor of "the guilt" of man's "ingratitude" comes in. Calvin, however, quickly proceeded to say: "But I think the true design for which miracles were appointed was, that nothing which was necessary for the proving of the gospel should be wanting at its commencement." Then came a concluding word: "And certainly we see that the use of them [miracles] ceased not long afterwards, or at least that instances of them were so rare as to entitle us to conclude that they would not be equally common in all ages." Here a further—and additional—idea was added, namely that miracles may have continued for a time beyond the commencement of the gospel, even in ages to come, but that they occurred rarely.

To review: Calvin's position on miracles was a rather complex one. First, it is apparent that he basically viewed miracles as having ceased and that this was because miracles occurred to illuminate and magnify the early proclamation of the gospel. This cessation of miracles was wholly the Lord's doing: it had

nothing to do with any human lack or failure. Second, miracles relating to the gift of the Holy Spirit no longer occur because the Holy Spirit is now given for purposes of salvation. Third, there is the hint that the cessation of miracles might be the result of some human factor, the guilt of man's ingratitude.[85] Fourth, if miracles did continue beyond the original gospel proclamation, they ended not long afterward or have occurred only rarely since that time. It can be readily seen that Calvin had no rigid view of miracles. Although he basically held to their cessation, there was some question about the reason for this and even some thought that miracles may not have ceased altogether.

Now let us turn to John Wesley in the eighteenth century. Like Luther and Calvin, Wesley spoke of miracles as having ceased. However, this cessation did not occur in New Testament times but when the Roman Empire became officially Christian. Then, Wesley said, "a general corruption of both faith and morals infected the church."[86] This corruption included the passing away of miracles. It is apparent that Wesley did not view the ceasing of miracles in an affirmative manner: "general corruption" was the cause.

Wesley strongly urged that the cessation of miracles was by no means God's sovereign action and therefore need not be permanent. He wrote, "I do not know that God hath any way precluded Himself from thus exerting His sovereign power, from working miracles in any kind or degree, in any age, to the end of the world. I do not recollect any Scripture wherein we are taught that miracles are to be confined within the limits either of the Apostolic or the Cyprianic age; or to any period of time, longer or shorter, even till the restitution of all things. I have not observed, either in the Old Testament or the New, any intimation at all of this kind."[87] This is a significant statement that obviously goes beyond the viewpoint of either Luther or Calvin.

Again, Wesley gave testimony to miracles out of his own personal experiences. "I acknowledge," he wrote, "that I have seen with my eyes, and heard with my ears, several things which, to the best of my judgment, cannot be accounted for by the ordinary course of natural causes; and which I therefore believe ought to be 'ascribed to the extraordinary interposition of God.' If any man can choose to style them *miracles*, I reclaim not."[88] This statement suggests that though Wesley spoke of miracles as having ceased at the formal Christianization of the Roman empire, he was not loath to accept the name of miracles for what he had seen and heard in his own ministry. Wesley's view that the Scriptures in no way confine miracles to any age of the church made room for his own conviction of contemporary miracles.

In the early twentieth century the strongest—and in many ways the most

influential—person to affirm the cessation of miracles was Benjamin B. Warfield, Princeton theologian. In 1918 Warfield's book *Counterfeit Miracles* (later reprinted as *Miracles: Yesterday and Today; True and False*) was published. The first chapter, entitled "The Cessation of the Charismata," declared one basic theme about miracles, namely, that they occurred as authentication of the apostles; hence when the apostolic period ended, miracles of necessity also ceased. Warfield wrote, "The Apostolic Church was characteristically a miracle-working church."[89] Then Warfield added: "They[90] were part of the credentials of the Apostles as the authoritative agents of God in founding the church. Their function thus confined them to distinctively the Apostolic Church, and they *necessarily passed away* with it"[91] (italics added). According to Warfield, this is a matter "of principle and of fact; that is to say, under the guidance of the New Testament teaching as to their origin and nature, and on the credit of the later ages as to their cessation."[92]

Let us note, first, the matter of "principle." The function of miracles, for Warfield, was authentication of the apostles: "to authenticate the Apostles as the authoritative founders of the Church."[93] Miracles, as earlier stated, were apostolic "credentials." Again "extraordinary gifts belonged to the extraordinary office."[94] In addition to the apostles themselves, others to whom they directly ministered the gifts could operate in them. In this connection Warfield quoted favorably from a Bishop Kaye: "My conclusion then is, that the power of working miracles was not extended beyond the disciples upon whom the Apostles conferred it by the imposition of their hands."[95] Hence it was only the apostles or "Apostolically trained men"[96] who, in principle could perform miracles. After these men passed off the scene, there could be no more miracles. Miracles "ceased entirely at the death of the last individual on whom the hands of the Apostles had been laid."[97]

In regard to "principle," Warfield also held that miracles could no longer continue after the apostolic period because of the relation of miracles to special revelation. In fact that is "a deeper principle," namely, "the inseparable connection of miracles with revelation, as its mark and credential."[98] Again, "their [the miracles'] abundant display in the Apostolic Church is the mark of the richness of the Apostolic age in revelation; and when this revelation period closed, the period of miracle working had passed by also, as a matter of course."[99] In summary, "the miraculous working which is but the sign of God's revealing power, cannot be expected to continue, and in point of fact does not continue, after the revelation of which it is the accompaniment has been

completed."[100]

We may next observe the matter of "fact." Warfield also claimed that as a matter of historical fact miracles did not continue after the apostolic period. He argued that claims to continuation of miracles into the postapostolic period are invalid: "There is little or no evidence at all for miracle-working during the first fifty years of the post-Apostolic church…. The writings of the so-called Apostolic Fathers contain no clear and certain allusions to miracle-working or to the exercise of the charismatic gifts, contemporaneous with themselves."[101] Warfield was here referring to the years from ca. 100 to 150 (the time of the "post-Apostolic" fathers or "Apostolic Fathers" times) immediately succeeding the first-century Apostolic period.

Next, Warfield stated that by A.D. 155 (mid-second century) miracles were being acclaimed. "Already by that date we meet with the beginnings of general assertions of the presence of miraculous powers in the church."[102] In this regard Warfield made reference to the writings of Justin Martyr (ca. A.D. 100–165) who "says in general terms that such powers subsisted in the church."[103] This testimony of Justin, said Warfield, was followed up by Irenaeus (lived ca. A.D. 130–200) "except that Irenaeus speaks somewhat more explicitly, and adds a mention of two new classes of miracles—those of speaking with tongues and of raising the dead… ."[104] However, said Warfield, Irenaeus "speaks altogether generally, adducing no specific cases, but ascribing miracle-working to 'all who were truly disciples of Jesus.' "[105] Miracles, after this, are reported in "an ever increasing stream" up to the fourth century but without Justin or Irenaeus or any other writer "having claimed himself to have wrought a miracle of any kind or having ascribed miracle-working to any known name in the church."[106] Hence, though there were miracles reported from the mid-second (A.D. 155) to the beginning of the fourth century (ca. A.D. 300), generalities, Warfield declared, marked them all.

According to Warfield, it was in the fourth century that testimonies to miracles began to abound. However, these testimonies, he said, were not really to miracles but to marvels. He declared, "When we pass from the literature of the first three into that of the fourth and succeeding centuries, we … come into contact with a body of writings simply saturated with marvels."[107] "These marvels, quite different in character from true biblical miracles," Warfield later said, "represent an infusion of heathen modes of thought in the church."[108] Indeed, taking a long view of the history of the church since then, we see that "the great stream of miracle working which has run through the history of the

church was not original to the church, but entered it from without."[109] From the fourth century onward, Warfield concluded, claims to miracles of any and every kind are inseparable from pagan superstition.

Now let us reflect on Warfield's view of miracles in terms—to use his language—of both "principle" and "fact." Recall that on the matter of "principle" Warfield spoke first of miracles as apostolic credentials and authentications—"extraordinary gifts belonged to the extraordinary office." Hence the apostles performed miracles as certification of their office. Also people on whom the apostles laid hands could work miracles, but no one, on principle, could do so after them. This, I must reply, is a quite confusing picture. If miracles were apostolic credentials, then the apostles alone should have worked miracles, and no one around them or after them. Warfield, I believe, was forced to extend the circle of miracle workers one step beyond the apostles because the New Testament unmistakably shows men like Stephen and Philip (who were not apostles) doing miracles. There is, of course, the even wider sphere of miracles mentioned as occurring in the churches of Corinth (1 Cor. 12:10) and Galatia (Gal. 3:5)—and of necessity being done (according to Warfield's argument) by people on whom Paul had laid his hands. But this is surely a gratuitous assumption; there is no biblical evidence to support such a view.

Now the question is this: If Warfield was willing to extend miracle working to those receiving ministry from the apostles, why did he stop there? Why not include one generation after another? Warfield's position would actually have been stronger if he could have maintained a consistent picture of miracles as solely apostolic credentials. Since he was not able biblically to do this but rather opened the door to nonapostolic people, there is nothing to prevent the continuation of miracles.[110]

Second, in regard to Warfield's "deeper principle" of the inseparability of miracles and special revelation, Warfield again had no adequate biblical justification. To say that when special revelation (i.e., the New Testament record) ceased, miracles necessarily ceased because they were its "mark and credential" is a wholly unwarranted statement. What connection is there, for example, between the working of miracles within the church at Corinth—"to another the working of miracles" (1 Cor. 12:10)—and special revelation? Moreover, if the words ascribed to Jesus in Mark 16:17–18 and John 14:12 about miracles to come are taken seriously, what possible connection will such future miracles have with authenticating prior revelation? There is—and this Warfield never seemed to recognize—an indubitable connection between the proclamation of

the gospel at any time in history with miracles. However, miracles—signs and wonders of many kinds—are *not the authentication of special revelation but of the true preaching of the gospel at any time in history.*

Turning now to Warfield's view of "fact," namely, that history demonstrates the cessation of miracles, I find Warfield's position again to be weak. His statement, in reference to the first fifty years of the postapostolic church, that there is "*little or no evidence*" and "*no clear and certain allusions*" to miracle working in that period, scarcely bespeaks firm negative evidence![111] Actually—to reply to Warfield—there is some evidence.[112] But even if there were no reference to miracles in postapostolic writings, this would scarcely prove that God had sovereignly withdrawn miracles because the apostolic period was over. In many ways—I would add—the period of ca. A.D. 100–150 was one of much lessened spiritual intensity than that of New Testament times,[113] so that one might expect fewer references to miracles and other spiritual gifts. In any event, Warfield's view in regard to the postapostolic church lacks firm substantiation.

Indeed, the position of Warfield is even more weakened by what he himself said about the period beginning around A.D. 155. Since Warfield admitted that two such eminent early-church figures as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus spoke affirmatively of miracles in their day, this hardly lends credence to his thesis that miracles have ceased. If nothing else, Irenaeus' striking words of testimony cannot be easily discounted. How could Warfield avoid such testimony—and that of later church leaders? Warfield's statement that such miraculous accounts were only generalities is surely a sign of weakness in his position. Moreover, since it was not until the fourth century, according to Warfield, that heathen intrusions of marvels, hence spurious miracles, came in, what is the significance of claims to miracles prior to that time? Warfield in no way suggested that the church fathers prior to the fourth century were only testifying to pagan intrusions of marvels. Were Justin, Irenaeus, and others misinformed or lying—or what?

To conclude: Warfield by no means gave adequate proof to this thesis that miracles ceased with the apostolic period. Neither in principle nor in fact does the New Testament and the history of the early church bear out Warfield's thesis.

Let us now turn briefly to Warfield's view of miracles in Protestantism. After discussing at some length Roman Catholic claims to miracles (viewed by Warfield as the apotheosis of pagan superstition), he moved to a discussion of Protestant claims to miracles. Warfield began his presentation by quoting favorably these words: "The history of Protestantism is a uniform disclaimer of any promise in the Scriptures that miraculous powers should continue in the Church."[114] This "universal disclaimer" thesis, however, immediately ran into

difficulty when Warfield forthwith came to a consideration of John Wesley who "would not admit that there was any scriptural ground for supposing that miracles had ceased."[115] What then to do with the Protestant Wesley? It was Wesley's "enthusiasm," Warfield argued, that caused him to embrace miracles and other charismata: "To such apparent lengths is it possible to be carried by the mere enthusiasm of faith."[116]

Warfield's main concern, after Wesley, was to demonstrate that Protestant claims to miracle working have been due largely to religious excitement,[117] even to the point of hysteria,[118] and that delusion[119] lay at the base of many such experiences. One of Warfield's summary statements is especially revealing. He spoke again of "the fact that the miraculous gifts in the New Testament were the credentials of the Apostle, and were confined to those to whom the Apostles had conveyed them"; then Warfield added immediately—"whence a presumption arises against their continuance after the Apostolic age."[120] Sadly, even tragically, Warfield's "fact," that is quite *unfactual*, led to a *presumption* that colored all his thinking thereafter. What he succeeded in doing was to deny the true teaching of Scripture, the presence of the living God, and the power of the gospel to be a witness to Christ in word *and deed.*

Warfield was far more restrictive on miracles than was his great Reformed forebear, John Calvin. For one thing, Calvin *never* spoke of miracles as apostolic credentials that of necessity passed away with the death of the apostles and those to whom they ministered. As we have seen, Calvin viewed miracles rather as sovereign adornments that were no longer needed after the early proclamation of the gospel. Thus *anyone*—not only the apostolic group—who early proclaimed the gospel might have been the channel for the occurrence of a miracle. Again, Calvin was far less rigid than Warfield in several ways. For one thing, Calvin spoke more in terms of probability: "It is more probable that miracles were promised only for a time." Again, Calvin hinted at the possibility that miracles may have ceased not because the preaching of the gospel no longer needed their lustre but because of some failure on man's part (the "guilt" of "ingratitude"). This indirectly suggests that with the proper human attitude miracles might even occur again.[121] Finally, Calvin did not totally foreclose the possibility of miracles after the apostolic period but declared that miracles would "not be equally common in all ages." Based on Calvin's view that miracles originally magnified the gospel, and that they might occur thereafter, it would seem possible to conclude that God, even in our day, might again adorn the gospel with miraculous signs. Is it not quite likely that with the powerful preaching of the New Testament gospel God would again certify it with miracles of many

kinds? Warfield could only say no; Calvin, I believe, would be open to the possibility.

I may have devoted more space to Warfield's *Counterfeit Miracles* than the book actually merits. However, I deemed it important to do so in light of its continuing influence on much evangelical thought.[122] Also Warfield's position on miracles is frequently used in opposition to the contemporary charismatic renewal.[123] Perhaps what I have written about Warfield here will prove helpful when I come to a more detailed discussion of miracles in volume 2 of *Renewal Theology.*

Three final remarks about miracles: first, I am amazed at the efforts many evangelical Christians make to defend the miracles recorded in the Bible while at the same time denying their continuance in the church. Does not this very denial play directly into the hands of those who view biblical miracles as little more than primitive mythology, pious exaggeration, and the like? If the God of the Bible does not perform miracles today, did He *really* do them then? By no means do we have to agree that every acclaimed miracle is of God, for doubtless there have been manifold claims to counterfeit miracles. But such claims should in no way rule out the real thing (Does not the counterfeit actually imply the existence of the valid?). We must not allow the Bible to become an archaic book of long-gone mighty deeds of God.

Second, I am appalled that there are some in our churches who do not hesitate to identify miracles today as "demonic." Of course, if present-day miracles are viewed as counterfeit, who counterfeits them? The answer readily at hand is that they are works of false prophets (as, for example, portrayed in Mark 13:22—"False Christs and false prophets will arise and show signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect") who operate in the manner of the future Satan-inspired "man of lawlessness" (whose "coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders" [2 Thess. 2:9 NASB]).[124] Hence, whenever or wherever a miracle is reported, the demonic must be at work. To reply: no doubt Satan is always ready to show "signs and wonders" and to deceive by his own pseudo-miracles, *but* this by no means ought to rule out true miracles from God. There is something terribly out of line when Satan may do miracles today but Almighty God none at all! God help us: let us hope and pray for a better understanding of God's work in our generation.

Third, I am excited that the contemporary spiritual renewal is vigorously reaffirming the validity of miracles for our time. This renewal has made bold to reclaim the New Testament dynamism of a church in which God not only works supernaturally, and therefore miraculously, to bring about new life but also

works miracles of many kinds. Participants in this renewal are convinced that in accordance with Mark 16:17—"these signs will accompany those who believe"—the witness of true believers should be accompanied by miracles. Indeed, miracles are a visible demonstration and confirmation of the truth of the gospel message. Again, those in the renewal strongly attest, in line with 1 Corinthians 12:28—"God has appointed [or "set" KJV] in the church … workers of miracles," that miracles continue. This divine appointment of miracle working was never meant to be for apostolic times only but also for the church throughout its history. Hence cessation of miracles is *never* the Lord's doing but represents failure on the part of God's people. Finally, participants in the renewal are willing to take the words of John 14:12 seriously—"he who believes in me will also do the works that I do, and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father." The believer "*will … do"* both Christ's miraculous works and more than Christ did. This staggering promise carries us far beyond negative views in regard to the continuation of miracles into an entirely new arena. It is not really a question as to whether miracles happen but whether we have begun to see happen what Christ intends! Could it be that our faith is still too small?

[1]The Westminster Confession of Faith (chap. V, sec. Ill) states: "God, in his ordinary providence, maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at his pleasure." The latter part of this statement refers to extraordinary providence, viz., miracles.

[2]Recall chapter 5, "Creation," 103-4.

[3]William Temple writes, "No Law of Nature … is ultimate. It is a general statement of that course of conduct in Nature which is sustained by the purposive action of God so long and so far as it will serve His purpose" (Nature, Man and God, 267).

[4]Rudolf Bultmann in his essay "New Testament and Mythology" (in Kerygma and Myth) speaks affirmatively of "the view of the world which has been moulded by modern science and the modern conception of human nature as a self-subsistent unity immune from the interference of supernatural powers" (p. 7). Bultmann consequently calls for "demytholo- gizing" miracles (as well as other supernatural elements in the Scriptures) to accord with scientific understanding. I hardly need add that such a capitulation to a particular view of science (which Bultmann believes is the view) produces havoc in his interpretation of the Scriptures. A glaring illustration of Bultmann's highhanded disregard of

the authority of Scripture may be seen in his view of the Incarnation-which for Christian faith is the greatest miracle of all. Bultmann says, "What a primitive mythology it is, that a divine being should become incarnate, and atone for the sins of men through his own blood!" (p. 7). Both Incarnation and Atonement, because of Bultmann's supposedly scientific world view, must somehow be reinterpreted ("de-mythologized") into this-worldly categories. Christian faith, I submit, no longer remains.

[5]As, for example, in the famous Heisenberg Principle of Indeterminacy (or Uncertainty) in which atomic indeterminacy is now recognized as a characteristic of nature. The particles in an atom conform to no consistent pattern of order and regularity.

[6]E.g., see L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, "The Nature of Miracles," 176.

[7]The Logos would be acting in contradiction to the "Logos structure."

[8]I have difficulty, therefore, with the words earlier quoted from the Westminster Confession about God's working "against" means. "Without" and "above" means, yes; but "against" sets God in contradiction to His own created agency. Calvin doubtless is the original source, for he wrote, "The Providence of God … works at one time with means, at another without means, and at another against means" (Institutes, 1.17.1). Karl Barth has correctly observed that "there can be no questioning of His contravening or overturning any real or ontic laws of creaturely occurrence. This would mean that He is not at unity with Himself in His will and work" (Church Dogmatics, 3.3.129).

[9]Often arguments against miracles are based on the premise that miracles are violations of the laws of nature. An example of this is the eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume. (For a helpful discussion of Hume, see Colin Brown, Miracles and the Critical Mind, chap. 4.)

[10]Despite the many helpful insights I find in C. S. Lewis' book Miracles, I am uncomfortable with his early statement: "I use the word miracle to mean an interference with nature by supernatural power" (p. 15). It is hard to imagine God "interfering" with His own order of creation.

[11]"One who believes in God will believe in the possibility of miracles" (S. V. McCasland, "Miracle," IDB, 395.)

[12]Emil Brunner puts it well in saying: "To deny the reality of miracle would be to deny the freedom of God, of the God who is the Lord of the whole world. To see this God at work, who is the free Lord of the world which he has created, means encountering miracle, whether this miracle of the

divine action works through the laws of nature or outside them" (The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, 160).

[13]We have previously noted that opposition to miracles may be due to an inadequate view of a closed universe: rigid natural law, pancausalism, etc. Here we are concerned with inadequate views of God.

[14]Spinoza in the seventeenth century developed an impressive pantheistic system. For Spinoza, God and nature are two names for the same reality. See, e.g., his Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Welfare.

[15]Some pantheists, including Spinoza, have spoken of miracle in the sense that everything is miracle, that is, the whole order of nature (God) is amazing, awe-inspiring, etc. However, as Macquarrie has well said, "If everything can be called 'miracle,' the word has been generalized to the point where it has been virtually devoided of content "(Principles of Christian Theology, 226).

[16]This means, incidentally, that He works from beyond the sphere open to scientific investigation but which (as earlier suggested) is pointed to by the increasing scientific sense of the openness of the universe. Walter M. Horton writes, "In such an open universe, miracles are not 'suspensions' of natural laws … but voluntary acts coming from a dimension beyond the objective dimension to which the sciences are confined [italics his]" (Christian Theology: An Ecumenical Approach, 132). "Voluntary acts" are free acts of the transcendent Creator.

[17]The verb splanchnizomai means to "have compassion." It is sometimes also translated as "have pity."

[18]A frequent Old Testament and New Testament expression for miracles.

[19]A frequent Old Testament and New Testament expression for miracles.

[20]In addition to pantheism (above).

[21]Thus deism is a quite different viewpoint from pantheism.

[22]The figure of God as a Watchmaker was used as early as the fourteenth century by Nicolaus of Oresmes. God has made the world like a watch and has wound it up. The watch now runs on its own. The Watchmaker need concern Himself no further.

[23]E.g., the book Christianity not Mysterious by early deist John Toland in 1696 expresses in its very title this deistic attitude. Deism came to flourish in England in the eighteenth century. It also had some outstanding adherents in early America, including Thomas Jefferson. His "Jefferson Bible" deletes all the miracles in the Gospels. Deistic thinking,

while not ordinarily under that name, continues with any person who views God in a distant, unrelated fashion.

[24]Deism should be carefully distinguished from theism. Theism, unlike deism, views God as involved in the world, hence miracles may occur. Historic Christianity is theistic therefore, not deistic. Theism is about midway between deism and pantheism. Theism, like deism, emphasizes the transcendence of God, and, like pantheism, it emphasizes the immanence of God-but without the extremes of either. Deism is absolute transcendence (God totally removed from the world); pantheism is absolute immanence (God wholly identical with the world). Theism as expressed in Christian faith affirms both God's otherness and His involvement: He is Creator and Sustainer, Maker and Redeemer.

[25]Recall our brief discussion of miracles on pages 72-73 under the heading of God's "Omnipotence." It begins with the statement: "God the omnipotent One is the God of miracles."

[26]Sometimes the expression is "mighty hand," e.g., "with great power and a mighty hand" (Exod. 32:11). "Right" and "mighty" are, of course, interchangeable, since the right hand is viewed as the hand of might and power.

[27]This applies to the accompanying miracle of the conception of John the Baptist in the barren womb of Elizabeth. The words just quoted above are preceded by these: "And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren" (1:36).

[28]"Miracle" is derived from the Latin verb mirari, "to wonder at." The noun form is miraculum, "object of wonder."

[29]E.g., see such New Testament Scriptures as Mark 5:42-"they were immediately overcome with amazement" (at the raising of a dead girl); Mark 7:37-"they were astonished beyond measure" (at a deaf and dumb man now hearing and speaking); Acts 2:12-"all were amazed and perplexed" (at people speaking in other tongues).

[30]The word "wonders" in various other English translations of the Scriptures quoted above is sometimes translated "miracles." Miracles are wonders-wonders of God and often producing wonder.

[31]The Greek word is terata (teras in the singular). According to Leon Morris, "The word [wonder] denotes a portent, something beyond explanation, at which men can but marvel" (The Gospel According to John, NICNT, 290).

[32]The Greek word is semeia (semeion in the singular).

[33]This occurs sixteen times in the New Testament: Matthew 24:24; Mark 13:22; John 4:48; Acts 2:19, 22, 43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 14:3; 15:12; Romans 15:19; 2 Corinthians 12:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:9; Hebrews 2:4. The order may be either "signs and wonders" or "wonders and signs." In the Old Testament the expression "signs and wonders" or "sign and wonder" (whether singular or plural invariably in that order) is to be found in Exodus 7:3; Deuteronomy 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 13:1-2; 26:8; 28:46; 29:3; 34:11; Nehemiah 9:10; Psalm 105:27 (KJV); Isaiah 8:18 (KJV); 20:3 (KJV); Jeremiah 32:20-21; Daniel 4:2-3; 6:27. In the Old Testament, unlike the New Testament, "signs and wonders" are not always conjoined (note, e.g., in the quotations above re "wonders," the word "sign" is not used).

[34]E.g., see Deuteronomy 6:8-"Bind them as a sign upon your hand"; Mark 14:44-"Now the betrayer had given them a sign"; Romans 4:11-"He received circumcision as a sign … of the righteousness which he had by faith."

[35]There are many such instances in both the Old and the New Testament.

[36]These verses are from the so-called "Longer Ending" of Mark (16:9-20). Despite questions concerning these verses as actually belonging to this Gospel (some ancient New Testament manuscripts do not contain them), I have no hesitancy in viewing them as valid Scripture. According to Stephen S. Short, IBC, "from the fact that verses 9-20 are relegated in the RSV to the margin, it is not to be deduced that they are not part of the inspired Word of God. The reason for their being relegated to the margin is that it is unlikely that they were written by Mark himself. …" The NASB puts these verses in brackets; the NIV includes them but with the marginal notation that "the two most reliable early manuscripts do not have Mark 16:9-20."

[37]In Matthew 13 times, Mark 7 times, Luke 11 times.

[38]We shall discuss the significance of this hereafter.

[39]Used only in Matthew 24:24 and Mark 13:22.

[40]This is also the case in the one reference to "signs and wonders" in the Fourth Gospel: John 4:48.

[41]The KJV translates this word as "miracles." The signs are miracles, but the Greek word again is semeia. The NIV combines the idea of signs and miracles by translating the word as "miraculous signs." The NASB mg.

has “attesting miracles.” (The KJV translation of semeion or semeia as “miracle” or “miracles” is generally followed throughout the Fourth Gospel; the NIV translation as “miraculous sign” or “signs” regularly occurs.)

[42]It is noteworthy that even as in the Synoptic Gospels the conjunction of “signs” and “wonders” does not relate to Jesus’ miracles: “signs” yes, but not “signs and wonders.” The only time in the Fourth Gospel that there is such a conjunction is the occasion when Jesus says to the official and those around him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe” (John 4:48).

[43]Note that the language of “wonders and signs” is now used in regard to Jesus. For surely He did “signs and wonders,” even if in the Gospels there was hesitation to use the expression in reference to Him (see earlier footnote).

[44]Cf. 5:12-“Now many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles.”

[45]Other translations substitute “miracle” for “sign”: “a notable miracle” (KJV, NEB), “an outstanding miracle” (NIV), “a noteworthy miracle” (NASB). The literal translation here of semeion as “sign” seems rather inadequate; thus the various “miracle” readings.

[46]Philip the evangelist, not the apostle. He and Stephen had been chosen by the Christian community to wait on tables.

[47]Literally, “the apostle.” Paul distinguished himself from the “super-apostles” (v. 11 NIV) who (as the overall context shows) were false apostles.

[48]The Greek word dynamesin literally means “powers.”

[49]The phrase semeiois kai terasin pseudous can be literally translated “signs and wonders of a lie.” The NEB reads: “signs and miracles of the Lie.”

[50]I much like the following statement: “Kerygma and charisma, preaching and miracles thus belong essentially together, according to the New Testament. In both Jesus Christ proves himself to be the living Lord, present in his church in the Holy Spirit” (O. Hofius, “Miracle,” NIDNTT, 2:633).

[51]The Greek phrase is dynamei to pneumatos.

[52]The Greek word dynameis here is translated “miracles” in NASB, NIV, and NEB. KJV (like RSV) renders it “mighty works.”

[53]The Greek word dynameis here is translated “miracles” in NASB, NIV,

and NEB. The KJV (like RSV) renders it “mighty works.”

[54]In the parallel passage of Matthew’s Gospel, “mighty works” (dynameis) is three times repeated. See Matthew 11:20, 21, 23.

[55]The word is translated “miracle” in KJV, NASB, and NIV. The NEB translates it as “a work of divine power.”

[56]This is “miraculous powers” in NASB, NIV, and NEB. The KJV has “mighty works.”

[57]This word is translated “miracles” in NASB, NIV. The KJV also has “mighty works.”

[58]This word is translated “miracles” in NASB, NIV, and NEB. The KJV has “wonderful works.”

[59]This word is so translated by KJV, NASB, NIV, and NEB.

[60]This is the first time that the RSV translates dynameis as “miracles” rather than “mighty works.” This will frequently be the pattern thereafter. The KJV, NASB, NIV, and NEB also translate it as “miracles.”

[61]The Greek phrase ou tas tuchousas, may be translated “not the common” or “not the ordinary.”

[62]The Greek words are energemata dynameon. The NASB, has “effecting of miracles”; NIV and NEB, “miraculous powers”; KJV (like RSV), “working of miracles.”

[63]The word is simply dynameis, “miracles” (so KJV and NASB). However, the implication is that persons are referred to (as the preceding “apostles,” “prophets,” “teachers” suggest), hence “workers of miracles” (also NIV; NEB reads “miracle workers”).

[64]The Greek phrase energon dynameis is literally “working miracles,” hence an ongoing working of miracles.

[65]The Greek word poikilais is translated “various” by RSV and NIV. The NEB translates it “manifold.”

[66]I have substituted the word “distribution” (as in NASB mgn.) for “gifts,” since the Greek word is merismois, literally, “distributions” or “apportionments” (see BAGD).

[67]The fact that they may later “commit apostasy” or “fall away” (v. 6) is irrelevant to the point that miracles did occur after the initial gospel proclamation. The expression “powers of the age to come” also casts light on miracles as eschatological signs, signs of the coming age.

[68]We have earlier made use of the expression “mighty works” as a way (especially in the RSV) of speaking of miracles. However, recall that

"mighty works" is a translation of dynameis, literally "powers." "Works" as we are now considering them are erga.

[69]The RSV has "deeds." "Works" (also KJV) seems preferable.

[70]In addition to the passages that will be quoted after this, other references are John 7:3, 21; 9:3-4; 15:24.

[71]The Greek words are meizona erga.

[72]The first two "signs" are miracles. (Recall our prior discussion.)

[73]According to the Gospel of Matthew, the risen and ascending Lord (i.e., returning to the Father) says, "All authority [or "power"] in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (28:18-19). This total power and authority given at the close of Jesus' earthly ministry was to be regnant in the years ahead through the ministry of those who witness for Him.

[74]The is from the Greek word parakleton. It is translated "Comforter" in KJV, "Counselor" in RSV and NIV, and "Advocate" in NEB. "Helper" is the preferred translation in BAGD ("parakletos = Helper in the Fourth Gospel"). Behm also writes: "Parakletos (Paraclete) seems to have the broad and general sense of 4 helper' " (TDNT, 5:804).

[75]Luther's Works, 24:79.

[76]Works of Martin Luther, 4:146.

[77]Luther's Works, 24:192.

[78]The Roman Catholic Church, both then and now, holds that miracles, among other things, signify "confirmation of the truth of the Christian revelation and of the Catholic religion" (New Catholic Encyclopedia, 9, "Miracles [Theology of]").

[79]"Prefatory Address to the King of France," Sect. 3 (Beveridge trans.).

[80]Ibid.

[81]Calvin's statement, just quoted, could be interpreted to mean that he himself had experienced miracles ("sure" ones over against the Roman Catholic "delusions"). However, this seems rather unlikely in light of Calvin's emphasis on miracles as confirming the original teaching of Christ and His apostles. Still-I would add-there remains some ambiguity in Calvin's words.

[82]Institutes, 4, 19, 6 (Battles translation).

[83]Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles, I, 121 (Beveridge translation for what follows).

[84]Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and

Luke, III, 389 (Beveridge translation for what follows).

[85]It is not clear what Calvin meant by such human guilt and ingratitude. One possibility could be found in Calvin's commentary on Acts 10:46 about tongues. He spoke there about tongues being given as "an ornament and worship to the gospel." This, as we have noted, was what Calvin said about miracles in general. Then Calvin added, "But ambition did afterward corrupt this … use, for as much as many did translate that unto pomp and vain glory which they had received to set forth the dignity of the human wisdom…. Therefore, no marvel if God took away that shortly after which he had given, and did not suffer the same to be corrupted with longer abuse."

[86]Works, V, 706.

[87]Ibid., 328.

[88]Ibid., 324-25.

[89]Counterfeit Miracles, 5. In a footnote Warfield mentioned, among other things, tongues, prophecy, healing, and raising the dead.

[90]Referring to the "gifts" (charismata)-a term Warfield used interchangeably with miracles.

[91]Ibid., 6.

[92]Ibid.

[93]Ibid., 23.

[94]Ibid.

[95]Ibid.

[96]Ibid., 25.

[97]Ibid., 24.

[98]Ibid.

[99]Ibid., 26.

[100]Ibid., 26-27.

[101]Ibid., 10.

[102]Ibid., 11.

[103]This is another quotation from Bishop Kaye that Warfield affirmatively cited.

[104]Ibid., 11.

[105]Irenaeus wrote about Christ's "true disciples" thus: "Some do certainly and truly drive out devils, so that those who have been cleansed from evil spirits frequently both believe and join themselves to the Church. Others

have foreknowledge of things to come: they see visions, and utter prophetic expressions. Others still, heal the sick by laying their hands on them, and they are made whole. Yea, moreover … the dead have been raised up, and remained among us many years. And what shall I more say? It is not possible to name the number of the gifts which the Church throughout the world has received from God" (Against Heresies, II, 32, 4). Warfield did not quote these words.

[106]Ibid., 12. In passing, Warfield mentioned Tertullian, Origen, and Cyprian (third- century church fathers).

[107]Ibid., 37.

[108]Ibid., 61.

[109]Ibid., 74.

[110]Charles Hodge, an earlier Princeton theologian, wrote in his Systematic Theology, 3, 452: "There is nothing in the New Testament inconsistent with the occurrence of miracles in the post-apostolic age of the church…. When the Apostles had finished their work, the necessity of miracles, so far as the great end they were intended to accomplish was concerned, ceased. This, however, does not preclude the possibility of their occurrence, on suitable occasions, in other ages. It is a mere question of fact to be decided on historical evidence" (italics added). Hodge accordingly did not (like Warfield) in principle rule out miracles. To be sure, the necessity of miracles attesting the original "great end" (i.e., the original proclamation of the gospel) has ceased; but this, according to Hodge, does not in principle rule out the possibility of future miracles.

[111]Farther on, Warfield made a jump to "wholly lacking" (ibid., 12); however, that statement went beyond his previous more hesitant words.

[112]For example, in the Letter of Ignatius to the Smyrneans (before A.D. 117) Ignatius wrote in his preface: "By God's mercy you have received every gift; you abound in faith and love and lack in no gift" (LCC, I, Early Christian Fathers, 112). These words, similar to Paul's in 1 Corinthians 1:7, doubtless included reference to the gift of working miracles (as did Paul's words; cf. 1 Cor. 12:10, 28-29).

[113]H. B. Swete, The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church, begins his foreword thus: "When the student of early Christian literature passes from the New Testament to the post- canonical writers, he becomes aware of a loss of both literary and spiritual power…. The spiritual giants of the Apostolic age are succeeded by men of lower stature and poorer capacity."

[114]Ibid., 127. A quotation from the Edinburgh Review, LIII, 302.

[115]Recall our earlier discussion of Wesley on miracles.

[116]Ibid., 129.

[117]Ibid. The Camisards or “French Prophets.”

[118]Ibid., 131. The Irvingite movement of the early nineteenth century.

[119]Ibid., 195. Various “Faith-Healing” practices.

[120]Ibid., 193-94.

[121]In Renewal Theology, volume 2, I will show in some detail how Calvin spoke of our failure to have sufficient faith as possible ground for spiritual gifts not to be present and operative.

[122]E.g., James Oliver Bus well in his book A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion, concluding a section that questions continuation of miracles, states, “In the opinion of the writer [Buswell himself], the best work in the field is Benjamin B. Warfield’s Counterfeit Miracles” (p. 182). Anthony A. Hoekema in his book Holy Spirit Baptism delineates Warfield’s position on miracles (pp. 59-65) and expresses full agreement.

[123]E.g., John F. MacArthur, Jr., in his book The Charismatic s, at critical points in discussing miracles unhesitantly quotes Warfield (see pp. 78 and 132) to defend his own anti- charismatic views.

[124]Literally, “wonders of a lie.’

8
Angels

We come, finally, in the doctrine of providence to a consideration of angels. Angels are by definition messengers[1] and serve as superhuman beings in various ways to fulfill God’s providential concerns in relation to the world and man.

I. THE EXISTENCE OF ANGELS

Angels are mentioned many times in both the Old and New Testaments.[2] The first instance is found in Genesis 16:7—"The angel of the Lord found her [Hagar] by a spring of water in the wilderness"; the last occurs in Revelation 22:16—"I Jesus have sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches." There are also a number of expressions in the Old Testament sometimes used for angels—namely, "sons of God,"[3] "holy ones,"[4] "watchers,"[5] and "hosts," as in the familiar expression "the Lord of hosts."[6] It is by no means invariably clear when angels are being referred to. For example, the word "host" may additionally refer to armies on earth[7] or even to celestial bodies.[8] However, in the numerous places where the word "angel" appears, there can be no question about its referring to a heavenly messenger.

The existence of angels is recognized throughout the Scriptures. Jesus unquestionably affirmed their existence in many of His teachings.[9] The only persons, it is interesting to observe, who were said to deny the existence of angels were the Sadducees in New Testament times: "The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit" (Acts 23:8). The Sadducees, however, represented only a very small group of people compared with the overall biblical witness. Angels were generally accepted as a part of the total picture of reality.

It has sometimes been argued philosophically that the existence of angels is probable in light of the hierarchy of being. Man stands at the apex of earthly existence as a rational being; but since below him is a wide gradation of lesser forms of life, it seems likely that there are other creatures in a scale above him. Or to put it another way: since there are purely corporeal entities (e.g., stones) and beings that are both corporeal and spiritual (man), there could well be wholly spiritual beings[10] —angels. Moreover, another argument: since man after death and before the resurrection of his body is a purely noncorporeal spiritual being,[11] it seems at least possible that God might already have created spiritual beings without bodies, namely, angels. Such arguments, however, do not really prove anything. It is only through the revelation of God in Scripture that the truth about angels is to be found. Nonetheless, the arguments mentioned do at

least suggest that the existence of angels is *not* antecedently impossible. Also it could be a check on man's pride at least to think that he might not be the highest creation in the universe![12]

When we turn to our contemporary situation, it is apparent that many people today are by no means ready to affirm the existence of angels. Angels are often viewed at best as symbolic expressions of God's action or as mythopoetic pictures of various dimensions of human existence.[13] In a scientific age, it is sometimes said, there is little, if any, place for angelic beings.[14] For many in the Christian church, while angels may be sung about and even recited in certain of the creeds, there has come to be a growing skepticism concerning their actual existence. In some cases the questioning about angels does not stem so much from an antisupernatural attitude as it does from the matter of relevance. Does Christian faith *need* angels? Is it not enough to believe in God without adding to the superstructure by bringing in angels? With a proper understanding of God and His own presence, there seems to many persons little space or even desire for heavenly messengers.

Let us pursue this a bit further. Even among some who accept the existence of angels by virtue of the biblical witness, there is not much zeal about them. Rather than belonging to the joy of faith, they are felt to be a burden. Furthermore, as far as theology goes, could we not bypass the whole area of angels and move forthwith to some other doctrine and be as well off, or even better off?[15] Sometimes too there is the recollection of earlier periods in church history when angelology was rampant, and both popular piety and theology were laden with interest in angels that went far beyond the biblical record.[16] Are we ill advised in Christian doctrine to venture again into this area?

But now there is another matter to be considered. Throughout the history of the church there have been frequent claims of visitations of angels. A few years ago a book appeared entitled *Angels on Assignment*[17] in which a local pastor claimed that he had had many visits of angels. He gave the names of some, descriptions of their appearance, their varied activities, special messages from God, and much else. In view of a book like this (and many other similar accounts in the past), one of the tasks of theology must surely be that of seeking to evaluate such claims through a careful study of biblical revelation. If angelic visits are still possible,[18] there is all the more need for such study to be done.

Now as we enter upon this consideration of angels, it is with keen awareness of many of the countercurrents, but also with growing conviction that there is much of importance and relevance that can accrue from such a study. It could be that angels play a significant role in our understanding of the whole of reality.

Whatever the case, I will seek to stay closely within bounds of Scripture,[19] and trust that deepened vistas of understanding will open up by the illumination of God's Holy Spirit.

II. THE NATURE OF ANGELS

At the outset it is significant to note that in the Scriptures angels belong to the realm of mystery.[20] They come and go; they speak and disappear; they act and are nowhere to be found. Often they appeared at highly important moments in biblical history, for example, in the New Testament at the birth of Jesus,[21] at His resurrection,[22] and at His ascension,[23] and they will appear at His future return.[24] Angels never call attention to themselves but invariably point to something else —often mysterious, even incomprehensible. They always seem to be a part of God's action and have their existence alongside or in relation to Him. The being of angels is a matter of little biblical interest; their activity is much more a matter of interest.

Now with this much by way of background, what can we say about the nature of angels? Here we must exercise some diffidence, since they probably would not care for such attention(!) and because the Scriptures do not give a great deal of information. Let us move therefore with circumspection.

A. Angels Are Moral Beings

As we consider the nature of angels, we need to recognize that angels belong in either of two categories: the holy or the unholy. The "holy angels"[25] are the primary concern of the Scriptures; they are God's angels[26] or Christ's angels;[27] often they are simply called "angels," with the understanding that they are holy and good. Indeed, holy angels are referred to in the Scriptures wherever the word "angels" (or "angel") appears except in four instances: Matthew 25:41; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; and Revelation 12:7–9.[28]

Before proceeding with the study of the good or holy angels, let us briefly comment on this negative category. According to 2 Peter and Jude, there are angels who sinned, lost their former high station, and are being kept in pits of "nether gloom" until the day of judgment.[29] In Matthew Jesus spoke of "the devil and his angels," for whom "eternal fire" has been prepared.[30] The Book of Revelation speaks of "the dragon [Satan] and his angels" and how both he and they were cast down to earth.[31] From the Scriptures in 2 Peter and Jude it is apparent that unholy angels are actually fallen angels, and in Matthew and Revelation that they are associated with the devil (Satan). Beyond that there is no clear biblical picture of their activity. It is possible that demons—unclean or evil spirits—frequently mentioned, especially in the New Testament, are fallen angels; however, that connection is not specifically made.[32] In any event this discussion about angels will focus on the Unfallen or holy angels, for, as I said before, it is about them that the Scripture is almost totally concerned.

Now to our basic point: the very fact of the existence of both fallen and Unfallen angels demonstrates that angels are moral beings. It is apparent from the record in 2 Peter and Jude that the angels who fell were guilty of a prideful moral decision; they "did not keep their own position" (Jude 6).[33] This implies that other angels did not make the same decision and have stayed in God's will from their beginning. Thus the holy angels are not simply holy by necessity but have retained their holiness and goodness by a free moral choice.

Angels—and henceforward we will use that designation for holy angels—are moral beings. They are confirmed in holiness by moral decision and serve as God's messengers in a freedom of total commitment. As moral beings, they are also always on the side of righteousness and justice among people. Of such character are the angels revealed to us in Holy Scripture.

B. Angels Are Spirits

Angels are pure spiritual beings. In the Book of Hebrews angels are described as "ministering spirits" (1:14). The word for "spirits" is *pneumata*,[34] the plural form of *pneuma* ("spirit"), which is also used in relation to God, for example, in John 4:24—"God is spirit." Angels, therefore, are real beings whose nature, like that of God, is wholly spiritual.[35] This is not an attribute or quality of their being; rather in essence angels are spirits.

Angels, accordingly, are incorporeal: they have no bodies. A spirit, a *pneuma*, does not have flesh and bones. Jesus in a resurrection appearance to His disciples said, "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have" (Luke 24:39).[36] Angels are spirits, therefore, without flesh and bones: they are incorporeal.[37]

Now, on the one hand, this does not mean that angels are without form. They are not something nebulous, shapeless, amorphous. Angels have particular being as do both God and people. On the other hand, having form does not mean that angels have a kind of refined, subtle, ethereal corporeality. It has sometimes been thought that angels may occasionally be seen perhaps as a glimmering, vaporous, appearing and disappearing light. Such, however, is impossible, for as spirits they are totally invisible to human eyes. Angels are spirits, having form but totally without corporeality.

But, we must immediately add, according to the biblical record, they may appear in human form. The earliest example of this is to be found in the story of Abraham and the visit of "the three men" (Gen. 18:2), two of whom turned out to be angels as they went on to Sodom (see 19:1—"the two angels"). The "men" ate Abraham's prepared meal and later that of Lot in Sodom. Also they "put forth their hands" (19:10) and rescued Lot from the Sodomites. So in every way they appeared to be men, not just phantasies but corporeal entities. Another Old Testament illustration of an angel as a man is that relating to Joshua near the city of Jericho, which had not yet fallen to Israel. Joshua "lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man stood before him with his sword drawn in his hand" and announced that "as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come" (Josh. 5:13–14). In turning again to the New Testament we observe that at the resurrection of Jesus, according to Mark's Gospel, the women "saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe; and they were amazed"

(16:5);[38] according to Luke, “two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling apparel” (24:4 NASB). Likewise at the ascension of Jesus the record in Acts reads that “two men stood by them [the apostles] in white robes” (1:10). The persons described in all these instances were undoubtedly angels, but they appeared as men. Another interesting statement in the same direction is that found in Hebrews: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (13:2). This probably refers to the story of Abraham and Lot and their hospitality, but of course it further suggests that other strangers to whom people have shown hospitality may also actually prove to have been angels!

Another point: angels as spirits are not bound to any particular place. They, like the wind,[39] move freely and invisibly, but even beyond the wind, which can be limited by objects. There is no limitation, no barrier, to the movement of angels. They suddenly appear[40] and disappear. For angels belong to another dimension beyond that of our spatio-temporal existence. Their abode is in heaven, and from there they may move to any earthly place at any moment and just as quickly return. We may here recall Jacob’s dream at Bethel of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven: “Behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!” (Gen. 28:12). And yet the ascent and descent are not from one physical sphere to another, but from the transcendent realm into our world of space and time. Angels as wholly spiritual beings, therefore, are bound by no earthly limitations.

C. Angels Are Finite Creatures

Angels were made by God; they are therefore His creatures. In the beautiful opening words of Psalm 148 there is first a call for angels, the heavenly host, to praise the Lord: "Praise the LORD from the heavens, praise him in the heights! Praise him all his angels, praise him, all his host!" Then follows a call to the cosmic host: "Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars!" After this the psalmist, addressing both heavenly and cosmic hosts, sings forth, "Let them praise the name of the LORD! For he commanded and they were created." Angels, as well as sun and moon; the heavenly host, as well as the shining stars, are God's creatures: at His command they all came into existence.

In correspondence with the words just quoted are those of Colossians 1:16—"In him [Christ] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers,[41] or authorities."[42] The "invisible orders"[43] consisting of thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities[44] refer to angels. Hence, God created not only all visible things—everything in the physical universe (the visible heavens and earth, all living things including mankind)—but also the vast invisible realm of angelic beings. They also are God's creation in Christ; they are likewise His creatures.

There is no clear biblical testimony as to the time of the creation of angels. Since angels are mentioned along with other creaturely reality in Psalm 148 and Colossians 1, one might assume that they were created at the same time. Indeed, a further Scripture that could point in this direction is Genesis 2:1—"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them." However, "the host of them" would seem to be the heavens and the earth whose description, without mention of angels, has been given in Genesis l.[45]

This much seems evident: the angels were created before man. For one thing there are the words of the Lord to Job: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth … when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4, 7). The angels, "the sons of God," were there at the laying of earth's "foundation"—an event that, according to Genesis 1, preceded man's creation.[46] Scarcely was man (as man and woman) created before there occurred the temptation by the serpent who was the mouthpiece of Satan. Thus Satan was already on the scene. If Satan is properly to be understood as a fallen spiritual being[47] —hence belonging to the category of fallen angels—

then the existence of angels was prior to human existence. On the basis of Job and Genesis we may affirm that the creation of angels preceded that of man. But as to the exact time, there is no sure word in Scripture.[48]

Next, we need to emphasize the finiteness of angels. Although they are spirits even as God is spirit, they are by no means infinite as He is. Angels are creatures, not the Creator; hence they are finite spirits. They are not everywhere present as God is and cannot be simultaneously in two or more places. However, in regard to our world they *may* be present to it at any moment and in any place. As finite, angels are also limited in knowledge. Jesus, in referring to the time of His future return, declared, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only" (Matt. 24:36). The angels, accordingly, are not omniscient. Nor are they almighty. To illustrate: many times in the Book of Revelation God is called "the Almighty," and though angels are depicted as powerful throughout the book, there is never the slightest suggestion that they are all-powerful too. Angels are much less than God: they are His finite creatures. And this means something else of signal importance. Since they are not the Creator, angels are neither divine nor semidivine. They are not to be worshiped, nor do they desire worship. The Book of Revelation in this regard affords an important corrective. We read that at the climax John was so overwhelmed by all the revelations given him that he said, "I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me." John, however, immediately adds: "But he said to me, 'You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren the prophets and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God'" (22:8–9).[49] God alone is to be worshiped, *never* His angels.

D. Angels Are Personal

Angels are personal beings. They are by no means to be understood (as has often been done) as merely impersonal forces that are either attributes of God, personifications of nature, or projections of human beings. We have already observed that angels are moral beings, and this of course means they are personal. Now we call to attention other evidences of the personal.

In the Scriptures two angels are given personal names: Gabriel and Michael. Although Gabriel is called "the man Gabriel" in the Book of Daniel, he is clearly an angel—one who comes to Daniel "in swift flight" (9:21).[50] In the Gospel of Luke Gabriel is specifically called "the angel Gabriel" (1:26) and as such he speaks to both Zechariah (1:13–20) and Mary (1:28–38). Michael is mentioned in the Book of Daniel, where he is called "the great prince" (12: l).[51] Michael is referred to also in Jude 9 as "the archangel Michael," and in Revelation 12:7 reference is made to "Michael and his angels." These names point to angels as personal beings.[52]

Again, angels are beings of intelligence and wisdom. This is apparent, first, from the fact that they are often depicted in the Scriptures conversing with someone. For example, the "three men" who visited with Abraham and then Lot carried on extended conversation (Gen. 18–19); the prophet Zechariah had a number of conversations with an unnamed angel (Zech. 1–6);[53] and Gabriel, as we have observed, spoke at some length with Daniel, Zechariah (the father-to-be of John the Baptist), and Mary. In the case of the latter two there was conversation back and forth. Again, it is interesting that in 1 Peter the gospel is described as containing "things into which angels long to look" (1:12). This signifies that angels are rational creatures who much desire to look into things relating to God's salvation of mankind. Also, Paul writes about "the mystery hidden for ages in God" and says that "through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities[54] in the heavenly places" (Eph. 3:9–10). These rulers and authorities belong to the invisible order[55] of angels. What is amazing here is that through the church's proclamation of the gospel God's wisdom is disclosed to the angels!

A lovely personal touch about angels is the way in which they are described as creatures of joy. We have already observed how at creation's dawn "the sons of God [the angels] shouted for joy" (Job 38:7). They rejoiced to see God laying

“the foundation of the earth.” Now that sin has come into the world, we are told by Jesus that the angels again rejoice when a sinner comes to repentance: “I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10 NASB). Beautiful! Just one sinner’s repentance and salvation cause rejoicing among God’s angels. One final, memorable picture is that of “the voice of a great multitude”[56] in heaven crying forth, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready” (Rev. 19:6–7). Even as the angels rejoiced at creation’s dawn and do rejoice over a sinner’s salvation, so they will rejoice—and summon others to do the same—when at last there will be the consummation of the marriage between Christ and His bride.

E. Angels Are Nonsexual

Angels are neither male nor female: they are nonsexual, or asexual, beings. They are personal, as we have just been discussing, but personhood does not signify sexuality for angels.

The clearest statement to this effect is found indirectly in the words of Jesus about the coming resurrection of persons from the dead: “When they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven” (Mark 12:25). Sexuality and marriage belong rather to the earthly realm where from their first creation the man and the woman were told to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth …” (Gen. 1:28). The human race did not appear in toto at the beginning; hence sexuality and reproduction were essential to its multiplication.[57] This is the way God made human beings—quite unlike angels.

Angels were nonsexual from the beginning, for God did not create them as a couple to fill the earth but as a vast number to dwell in heaven. They did not—and do not—form a race that continues to multiply by birthing but a company that has totally existed since their original creation. Hence, there is no need for means of reproduction.

As we have earlier discussed, angels have at times appeared as human beings; indeed, we have observed several instances where they are described as men. However, such a description by no means intends to say that angels are masculine.[58] Since an angel is “a messenger,” and messengers in the Scriptures are basically thought of as men, it follows that they will be spoken of as men. However it should be added, their dress, when mentioned, is not necessarily masculine: it may, for example, be “dazzling apparel”[59] or “a white robe”[60] and these are neutral expressions. Actually such language points more to angelic brightness and purity than to descriptions of clothing.

A final word about angels as nonsexual persons: for human beings, sexuality is so closely related to personhood that it may be hard for us to think of asexual beings as fully personal. Yet, as noted, Jesus teaches that in the resurrection to come we will be like angels, neither marrying nor giving in marriage. Will this mean a diminution in personhood and in the personal relationship that is found in the beauty of a happy marriage relationship? It clearly cannot mean this, since the life to come is to be fulfillment, not diminution, possibly through relationships of such higher intensity as to far transcend what even the finest marriage on earth has contained. If that is the case, then angels even now may

know and experience a relationship to one another and to God that we cannot begin to imagine. It may well be deeply and profoundly personal.

F. Angels Are Powerful Beings

Angels are often depicted in the Scriptures as powerful, mighty, and of great strength. Indeed, this particular characteristic is usually the dominant one shown. Although they are by no means almighty, as we have observed, they still are mighty beings.

Here we may first note how angels are addressed by the psalmist as "mighty ones": "Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, hearkening to the voice of his word!" (103:20). In the New Testament, as we have seen, angels are spoken of as "thrones," "dominions," "rulers," "authorities"—all such language pointing in the direction of powerful beings. They truly are "mighty ones." When Christ returns, according to Paul, He will be "revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire" (2 Thess. 1:7).

In addition to such statements referring to angels as mighty beings, there are many biblical pictures of them wielding power. For example, on one occasion after God had punished Israel so that seventy thousand men died from a pestilence, the Scripture adds: "And God sent the angel to Jerusalem to destroy it" (1 Chron. 21:14–15). The power of the angel was such as to have wiped out a whole city. In the Book of Acts we are told that when King Herod accepted the accolade of those who proclaimed him to be a god, "immediately an angel of the Lord smote him, because he did not give God the glory" (Acts 12:23). In the Book of Revelation angels are portrayed variously as powerful beings; e.g., a "mighty[61] angel" (10:1); an "angel who has power over fire" (14:18); and several angels who, in turn, pour out bowls of God's wrath that wreak devastation upon man and the earth (ch. 16). While angels—it bears repeating—are not omnipotent, they are able to wield great power.

Angels may also exercise their power to give strength to one in need. In the story of Daniel, we read, "one having the appearance of a man [i.e., an angel] touched me and strengthened me" (Dan. 10:18). Similarly, about Jesus Himself in Gethsemane praying in agony concerning the Father's will, it is written that "there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him" (Luke 22:43). This latter is an especially dramatic and revealing picture, namely, that an angel gave strength to the Son of God in His profound travail of soul.

G. Angels Are Immortal

A final brief word on the nature of angels: they are immortal. This does not mean that they are eternal, for they are God's creatures. They came into being (as we have discussed) at some time in the past. However, once the angels have been made by God, they will never cease to exist.

One statement of Jesus is particularly significant in this regard. He says of those who rise from the dead that "neither can they die any more, for they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection" (Luke 20:36 NASB). Although Jesus' statement directly focuses on the fact that believers will not die after the coming resurrection, He speaks of this as a likeness to angels. Hence, angels do not die; they are immortal.

Since angels are "spirits," it follows that they do not experience death.[62] Angels may experience judgment (as in the case of fallen angels) but not death. Angels will live forever.

III. NUMBER AND VARIETY

We come now to some external matters. To put it simply in question form: How many and what kinds of angels are there?

In speaking to the first, it is apparent from Scripture that there are great numbers of angels. There is, of course, a limit, for angels are finite beings; nonetheless, their number is very large. A few Scriptures will illustrate this, beginning with the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 33:2—"The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned from Seir upon us … he came from [or "with" NIV] the ten thousands of holy ones." In a vision Daniel beheld "the Ancient of Days" on His throne and declared, "Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand[63] stood before him" (Dan. 7:9–10 NIV). Those who attend Him are undoubtedly angelic beings, and the number is vast. The writer to the Hebrews says that in worship "you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads[64] of angels" (Heb. 12:22 NASB). In the magnificent heavenly scene of the Lamb beside the throne that John describes in Revelation, he declares, "I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb'" (5:11–12). This statement about myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands vividly demonstrates the vast number of angels: It seems incalculable.[65]

Now let us move on to the second question about variety. By the word *variety* I intend to deal with the matter of special designations or different orders[66] of angels. This, it should be said at the outset, is a difficult area, but I will seek under the Spirit's guidance to apprehend the scriptural witness.

First, let us look into the matter of *"the angel of the Lord"* This is a recurring expression in the Bible, sometimes also "the angel of God" or "my angel." As it is used in the Old Testament, the phrase "the angel of the Lord" clearly refers to a particular angel—"the angel"—who is never further named but who seems often almost identical with the Lord Himself. The first reference to "angel of the Lord" is in the story of Hagar's fleeing from Sarah: "The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water." Then the angel said to her, "I will so greatly

multiply your descendants that they cannot be numbered for multitude." Whereas the angel said this, he spoke as God would speak. Is this only an angel? Indeed, the text proceeds to say that Hagar "called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, Thou art a God of seeing'; for she said, 'Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?'" (Gen. 16:7, 10, 13). The angel of the Lord and the Lord here seem indistinguishable. Another memorable example is found in the story of Moses at the burning bush. First, the Scripture reads that "the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush"; and then that "Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God" (Exod. 3:2, 6). God and the angel again seem to be indistinguishable. There are many other similar passages.[67]

The angel of the Lord, accordingly, is not only an angel. He is "the angel of the theophany,"[68] in which God appeared as an angel. If God Himself was to appear on the scene, He had to veil Himself sufficiently (as seen in the accounts above) for a human being to be able to bear His presence.[69] In that sense these appearances are all prefigurements of the later Incarnation in Jesus Christ.[70] It is significant that with the coming of Christ there are no further identifications of an angel with God Himself. Indeed, where "angel" and "Lord" are associated in the New Testament, it is invariably not "*the* angel" but "*an* angel of the Lord."[71] The reason seems to be apparent: *the* angel of the Lord, who is clearly also more than an angel, has now made His climactic coming in human flesh.

So in the order of angels "the angel of the Lord" occupies a unique category. He is not just a higher angel, or even the highest: He is the Lord appearing in angelic form. "The angel of the Lord" is both an angel and a divine theophany. Now we proceed to consider angels who are only angels, and certain of the designations given them.

First, there are angels spoken of as *archangels*. By definition an archangel is a "chief angel."[72] Actually the word "archangel" is used only twice. Let us observe these two instances.

One place where the word occurs is 1 Thessalonians 4:16, where Paul speaks of "the voice of the archangel." This is in regard to the return of Christ: "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel" (NIV). Literally, it is "with a voice of an archangel,"[73] thus implying that there is not only one archangel. The identity of this archangel is not mentioned, possibly because the truly important figure is the Lord Himself. What may be significant, however, is that it is an archangel, not simply an angel, whose voice will be heard at the Lord's return.

It is possible that this archangel is Gabriel. While we have earlier observed

that he is called “the angel Gabriel” in Luke’s Gospel, there is no mention there of Gabriel as an “archangel.” However, Gabriel speaks of himself thus: “I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God” (Luke 1:19), a statement that suggests high position. Further, it is Gabriel’s role to announce the coming birth of Christ to Mary; it is his voice that sounds forth: “Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” (Luke 1:28). He is the angel of the Annunciation. Since Gabriel announced the first coming of Christ, it may well be—though it cannot be proved—that he will announce the second coming. If so, he will twice be the angel of the Annunciation! This would also mean that Gabriel is the archangel whose voice will someday be heard at the return of Christ.

A further word about Gabriel: in his Old Testament appearances he came twice to give Daniel understanding: “Gabriel, make this man understand the vision” (8:16), and “Daniel, I have now come out to give you wisdom and understanding” (9:22). The angel then attempted to enlighten Daniel (8:17–26; 9:23–27). Thus Gabriel is shown to be an angel of communications and enlightenment,[74] —the role he played again in the New Testament as he spoke to Zechariah (about the coming birth of John the Baptist) and to Mary. So it seems all the more likely that Gabriel will fill the role of the archangel whose voice at the climax of history will be the ultimate communication and enlightenment.

Now let us move on to the other place where the word “archangel” occurs. It is found in Jude 9, and there reference is made to Michael: “the archangel Michael.” Thus Michael is the only specifically designated archangel in the Bible. This passage speaks of an occasion “when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses.” Although there is no earlier scriptural record of this dispute, what is significant is the portrayal of Michael as a contender. A similar picture of Michael is set forth in Daniel, where he is described as “the great prince who has charge of [Daniel’s] people” (12:1). Earlier Michael was shown to be one who contended by the side of the Lord against other princes of Persia and Greece. Indeed, the messenger of the Lord said, “There is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince” (10:21). Michael thus is a warrior prince, the archangel who contends mightily against foreign and evil forces. This is shown finally in Revelation 12:7 where “Michael and his angels” are depicted as “fighting against the dragon [Satan]” with the result that the dragon was thrown out of heaven. In this critical hour of contending Michael won his greatest battle.

This is as much as can be said about archangels in the Bible. However, since Michael is also called “one of the chief princes” (Dan. 10:13), this has given rise to the idea that there may be other “princes” who are also archangels. We do

well, however, to stay within the boundaries of Scripture.[75]

Second, there are angels called *cherubim.*[76] They are mentioned over ninety times in the Old Testament and once in the New. There is no clear description of their appearance except for the fact that they are represented as creatures usually with wings.[77] In any event, they are of great splendor and power in the service of God.

The cherubim are shown to serve particularly in two ways, the first being to *guard the holiness of God.* This is apparent early in the Book of Genesis, where we read that after man had sinned, "He [God] drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim,[78] and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life" (3:24).

The cherubim and the flaming sword prevented sinful man and woman from returning to the presence of the holy God and as sinners from partaking of eternal life. The cherubim are next depicted in the Book of Exodus as carved figures of gold placed at the two ends of the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle. They faced each other, spreading their wings above and covering the entire ark (25:18–22). Thus symbolically the cherubim protected the sacred contents of the ark (especially the Ten Commandments) and also provided the setting for God to speak: "There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you …" (v. 22).[79] Also on the veil that separated the Holy of Holies (containing the ark) from the outer Holy Place of the tabernacle, cherubim were embroidered (26:31). Thus again the cherubim represent guardianship of the most holy. All of this is later repeated with some variation in the building of the temple (see 1 Kings 6:23–35; 2 Chron. 3:7–14). If anything, the cherubim of the temple are even more impressive with a wingspread of fifteen feet covering an entire wall. Thus whether at the gateway of Eden, in the tabernacle, or in the temple, the cherubim are seen as guardians of the holy and also the place of God's holy presence.

The second function of the cherubim is that of being *throne-bearers of God.* The wings of the cherubim seemingly served as a visible pedestal for God's invisible throne. God is many times spoken of as "enthroned upon [or above] the cherubim."[80] Hence He speaks from between the cherubim because He is enthroned upon and above them. Interestingly, the cherubim are viewed not simply as a fixed pedestal for God's throne but also as a mobile one. When David gave Solomon instructions for the temple, it ihcluded a "plan for the golden chariot of the cherubim that spread their wings and covered the ark of the covenant of the LORD" (1 Chron. 28:18). Since the cherubim represent a

moveable chariot, this signifies that God's throne cannot be rigidly fixed to any earthly location, not even the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle or the temple. In line with this, the psalmist speaks of God riding on a cherub: "He rode on a cherub, and flew; he came swiftly upon the wings of the wind" (Ps. 18:10).[81] * The "golden chariot of the cherubim" in this poetical description is by no means affixed to an earthly place but is ridden by God. The cherubim accordingly are throne-bearers of the holy God wherever He is or moves.

This picture of God enthroned above the cherubim becomes all the more vivid in the vision of Ezekiel. The cherubim are depicted in "the likeness of four living creatures" (Ezek. 1:5).[82] They had the form of men, but with four faces—those of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle—and four wings, two of which constantly touched each other while the others covered their bodies. They moved rapidly to and fro like bolts of lightning (v. 14). Above the four living creatures—the cherubim—and their outstretched wings is the firmament, shining like crystal. Above the firmament is the likeness of a throne, and above it "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD" (v. 28). From that lofty place above the cherubim with outstretched wings, God spoke to the prophet. In this extraordinary vision are combined both the elements of mobility—the cherubim moving to and fro—and the awesome sense of God's presence above them.

It is apparent from the preceding statements about the cherubim that they are beings who are very close to the holy presence of God. Although they cannot be adequately described,[83] they are clearly protectors of God's holiness and throne-bearers of His presence. From *between* them He may speak, *upon* them He may ride, but *above* them He is enthroned in majesty and glory.

Third, there are also angelic beings called *seraphim*.[84] Unlike the cherubim, which are mentioned many times in the Bible, there is only one sure reference to seraphim, namely, in Isaiah 6.

In a temple vision of God seated upon a lofty and exalted throne, Isaiah also beholds the seraphim: "Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew" (v. 2). Again, as with the cherubim there is the depiction of wings; however, the seraphim have six (rather than four or two). Moreover, the seraphim stand *above* God and His throne; they are not underneath (like the cherubim) but above.

Next we observe that the seraphim's wings were being used in an amazing way. They flew with two wings, and yet the flying was not movement in any direction, for the seraphim were standing ("above him stand"), thus hovering without positional change. Two wings covered the face in awe before the glory of the Lord; two wings covered their feet[85] in humility before the overwhelming

majesty. Then one called to another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (v. 3). As the cry went forth, the very foundations shook and the smoke of God's holy presence filled the temple.

The seraphim therefore are shown as beings who before the throne of God constantly worship Him and declare His holiness. They also—so the scene unfolds—are emissaries of God's forgiveness, for one of the seraphim flew down to touch Isaiah's mouth and purge away his sin and guilt (vv. 5–8). The seraphim are holy beings who are concerned that the whole earth be full of God's holiness and glory.

In comparing the cherubim and seraphim, it is apparent that though both are closely related to God and His holiness, their sphere of activity is not the same. The cherubim protect the holiness of God, uphold His throne, and even serve as His chariot. In that sense they are servants of God. The seraphim are on a higher level, even above the throne of God, and they are constantly declaring God's holiness and praise, and are ever ready to do His bidding. They are "the nobles among the angels."[86] The cherubim and seraphim are like a beautiful circle around the throne of God, the bottom half being the cherubim and the top half the seraphim. Together in perfect unity, they live to glorify God.

A word may be added about "the four living creatures" described in Revelation 4:6–9. One is "like a lion," another "like an ox," another "with the face of a man," and another "like a flying eagle." There is obviously a similarity to the cherubim in Ezekiel's vision except that in Ezekiel's case *each* cherub had four faces—that of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle. In Revelation, as noted, they are four distinct creatures. Also these living creatures, unlike the cherubim but like the seraphim, have six wings and also, like the seraphim, sing forth God's holiness. We read, "And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all round and within, and day and night they never cease to sing, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!'" (v. 8).

The fact that the living creatures of Revelation surround God's throne—they are not throne-bearers (as are the cherubim)—and declare His holiness would suggest that they be identified as seraphim.[87]

Fourth, there are miscellaneous classes of angels. As we have observed, Paul speaks in Colossians 1:16 of the invisible realm or order as that of *thrones y dominions, rulers,* and *authorities.* Further on in Colossians the apostle speaks simply of rule and authority: Christ is "the head of all rule and authority" (2:10). The same language is used in Ephesians 3:10 (as earlier quoted): "the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places." Earlier in Ephesians Paul spoke about

how Christ has been raised "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion" (1:21). Note that in Ephesians 1:21 the word "power" (*dynamis*) is also used, possibly in place of "thrones."[88] The use of "powers" is also found in 1 Peter 3:22, which speaks of "angels, authorities, and powers subject to him [Christ]." *Powers* is often thought of as a fifth classification.[89] Now the above classifications, while relating to good angels, are also used by Paul in reference to evil forces—rulers, authorities, and powers. In Colossians, after twice speaking affirmatively of rulers and authorities (see above), he later spoke of how Christ by His victory "disarmed the rulers and authorities" (2:15 NASB). In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul wrote of Christ's "destroying every rule and every authority and power" (15:24). Regarding the ongoing Christian conflict, Paul says in Ephesians: "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities" (NIV), "against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (6:12 NASB).[90] In Romans Paul assures believers, among other things, that "neither … angels nor rulers[91] … will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (8:38–39).

It is apparent, therefore, that the Scriptures are dealing with various classes of angels—good and bad. Leaving aside the forces of evil, we comment, first, that the five designations of thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities, and powers are not necessarily distinct categories. As already mentioned, thrones and powers may be the same. Second, while all of these are classes (even if not necessarily clearly distinguishable), there is no assured hierarchical ordering. The early church indeed saw a ranking from higher to lower in the designations of thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities, and powers,[92] but the Scriptures do not clearly teach such. Probably it is better to view these five as general classifications without seeing in them differences of rank or dignity.

Further, there is really no way of clearly differentiating between thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities, and powers. What is a "throne" in contrast with a "dominion," a "rule" (or principality) in contrast with an "authority" (or "power")? Moreover, are these really to be distinguished from other angelic beings—cherubim, seraphim, archangels, and angels in general? There is no assured biblical answer. We do well simply to recognize thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities, and powers as broad, general classifications of angels.

This does not mean to say that there is no angelic ranking. An archangel would surely seem to be higher than an angel (we may recall "Michael and his angels"). Also there are "legions of angels," for Jesus Himself spoke of such (Matt. 26:53). A legion[93] of angels, it may be supposed, would call for a

commanding officer, hence a superior angel. Indeed, in the Old Testament the angel appearing to Joshua calls himself "commander of the army of the LORD" (Josh. 5:14), that is, the army of angels. He is obviously in a rank above all the rest. But having said this much, we dare venture no further, lest we go beyond Scripture into speculation and fantasy.

One final word in regard to organization: although there is no clear-cut delineation of ranks of angels, it is apparent from Scripture that angels do form a court or council in relation to God. The psalmist declares, "For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD? Who among the heavenly beings [or "sons of gods"] is like the LORD, a God feared in the council of the holy ones, great and terrible above all that are round about him?" (89:6–7). "The holy ones" are unmistakably angels who form a council about God. Psalm 82:1 speaks of how "God has taken his place in the divine council." In another relevant passage the prophet Micaiah declared, "I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing on his right hand and on his left" (2 Chron. 18:18). There was then a conversation between God and those around Him about a course of action to be taken. The right hand and the left here suggest some kind of organization, but the most relevant matter is that "the host of heaven," the angels, form a council in relation to Almighty God.

IV. THE ACTIVITIES OF ANGELS

As we begin an orderly reflection on the activities of angels,[94] it is important to emphasize at the outset that angels function always in relation to God. In a real sense they have no independent activity, but are invariably portrayed as functioning in the presence of God or on some mission from Him. Let us now consider some of their activities.

A. Praise and Worship

The primary activity of angels is the praise and worship of Almighty God. There could be no more beautiful picture of angelic praise than that found in Revelation 5:11–12:

> Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!

Similarly we read in Revelation 7:11, "And all the angels stood round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne, and worshiped God." Looking back to Revelation 4:8, we are told that worship goes on night and day: "And the four living creatures[95] … day and night … never cease to sing, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty.'" The magnificent worship of God by myriads of angels, their profound reverence before the throne of God as they fall on their faces to worship Him, the never-ending praise of His holiness and majesty—*this* is what angels primarily do.

Hence when the psalmist cried out, "Bless the LORD, O you his angels" (103:20) or 'Praise the LORD from the heavens, praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his host!" (148:1–2), he was by no means asking the angels to do something (namely, bless and praise the Lord) that they were not already doing or needed to be encouraged to do. Rather, the psalmist was rejoicing in their praise and proclaiming it to all the world.

It is good and inspiring to know that the praise and worship of God is always going on. Even if there were not a person on earth or a saint in heaven to praise God, it would still be happening! But far more than that, it is a joy to realize that when we do praise God, we are by no means doing so alone. We unite with the choirs of heaven in a praise and glorification of God that is utterly beyond all description. Praise ye the Lord!

B. Communication

Angels were active in the communication of God's word—His truth, His message. According to the New Testament, the law of God was communicated through angels. Stephen spoke of "the law as delivered by angels" (Acts 7:53), Paul of the law as "promulgated"[96] through angels (Gal. 3:19 NEB), the writer of Hebrews of the law as "the word spoken through angels" (2:2 NASB). Hence the angels were involved at Mount Sinai in the communication of the Law.[97] As we have previously observed, there was communication by "the angel of the LORD" with Hagar, the "three men" with Abraham, and the "commander of the army of the LORD" with Joshua. Other similar instances could be recalled.

This communication sometimes was a matter of *interpretation.* Particularly was this the case for Daniel to whom Gabriel interpreted the meaning of visions: "Behold, I will make known to you what shall be at the latter end …" (Dan. 8:19) and "consider the word and understand the vision" (9:23). In Zechariah there is not only conversation (which I earlier commented on) between the prophet and the angel but also an accompanying interpretation (Zech. 1–6). The Book of Revelation is "the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:1), but it was imparted through an angel: "He [Christ] made it known by sending his angel to his servant John" (1:1). Hence, the revelation that follows was made known and often interpreted (even when the text does not specifically say so) by an angel.

The communication may basically have been an *announcement.* The angel of the Lord appeared to Abraham who was about to sacrifice his son Isaac, and he told Abraham to stay his hand because, he said, "I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son" (Gen. 22:12). In another situation the angel appeared to a barren woman, wife of Manoah, and said, "Behold, you are barren and have no children; but you shall conceive and bear a son" (Judg. 13:3). Quite similar were the appearances of Gabriel to Zechariah and Mary (as we have discussed), each time to announce the birth of a son. Nor should we overlook the appearance of an angel to Joseph in a dream saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:20). Also, it was by angelic announcement—"he has risen" (Matt. 28:6)—that the women at the tomb were apprised of Jesus' resurrection. Some weeks later, immediately after the ascension of Christ, two angels told the apostles, "This Jesus … will come in the same way you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). In these and many other instances, angels conveyed

announcements from God.

Again, the communication was sometimes in the simple form of a *direction.* Elijah was told by the angel of the Lord, “Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria” (2 Kings 1:3). An angel said to Joseph again in a dream, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt” (Matt. 2:13). An angel spoke to the apostles, “Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life” (Acts 5:20); to Philip the evangelist, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza” (8:26); and to Cornelius in a vision, “And now send men to Joppa, and bring one Simon who is called Peter” (10:5). Also an angel said to Paul, “Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar” (27:24). All these were simply communications pointing the direction (in Paul’s case confirming it) that one was to take.

The role of communication clearly is important in the activity of an angel. A communicator is a messenger,[98] whether to interpret, announce, or point the way. The angel comes to speak from God.

C. Ministry

A central role of angels is that of ministering to the needs of God's peopie. Angels are spoken of in Hebrews as "ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation" (1:14 NASB). They surely do *not* have the role of bringing about salvation, but in this passage they are said to be sent forth by God to minister to the heirs of salvation.

We may view the ministry of angels first of all as that of *consoling* and *strengthening.* An early and beautiful picture of consolation is found in the story of Hagar and her young son, Ishmael. Hagar in the wilderness with her son ran out of water, and the boy, about to perish, began to cry. Hagar also wept, not wanting to see the boy's death. But the angel of the Lord came to console her, saying "Fear not; for God has heard the voice of the lad …" (Gen. 21:17), and Hagar's eyes were opened to see a well of water. A similar picture of consolation and succor occurred when Elijah was utterly fatigued and asked the Lord to take away his life. As he slept, "an angel touched him, and said to him, 'Arise and eat'" (1 Kings 19:5) and thereupon provided food for a long journey ahead.

In Jesus' own life there was also a similar ministry of consoling and strengthening by angels. Two instances are recounted in the Gospels. Jesus had fasted for forty days in the wilderness and gone through severe temptations by the devil. Finally, "the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him" (Matt. 4:11). It is not said how the angels ministered, but we may be sure they provided just that consolation and strength the Lord needed after those many trying days. Again, immediately after Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane had prayed earnestly, "Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done," the Scripture reads: "And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him" (Luke 22:42–43). Truly, this is another moving picture of angelic ministry.

In none of these cases were angels mediators of God's general providence wherein God Himself upholds and maintains His creation and His creatures[99] These are rather instances of God's special providence in which He made use of His angels for particular purposes. God, to be sure, is ultimately the One who consoles and strengthens, but He may—and in the instances cited did—work through the instrumentality of His angelic messengers.

The ministry of angels is also of *protection* and *deliverance.* As Israel prepared to move on from Mount Sinai, God said, "Behold, I send an angel

before you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place which I have prepared" (Exod. 23:20).[100] Thus protection and deliverance were assured by an angel's presence. Daniel was thrown into the lion's den, but was delivered by an angel: "My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths" (Dan. 6:22).[101] On the occasion of the apostles' first arrest and imprisonment, an angel delivered them: "At night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out" (Acts 5:19). At a later time Peter himself was asleep at night in prison, bound with chains between two soldiers with sentries guarding the door, when "behold, an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell … and the chains fell off his [Peter's] hands." Peter then followed the angel past the guards. The iron gate of the city opened of itself so Peter could enter. When Peter fully realized what had happened, he said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod …" (Acts 12:7, 11).

In this whole matter of protection and deliverance, two passages in the Psalms stand out markedly. In regard to protection: "He will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone" (91:11–12). In regard to deliverance: "The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them" (34:7). These words are marvelous assurances of the ministry of angels in varied life situations that may be fraught with danger.

Also we must surely add the words of Jesus about angels in relation to "little ones": "See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 18:10). "These little ones" appear to be Jesus' disciples.[102] They have angels ("their angels"), probably guardian angels[103] (in line with Psalms 34 and 91), or possibly individual ones,[104] who have a special relation to God, continually beholding His face. This is truly a beautiful picture: angels who ever behold God in His glory are the angels of believers! To realize this is to be all the more assured of their God-reflecting, God-directed personal care and protection.

In summary, the ministry of angels to believers in terms of consolation and strength, of protection and deliverance, is much to be rejoiced in. This does not mean, however, that we are to look to angels for their aid, and surely not to pray to them (there is utterly no biblical example of this). We are to look only to God, who as He wills makes angels "ministering spirits" to the heirs of salvation.[105]

D. Execution of Divine Judgment

Another important activity of angels in the Scriptures is that of executing judgment upon evil. God may execute judgment directly, but often it is through the agency of His angels.

This execution of judgment was at times against Israel itself because of sin and evil. We earlier observed how God sent an angel "to Jerusalem to destroy it." Although God did check the angel—"It is enough; now stay your hand" (1 Chron. 21:15)—the relevant point is that an angel was called upon to execute God's judgment. The judgment was sometimes against Israel's foes: "And that night the angel of the LORD went forth, and slew a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians" (2 Kings 19:35). The Scripture does not say how they were slain, but again the relevant matter is that an angel of God executed the judgment.[106] In the New Testament an angel struck down King Herod in his vainglory: "an angel of the Lord smote him" (Acts 12:23). These are all instances of God's past judgments in which He made use of angels to execute His judgment.

Also the Scriptures affirm that at the consummation of history angels will be active in judgment. Jesus declares concerning "the close of the age" that "the Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and throw them into the furnace of fire" (Matt. 13:41). Similarly, Paul spoke of the coming day "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance …" (2 Thess. 1:7–8). Although it is not said here that the angels will inflict the judgment, they are associated with Christ in it. Finally, in the Book of Revelation angels again and again are shown to be executing judgment; in one instance "four angels were released … to kill a third of mankind" (9:15; also see 8:7–12; 16:1–11).

Angels are undoubtedly powerful beings and fierce in their execution of the judgments of God.

E. The Doing of God’s Will

Finally, the whole purpose of angels is to accomplish the will of God. This has surely been apparent in all that has been written in the preceding pages. Here we may quote again the words of the psalmist: “Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, hearkening to the voice of his word!” (103:20). The angels do God’s word; they obey His command—clearly without question or hesitation. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, “Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10), He was indirectly referring to angels, for they are the ones who do God’s will in heaven. Moreover it is implied that they do it perfectly, since the prayer is that God’s will be done on earth *as* it is in heaven. Surely it is not without significance that when Jesus in great agony of spirit prayed, “Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42), an angel appeared from heaven to give Him strength.

For the angels of God ever delight to do God’s will. They are the original patterns and exemplars of God’s desire for all His creation.

V. HUMAN EXPERIENCE OF ANGELS

We come, finally, to a consideration of the experience of angels in our world today. Much has been written in the preceding pages about the existence and nature of angels, their number and activities. But, one may ask, can they really be experienced? Also, as was mentioned earlier, some people have made claims to angelic visitation. Are there ways of testing such? Let us look briefly into these matters.

First, with the Scripture as our guide, we can say that there is undoubtedly the presence and activity of angels today. We have observed statements in Psalms 34 and 91: "The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him and delivers them," and "He will give his angels charge over you to guard you in all your ways." These words were written not only for Israel's benefit but also for all those who "fear" (reverence) the Lord, and in the latter case, for him "who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty."[107] Thus we have the biblical assurance of angelic protection and deliverance for those who fear God and live close to Him. We may not (like Elisha's servant) see the angels, but this is not to deny the reality of their presence[108] or to deny that our spiritual eyes might be opened to behold them.

One quite relevant Scripture is that of Hebrews 12:22—"But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering." This verse alludes to Christian worship in which we come not only to spiritual Mount Zion but also to myriad numbers of festive angels.[109] If this is the case, is it not possible that our spiritual eyes may behold them or at least that we might be aware of their presence? We do not physically see the living God, yet we know and sense that He is there. Could this not also be true of His angels?

Another, more down-to-earth, possible experience of angels is that mentioned in Hebrews 13:2—"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." As we recall, Abraham and Lot, without being aware that they were serving angels, showed hospitality to their unknown visitors and were blessed in return. So it remains possible that in hospitality to strangers we may still entertain angels. The Scripture does not

speak in this case of entertaining friends—as important as that is[110] —but of strangers who could turn out to be angelic visitants.

On the matter of visitation of angels it is well to be aware of scriptural warnings against satanically inspired counterfeits. Paul, for example, declared that "even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14). Hence, if one were suddenly to behold what appeared to be an angel in "dazzling garments" (as did the women at the tomb, Luke 24:4 NEB), there is no guarantee that it would be truly an angel of light, a holy angel. It could be Satan using a brilliantly subtle counterfeit to bring a message that outwardly and almost overwhelmingly purports to be from the Lord. If so, it would—whatever the appearance of truth—be a total deceit and perversion. In another place Paul warns against turning from the gospel of Christ and says that "even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him [the angel] be accursed" (Gal. 1:8). Such an "angel from heaven" would not be one of God's angels but an emissary of Satan. He might not appear in supernatural dazzling light but in the familiar garb of one who is respected, even trusted, and then subtly proceed to distort the whole truth.[111] Satanic disguise, while it may be that of outward display, can be far more devastating when in the affairs of everyday life the truth of God is laden with deceit.

In this same vein, we are warned that "in later times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). *Angels are "spirits"* ("ministering spirits" [Heb. 1:14]), *but not all spirits are angels of God.* They may be the devil's spirits—demonic spirits—who present themselves through human voices as messengers of light. They may use Scripture (recall Satan quoting Scripture to Jesus: Matthew 4:6; Luke 4:9–11) and even coat their message with some truth, but overall the intention is to lead away from the teaching of Scripture and the truth of the gospel. So it is urgent in these "later times" to be sure that the message is from God.

Another important Scripture comes to mind: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God" (1 John 4:1). It is important to emphasize that not everything supernatural is of God; hence we are not to believe every spirit. Testing, then, is very necessary, especially in a day when Satan with his cohorts is multiplying his activity.

Two tests stand out: first and primarily, there is the test of Scripture. If the "spirit" should speak in any way that contravenes or distorts the gospel message,[112] then it is not of God—no matter how illustrious or impressive the words might be. Moreover, if the word spoken goes beyond Scripture into some

presumed new revelation about God, His nature, His purpose, His plan, etc.,[113] it is not of God but of the adversary. Second, there is the matter of spiritual discernment. One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is the "discerning of spirits" (1 Cor. 12:10 KJV) by which the Holy Spirit enables a person to discern whether the spirit that is present is from God or Satan. While this discernment may suffer from some human subjectivity and constantly needs the check of Holy Scripture, it is an additional and increasingly important test for the activity of spirits in our time.

Finally, on this matter of experiencing angels, it is probably wiser to speak more of *their presence than of their visitation*. There were indeed visitations in biblical times, and they surely may occur at any time again. But in the Scriptures the emphasis for the believer rests mainly on the continuing presence of angels. We have observed this in statements about the angels encamping around and guarding believers, about believers having angels who constantly behold the face of God, about the worship experience in which angels are present in festal and joyous assembly, and so on. This is a matter largely of their unseen but very real presence. The emphasis is wrongly placed when the focus is on angelic visitation; indeed, expecting, looking for, or hoping for such visitors is nowhere encouraged in God's Word. We are rather to pray for and expect, especially in our day, a greater visitation of the Holy Spirit (that's where the action is!). And, as far as angels are concerned, we may rejoice in their invisible but continuing providential presence.

[1]The word "angel" in Greek is angelos. It may refer to a human messenger, as in Mark 1:2-"Behold, I send my messenger [John the Baptist] before thy face, who shall prepare thy way" (cf. Matt. 11:10; Luke 7:27); Luke 7:24-"When the messengers of John had gone"; Luke 9:52-"And he sent messengers ahead of him"; James 2:25-"Rahab … received the messengers and sent them out another way." In all of these a form of angelos is found, representing a human messenger. However, in all other cases in the New Testament angelos refers to a heavenly messenger. It is, of course, these heavenly messengers that we will be considering.

[2]In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for "angel," maVak, occurs some 114 times; angelos in the New Testament some 169 times.

[3]Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Psalm 29:1; 89:6; cf. Daniel 3:25. For the Psalms passages RSV reads "heavenly beings" with the marginal reading "sons of gods." The "sons of God" referred to in Genesis 6:2 who marry "the

daughters of men" are viewed by many as angels; however, it is more likely that they are the godly line of Seth (see Gen. 4:25–26) who intermarry with the ungodly line of Cain (see 4:1–24). In light of Jesus' words that angels do not marry (Mark 12:25), it hardly "seems possible that Genesis 6:2 can refer to angels.

[4]Or "holy one." See Deuteronomy 33:2; Job 5:1; 15:15; Psalm 89:5,7; Daniel 4:13,17, 23; 8:13; Zechariah 14:5.

[5]"Holy one(s)," also called "watcher(s)," found in Daniel 4:13, 17, 23.

[6]An expression used nearly three hundred times in the Old Testament.

[7]In some instances "the Lord of hosts" may refer to God's lordship over the hosts of Israel; however, in many cases, reference is clearly made to "the host of heaven," that is, "the host of angels" (as, e.g., in 1 Kings 22:19 and Luke 2:13).

[8]For hosts as celestial bodies, see, e.g., Deuteronomy 4:19-"the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven."

[9]The references are too many to list. There are over twenty in the four Gospels. We will be noting a number of these later in this chapter.

[10]For a discussion of angels as spiritual beings or "spirits," see below.

[11]See, e.g., Hebrews 12:23-"the spirits of just men made perfect" (cf. Rev. 6:9).

[12]A concluding footnote from A. H. Strong: "The doctrine of angels affords a barrier against the false conception of this world as including the whole spiritual universe. Earth is only part of a larger organism. As Christianity has united Jew and Gentile, so hereafter will it blend our own and other orders of creation: Col. 2:10-'who is the head of all principality and power' = Christ is the head of angels as well as of men; Eph. 1:10-'to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth' " (Systematic Theology, 444). This I like, for it carries one beyond philosophical reasoning (though it is similar to it) into the province of biblical revelation.

[13]In similar fashion Paul Tillich refers to angels as "Concrete-poetic symbols of the structures or powers of being. They are not beings but participate in everything that is." He speaks also of "their rediscovery from the psychological side as archetypes of the collective unconsciousness" (Systematic Theology, 1:260). Thus angels are only symbolic representations of an aspect of the world or of human consciousness.

[14]"In a universe of electrons and positrons, atomic energy and rocket power, Einsteinian astronomy and nuclear physics, angels seem out of place." So writes Bernard Ramm in an article, "Angels," in Basic Christian Doctrines, 65. Ramm, while himself affirming the reality of angels, does surely capture some of the modern mood. Bultmann expresses this modern mood in writing: "It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and scientific discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of daemons and spirits" (Kerygma and Myth, 5).

[15]Applying "Ockham's razor" (also called the Law of Parsimony or Economy), i.e., that entities are not to be multiplied beyond necessity, could we not "shave off" angelology in toto with no real loss to theological endeavor? If angels are not necessary (so this reasoning goes), let us dispense with further consideration of them.

[16]A. H. Strong writes, for example, about scholastic theology (theology of the Middle Ages): "The scholastics debated the questions, how many angels could stand at once on the point of a needle … whether an angel could be in two places at the same time; how great was the interval between the creation of angels and their fall… whether our atmosphere is the place of punishment for fallen angels," and so on (Systematic Theology, 443). In popular piety angels often also became more important than Christ or the Holy Spirit in mediating the things of God.

[17]The book is by Pastor Roland H. Buck as told to Charles and Frances Hunter.

[18]This is a matter we have yet to consider. I believe that there is both biblical and experiential testimony to such a possibility. (See the interview with me by the editor of Christian Life magazine entitled, "Angels in Your Life," [Nov. 1980], 30-77).

[19]In a section on angels Calvin well says, "The duty of a Theologian … is not to tickle the ear, but confirm the conscience, by teaching what is true, certain, and useful …. Bidding adieu, therefore, to that nugatory wisdom [regarding angelic speculation], let us endeavor to ascertain from the simple doctrine of Scripture what it is the Lord's pleasure that we should know concerning angels" (Institutes, I. 14. 4, Beveridge trans.).

[20]Not mythology!

[21]Luke 2:13-"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men.' "

[22]E.g., Matthew 28:2-6-“An angel of the Lord descended from heaven and … rolled back the stone … the angel said to the women … ‘he has risen.’ “

[23]Acts 1:10-“while they [the apostles] were gazing into heaven … two men stood by them in white robes.”

[24]E.g., Matthew 16:27-“the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father.”

[25]For this expression see Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; Revelation 14:10.

[26]See Genesis 28:12; 32:1; Luke 12:8-9; 15:10; John 1:51; Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 3:5. The expression is usually “the angels of God.”

[27]See Matthew 13:41; 16:27; 24:31; 2 Thessalonians 1:7. They are “his angels.”

[28]It is possible that Paul’s reference in Romans 8:38 to “angels” also relates to unholy or evil angels, but that is by no means certain. First Corinthians 6:3 is another possibility. However, as a general rule unholy or wicked angels are not called “angels” without some defining adjunct.

[29]Peter 2:4; Jude 6.

[30]Matthew 25:41.

[31]Revelation 12:7-9.

[32]In one New Testament incident (Matt. 12:24-28; Mark 3:22-26) “Beelzebul” is called “the prince [or “ruler”] of demons.” Since Satan and Beelzebul are closely associated in the account, Satan is actually “the ruler of the demons.” Since Satan has his angels (as we have observed), it is possible that these angels are also demons. D. E. Aune, contrariwise, writes in an article entitled “Demons” (ISBE, 1:923) that “the fallen angels … are nowhere in the N.T. regarded as demonic beings.” I would not, however, rule out this possibility. Moreover, if the demons are not fallen angels, where do they come from? (Incidentally, the tracing of demons back to the offspring of Nephilim [or giants] in Genesis 6:4, an attempt made in Intertestamental Judaism, has very little to commend it.)

[33]Satan’s prideful action, similar to and possibly the background for the angel’s seeking to go beyond their own “position,” will be discussed in chapter 10, “Sin.”

[34]Angels are also called pneumata in Hebrews 1:7-“[God] makes his angels pneumata.” The RSV, NIV, NASB, and NEB translate as “winds”; KJV as “spirits.” Either translation is possible, as pneuma means both “wind” and “spirit” (cf. John 3:8).

[35]Here the word “spiritual” does not refer to a quality as, e.g., when one speaks of a “spiritual man” over against an “unspiritual man” (as in 1 Corinthians 2:14-15). “Spiritual” in regard to God and angels signifies their essence. Calvin writes regarding angels that “they are real beings possessed of spiritual essence” (Institutes, 1.14.9).

[36]It is significant that even though Jesus had been raised with a spiritual or glorified body, He is still not “a spirit.” This, incidentally, points also to the fact that in the resurrection to come when we too shall have a spiritual body we will not be “spirits.” We will never (it hardly needs saying) be angels.

[37]The basic difference between angels and people is that while angels are spirits, people have spirits. However, since the spirit is the deepest dimension of human nature (see chapter 9, “Man”) and will continue after death until the future resurrection of the body, there is a certain kinship with angels.

[38]In the parallel Matthew 28:2 (as earlier quoted) the word “angel” is specifically used.

[39]Recall the statement that God “makes his angels winds” (Heb. 1:7 RSV and others).

[40]Even when angels appear as men there is no gradual arrival as with ordinary men. As quoted above, “two men suddenly stood near … in dazzling apparel.”

[41]NASB, NIV. The RSV (SO KJV) has “principalities.” “Rulers,” I believe, is preferable.

[42]The KJV and NEB translate this word as “powers.” The Greek is exousiai.

[43]NEB.

[44]This will be discussed in more detail later.

[45]Also cf. Psalm 33:6—“By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth.” See, likewise, footnote 14 in chapter 5, “Creation.” Also recall footnote 8 in this chapter.

[46]I realize that there is a poetic note in the verses quoted from Job, especially about how the morning stars “sang together.” However, “the sons of God” who “shouted for joy” have been referred to earlier in Job, and there they definitely represent angelic beings: “the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD “ (1:6; 2:1).

[47]For a fuller discussion of Satan and his fall, see chapter 10, “Sin,” pp.

224-26.

[48]It has at times been surmised that since angels belong to the spiritual invisible realm, God would have created that realm prior to the physical, visible universe. Thus the higher would have preceded the lower. However appealing the thought may be, it is only conjecture (and possibly invalidated by the order in Col. 1:16). It is good to bear in mind that the Bible is a book basically about God and His relationship to man. It is not a book about angels (for such a book would surely include information about their creation as the Bible does about man) and therefore leaves many areas largely untouched. Angels in the Scriptures are depicted only in their relationship to God, the world, and man.

[49]Cf. Revelation 19:10. Colossians 2:18-19 is also a warning against the worship of angels: "Let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels…. not holding fast to the Head."

[50]Also cf. Daniel 8:16.

[51]Also cf. Daniel 10:13, "one of the chief princes," and 10:21, "your prince."

[52]In the Apocrypha (noncanonical writings) three other angels are named: Raphael (Tobit 3:17), Uriel (2 Esdras 4:1), and Jeremiel (2 Esdras 4:36).

[53]"The angel who talked with me" is a recurring expression.

[54]Both NASB and NIV have this reading; RSV (so KJV) has "principalities and powers."

[55]Recall our earlier footnote on this (re the NEB translation of Col. 1:16).

[56]There is no specific statement that these are angels; however, the context and language suggest such. So G. E. Ladd: "the voice of a host of angels" (A Commentary on the Revelation of John, 246).

[57]We might add that with death intervening, sexual reproduction is essential not only to the multiplication of the human race but also to its survival.

[58]There has been an interesting gender shift in that today angels are often viewed in the popular mind as females. For example, "You are an angel" is a term of endearment usually addressed to a woman, not to a man. The angels of Scripture, however, scarcely seem female.

[59]Recall Luke 24:4.

[60]Recall Mark 16:5; Acts 1:10. Cf. Daniel 10:5, depicting an angel "clothed in linen."

[61]Or "strong" (NASB); The Greek word is ischyron.

[62]As we will discuss in the next chapter, "Man," this is also true of human

spirits. The body dies, but the spirit does not. The spirit in man likewise is immortal.

[63]"Myriads upon myriads" (NASB, NEB).

[64]"Thousands upon thousands" (NIV), "innumerable" (RSV). The Greek word my rías means "a very large number, not exactly defined" (BAGD).

[65]Nonetheless there have been attempts to calculate the number of angels, especially in the Middle Ages. Note this statement: "Since the quantity [of angels] … was fixed at creation, the aggregate must be fairly constant. An exact figure-301, 655, 722-was arrived at by fourteenth century Cabalists, who employed the device of 'calculating words into numbers and numbers into words' " (Gustav Davidson, A Dictionary of Angels, xxi). This attempt probably strikes us as amusing, even ridiculous; but, even more than that, it was quite misguided, since the Scriptures do not give or intend to give that kind of information.

[66]By "orders" I do not necessarily mean "ranks." I will touch on the matter of a possible celestial hierarchy later, but at this point my only concern is to reflect on the biblical data concerning classes or orders, regardless of possible rank.

[67]See Genesis 18, where one of the "three men" soon spoke as the Lord. Thereafter, two of the men went on to Sodom while Abraham talked with the other, now designated as "the LORD." In another story Jacob declared first how "the angel of God" spoke to him in a dream (31:11), and added that the angel said, "I am the God of Bethel" (31:13). In the Book of Judges we read that on one occasion the angel of the LORD said, "I will never break my covenant with you" (2:1), thus identifying the angel with the Lord who had made the covenant. Similarly in the story about Gideon "the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak" to talk with Gideon. Shortly after that the text reads, "And the LORD turned to him and said …" (Judg. 6:11, 14). See also 2 Samuel 14:20 where "the angel of God" is said to have such wisdom as "to know all things that are on the earth," and Zechariah 12:8, where "God" and "the angel of the LORD " are immediately linked together.

[68]Theophany means "appearance of God."

[69]I like the words in Isaiah 63:9, where the prophet says, "The angel of his presence saved them." That expression beautifully combines the two aspects: an angel but also God's presence.

[70]One could speak of these as temporary visits by the Second Person of the Trinity prior to His coming in human flesh.

[71]See Matthew 1:20, 2:13, 19; 28:2; Luke 1:11; 2:9; John 5:4; Acts 5:19; 8:26; 12:7, 23; Galatians 4:14.

[72]Arche in Greek means “first”: “the first person or thing in a series, the leader” (Thayer). We have already observed that archai may be translated “rulers.” An archangel is therefore a chief, a ruler, even a prince of angels.

[73]The Greek phrase is en phone archangelou.

[74]It is interesting that Pope Pius XII in 1951 designated Gabriel as the patron of those involved in communications-radio, telephone, telegraphy, and television(!). Surely, one might add, communications need all the help it can get to bring about enlightenment, and if Gabriel can assist, we may be duly grateful!

[75]The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches recognize Raphael also as an archangel. He is spoken of in the apocryphal book of Tobit (a book accepted as canonical by those churches) as serving to heal Tobit’s blindness, to bring about a marriage for his son, and to bind the demon Asmodeus (Tobit 3:17). Also on one occasion he said, “I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels who present the prayers of the saints and enter the presence of the glory of the holy one” (12:15). Since the apocryphal books are not viewed as canonical Scripture by Protestants, Raphael is not accorded the same standing as Gabriel and Michael. Jewish tradition-also accepted in much of the early church-named, in addition to Gabriel, Michael, and Raphael, also Uriel and Jeremiel (both also mentioned in the Apocrypha), Raguel, and Sariel, thus bringing the number to seven (see Davidson’s Dictionary of Angels, in loco). The number seven has often been viewed as a number of completeness, and justification for that number in reference to archangels has also been sought from Tobit 12:15 (above) and from Revelation 8:2, which speaks of “seven angels who stand before God.” The argument-somewhat tenuous-is that such language refers only to archangels, as, for example Gabriel who (as we noted) said, “I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God.”

[76]This is the plural of cherub. “Cherubims” (KJV) is now viewed as improper English. Both “cherubs” and “cherubim,” are correct English; however, because of the popular image of cherubs as chubby, rosy-cheeked children, “cherubim” is much better!

[77]Cherubim are often portrayed in art as having, in addition to large wings, also a human head and an animal body. However, there is no scriptural

support for the latter two details. Incidentally, in our study of angels thus far this is the first instance in which wings are mentioned. This suggests that the common picture of all angels as having wings is an exaggeration of the biblical testimony.

[78]There is no reference to the number of cherubim. Because of the carved figures of only two above the mercy seat (which I will mention next), it has often been assumed that there were two at the entrance to Eden. Indeed, in art work they have often been so depicted. However, the text in Genesis by no means necessitates a figure of only two.

[79]Cf. Numbers 7:89.

[80]See 1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chronicles 13:6; Psalm 80:1; 99:1.

[81]Cf. 2 Samuel 22:11. In this poetical description God's "flying" relates to the wings of the cherubim whose substratum is that of the wind.

[82]These "living creatures" are not specified as cherubim until Ezekiel 10:15.

[83]Even the words in Ezekiel do not claim that the cherubim were four living creatures: it was their "likeness." Indeed, further on when their four faces are again mentioned, the face of an ox is omitted and replaced simply by "the face of the cherub" (10:14). Much later when Ezekiel is delineating the vision of the temple to come, the cherubim have only two faces-those of a man and of a young lion (41:18-19). Hence, we are by no means to understand these as literal descriptions. Since cherubim are spiritual beings (not just symbols as is sometimes said), this cannot adequately be portrayed in any fixed manner.

[84]Not "seraphims" (as in KJV). "Seraphs" is also a valid plural (as in NIV). (The designation "seraphs" does not suffer from the distorted imagery of "cherubs!")

[85]Recall that two of the four wings of the cherubim in Ezekiel's vision covered their bodies, doubtless the same posture of complete humility.

[86]L. Berkhofs words in his Systematic Theology, 146.

[87]Because of the similarities of the living creatures in Revelation to both cherubim and seraphim, the question may be raised as to whether the Scriptures are really portraying distinct angelic personages or rather depicting in symbolic images the service and worship of God in the heavens. A. H. Strong, for example, speaks of them as "symbolic appearances" 0Systematic Theology, 449). However, even a symbol (and

surely there is symbolic language especially in the Book of Revelation) does not deny reality but uses figurative speech to express the otherwise inexpressible: spiritual realities in earthly language. Thus there can be cherubim, even if the portrayal may be somewhat diverse (e.g., between Exodus and Ezekiel); there can be seraphim, even if the figures do not fully agree (e.g., between Isaiah and Revelation). I would change the "can be" to "are" and rejoice to affirm their reality.

[88]This, then, would make the lists in Colossians 1:16 and Ephesians 1:21 totally correspond.

[89]In the early church by the fourth century. See below.

[90]In this verse Paul adds two other evil groupings: world forces (kosmokratoras) and spiritual forces {pneumatika).

[91]Instead of "principalities" as in KJV, RSV, NASB. It is the same Greek word archai, usually translated "rulers."

[92]The ranking, however, began higher and included nine groups, in descending order thus: Seraphim, Cherubim, then came Thrones, Dominions, Principalities (Rulers), Powers (Authorities), Virtues (Powers), and finally Archangels and Angels. Seraphim and cherubim were viewed as highest because of their being constantly in relationship to the throne of God. Thrones by definition were in proximity to God's throne (hence next in order). Then came the various classification of Dominions, Principalities, and Powers. Strangely, Archangels were listed along with Angels as lowest in the scale because their lot was only the service of mankind. It is also interesting to note that since the fourth century the choirs of angels were reckoned to be nine, ranking all the way from seraphim to "ordinary" angels!

[93]A legion equalled six thousand troops.

[94]I regarding the activities of angels. Here we will seek to draw some of this together as well as cover additional ground.

[95]Recall our earlier discussion of these as probably seraphim, pp. 185-86.

[96]The Greek word is diategeis. This is the same word as in Acts 7:53; hence "delivered" could again be the translation here. The NIV reads "put into effect." "Ordained" (KJV, RSV) is less satisfactory.

[97]This is not directly stated in either Exodus or Deuteronomy when the law was given to Moses. However, such may be implied in Moses' final blessing as recorded in Deuteronomy 33:2: "The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount

Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints [= holy ones or angels]: from his right hand went a fiery law for them" (KJV). The holy ones or angels were involved in the going forth of the "fiery law."

[98]As mentioned early in this chapter, "angel" basically means "messenger."

[99]"Recall the earlier discussion of this under "Aspects" of Providence, pages 118-21.

[100]Cf. also Exodus 32:34; 33:2; Numbers 20:16.

[101]In the matter of protection I might also have cited the story about Elisha and his servant in a village surrounded by horses and chariots of the Syrian army. God opened the eyes of the servant to see what Elisha could also see: "Behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (2 Kings 6:17). Although the word "angel" is not used, it is apparent that these were angelic hosts.

[102]A frequent interpretation in the past has been that of viewing "these little ones" as children particularly in light of the earlier statement in Matthew 18:5-6 where "child" and "these littles ones" are in close proximity. However, the expression "these little ones" as earlier used in Matthew 10:42-"And whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward"-refers unmistakably to a disciple, not a child. Note also the parallel in Mark 9:41-"For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ, will by no means lose his reward"-where "these little ones" is not used, and reference is clearly made to one who bears the name of Christ. "These little ones" is found in Mark 9:42, but again it is apparent that they are believers, not children: "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin… ." Cf. also Luke 17:2. Another comment: some have seen, particularly in light of Luke 17:2, a distinction between the "disciples" to whom Jesus spoke and "these little ones" about whom He spoke. This would suggest that the "little ones" are the humbler or weaker among the disciples (so I. H. Marshall, Commentary on Luke, NIGTC, in loco: "The insignificant and weaker members of this group of disciples are meant here"). I do not think this is likely, especially when viewed in relation to other similar passages (as mentioned). "Little ones" are those who "bear the name of Christ." I agree with O. Michel in his article on mikros (TDNT, 4:651), that "these little ones" refers "to people who are present without disparagement, and without having children in view."

[103]While Matthew 18:10 does not directly say this, it would seem to be

implied; “their angels” would suggest such.

[104]Matthew 18:10, however, does not specify individual guardian angels; it is “their angels” (not “his angel”). Psalm 91:12, as quoted before, reads: “they will bear you up.” This does not rule out the possibility of individual guardian angels, as Acts 12:15 may suggest: “They [the disciples] said, ‘It is his [Peter’s] angel!’ “ Acts 12:15 is disputed by some as a valid support text for individual guardian angels, since it was both a statement made in excitement (see the background: Acts 12:6-14) and was factually not true: it was Peter himself. The important matter, after all, is that Jesus’ disciples did have angels, whether one or many!

[105]Charles Hodge puts it well: “The people of God … may rejoice in the assurance that these holy beings encamp round about them; defending them day and night from unseen enemies and unapprehended dangers. At the same time they must not come between us and God. We are not to look to them or invoke their aid. They are in the hands of God and exercise his will; He uses them as he does the wind and lightning” (Systematic Theology, 1:642).

[106]Lord Byron’s poem “The Destruction of Sennacherib” vividly depicts this judgment. After speaking of how the Assyrian host “lay withered and strown,” Byron writes: For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast, And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed; And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill, And their hearts but once heaved, and forever grew still!

[107]These are the opening words of Psalm 91.

[108]Billy Graham in his book Angels: God’s Secret Agents writes: “Angels, whether noticed by men or not, are active in our twentieth-century world. Are we aware of them?” (p. 158). It is not a question of their presence and activity, but of our awareness.

[109]The NIV translates this statement thus: “You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly.”

[110]The New Testament strongly emphasizes hospitality, e.g., Romans 12:13-“Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality [literally, “pursuing hospitality”]”; 1 Peter 4:9—“Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another.” Christian leaders must be “hospitable” (see 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8). The early church record in Acts has many accounts of hospitality, by which homes were open to visiting believers.

[111]The “angel of light” to which Paul referred was in the person of “false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ”

(2 Cor. 11:13). This is a potent reminder that Satan's chief emissaries are not worldly in appearance or in speech but operate *from within* the circle of faith.

[112]In 1 John 4 (quoted above) the gospel message was being undermined by those who denied the Incarnation, denying "that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" (v. 2).

[113]In Mormon teaching, the angel Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith and led him to certain "golden plates" that now make up The Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon-adding much to the Bible, hence new revelation-is viewed by its adherents as equal in authority to Scripture. The Articles of Faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (Mormon) declare: "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as it is translated correctly; we also believe The Book of Mormon to be the word of God." Although the angel Moroni did not speak the words in The Book of Mormon, the very fact that he led Joseph Smith to presumed additional truth (much of which also contradicts the Bible) invalidates the Mormons' claim that Moroni is an angel from God. In the book Angels on Assignment (earlier mentioned) it is interesting that one of the angels who spoke to Pastor Buck is named Chrioni (sound alike to Moroni?). He along with (presumably) Gabriel, Michael, and another angel named Cyprion provide much new information about angelic size and dress, angelic activity not recorded in the Bible, additional "truths" from God, etc. Although Angels on Assignment is by no means as extreme as The Book of Mormon, it does make one wonder very seriously about the source of these angelic visitations. (For a comprehensive critique of Angels on Assignment, including a list of five tests for angelic visitations, the reader may write to me at Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA 23463, and I will be glad to send a copy.)

9
Man

We now make a transition in theology from God and His works in creation and providence to the doctrine of man. (The word *man* here is of course generic man, meaning mankind—both men and women.) The subject of man has been touched upon earlier in various connections, but we have not specifically directed our attention to it. Let us, accordingly, move to a more particular consideration of the nature of man. We may well begin with the question "What is man?"

Not only does that question stand at the beginning of a verse in the Bible (Ps. 8:4), but also it is one that has been asked for thousands of years. On the surface it would seem a relatively simple question to answer, since it relates to that which is closest to us, namely, ourselves. Moreover, compared to the question of God, man is an obvious fact, an ever-present object for empirical investigation (whether God is real may be open to question, but not the reality of man). Answers ought to come much easier and with more assurance. Nonetheless, the range of views about man is extremely diverse. Let us briefly note some of these:

1. *A materialistic view*. Man is a portion of matter composed of hydrogen, carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, calcium, and other elements (chemical value: between $5 and $10). He is wholly constituted by the physicochemical world, even though he is quite complicated in composition.

2. *A biological view*. Man is an animal with a highly developed nervous system; the laws of his being are biological in character. He is the most highly evolved of all animals through a process of natural selection and survival of the fittest (Darwin), but he remains an animal through and through.

3. *A psychological view.* Man is a creature wholly formed by his heredity and environment, and all that he does is determined by that. Freedom is an illusion. Further, his conscious life is determined by animal instincts embedded in the unconscious (e.g., the sex-instinct [Freud]). Anything higher than this—God, morality, conscience—represents a projection of psychological needs or inhibitions.

4. *An economic view.* The hunger drive in man is basic. He is what he eats.

The fundamental fact about man is the class struggle based on economic determination: the relation between producers and consumers. Man is a unit in an economic system, and society must function accordingly (become "classless" [Karl Marx]). There is no religious basis for man; indeed, religion is an illusion (the "opiate of the people") and seeks to cover the true situation.

5. *A sociological view.* Everything about man is determined by group mores, customs, prejudices. Society is "the great being" (Comte), and the individual counts only as a factor in it ("I am not an individual personality but a member of the German race" [Nazi statement]). The state, the clan, even the family comes first; the collective, not the individual, rules.

6. *A philosophical view.* Man is the animal that thinks ("*animal rationale*"). What is unique about man is his mind: it is his essential nature. The body is quite secondary, perhaps even a handicap to the activity of pure thought and reflection. Man is essentially reason (Plato, Aristotle). Man is what he thinks, and the thinker is the complete person (education = virtue). The philosopher is, or should be, king over the world.

7. *An existentialist view.* Man is what he makes himself to be. The call is to live creatively, to fulfill every potentiality, to become the "superman" (Nietzsche). Man is nothing but what he makes himself into ("I act, therefore I am" [Sartre]). It is not thought but action that makes man fully human.

Such a welter of ideas! By no means are they all alike, since they represent a wide range of materialistic, naturalistic, and humanistic perspectives. Moreover, there is often overlapping between one and another, and there are variations within the different perspectives.[1] Doubtless, there is truth in many of the things said about man (there *are* biological, psychological, economic, and other factors in human existence). However, something quite fundamental is missing in all of these viewpoints. *Another standpoint, another perspective, another point of view is needed, for none of these views depicts man in his full dimension.* It is urgent that we begin again, and this time look at man not from within but from without —indeed from a perspective totally beyond.

This means that we must view man in the light of *divine revelation.* We have already seen the need for revelation in the knowledge of God. It might, however, seem surprising that there is need for revelation about who we are. But the need is very great. For actually we are too close to ourselves to see ourselves properly (as the diversity of views previously outlined would suggest). Therefore, we can but be grateful for the light of God's revelation, the truth in His Word—a perspective from without and above to throw light on the true dimensions of human nature. We might even say—over against all the views described—that through revelation there is a *theological understanding* of man. To that we now

turn.

I. MAN IS THAT ENTITY

CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD.

According to Genesis 1:27, “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Here is a totally different perspective on man: Man viewed from the vantage point of God. He is made in the image, and after the likeness (Gen. 1:26) of God.

A. Man's Place in the Universe

The opening chapter in Genesis describes God's creation of the universe. The description climaxes in verse 26 with man being seen as that creature who is *between* God and the world. He is "man the amphibian"—existing between two realms.

/. Man Is Above the Animal World

Although the animal world is a creation of God[2] and thus represents a totally new step ahead, it does not have the unique stature of man. When God turned to make man, He took still another step—a huge one: He made man in His image and likeness. This by no means denies man's relationship to the animal world (any more than the creation of animal life denies prior vegetable life), but it does give man a unique status. He is a fresh creation and therefore not simply a higher or more complex entity than what preceded him.

This means that there is a *qualitative* difference between man and the highest subhuman creature. There is no gradual evolution of animal into man by a series of steps over a lengthy period of time. Hence, there is no "missing link"[3] to be found, since God simply moved past the animal kingdom and established a new order in creation.

A further word might be said about what preceded man. On the same sixth day "God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds" (Gen. 1:25). There is no new creation here (as with the first creation of life in the sea and sky [v. 21]), but a continuation of animal life on a still higher level: this is a making, not a creation. Yet the beasts of the earth (along with other land animals) are distinctive enough from the preceding animal life to occupy a separate day of creation, namely, the sixth and last. Indeed this is the same day when man was to be created. How much of the sixth day (or age)[4] God devoted to the "beasts of the earth" and whether He "made"[5] these in one, two, or ten thousand steps is not told us. He made them "according to their kinds,"[6] and this can also allow development within their kind.[7] Thus, for example, there could be the development of the anthropoid ape to higher levels within its "kind," but there is a qualitative gap between the most highly developed ape and the appearance of man in creation. This by no means rules out a close biological relation to what God has just finished making, for man is the climax and fulfillment of God's preceding work. But at a certain moment on the same "sixth day," God reached

beyond all that had preceded and created a new being—man. There is continuity with the past but an even greater discontinuity: man is a new creation.[8]

2. Man Is Under God

Man in his creation is accorded an extraordinary place. There is something unique about his status: he is made to occupy a place in the world, even the universe, far above all the rest of creation. Here we may turn to the words of the psalmist with which we began: "What is man?" and proceed to note that the question is in the context of the vastness of the heavens, the moon, and the stars; in comparison, what is man? Then follow the words "Yet Thou hast made him a little lower than God" (8:5 NASB).[9]

This does not mean that man has divinity. No, for all his uniqueness he is not to be compared with God, nor is he to seek to be God or play God. Accordingly, any form of mysticism that identifies man or any aspect of man with God is wholly in error. Likewise, any expression of titanism whereby man seeks to exalt himself to the place of God is to confuse the creature with the Creator. Man, created under God, is in no way God.

Nonetheless, man has a place in the universe that is extremely high. Nothing else is said in the Scriptures to be created in God's image.

Being under God is not only a position; it is also a statement that man is to function under God's direction and command. He is not to be an autonomous creature, thereby self-ruled, but a theonomous one, ruled by God. This is man's high privilege: to be in the service of the Creator of all the universe.

B. Man's Function

The fact that man is created in the image of God means that his basic function is to *reflect God.* Man is God's reflection on earth and in the cosmos; he is the creaturely repetition of God the Creator. Even as a father or mother may be imaged in a son or daughter, so is God imaged in human persons. It is interesting to note that after Genesis 5:1–2, where the words of Genesis 1:26–27 are nearly repeated, the next verse reads: "When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth." Man, accordingly, is to God as Seth is to Adam: made in the Father's likeness and image. Man is God's reflection upon earth: the mirror of God.[10]

1. Man Is to Reflect God's Dominion

Man, first of all, is to reflect God's dominion. The words of Genesis are clear: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth" (1:26). God, who is the Lord over all things and sovereign over heaven and earth, willed to be reflected in one called man by making him to have subdominion over all other living creatures and over all the earth. Indeed, man was given dominion over everything that God had made: "Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet" (Ps. 8:6). According to Hebrews, "in putting everything in subjection to him, [God] left nothing outside his control" (2:8).[11] This is a remarkable picture of man as vice-regent of the Creator of the universe.[12]

Let me amplify this. Man truly is crowned "with glory and honor" (Ps. 8:5) to hold such a position as this. According to Hebrews, man has been made "a little lower than the angels" (2:7 KJV and NIV),[13] but his position is very high indeed. All the world has been put under man—the animals, the earth itself with all of its treasures, all the works of God's hands. The latter could include the physical universe at large: the sun, the moon, the planets, even to the farthest reaches of space. Although man cannot control the sun, moon, and planets in their

operation (all of which belong to God's sovereignty), he has learned in recent years how to harness heat from the sun and even to travel to the moon and investigate the surface of nearby planets through visiting spacecraft. And this all may be but the beginnings of much greater accomplishments that man may yet achieve. Truly God has crowned man with glory and honor.

But let us go back to the more earthly sphere of man's subdominion or viceregency. First, there is the sphere of the inorganic world: the earth itself with its many treasures that God has placed within it. Genesis 2 refers to a river flowing out of the garden of Eden and becoming four rivers. Mention is made of gold, bdellium ("aromatic resin" NIV), and onyx in a nearby region. Thus the earth—with its rivers, riches of gold, aromatic resins, and precious stones—is placed here for man's use, discovery, and enjoyment. Second, there is the sphere of the organic world of vegetation, plants, and trees (Gen. 1:11). In Eden "the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food" (Gen. 2:9). Further, man has the responsibility to "dress" and "keep" (2:15 KJV) the beautiful garden he has been placed in. It is significant to note that although the animals are a higher order in creation than vegetation, plants, and trees, and that although the latter has also been given to the animals for food,[14] nonetheless man alone has dominion over, and stewardship for, the world of organic nature. Both man and animal depend on earthly vegetation to live and are therefore superior to it, but no animal dresses and keeps a garden, or plants and cultivates the earth. Only man, made in the image of God, has this ability and responsibility. The whole area of ecology, it should be added, is therefore a God-given concern for man. Men and women are stewards of the world of nature that God has placed around them and under them. Third, there is the sphere of the animal world over which man is given dominion. In Genesis 2 we read how God brought to the man various animals that He had made so that man could name them. "Now the LORD God had formed[15] out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name" (Gen. 2:19 NIV). The very naming of the animals was an exercise of authority (even as a parent demonstrates authority over his child by naming him) and expressed man's dominion over the animal world. Hence, man could use the animals that were subject to him. He could train and domesticate them and even offer them in sacrifice (e.g., Gen. 4:4: Abel's offering from his flock). Of course, they are no more to be abused than is the world of plant life. Indeed, they are to be protected and preserved (e.g., Gen. 6:19–20: the animals taken on the ark). But that the animals are under man is unmistakably apparent.

By “man,”[16] let me emphasize, is meant “man and woman.” And together they are to share dominion over all God has made. We quote again the words, “Let us make *man* in our image, after our likeness; and let *them* have dominion… .” The word “them” is specified in the next verse as “male and female”: “So God created man in his own image … male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:26–27). Hence, even though the woman was not yet on the scene when the man was first placed in Eden, or when the animals were brought to the man for naming (2:21ff. indicates that the woman was made after the naming of the animals), she shares with the man dominion over all the world—inorganic and organic, plant and animal. Together, under God, they are made vice-regents of creation.

It needs to be added that the man did not originally have dominion over the woman. The fact that she was to be a “helper”[17] for the man (Gen. 2:18) and that she was “taken from the man” (2:22), hence auxiliary to him and under his care, did not mean that she was under his rule and dominion. Indeed, the man’s ruling over the woman was a condition resulting from her sin and God’s judgment: “He shall rule over you” (3:16). However, even in this condition resulting from the fall,[18] man and woman still have dominion over the rest of the world.

2. Man Is to Reflect God’s Being

One of the most significant features of man’s creation in the image of God is that he is created in duality. Let us hear again the words of Genesis 1:26–27: “Then God said, ‘Let us make *man* in our image, after our likeness; and let *them* have dominion…. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created *him;* male and female he created *them*.” Man is man and woman; man is male and female.[19] In Genesis 2 this creation of man in duality occurs not at once, but in sequence. God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helper fit for him.”[20] After a time, when none of the animals proves suitable, a woman is fashioned from a part of the man’s side.[21] Thereafter, the man declared: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Gen. 2:23).[22] As in Genesis 1, man is man and woman.

Now all of this on the creaturely level is the reflection of God’s own being. God, who exists in plurality (“Let *us* make man”), does not will that man should exist in singularity: He created man as male and female. God, who is not alone, for in Himself He is the fellowship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, does not

intend that man should be alone ("It is not good that man should be alone"). So He made a woman to share the man's life. Since she is "bone" of his "bone" and "flesh" of his "flesh," the man cannot truly exist without her.

The creation of man and woman in this ontological relationship is thus a creaturely repetition of the being of God, whose inner life is one of relationship and mutuality.[23] Thus it is not man alone that is made in the image of God, but man *and* woman. There is both unity (God is God, and man is man) and differentiation (God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and man is man and woman). Man, the male, in one sense is the image of God,[24] reflecting His dominion and authority, but in another the image is incomplete without the woman.

The fact that God created man as man and woman means that only in the differentiation and functioning of the two is God fully imaged on earth. Maleness and femaleness in their distinctiveness, with all that it means to be man and woman, is the divine reflection. Any blurring of the difference between man and woman—biological, psychological, social, even spiritual—is a blurring of the divine image.[25] Man and woman are made to complement each other, and neither is complete without the other. In mutuality and reciprocity they reflect the image of God.

This mutuality and reciprocity are all the more vividly set forth in the coming together of man and woman in marriage. In Genesis 2, just following the man's statement about the woman whom God had made (v. 23), the Scripture adds: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (v. 24). A man, cleaving to (or "united to" NIV, NEB) his wife in marriage, is one with her, yet they are distinct and separate persons. This is the closest possible reflection of the unity of three distinct and separate persons in one Godhead.

The creation of man in the duality of man and woman, we note next, is the paradigm of relationship for human life in general. Man's humanity consists not only of his creativity, his reason, his freedom (as important as all of these are), but also and basically of his relationship to others. Humanity is "fellow humanity"; it means to be related to every other person as an "I" to a "Thou."[26] This signifies that man is only truly man as man and woman, or more broadly, as man with his fellow-man. "Existence-in-community is part of true humanity. Man cannot realize his nature without the other."[27]

It follows from this that man's relationship to his fellow-man is sacred, for it images the triune God. Man is his "brother's keeper"! In Genesis 4 there is the tragic story of Cain murdering his brother Abel, and afterward asking, "Am I my

brother's keeper?" (v. 9). Murder is a terrible act because it destroys the human relationship that images the divine. Accordingly, as God said later to Noah, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image" (Gen. 9:6). One who has destroyed another has destroyed the image of God—not merely another's life—and must therefore himself be destroyed. The relationship to one's brother, one's fellow-man, is wholly sacred; for it is the image and reflection of God.

It is interesting to turn to the New Testament and observe how it is said there that Jesus Christ is the image of God. "He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation" (Col. 1:15). This, of course, signifies that Christ is the reflection of God on earth and his exact representation.[28] But we must also note that Christ is "the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1:18). Since the head cannot be separated from the body, *Christ with the church is the full reflection of God.* This is said in different words in Ephesians 1:23, where Christ's body, the church, is described as "the fulness [Gk. *pleroma]* of him who fills all in all." Thus it is in the beautiful relationship of Christ with His people that God is imaged forth in fulness. There is a mutuality and reciprocity between Christ and His church, a giving and receiving, a sharing that is the fulfillment of all that the Old Testament has to say about the image of God. Also, strikingly, it is the love of Christ for the church that now becomes the archetype for the husband and wife relationship:[29] "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25). Thus the marital relationship, so dramatically imaging the triune God, is caught up and given further impetus in the still higher relationship of Christ to the church. Herein is the climactic, and now foundational, imaging of the divine reality.

Finally, although man is created in duality—man and woman, husband and wife, man and his fellow-man—it is important to recognize that there is also a *third partner* in all of these relationships; namely, God Himself. It is apparent that man's humanity is not only "fellow-humanity," but it is also "God-related" humanity. At every point in the narrative of Genesis 2, man is aware of God's constant presence and concern: The LORD God takes the man and puts him in the garden; the LORD God commands the man concerning what he may do and not do; the LORD God brings the animals to the man for naming; the LORD God takes the woman from man's side and brings her to him; and (Gen. 3) the LORD God walks in the garden in the cool of day to have fellowship with man. There is actually a relationship to God that is even prior to man's relationship with woman, for she was not made until after God placed man in the garden, and gave him responsibility for its cultivation, commanding him concerning his actions. It,

of course, continues after that for both man and woman. But the primacy of all relationship is with God: man stands first before God and second beside his neighbor.

Thus in a real sense there are three parties in mutual and binding relationship: God, man, and fellow-man. Man is not truly man unless he is open to both God and his neighbor in a continuing relationship of receiving and giving, obeying and blessing. As man rejoices both in God and in the one set beside him, he fulfills his true humanity.

Thus does man most fully image God, for God Himself is the living unity of rich and mutual relationship. Man under God and beside his neighbor: it is this triune relationship that is the ultimate reflection of the triune God. This is man—made in the image and after the likeness of God.

3. Man Is to Reflect God's Character

God wills to have on earth a reflection of His own character. God, who is a God of holiness, love, and truth, desires to have this character reflected in man. Therein does man image most fully the God who has created him.

The foundational fact about the character of God is His holiness and righteousness.[30] Thus when He created man according to His image and likeness, man was made originally holy and righteous. This is apparent from the words of the New Testament where Paul says, "Be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:23–24). To be created "after the likeness of God"[31] is to be created in true righteousness and holiness. Hence, man was originally made like God in holiness and righteousness of life.[32]

Now this fact about man is not stated as such in Genesis 2. However, in light of the fall of man in Genesis 3, it is apparent that he moved from a higher state to a lower one. This retrogression was basically from a state of holiness and righteousness to one of unholiness and unrighteousness. Therefore man, as he came from the hand of God, was righteous and holy.

This does not mean that man originally stood in a perfected holiness and righteousness, for he had not yet been tested. Nor was it the holiness of the saints that comes from the Holy Spirit in the Christian life. Still it was a positive quality reflecting the holiness and righteousness of God.[33]

A further confirmation that man's being was one of righteousness is cognizable from the words of Paul about "the law … written on their hearts"

(Rom. 2:15). The Gentiles, who do not have the law given through Moses, nonetheless have an interior law, a kind of righteous code to which "their conscience also bears witness." This righteous code, therefore, is written on every person's heart and has been so from the beginning of creation. Man as a human being, whether the first man or the thousandth or the millionth, has a God-given, innate sense of right and wrong (however much that sense may be blurred and distorted by sin). This bears witness to the fact that essential human nature is constituted in holiness and righteousness.

God is also a God of love, and therefore He made man in His image to reflect that love. In both Genesis 1 and 2 God's love and goodness[34] are constantly shown forth. As we have noted, the word "good" appears over and over again in Genesis 1. Six times God declared what He had made to be "good"; and when all was finished, "behold it was very good" (v. 31). In all of this He was preparing the way for man.[35] Genesis 2 continues the account of God's love and goodness wherein "out of the ground [in Eden] the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food" (v. 9). God also shows His goodness by giving man "a helper" in the woman. Since God is good and loving, man created in His image is to show forth the same.

That man created in God's image is to reflect the love of God is demonstrated vividly in Jesus Christ, who is "the express image of his person" (Heb. 1:3 KJV). Christ is "the last Adam" and "the second man" (1 Cor. 15:45, 47) and thus in His whole life shows forth the exact picture of man in his originally created state. Moreover, there is nothing that so clearly denotes Christ as love and goodness. Hence in the love of Christ, demonstrated over and over again for all people, the love of God is fully made manifest. Such love, expressly imaging God the Father, was the love in which man was originally made. God made man to love Him, to love his wife, to love his neighbor, and to love all people. Thus truly is man the image and likeness of God.

We have noted before that humanity is fellow-humanity. This means that to be man is to exist in relationship, and thus to be responsible for and to the other person. At the heart of all responsibility is love. Thus when man truly loves, he reflects the central aspect of God's character; for God is love. Hence, a person is to be measured not so much by creative genius and intellectual accomplishments but by the degree to which he or she embodies the love of God, "for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7).

God is also the God of truth.[36] Accordingly, man created in His image and likeness is made to walk the way of truth. We may observe this by looking first at the New Testament where Paul speaks about truth: "Do not lie to one

another," and then adds, "seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" (Col. 3:9–10). To be "renewed in knowledge" is to be renewed in truth, in which there can be no lying, no untruth. Man walking in God's truth, God's word, is man imaging God.

Returning to Genesis 2, we behold God declaring His truth to man in the garden of Eden, saying, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (vv. 16–17). This is a simple, unmistakably straightforward statement made by the God of truth, who does not lie. It is verily the word of God and therefore absolutely true.

Man, made in God's image, is called thereby to walk in that truth. If he does, he images His creator; if he does not, the image is marred and defaced. To walk in God's truth is not to question God's word or command,[37] but to walk in the full integrity of what God has declared. We can believe that the first man before the fall thus walked in God's truth.[38]

II. MAN IS THAT ENTITY INBREATHED BY THE LORD GOD

According to Genesis 2:7, “the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” Here is an additional perspective on man. Not only is he the entity uniquely created in the image of God but also his living being is the result of the inbreathing of the LORD God.[39]

We behold in this Genesis 2 narrative how man is *constituted.* Here we move past the consideration of man’s place and function (as previously discussed) to a reflection on the unique manner in which he was made.

A. Dust From the Ground

Man was, first of all, formed from the earth. In this sense the basic material of his body is no different from that of anything else in the earth. Chemical analysis has demonstrated that the particles of which earth is composed (nitrogen, calcium, oxygen, etc.) are the basic elements of the human body. Even rocks, despite outward appearance, are composed of the same elements as human flesh. Animals are likewise formed from the earth: "Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air" (Gen. 2:19 NIV). Thus, in this respect there is nothing unique about man: he shares the same elemental composition with God's other earthly creations.

There is no suggestion here, however, that man was made out of an animal or has an animal ancestry. The animals, to be sure, preceded man, and like them man was formed out of the ground, but there is no suggested kinship. Doubtless, God made man like the animals (an obvious biological fact), especially the higher animals that most closely resemble him, but his body was separately formed.[40] It was made, like the animals, from the dust of the ground.[41]

That man is "dust," taken from the earth, is affirmed many times in the Scriptures. In the next chapter of Genesis after man had sinned, God stated that the result would be toilsome labor "till you return to the ground." Then He added, "For out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (3:19). Abraham, boldly speaking to the LORD, confessed in humility that he was "but dust and ashes" (Gen. 18:27). Job cried to God, "Remember that thou hast made me of clay; and wilt thou turn me to dust again?" (Job 10:9). The psalmist speaks of how the LORD "pities his children … For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust" (103:13–14). And in the New Testament Paul takes us back to the beginning in saying, "The first man was from the earth, a man of dust" and refers to all men as "those who are of the dust" (1 Cor. 15:47–48). It is also significant to note that the very word "man" in Hebrew, '*adam*,[42] may be derived from the word for ground, ʾēreṣ.[43] Thus man is very much a creature of the dust.[44]

We need then, first of all, to stress that man is material: he *is* a body. Thus it is not so much that he has a body but that—whatever else may need to be said—he is a corporeal being. This is the whole of man viewed under his primary aspect. The body is not simply a temporary integument or shell for the soul[45] but is a

constitutive element of human existence. Nor by any means is the body as such evil,[46] as if it were the cause of all sinful desires and acts.[47] On the contrary, when God had finished the making of all things, including the universe and the bodies of animals and man, He saw that it was all "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Indeed, since God Himself formed the body—and, we can believe, with loving concern—it has a very important place in the purpose of God.

This needs further emphasis: the body is good and important. In many ways the body images its Maker, not, of course, in terms of materiality, but in its proportion, symmetry, and beauty—even in terms of its marvelous functionality. Moreover, the Son of God took upon Himself a body—a real one.[48] The bodies of believers, furthermore, have been honored by being joined to Christ; additionally, the Holy Spirit has come to dwell in their bodies. Thus Paul wrote, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? … Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you?" (1 Cor. 6:15, 19). Then he added, "So glorify God in your body" (v. 20). Finally, God's intention is not that the body cease its existence after this life, but that, in due course, it be resurrected as a "spiritual body" (15:44). It may have begun only as "dust," but, transformed, it will continue forever.

A further word relates to glorifying God in the body. Giving a body to indolence, to selfish appetites, to gluttony, and to immorality[49] is a grave sin against God. Moreover, to say or think that it does not matter whether the body is cared for properly, given adequate nourishment, and kept in healthy condition —that the soul or spirit is what "really" matters—seriously dishonors the God who made the body, the Christ who took it upon Himself, and the Holy Spirit who tabernacles within. *Glorify* God in your *bodyl*

B. The Breath of Life

Man, secondly, contains within himself the breath of life. In this sense man is no different from the entire animal world. According to Genesis 1:30, God said, "And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." Man shares with beast, bird, and creeping things the breath of life.

Now this should by no means be viewed as of little significance. As we have earlier noted, God took another creative step (after the creation of the heavens and the earth) when He created the living creatures (Gen. 1:21), and they thereby received the miracle of conscious life. This came about, as we are now recognizing, by His granting them "the breath of life." Breathing, which belongs to both animal and man, is so commonplace that it scarcely needs comment. Yet it is the very mechanism whereby life is maintained. Breathing marks the commencement and the continuance of life. When one "breathes his last," physical life is done. The breath of life, which cannot be seen, measured, or really well understood, is the gift of God for the actuality of conscious existence.

Until man received the breath of life, he was quite literally a dead thing. No matter how well molded or formed by God, he was still nothing but dust—an inanimate, lifeless entity. With the appearance of breath man became a living being.

But we cannot proceed at this juncture to talk about man as a living being, because something quite important has not yet been said. And this relates to what is basic to man who has the breath of life: *his very breath is due to a special act of inbreathing by God.* "God … breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Gen. 2:7). In this, man is unique; of no lesser creature than man is this said. Both man and animal have the breath of life, but only man has his breath infused directly from the inbreathing of God.

This means, for one thing, that man is created by God in a unique and intimate relationship to Him. Thus the breath that God breathes into man's nostrils is more than physical breath (though it is that too). It is also spiritual breath because God is spirit. The words "breath" and "spirit" are interchangeable terms.[50] Job speaks of the spirit of God being in his nostrils: "as long as my breath[51] is in me, and the spirit[52] of God is in my nostrils" (Job 27:3). Thus man has in him the breath of life, which, though in one sense physical and thus the

same as all the animal world, is also spiritual. God has breathed into man a spirit that totally transcends anything hitherto in all creation—a spirit that has a unique relationship with the living God.[53]

We must be careful to understand, however, that the "spirit-breath" in man is not God Himself. Man does not have a deposit of the divine Spirit, else he were partly divine. No, "the spirit of God" (about which Job speaks) is the spirit *from* God, but so closely related to God that it comes from His own "breathing" and in that sense is the "spirit of God." Man's spirit accordingly is inbreathed by God—by His Spirit—and is intimately related to, but by no means identical with, the Spirit of God.

Now all of this points to the important truth that man's spirit is peculiarly the place of dealings with God. On the one hand, God makes use of the human spirit to probe man deeply. "The spirit[54] of man is the lamp of the LORD, searching all his innermost parts" (Prov. 20:27). Again, the spirit of man may prove faithless to God; the psalmist speaks of "a generation whose … spirit was not faithful to God" (78:8).[55] Again, the spirit may earnestly seek after the Lord: "My spirit within me earnestly seeks thee" (Isa. 26:9).[56] The spirit in the Gospel of John is particularly related to worship: "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth" (4:24). The spirit of the Christian in whom the Holy Spirit dwells is sensitive to that Spirit: "When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:15–16). The Spirit of God thus communicates with the human spirit. Finally, it is the spirit through which praying in "tongues" occurs: "If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays …" (1 Cor. 14:14). Through such praying one "utters mysteries in the Spirit" (v. 2). From this wide range of biblical evidence, confirmed in many a Christian's experience, the spirit of man is particularly the vehicle of divine-human communication.[57]

It should be added that a failure to understand man as spirit leads to a misunderstanding of his relationship to God. It unfortunately becomes either too intellectual, too emotional, or too volitional.[58] There are, to be sure, thoughts about God, feelings in relation to Him, and proper acts of will; but it is only on the profounder level of spirit that genuine communication and relationship are established. Such communication is suprarational, supraemotional, supra volitional. It is the base of all of these but is not simply to be identified with any one of them. Spirit transcends them all.

It is obvious that what has been said here about the transcendence of spirit in man can relate back to what was earlier said about man's having dominion over the world. Man, made in God's image and given this dominion, is enabled to

fulfill that dominion through the spirit. This makes man's conscious life transcendent to all else that God has brought into being. Man is God's vice-regent by virtue of the kind of life that God has planted within him. He can exercise authority over the animals, he can rule over the earth, he can build cities, he can invent musical instruments and forge tools of bronze and iron,[59] he can build towers into the heavens,[60] and he can explore the universe. This is man whose great dominion has been made possible by the inbreathing of the Spirit of God into some dust of the earth! This is man—the transcendent living being.

The spirit, accordingly, is the very *essence* of human nature. Not only does the spirit transcend all other aspects of human existence, but these aspects are all grounded in it. The spirit is the quintessential self-that which has been inbreathed by God—and though it does not in this world stand in isolation from the body or the various other functions of the living person, the spirit is the base and center of them all. The spirit operates *through* the mind, the will, and the emotions but is to be identified with none of them. Spirit may even be called "the principle of the soul." The spirit in some ways is the most elusive of all aspects of human existence. It is the center of man that, being grounded in the reality of God, is the ground of all else in human nature.

It follows that the human spirit is *immortal.* Since it is inbreathed by God, it is imperishable. The body, to be sure, returns to dust at death, but the spirit cannot die. Death is the absence of spirit. Hence at the death of the body, the spirit is "given up" to God. Ecclesiastes speaks of how at the end of life "the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it" (12:7). We recall also that at His death Jesus cried out from the cross: "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:46). The spirit cannot die: it comes from the breath of God, and is sustained by Him both now and forever.

C. A Living Being

Man, lastly, is a living being. He, who is the union of "the breath of life" and "the dust of the earth," of spirit and of body, is a "living being" or "living soul" (Gen. 2:7).[61] The same expression is used for the animals.[62] Both people and animals are living beings or living souls. Both are constituted of "dust" (or "ground") and the "breath of life," and thereby become "living beings." However, the great difference is that man is a living being of a much higher—even qualitatively higher—order than animals. For man is uniquely the combination of breath (spirit) from God and dust (body) from the ground. So is he a living being.[63]

As we begin to reflect on man as a "living being" or "soul," we are not to understand this as a third part of man but as the resulting expression of spirit functioning through body. It might be said that spirit is the principle of man as soul. Soul (or life) is grounded in spirit and so is inseparable from spirit, but it is not a third part.[64] It is the *whole of life* through which the spirit of man expresses itself.

It is to be noted that there are instances in the Scriptures where soul and spirit are used quite similarly or in close connection. For example, both spirit and soul can be spoken of as disturbed: "his spirit was troubled" (Gen. 41:8), the "soul is cast down …" (Ps. 42:6). Also compare "Now is my soul troubled" (John 12:27) with "he was troubled in spirit" (John 13:21).[65] In the *Magnificat* Mary cries out, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46–47). In all these cases, which surge with deep emotions, a close approximation occurs. Hence it would be unwise to seek too neat a division. That there is a difference, though not readily apparent, is to be seen, for example, in the words of Hebrews 4:12—"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit." Division is possible; for even if they are not different substances, they do signify profoundly different dimensions of human nature, because the spirit is that in which the soul is grounded. Thus, while spirit and soul may be used to express much the same thing, there is a difference that the Word of God can pierce through.[66]

Now we may look more closely at man as a living being or living soul, which relates directly to *conscious life.* Man shares consciousness with the animals,

which are also living beings or living souls. However, as noted, there is a qualitative difference between man and animal. The specific difference is that man's conscious life includes the wide range of his intellectual, emotional, and volitional life. This does not mean that animals, especially the most highly developed ones, have none of this. However, with man there is such a great difference in these areas that quantitative measurement does not suffice: there is a qualitative otherness. With the mind man rises into the realm of concepts, ideas, and imagination and can even reflect upon himself in his rational self-transcendence; with the emotions man can rise to the supersensible realm and may rejoice in the good, the true, and the beautiful; with the will man can put into practice complex energies of self-determination and move beyond the confines of instinct and environment. Man as living soul, by virtue of being grounded in spirit, is self-transcending in every area of his conscious life.

The "soul," then, is *the kind of life* man has. Soul represents the human act of living in its various intellectual, emotional, and volitional dimensions. Soul is that which proceeds from the depths of the spirit as it animates the body.

The soul obviously is not preexistent[67] since it comes into existence through the conjunction of spirit and body. So far as postexistence—existence beyond physical death—is concerned, it is the spirit and not the soul that is said to go immediately "upward" (as we have noted). In the case of the believer, the spirit is present with God at the moment following death and is made perfect.[68] However, the soul may also be described as present with the Lord,[69] for it is grounded in and lives out of the spirit. Thus because of its spiritual dimensions it too may be said to be immortal. Animals, while having souls, do not have spirits sustained by the breath of God and thus do not continue beyond death. Man is unique again in that he is sustained by God. Although his body does return to dust, his spirit/soul continues.[70] Such is man's high stature—as inbreathed by the Spirit of the living God.

III. MAN IS THAT ENTITY MADE TO BE FREE

Genesis 2:16 gives a further perspective on man: “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.’” Not only is man uniquely created in the image of God and inbreathed by the LORD God, but he is also *made in freedom.*

A. A Positive Freedom

Man in his original situation was granted a freedom to have fellowship with God, to work gladly and productively, to enjoy the good things God had made, and even to partake of "the tree of life." We may observe these in turn.

Man was created free for fellowship with God. As we have noted, man is man and woman, man with his neighbor, man in relationship with his fellow-man. But ultimately what counts the most, for it is that on which all else depends, is man in relationship to God. By "walking in the garden in the cool of the day" and "calling" to man (Gen. 3:8–9),[71] thus giving him the freedom to respond, God gave man the highest possible freedom.

The freedom for fellowship with God is the most precious of all freedoms. Originally, there was nothing that stood in the way of this fellowship: no evil, no sin, no estrangement. The beginning was as the end some day will be in the new heaven and the new earth: "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them" (Rev. 21:3). Man *able* to walk with God, to talk with Him, to commune with the God of the whole universe, and all this in intimate and perfect communion: this is the glorious picture. Such freedom, such ability—there can be nothing higher.

Man was created free to work gladly and productively. He was placed in the garden to dress it, to keep it, to cultivate it. There was no hindrance to this free and glad expression. There were neither thorns nor thistles, nor was the ground hardened so that man's work should become toil and bondage.[72] Nor was there blight or decay. Once again, the beginning in Eden was as the end will be in the new world when "creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21).[73] Man was free to enjoy his work without obstacle or hindrance of any kind.

All this the man could do, and he could do so with the woman as his helper. Her work would be alongside his. But as "the mother of ajl living" (Gen. 3:20), her chief joy would lie in the bringing forth and rearing of children. That was to be her special work (even as the man's was to cultivate the earth) from the moment of giving birth to a child, but originally there was to have been no agony in it.[74] To "be fruitful and multiply" (1:28) was a commission laid on man and woman together, and freely and joyously they would share this calling.

Man was also created free to enjoy the beautiful world God had made. For "the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to sight and good for food" (Gen. 2:9), and then He said to the man: "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden" (2:16). All was there for the man to delight in—fruitbearing trees; the river flowing out of Eden (2:10); and nearby precious stones, metals, and ointments (2:11–12).[75] Man was free to enjoy all the good things of creation. The animals were there also, not wild and untamed, but so close to the man that they could be brought to him for naming. They were his companions; he had no fear of them nor they of one another. Man was free to enjoy the good and beautiful world that God had made.

Moreover, and climactically, there was also "the tree of life" that man could partake of. For "the LORD God made to grow … the tree of life also in the midst of the garden" (Gen. 2:9).[76] To eat of this tree would be to "live for ever" (3:22); hence it could be called "the tree of immortality." Incidentally, this shows that man was not made immortal[77] but "immortable" by partaking of this lifebearing tree. Man was made free even to partake of immortality by eating its fruit. Since it was placed "in the midst" of Eden and not in some hidden or far-away spot, God clearly intended that man should refresh himself by it and live forever on the good earth that He had made.

Such was the freedom of man in the beginning. It was essentially a positive freedom—for fellowship with God, for glad and productive work, for partaking of the good things of creation. There was no obstacle in the way of man's sharing in all of this.

What is especially marvelous is that man originally was free from compulsion, unhindered by the dominion of sin, and therefore able to do all that he had been created to do. There was a vital communion with God, a harmonious unity with all creation, a beautiful relationship between man and woman. This, we may add, is the only kind of freedom that is true freedom, namely, to be able to do all things without barrier or hindrance. However, it is a freedom man has not fully known since Eden. As the apostle Paul comments, "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Rom. 7:19). In Christ, we may praise God that "the Spirit of life" has set us "free from the law of sin and death" (8:2). But even this freedom will not be perfected until the end when all things are fully complete.

True freedom is the freedom to function according to God's intention; it is for man to act in harmony with his own created being. It is therefore a "structured" or "oriented" freedom.[78] God did not make man with a freedom that is neutral or indifferent, but with a freedom that is pointed toward genuine self-fulfillment.

Moreover, this freedom includes the ability to do that for which man the creature is made: *the ability to do God's will.* Thus man in his created freedom was able not to sin;[79] he was free to fulfill his true God-given destiny.

A final note on this point: this is the only kind of freedom that the Christian ultimately is concerned with. It is to be free from compulsion, unhindered by sin's dominion, and able to do God's will. All other "freedom" is still bondage, no matter what the world may say. Freedom, according to many people who are outside the faith, is viewed as the liberty to do "one's own thing," to act according to one's own pleasure. Indeed, by a strange and tragic quirk, to do as God pleases is often viewed as slavery, the surrender of freedom. According to some, God must be denied so that man may be free.[80] Such a view is totally foreign to Christian faith, which sees such "freedom from God" as bondage—bondage to the self with the whims and caprice of one's own will. True freedom is liberation from this bondage, which parades as freedom, and finding genuine fulfillment in God's will, God's Word,[81] God's truth. It is the genuine freedom for which Christ has set us free![82]

B. A Freedom of Decision

Man in his original situation was granted the freedom to decide in relation to God's will. Although his freedom was oriented toward God, there was no compulsion. Man could move in another direction. He had to decide for God and His will. He could disobey God and fracture his own created being by doing what God forbade, namely, eating of "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:9). On the other hand, he could spurn this tree and know only the good by his continuing obedience.

This shows that freedom cannot be a coerced thing, else there is no substance to it. Even though man is oriented toward God, and his God-given freedom enables him to have fellowship with God and to do His will, man is not compelled by his orientation. For although he has that high freedom to obey God's will, disobedience, however foreign to genuine freedom, is not ruled out. *As surely as freedom is a fact, it must contain within itself a genuine decision.* If there is no option but to do God's will, freedom is a word only.

We must, however, quickly emphasize that man was not so created in freedom that he had equal options before him: to obey or disobey. The "tree of life," of which man might freely eat in his obedience to God, was "in the midst of the garden." The "tree of the knowledge of good and evil," which was forbidden to man was somewhere present, but it is not said to have been "in the midst."[83] It was eccentric (i.e., out of the center), and thus not an equal option. Hence, there were not before man two trees equally positioned, one on the right and one on the left. No, the tree of life was central. Thus the focus of man's nature was oriented toward communion with God. If he would choose to disobey God by eating of the eccentric tree, he would turn from his true end. Man was called to obedience and not to disobedience. If he would choose the latter, he would become thereby as off-centered (as "ec-centric") as the tree itself. He would be out of God's will, and the consequence finally would be the destruction of freedom itself. To decide for God, accordingly, is to choose life rather than death.[84]

The freedom of decision is essential to man, the creature of God. And as surely as he passes by that which is not central but peripheral and decides for God, his freedom is thereby strengthened. Thus it is not that God put man on trial or that man had to pass a test to incur God's favor, but that God desired from man free, spontaneous obedience.[85] God did not make man to be an

automaton who of necessity does His will, but rather granted to him the freedom to confirm what God had commanded. Thereby does freedom take on character.

We can now recognize that although man has been made like his Creator in righteousness and holiness, in goodness and truth, he must confirm these with a free decision for God. In this way, and this way only, genuine character comes about. Character is the result of decision for the good, the true, the right. If there is no opportunity for contrary decision, as destructive as it is, there can be no establishment of character. By saying no to a deviant possibility, man is confirmed in the truth.

One additional matter needs to be noted, namely, that it was God's original intention that man should be aware only of the good. Everything was good that God had made, even "very good" (Gen. 1:31). This included "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." The reason man was forbidden to eat of that tree was not that the tree itself was evil or the fruit poisonous, but that by doing what God forbade, man would know the realm of evil. God intended rather that man —by choosing solely to obey, to walk only in His will, to live in perfect communion with Himself, his neighbor, and all creation—would know nothing but goodness and truth. He would not even be aware, as was God, that there was another realm, a realm of evil.[86] Man would live wholly in the realm of light, truth, and goodness both for now and, by partaking of the tree of life, for ever.

Some day the end will be like the beginning. Partaking of the "tree of life" in the city of God (Rev. 22:2), man will totally focus on God Himself.

"They need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light" (v. 5). This is all that we will see or know or want to know. "Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and every one who loves and practices falsehood" (v. 15). But those "outside" will not be seen or known in their final condition of wickedness and hopelessness. For we will behold only the LORD God—and in His light see light alone—throughout all eternity.

[1]"The views were also stated rather sharply, so that not everyone, for example, with a sociological or philosophical orientation would altogether fit the picture given. Still I would hold that these views, as outlined, generally represent prevailing perspectives.

[2]As we observed in chapter 5, "Creation," pages 106-7.

[3]In a meeting of the Council for the Advancement of Science, the director of the American Museum of Natural History, Dr. Niles Eldredge, stated

that fossil study shows no evidence of transitional forms anywhere in evolution; thus the "gradualist view of evolution" is increasingly questionable. So reports the Los Angeles Times science writer (Nov. 19, 1978, pt. 1, p. 24), George Alexander. He begins the story saying, "the search for 'missing links' between living creatures, such as humans and apes, is probably fruitless … because such creatures probably never existed." This is a quite remarkable shift in viewpoint! If it comes to command the field, this will be another case of convergence between the findings of science and the Bible.

[4]See the discussion on "day" in chapter 5, pages 108-12, "Creation," where the thesis that a day was a period of time, however long or short, in which God accomplished a certain work was set forth.

[5]"Making" (unlike "creating") contains the idea of "fashioning" or "molding" preexistent materials.

[6]The Hebrew word min (translated "kind") is not specific but points to the order or phylum to which the animal belongs. There is a distinctiveness and fixity of animals within the broad order in which they were made. As Henry Morris has put it: "There is a tremendous amount of variation potential within each kind, facilitating the generation of distinct individuals and even of many varieties within the kinds, but nevertheless precluding the evolution of new kinds. A great deal of 'horizontal' variation is possible, but no 'vertical' changes" (The Genesis Record, 63).

[7]For example, the development of the horse from a cat-sized ancestor to the present is evidenced through fossil remains. But there is no development that brings it closer to being, say, a cow. Gleason Archer writes, "Even though thousands of mutations have been closely studied, not a single clear example has been demonstrated whereby a mutation has … brought any new structure into existence (Old Testament Introduction, 190).

[8]The question is sometimes raised about the "caveman"-e.g., "Java ape man," "Peking man" "Neanderthal man," and "Cro-Magnon man." There is the problem of their assumed great antiquity as well as their relation to man created according to Genesis 1 and 2. If, for example, prehistoric Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon "man" are of the same genus as man in Genesis 1-2, were they also made "in God's image"? If so, the account in Genesis 1 of the creation of man would relate to the first man (and woman) from whom came Neanderthal, Cro-Magnon, etc. However, if the dates usually suggested (Neanderthal, 50,000 to 100,000 years ago;

Cro-Magnon, 10,000 to 35,000 years ago) are generally correct, they would seem to be much earlier than the account in Genesis (as based on a study of the genealogical tables). In that case there could be no genetic connection between these prehistoric creatures and the created man of Genesis 1-2. They would, rather, belong to the category of highly developed manlike animals prior to the breakthrough of the creation of true man. Another alternative is twofold in nature: first, it is possible that the antique dating of prehistoric man is exaggerated, and if better calculated would fall within the Genesis framework; second, it is also possible that the traditional dating of Adam (around 4000 B.c.) is far too recent. On this latter point, for example, by taking the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 10-11 as representing literal generations, the total years from Adam to the birth of Abraham is about two thousand years. But if they record only the most outstanding ancestors of Abraham, there could be a much longer span, possibly five or six thousand years reaching back to Adam. If Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon "men" are descended from Adam (possibly through Cain), they would all have been later destroyed by the Flood. Whatever the right direction that answers this whole problem, the important thing to bear in mind is that with the creation of man in Genesis 1 something totally new has come in: man created in the image and likeness of God. For a helpful discussion of the matter of prehistoric man and the biblical account see Carl F. H. Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, vol. 6, chap. 9, "The Origin and Nature of Man."

[9]See footnote 38 in chapter 5, "Creation," where mention was made of other translations: "gods," "heavenly beings," "angels."

[10]Some have assumed that since man, who images God, has a body, God must also be corporeal. Such biblical language that refers to God's face, hand, finger, etc.-it is urged-points in this direction. However, since God is spirit (John 4:24), these are to be understood as anthropomorphisms (see discussion in chapter 3, "God," p. 53). God did take upon Himself a body in the Incarnation, but the body was that of man: God is spirit.

[11]The Greek phrase is auto anypotakton, literally, "unsubjected to him."

[12]Hebrews adds, "As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him" (v. 8), referring particularly to death wherein people are "subject to lifelong bondage" (vv. 9-15). However, in man's original creation there was no death; under God he was therefore under no subjection. Man as sinner confronting death nonetheless is still in the place of exercising

dominion over all that God has made.

[13]The RSV reads: “for a little while lower than the angels” (so NASB, similarly NEB). Brachu ti can refer either to time (thus “a little while lower”) or quantity (thus “a little lower”). When compared with the use of brachu ti in John 6:7 where it is clearly quantitative, and, most of all, in the context of Psalm 8 where there is no suggestion of “a little while,” the KJV and NIV translations seem the more likely. On the matter of whether man is a little lower than God or a little lower than angels, a distinction that is not altogether clear in Psalm 8 (recall footnote 9) though Hebrews definitely speaks of angels, we may say that both are true. In the hierarchy of being, God is, of course, first, angels (as purely spiritual beings) second, and man third.

[14]“And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food” (Gen. 1:30).

[15]This translation of the NIV in the pluperfect tense-“had formed” (the Hebrew verb wayyïser shows only completed action, hence perfect and pluperfect are indistinguishable)-locates the formation of the animals at an earlier date. This accords with Genesis 1, where the animals are formed prior to man.

[16]The Hebrew word for “man,” ‘adam, refers primarily to generic man, hence, mankind.

[17]The Hebrew word is ‘ëzer. It is “frequently used in a concrete sense to designate the assistant” (TWOT, 2:661).

[18]For man and woman “in Christ,” though the woman is still subject to the man and the husband is head of the wife (1 Cor. 11:3), there can be no arbitrary rule, for “the head of every man is Christ” (same verse). The man will love her and care for her, even “as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25).

[19]The word “man” is not exclusive but inclusive (thus, e.g., “chairman” can be either male or female. There is no need to say “chairperson”).

[20]Literafly, this is “corresponding to” (as in NASB mgn.). The Hebrew hnegdo also suggests “in front of and facing him”-i.e., “equal and adequate to himself’ (see “Woman” by John Rea in WBE, 2:1817-18).

[21]“Rib” is the usual translation in Genesis 2:21-“So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs. …” The NIV has an alternate reading: “took part of the man’s side.”

(Heb. sela, is elsewhere always translated as “side” or “side chamber,” e.g., Exodus 25:12, 14; 26:20; 2 Samuel 16:13; 1 Kings 6:5; Job 18:12 NASB; Ezekiel 41:5-6.)

[22]The English language can fortunately reproduce the assonance of the Hebrew ‘ issâh, “woman” with ‘is, “man.”

[23]“God exists in relationship and fellowship. As the Father of the Son and the Son of the Father He is Himself I and Thou, confronting Himself and yet always one and same in the Holy Ghost. God created man in His own image, in correspondence with His own being and essence…. Because He is not solitary in Himself, and therefore does not will to be so ad extra [outside Himself], it is not good for man to be alone, and God created man in His own image, as male and female” (Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, 3.2.324).

[24]According to Paul, “Man … is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man” (1 Cor. 11:7).

[25]Attempts being made in our time (“unisex,” for example) to play down the differences militate against the God-given differences that make for the true fulfillment of each.

[26]This is especially Martin Buber’s term in his book I and Thou, in which he stresses that life is personal relationship. Another person is never to be treated as an “it”-a thing-but as a “thou.”

[27]Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, 64.

[28]According to Hebrews 1:3, “He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature” or is “the express image of his person” (KJV).

[29]Even as husband and wife are the archetype for all of life as relationship (see above).

[30]See chapter 3, “God,” pp. 59-63.

[31]The Greek phrase is kata theon, literally, “according to God.”

[32]Calvin writes that “what was primary in the renewing of God’s image also held the highest place in the creation itself’ (Institutes, 1.15.4, Battles trans.). Thus do we move back from the New Testament to Genesis for the fuller understanding of the image of God.

[33]It is not satisfactory to say that man was innocent, but not holy. Man, to be sure, was innocent, that is to say, free from guilt or sin. But he was also, positively, made in righteousness and holiness.

[34]Earlier we have noted that the goodness of God is an all-embracing term to express many dimensions of His love. See chapter 3 “God,” pp. 67-68.

[35]Recall the previous discussion of this in chapter 5, “Creation,” pp. 113-14.

[36]See chapter 3, “God,” pp. 68-70.

[37]As “the serpent” did in Genesis 3:1.

[38]Some words of H. Bavinck merit quoting: “He [the first man] loved truth with his whole soul. The lie, with all its calamitous consequences of error, doubt, unbelief, and uncertainty, had not yet found a place in his heart. He stood in the truth, and he saw and appreciated everything as it really was” (Our Reasonable Faith, 214).

[39]Thus the account in Genesis 2 of the forming of man is not a different account from that of Genesis 1 but actually a more intimate and more personal one.

[40]Paul writes that “not all flesh is alike, but there is one kind for men, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish” (1 Cor. 15:39). Note that Paul not only differentiates the flesh of man from that of animals but also the flesh of animals from that of birds and fish (the two preceding living creatures, in order, made by God [Gen. 1:20-22]).

[41]The question might then be asked, “Is, then, man a unique creation of God?” Does not bara9 , “to create,” exclude the use of preexistent materials? Bara9 does exclude preexistent materials, to be sure, insofar as the universe is concerned (Gen. 1:1), but thereafter in reference to the living creatures who were said to be created (Gen. 1:21) and man (Gen. 1:27), bara’ refers only to the radically new element. In the living creatures who contained the same preexisting materials as plant life, the radically new was conscious life. In man the radically new was (as noted earlier) his being made in God’s image and (as we shall shortly discuss) being inbreathed by God Himself. Indeed, man did not actually come into existence by virtue of the forming of the body. This happened only when the body was inbreathed (see below).

[42]This, of course, is also the proper name Adam. “Man” and “Adam” are interchangeable in Genesis 1 and 2. Translations vary: The KJV most frequently translates 9ädäm as “Adam” (six times, beginning with 2:19), NIV and NASB only once (in 2:20), RSV and NEB not at all.

[43]It is interesting that the Latin word for man, homo, likewise derives from “ground,” humus.

[44]Calvin suggests (in his own inimitable way) that this should be a lesson for us in humility: “And, first, it is to be observed that when he [man]

was formed out of the dust of the ground a curb was laid on his pride-nothing being more absurd than that those should glory in their excellence who not only dwell in tabernacles of clay, but are themselves in part but dust and ashes" (Institutes, 1.15.1, Beveridge trans.).

[45]In Greek thought the body was frequently viewed as "the prison house of the soul" and thus is to be delivered from it as soon as possible. Upon death of the body, the soul would at last be set free.

[46]This was a tenet of Gnosticism that Paul challenges in Colossians 2:20-23. See A. M. Renwick, "Gnosticism," ISBE, 2:486-87.

[47]In the New Testament Paul speaks strongly about the "flesh" (sarx) and its passions (e.g., Gal. 5:16-21). However, "flesh," in Paul's language here, signifies man's sinful tendencies whether of body, mind, or spirit; it is not the same as body (soma).

[48]Contrary to Docetic views that claim Christ's body was only apparently corporeal. See discussion in chapter 13, "The Incarnation."

[49]The context of Paul's words in the preceding paragraph about the body as a temple is that of the evil of prostitution: "Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!" After that he added, "Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body" (1 Cor. 6:15, 18).

[50]The word for "breath" in Genesis 2:7 is neSâmâ. Later, in 6:17, where the expression "breath of life" is again used, the word for breath is ruah. See also Zechariah 12:1, which speaks of "the Lord, who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth and formed the ruah of man within him."

[51]The Hebrew word is neSâmâ. The niv reads: "as long as I have life within me, the breath of God in my nostrils."

[52]The Hebrew word is ruah.

[53]The word for "spirit," usually ruah, is also used occasionally for animals. E.g., in Genesis 6:17 God speaks of destroying everything "in which is the ruah of life." This includes both men and animals. However, the ruah of life which animals have is not inbreathed by the Spirit of God, nor does it posit any special relationship to God. In the Book of Ecclesiastes the spirit of man is spoken of as going upward when man returns to dust, the spirit of the beast (or animal) as going downward. The writer expresses some uncertainty: "Who knows whether the spirit [ruah] of man goes upward and the spirit [ruah] of the beast goes down to the

earth?" (3:21). That this conjecture is true is confirmed by the unfolding revelation in the Bible. Hence, an animal may have a spirit, but it is much more akin to breath, and has no "upward" relationship to God.

[54]The Hebrew word in this case is *nᵉšāmâ*, usually translated "breath."

[55]The word "heart" is also found in this verse: "a generation whose heart was not steadfast." "Spirit" and "heart" here and elsewhere are often parallel terms (e.g., also see Ps. 51:10; 143:4).

[56]The "soul" is also mentioned in this verse. It begins: "My soul yearns for thee in the night." We will discuss the "soul" in the next section.

[57]Let me give a few quotations. George Hendry: "The human spirit is the organ of his [man's] encounter with God" *(The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology*, 107); Reinhold Niebuhr: "Spirit is … primarily a capacity for and affinity with the divine" *(The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 152); Karl Barth: "Man exists because he has spirit … he is grounded in, constituted, and maintained by God" *(Church Dogmatics* 3.2.344).

[58]This is one of the basic weaknesses in a dichotomous view of man, namely, that he is only body and soul, spirit being identified with soul. Since soul has basically to do with the intellectual, emotional, and volitional aspects of man, what spirit points to may be eliminated or radically subordinated.

[59]See Genesis 4:17-22 for the earliest record of some of these accomplishments of man.

[60]See Genesis 11:1-9, the story of the tower of Babel.

[61]The Hebrew expression translated "living being" (in RSV, NIV, and NASB) and "living soul" (in KJV) is *nepes hayyâ*. The word *nepes*, while referring to the totality of the being (hence, also sometimes translated as "person" or "self'), may also refer to the way a "living being" functions, namely, through conscious life or "soul."

[62]See, e.g., Genesis 1:21, 24; 2:19. The Hebrew is likewise nepes hayyâ in all of these verses, whatever the English translation.

[63]"The fact that he [man] is not just earth moulded into a body, and not just a soul, but a soul quickened and established and sustained by God in a direct and personal and special encounter of His breath with this frame of dust, is the differentiating exaltation and distinction of man" (K. Barth, Church Dogmatics, 3.1.237).

[64]This means that trichotomy, which views man as constituted of three parts, also has a serious weakness: "soul" is not a third part of man.

However, since it is not identical with body or spirit, trichotomy does point in the right direction.

[65]In these four references the Hebrew terms *nepeš* ("spirit") and *nepeš* ("soul") parallel the Greek words pneuma for "spirit" and psyche for "soul." Psyche, like *nepeš*, may often be translated simply "being" or "life."

[66]Another New Testament text that denotes a difference between spirit and soul (and also body) is 1 Thessalonians 5:23-"May your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The Word of God, namely, Jesus Christ, will at His coming be viewing man in depth and in toto; no aspect of man will escape His piercing judgment.

[67]Plato, for example, held that the soul preexisted the body and that at birth the soul selected a body to form a human life.

[68]The Book of Hebrews speaks of "the heavenly Jerusalem" where are present "the spirits of just men made perfect" (12:22-23).

[69]In the Book of Revelation John saw "under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne" (6:9). This view of souls after death is unique to Revelation. Ordinarily, the picture in the Bible is that of the continuance of the spirit.

[70]The body that returns to dust will some day become a "spiritual body" (see 1 Cor. 15:44). Then there will be the completed presence of man with God.

[71]Of course, the narrative in Genesis 3:8-9 is God's calling man to account, but this very call indicates man's special relationship to God and his original freedom to have fellowship with Him.

[72]All this we can see in retrospect from the curse imposed because of the fall of man: "Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you. … In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread …" (Gen. 3:17-19).

[73]All this belongs to the future glory: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18).

[74]Agony in childbirth came with the fall. Concerning woman God decreed: "I will make intense your pangs in childbearing. In pain shall you bear children" (Gen. 3:16 ab). Many translations suggest that the fall multiplied pain (rsv; "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing,"

similarly niv, nasb), and that woman would have known suffering regardless of sin and the fall. A better understanding, I believe, is that woman, like man, is made for work, but there was to be no toil, pain, or anguish either in man's cultivating the earth or in woman's bringing forth a child. (The same Hebrew word, 'ïssabon, is used in Gen. 3:16-17 for "pain" and "toil.") Recall our earlier discussion in chapter 6, the section on suffering.

[75]In an extraordinary lament over the king of Tyre, Ezekiel speaks of man's primeval condition: "You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, carnelian, topaz, and jasper, chrysolite, beryl and onyx, sapphire, carbuncle, and emerald" (28:13).

[76]The Book of Revelation shows that the end will be similar to the beginning in that once again there will be "the tree of life" (22:2). The scene, however, is different: before, the tree was in a garden, then it will be in a city-the city of God and the Lamb.

[77]The spirit is immortal, as we have noted; however, I refer here to man in his entirety (spirit, body, and soul), who would have gained immortality by partaking of the tree of life. (For more discussion on the tree of life, see chapter 12, "Covenant," IV. A. "The Covenant With Adam.") .

[78]George Hendry in The Westminster Confession for Today, 66.

[79]To use the traditional Latin phrase, man was created posse non peccare, "able not to sin." Sinful man is non posse non peccare, "not able not to sin." To look further (as we will note in chapter 13, "The Incarnation"), Christ was non posse peccare, "not able to sin."

[80]This is a basic theme in atheistic existentialism, running from Nietzsche to Sartre. To deny God makes man responsible for his own existence. For if there is a God with laws and commands, human freedom is thereby given up. See, for example, Sartre's "Existentialism Is a Humanism" in his Existentialism and Humanism.

[81]Jesus put it succinctly in saying, "If you continue in my word … you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32).

[82]"For freedom Christ has set us free" (Gal. 5:1).

[83]Note Genesis 2:9-"And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." The niv reads: "In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (similarly neb). The rsv

(similarly kjv and nasb) seems more accurately to reflect the Hebrew. It is true that Eve later spoke of the forbidden tree as being "in the midst of the garden" (Gen. 3:3), but this statement is better viewed, I believe, as attributable to her confusion caused by the serpent's deception. For fuller discussion, see the next chapter: "Sin."

[84]Observe how this corresponds to the words of Moses to Israel: "See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil [note the correspondence to the two trees in the garden] … therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live" (Deut. 30:15, 19).

[85]"If He did call him to fellowship and union … He had to give him freedom … not to tempt him or to test him, but to give him place for spontaneous obedience according to his creation" (K. Barth, Church Dogmatics, 3.1.266).

[86]See the next chapter, "Sin," for a discussion of this matter.

10
Sin

In coming to a consideration of the Christian doctrine of sin, we have arrived at the basic problem within human nature and society. Man the creature is also man the sinner. It is the actuality of sin that has blighted the human situation since the beginning of history. It is to this critical situation that Christian faith primarily addresses itself, for Christianity is at heart a way of salvation. Hence, we must now reflect carefully on this aspect of the human condition: the all-prevalent problem of human sinfulness.

Before proceeding further we should recognize that there are many other views of the human situation. To the question "What is man's problem?" many answers are given. For example: (1) Man basically has *no* problem. He may have a few defects here and there, but underneath it all his condition is fine. Any dark view of man or human nature is perverted and militates against a normal and natural existence. The more we believe that people are "O.K.," the better the human situation will be. (2) Man is on the way up. If his condition is not altogether good, it is because he is *not yet mature*. When one considers his animal background, his evolutionary past, it is not surprising that it takes a long time to become fully human. To be sure, there is something of the animal still in him—a kind of vestigial carry-over (like the human appendix)—but he is gradually sloughing it off. Man doubtless needs to attend to these problems, but most of all he should be encouraged to move ahead. (3) Man is not sufficiently enlightened. His problem is basically *ignorance*. He does not know enough yet about what is really good for him and society, about human relations and how to improve them, about the dangers of war and things leading to it. If he only knew more, he would also conduct himself and his affairs properly. More education, please! (4) Man's problem is basically his *suppression* of his own individuality and personal needs. He needs to become himself, unencumbered by authority patterns, ancient taboos, repressive guilt. When this happens, human nature comes to full flower. (5) The only real problem is that of a *negative* attitude about life. If a person will think affirmatively, feel positive about everything, and act with vigor and enthusiasm, he will soon overcome any problem that has bedeviled him. The less said about "sin" the better; rather let us be on our way

forward and upward!

One further view is sometimes expressed, namely, that the prevailing human condition is one of estrangement and alienation. Beneath any surface problems there is a deep sense of dislocation and unease—in relation to the surrounding world, to other people, even to oneself. Often this is manifested as an undercurrent of anxiety. This may eventuate in moods of pessimism, even hopelessness and despair. For such an "existential"[1] view of the human situation, it seems apparent that none of the preceding answers provides in-depth help.

This brings us to the Christian perspective on the human situation—a perspective that sees the problem as a serious one. Neither increased education, nor attainment of maturity, nor a more affirmative attitude, nor fuller self-expression sufficiently grapples with this profound human problem. In the light of Christian faith such optimistic evaluations of the human situation avail little. The "existential" assessment (noted above) of the human situation with its dark depiction of man's estrangement, hopelessness, and anxiety more closely approximates the Christian understanding. However, Christian faith provides a more adequate perspective of the human plight[2] and, most importantly, shows the root cause to be the fact of human sinfulness. Accordingly, let us now turn to the consideration of sin.

I. DEFINITION

Sin may be defined as the personal act of turning away from God and His will. It is the transgression of God's law, yet the act is ultimately not against the law but against His person. David, after his violation of God's law,[3] cried out, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight" (Ps. 51:4). Sin is against God—against His holiness, love, and truth; it is deeply and profoundly personal. The Lord Himself, in the words of Isaiah, lamented concerning Israel: "Sons have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me" (Isa. 1:2). Herein is the heart and tragedy of sin: a personal spurning of the Lord of love.

Simultaneously and concretely, sin is the violation of God's command. It is the turning away from God's expressed will: indeed, in the spirit of "not Thy will but mine be done." Against the background of knowing God's command, it is a matter of willful transgression. Paul says of mankind in general that "though they know God's decree (that is, His commandments concerning wrong practices) … they not only do them but approve those who practice them" (Rom. 1:32). Sin thus is to act contrary to God's will either by deed or by consent.

In a definition of sin there are the aspects of both *deviation* and *rebellion.*

On the one hand, there is the failure to measure up to God's intention—a missing of the mark.[4] There is a deviation, a going astray, a turning aside from the Lord God and His will. On the other hand, there is the direct rebellion against God's purpose or command.[5] Hence, sin is an act of defiance for the purpose of pursuing one's own will and way. In summary, whether sin is deviation or rebellion, it is a personal act against Almighty God.

It is precisely this turning away from God and His will—a movement that becomes habitual (the act becomes a condition)—that has led to the human situation earlier described. The inability of man to resolve his problems through either more optimistic affirmations and efforts or more pessimistic assessments and actions is grounded in the prevailing situation of contrariness to God. Because mankind transgresses God's declared will, the resulting human situation is a hopeless one. Frustration, alienation, guilt, and anxiety are endemic, for permeating all human life is the poison of sin. Such is the universal condition.

II. ORIGIN

One of the most difficult of questions concerns the origin of sin. First of all, sin seems out of place both because of the character of God and because of the kind of world He has made. God Himself, in whom there is nothing of evil (for He is One of utter holiness, righteousness, and truth) made a world in which everything including man was good, indeed "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Man was created at the climax and apex of creation in God's own image and likeness, thus in holiness and righteousness and truth.[6] What possible place could there be in this good creation for the slightest trace of sin or evil? Second, even after a consideration of the biblical picture of the origin of sin (to be discussed soon), mystery about it doubtless will still remain. Paul speaks of "the mystery of iniquity"[7] (2 Thess. 2:7 KJV) or sin. This surely applies to its origin as well as to its final appearance.[8] Sin inevitably points to the irrational and is the utter antithesis of order and sense. No matter how thoroughly it is described or analyzed, it cannot be fitted into any totally coherent scheme. Third, the revelation in Scripture is sparse in detail. There is some reference to origin (as we will discuss), but the concern of the biblical record is much more with the nature and effects of sin, what God has done to overcome its power, and how believers are to cope with it. Sin is a fact, indeed, *the* dark fact of the human condition. But there is hope, there is salvation, there is victory!

Although the origin of sin is a difficult question, there is still much value in seeking to deal with it. For though we are now concerned with sin in its origin —"original sin"—our reflection does not relate simply to primal history but in some sense to the continuing source of sin in every human life— "actual sin."[9] Thus what is said concerning the origin of sin's first occurrence will help us understand its continuing appearance.

As we reflect on the origin of sin, let us begin with the narration in Genesis 3. For as Paul declares, "Sin came into the world through one man …" (Rom. 5:12). Hence, it is the account of the sin of original man, who is man and woman,[10] and the first occurrence of sin that must be our focus. The critical question is, How did sin occur at the beginning of human history?

A. The Temptation by Satan

As we turn to the opening account in Genesis 3, it is apparent that the first figure in the drama of sin's origin is neither man nor God, but Satan: "Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made" (v. 1 NASB). "The serpent" is obviously not simply a beast of the field; he is said to be "more crafty than any beast." Also the next statement depicts the serpent as being able to speak: "He said… ." Although Genesis does not directly declare it, it is apparent from the overall testimony of Scripture and specifically the words in the Book of Revelation about the "ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan" (12:9), that the serpent of Genesis 3 is the disguise and mouthpiece of Satan.

The story that unfolds, leading to the entrance of sin into the world, depicts the temptation by Satan. From the opening words to the woman, "Did God say …?" (v. 1) to his open declaration that they would "be like God, knowing good and evil" (v. 5), there is subtlety, craftiness, and deception throughout.[11] The woman finally succumbed, as did her husband.

This account of the temptation by Satan may raise questions concerning both the *identity* of Satan and his *reason* for speaking through the serpent. Actually, there is little biblical information on either matter. Regarding identity, Satan is mentioned in the Old Testament in only three passages: 1 Chronicles 21:1; Job 1–2; and Zechariah 3:1-2.[12] In these he is the inciter of David to take a census, the impugner of Job's integrity, and the accuser of Joshua as unfit to be high priest. In the New Testament there are many references to Satan, or the Devil.[13] His activity continues to be that of temptation, accusation, deception, and constant attack against all that is of God. In the words of Jesus, the devil was "a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). From these words about Satan in both the Old and New Testaments, the probable reason that he speaks through the serpent is his unceasing opposition to all that is of God and his determination at the outset to pervert and destroy God's highest and noblest creation in the physical universe, namely, man.[14]

A further question concerning Satan's *origin* is raised; however, on this matter nothing is said directly. We might first observe that, according to 1 John 3:8, "the

devil has sinned[15] from the beginning." This would suggest that prior to the sin of man, the devil had already sinned, for he was the provocation of man's sinning. Satan's existence, doubtless, preceded the creation of man. However, there is no suggestion that Satan existed eternally, for he has not always sinned or forever been a sinner, but he sinned "from the beginning." This implies that before "the beginning," that is, of his own creation, there was no Satan. Hence he belongs to the created order of reality. Satan accordingly is not eternal; he is not God or in any sense divine—not even a fallen divinity—but is a creature of God, however perverse he may be or have become.[16]

Does this then mean that God, in addition to creating a "very good" world, also created an evil world, or at least one evil creature, Satan? This, of course, is impossible, since God is totally holy and righteous in all His actions. The only possible answer is that Satan is a fallen creature, albeit of a different order than that of man. That such is the case is unmistakably implied in such biblical language as "the dragon [i.e., Satan] and his angels" (Rev. 12:7). The Scriptures also affirm that there were "angels that did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling" (Jude 6). Moreover, God "did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell" (2 Peter 2:4). Satan could well have been their leader ("Satan and his angels"), although it is apparent that while now likely a denizen of the "pits of nether gloom,"[17] he emerges to carry on warfare against God's human creatures.

All of this concerning Satan's origin may raise an additional and more pertinent question concerning Satan's *sin.* If he sinned "from the beginning," what was—and continues to be—the nature of that sin? If there is an answer here, it may lead to a better understanding of his temptation of man, since Satan is likely to seek to warp creatures into his own image and likeness. Actually, there is no totally clear biblical teaching on Satan's sin; however, from what there is, the picture suggests *pride* to be at the center of it. We have already noted that the angels who fell "did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling." This implies some kind of a revolt against their God-given status. They were seemingly cast down because of a prideful rebellion in heaven, probably with Satan at its head. A statement of the apostle Paul that describes the qualifications of a bishop or overseer also links pride with Satan's downfall: "He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil" (1 Tim. 3:6). Being "puffed up with conceit"— a vivid picture of pride—is to follow the way of the devil into condemnation. These words of Paul make rather specific that pride, or conceit, is the sin that led to Satan's downfall.

In this connection reference is sometimes made to the passage in Isaiah that reads, “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer,[18] son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God … I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell” (Isa. 14:12–15 KJV). This passage relates specifically to the king of Babylon, his pride, and his fall. Yet since in boastfulness and pride the words seem to go beyond what even the most arrogant of earthly monarchs could declare, the name of Lucifer and the words spoken have been frequently applied to Satan in church tradition. Thus Lucifer, often also considered to be an archangel, was viewed as the name of Satan prior to his fall. Although it is common today to score such tradition as a misrepresentation of Isaiah 14, that chapter, not unlike certain passages in the New Testament previously noted, describes an overweening pride and arrogance that above all characterize Satan. Truly Isaiah 14 presents the classic case of one “puffed up with conceit,” of one who did not “keep [his] own position.” It seems difficult to construe such a personage as less than the embodiment of Satan.[19] This becomes even more apparent when—as will be noted later in more detail—the serpent’s temptation climaxes with the words “you will be like God” (Gen. 3:5). How extraordinarily similar to the pompous declaration of “Lucifer”: “I will be like the Most High”! It is such haughtiness that contributed to a tragic downfall.[20]

As we look again at the account in Genesis against the preceding background, we realize that evil did not begin with Adam and Eve. In the figure of the serpent, it was already here. By no means does this signify that evil is a part of the world God made, because, as we noted earlier, the serpent is the disguise of Satan. Nonetheless, evil did precede man’s temptation, sin, and fall; it searched out man as a target for its deadly venom. This means, moreover, that the origin of sin cannot be placed simply in man’s freedom or God’s permission (both of which will be discussed later). The temptation is not due either to some tendency in human freedom toward sin or to God’s permission for opening the door in that direction. Creaturely freedom is nothing but good, and God Himself tempts no one.[21] Hence, though man is fully responsible for his sinful action (also to be discussed later), it is important to recognize that the temptation comes from a third party who is the very incarnation of evil.[22] Next we briefly observe that the way of temptation is the way of deception. The serpent, crafty and subtle (as becomes apparent in the conversation to follow), first raised a deceptive question about God’s word. After gaining a hearing, he flatly contradicted it. Observe

now his question to the woman: “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?” (Gen. 3:1 NIV). God, of course, did not say that; His word was: “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat” (2:16–17). The serpent’s question was loaded with craftiness and deception: he questioned whether God had spoken what had doubtless been told to the woman by her husband,[23] he perverted what God did say, and he furthermore implied that if God were good and just, He would not have prohibited the man and woman from enjoying the good fruit of any of the trees He had placed in the garden. After the woman’s reply (which will be discussed later), the serpent proceeded to flatly contradict God’s warning that death would result from partaking of the fruit of “the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” God had said, “When you eat of it you will surely die” (Gen. 2:17 NIV). Now Satan implied that not only is God unjust, He is also a liar: “For God knows [the serpent continued] that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God” (3:5). Thus the serpent blatantly declared that God is also determined to keep mankind from still higher attainments and achievements. What a maze of craftiness, deception, and lies on Satan’s part! How relevant these words of Jesus: “[The devil] has nothing to do with the truth…. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

The result of this serpentine display of subtlety and distortion is that the woman was completely deceived. As Paul puts it, “The serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness” (2 Cor. 11:3 NASB). Again, “it was not Adam who was deceived,[24] but the woman being quite deceived,[25] fell into transgression” (1 Tim. 2:14 NASB). She partook of the forbidden fruit, spoke to her husband,[26] doubtless urging him to eat also, and he ate.

The temptation by the serpent—Satan himself—is the primary consideration in the origin of sin.

B. The Freedom of Man

It is important now to observe that the primal sin was an act committed in freedom. Although the woman was deceived by the serpent, there was no compulsion involved; and although the man listened to his wife, he did not have to eat the fruit. The temptation did not perforce lead to sin. Both the man and the woman as free agents—"able not to sin"[27] —were responsible for what they had done.

Significantly and relevantly, they both later tried to avoid responsibility for their actions. When God questioned Adam, he replied, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate" (Gen. 3:12). The woman, in turn, replied to God's question: "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate" (v. 13). God, however, did not accept the attempt of either to lay the blame elsewhere. The serpent, to be sure, was cursed by God (vv. 14–15—it had no one else to blame!), but both the man and the woman were punished by God (vv. 16–19) for what they had done. They were fully responsible for their sinful actions.

Let us explore this a bit further. It could be objected that the temptation of the woman was so subtle and deceptive that she could do little other than take the fruit. Could she really have been fully responsible? A threefold answer may be suggested. First, the woman freely entered into dialogue with the serpent. She did not have to do so. Moreover, this conversation seemingly happened without her husband's participation. The woman, made as "a helper" for him (Gen. 2:18), here acted on her own; she was out of order. While acting on her own was not a sin as such, it led to disorder and deception. Second, no matter how severe the temptation, the woman did not have to be deceived. If she had immediately rejected the first insinuation of the serpent, "Did God really say," with a firm "No!" and had then quickly turned away to the Lord God her Maker and also to her husband, none of this would have had to happen. *She allowed herself to be deceived.* Third, it is the clear witness of the Scriptures that, no matter how strong the temptation, God is able and willing to show a way out. For example, hear Paul's words: "God is faithful, and he will not allow you to be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13). If the woman had looked to the faithful God as soon as the serpent spoke, He would have provided the way of escape. Alas, she did not and was deceived. Hence, the responsibility for the action was her own.[28]

What about the man? It could be argued that although he was not deceived by the serpent, he could hardly avoid following his wife's bidding. According to the text in Genesis, "she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband and he ate" (3:6). After giving some of the fruit to her husband, she spoke to him.[29] What she said is not recorded; however, before this, the serpent had completed his deception of her (see v. 5), and she had now become convinced of several things about the forbidden tree: "The woman saw that the tree was to be desired to make one wise" (v. 6). Doubtless (the serpent having gone on), she told her husband of these "marvelous" things about the tree. He listened to her voice and was more and more carried away by the beckoning tree, coveting what was forbidden, and soon was partaking. Since she had already eaten, the man may also have felt that he should stand by his helpmate: she had been "taken from" him (2:21–22); they had become "one flesh" (2:23–24). In any event, he approved of her deed[30] and, listening to her voice, took the fatal plunge. There was no obligation, however, to follow his wife's example or bidding: the man sinned in full responsibility.

Thus man (as man and woman) cannot be absolved of responsibility for sin's entrance into the world.[31] The action was wholly contrary to God's command, and done in the freedom God had granted. Nor was it a matter of ignorance or naïveté, but an actual decision of the will to be deceived rather than to follow God's bidding. Such is the sad, indeed tragic, picture of mankind's action in the beginning.[32]

C. God's Permissive Will

Finally, sin could not have occurred without God's permissive will. It was a matter both of God's permission and of His will. God permitted it to happen, yet also through its occurrence He purposed to make it an instrument to manifest His grace and glory.

First, let us speak of God's permission. In the case of the temptation by Satan, there is undoubtedly a parallel to be found in the later story of Job that depicts God as allowing Satan to perform his deeds.[33] God at the beginning permitted Satan to tempt man. Clearly without God's permission, the serpent could have had no contact in Paradise with man. With regard to human freedom—a freedom basically to do God's will—there is also the possibility of turning from God, else it were a freedom in name only. God permitted man to spurn His command and thereby to sin against Him. In sum, without God's permission, there could have been neither the temptation by Satan nor the fatal decision by man.

Second, God's will was actively involved in what transpired. The occurrence of sin was by no means a bare permission, so that God, as it were, simply allowed it to happen. Rather, although sin is contrary to God, He willed to fulfill through it His own purpose. God is able to bring good out of evil and to make the sin and fall of man subserve that intention. In this connection the words of Joseph to his brothers, who had sold him into Egypt, are apropos: "You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20). Likewise, God, in spite of all the evil of mankind's sin and fall, was working out a good purpose in it.

There is undoubtedly a strange paradox here. God surely did not will the sin of man, else He would have been the author of evil; yet He did will that through sin and the fall His purpose should be fulfilled. One aspect of this surely will be the demonstration of His grace, for only through sin will the glory of God's grace become utterly manifest. Without the sin of the human race, there would have been no Calvary and no demonstration of the incredible love of God. Thus it is through the very sin and fall of man that the "amazing grace" of God the Father in Jesus Christ will be made known.[34]

Indeed, not only was the grace of God to be gloriously manifest through the Fall by the redemption that later was to occur, but also the person who experienced that redemption will know a joy and blessedness beyond measure—a "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8 KJV). The saints of God will

sing not only the song of creation but also the song of redemption![35] Heaven itself will echo to those strains, and God will be all the more wondrously glorified.

The permissive will of God stands ultimately behind the sin and fall of mankind. This by no means mitigates the heinousness of sin and evil nor the ensuing misery of the human condition. But it does say that through it all God is sovereignly working out His purpose to manifest the heights of His grace and glory.

III. NATURE

We move now to a consideration of the nature of sin. Our concern at this juncture is to describe sin in its occurrence with its various components or elements. We will observe, in turn, sin as unbelief, as pride, and as disobedience.

A. Unbelief

The whole story of the first sin in Genesis 3 is rooted in the shaking of faith in God and His word, His goodness, and His justice. It begins, as noted, with the serpent's words: "Did God say …?" (v. 1). The serpent was by no means simply asking for information. Rather, he called into question both God's word ("Did God really[36] say?") and His goodness, namely, that in all that beautiful garden, they should "not eat of any tree?" God had said something quite different: "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely[37] die" (Gen. 2:16–17). It is apparent, however, that the woman was shaken by the serpentine question, for though she did move to God's defense, saying, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden,"—God is not *that* unjust—she added, "But God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die'" (3:2–3). Here, even as the serpent had subtly misstated God's word, the woman under growing deception likewise misstated what God had said. There was nothing in God's command about not *touching* the forbidden tree or that touching it would cause death. Moreover God did not speak of that tree as being in the midst of the garden.[38] Everything was becoming confused in the woman's mind, and her words were a mixture of truth and error; and of most serious significance, the forbidden tree now was at the center of her attention. The tree of life, which was actually in the midst of the garden, was forgotten; her only concern was the forbidden tree, and the temptation to partake of it grew rapidly. As a result, the serpent was able to unleash a direct and venomous attack on God's word: "You surely shall not die!" (Gen. 3:4 NASB). There was no contradiction by the woman, nor later by the man. A lie, totally opposite from God's word,[39] was believed, and the entrance of sin into the world began.

It is apparent from the narrative that the root of mankind's sin and the ensuing fall is unbelief. Rather than standing upon God's word in faith, the man and the woman departed from it. Had the one first tempted quietly but unmistakably reaffirmed what God had said, the voice of temptation would have been repelled. This should have begun when God's word was first questioned: "Did God really say?" It was too late when the lie had been pronounced: "You surely shall not die." The very moment that the question was raised about God, His word, His

truth, and His goodness was the crucial moment to strike back: "No, God did *not* say that; *He did say this—and I am standing by His word."* By such a response of faith, the temptation would have been driven away, and no lie could possibly have been heeded.

Let us reflect a bit further on how all this came about. Basically the issue is this: Why did the question that led to sin and the fall, "Did God really say?" emerge? The serpent, to be sure, spoke it, but it had somehow to find a responsive chord. To get at an answer as to why the question became so insistent, observe that the whole setting of the dialogue was not simply the garden, but man and woman together in the proximity of the forbidden tree.[40] This suggests that, in spite of all the good things God had provided for them, including eternal life, they were attracted to what had been forbidden. Rather than rejoicing and delighting in God's gifts with a subsequent disregard for anything else, they stood as if transfixed by this one thing forbidden.

Such is the way of temptation, we may add, for when anyone allows a forbidden thing to become the object of direct attention, it may soon become so attractive and compelling that all other good things including God Himself are simply bypassed under the growing urgency to have it. In fancy, the thing forbidden becomes the *only* important thing; so, regardless of its prohibition, the temptation is well-nigh overwhelming. Moreover, one may not be long in that situation before one is convinced by a sinister voice intimating or insisting that there is no harm in partaking of it. Regardless of what God may have said, surely it must be the way of life, not death.

Sin thus entered upon the stage of the world when mankind turned from God and His word and was carried away by what God had forbidden. The forbidden was *not* placed here to lure man from God, but to give opportunity through spurning it to freely decide for God. But if and when the interdicted is focused on, that very thing becomes a subtle force of increasing temptation. No longer is God's word heeded, His goodness believed in, or His justice recognized. Unbelief emerges full scale, and the forbidden thing is wholly embraced. Such is the dark and tragic way of sin's emergence through unbelief.

It is important that we understand this narrative of the occurrence of unbelief in its vast proportions. One may be inclined to wonder why God should attach such a terrible penalty—death—to the human race for partaking of a forbidden tree. The basic point, however, is this: to believe in God and do His bidding, whatever may be His will and command, is the *only* way of life. To do anything else is to move away from the living God and therefore most surely to die. Death is not an arbitrary penalty; it is the inevitable consequence for all human existence that turns away from God.

To this day all sin is grounded in failure to believe in God and His word. Sin is attraction to the false claims of the world that offer something better than God: excitement, adventure, pleasure, and the like. To stay with the things of God, the world declares, is to be cramped and confined; whereas to break free of Him is to know life and liberation. And people, like the man and the woman at the beginning, continue to be deceived by the voice that offers such alluring prospects. However, nothing could be more of a delusion. For to live contrary to God and His word is no longer life; it is to walk the way of disaster and death.

Here we may be reminded that if faith is man's true response to God, unbelief ("unfaith") is man's false response. According to Paul, "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). Thus any action of a person that springs from unbelief is wrong. Faith, moreover, is essentially trust; and if it is replaced by distrust, every deed is off base and leads to destruction. Faith is not blind or credulous, but at its heart is simple childlike trust: an unwavering commitment to Him who is the Father of all creation.

It follows that the two diametrical opposites in the Scriptures are not vice and virtue but sin and faith.[41] To be sure, evil is the contrary of good, and morality of immorality. But the deepest cleavage lies between unbelief, which is both the first appearance of sin as well as its basic continuance, and the faith in God that essentially affirms God and His truth. Faith receives every blessing that man can know from God and rests in Him; from unbelief flows all that is not of God. Unbelief, accordingly, is the tragic root of the sin of the human race.[42]

B. Pride

In the Genesis narrative, after saying, “You surely shall not die,” the serpent continued, “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,[43] knowing good and evil” (3:5). Here is the temptation to pride, ambition and self-exaltation in the highest degree: to be “like God.”

I must make two comments immediately: First, it is apparent that this is the very essence of satanic evil, for it was Lucifer who long before attempted to be “like the Most High.”[44] Second, man made in God’s image and already like Him in so many ways is tempted to be like Him in the wrong way by exalting himself to the place of God. Of all God’s earthly creatures, only man—already set so high—could be tempted to follow in Satan’s path.

The background for this temptation to pride is the failure to trust God and His word—i.e., unbelief.[45] Once the woman had turned from heeding God’s word and had begun to question God’s goodness and justice, she was ready to believe the lie about not dying. Now that this blatant untruth had insinuated[46] itself into her system and taken full possession, the promise of the serpent became all the more irresistible. No longer standing under God’s word and attracted by the forbidden, she was ready to do exactly the opposite of what God had commanded and to pridefully exalt herself to the place of God. Thus with scarcely a break does unbelief eventuate in pride and ultimately in self-destruction.

Leaving the account in Genesis briefly, we observe that pride is spoken of in many other Scriptures. The psalmist declares concerning the wicked: “In the pride of his countenance the wicked does not seek him [God]; all his thoughts are, There is no God’” (10:4). In Proverbs are these words: “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (16:18). According to the prophet Isaiah, “the haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the pride of men shall be humbled; and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day” (2:11). God declared through Amos, “I abhor the pride of Jacob, and hate his strongholds” (6:8); similarly through Zechariah, “The pride of Assyria shall be laid low” (10:11). In relation to Edom, God spoke through Obadiah: “The pride of your heart has deceived you…. Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, thence I will bring you down” (1:3–4). These are but a few of the Old Testament passages where pride, haughtiness, and self-exaltation

are declared to be at the heart of wickedness, and despite the deception involved, will assuredly lead to fall and destruction.

In the Gospels Jesus spoke against Capernaum: “And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades” (Matt. 11:23; Luke 10:15). Further, Jesus declared on more than one occasion: “For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:11; cf. Matt. 23:12; Luke 18:14). Unmistakably Jesus was saying that the proud and haughty spirit will be brought low. Jesus, moreover, embodies in Himself the opposite of the proud spirit, for He was “gentle and lowly” (Matt. 11:29) in His whole life and ministry. Indeed, the very Incarnation, as Paul describes it, was of Him who, “though he was in the form of God … emptied himself, taking the form of a servant … humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:6–8). Here is the amazing and total antithesis of pride and self-seeking: it is giving up heaven’s glories for the sake of a lost human race.

Now as we reflect again on the account in Genesis, it is all the more apparent how perverse is the temptation to be “like God.” Nothing could be more foreign to God’s way (especially as seen in Christ), nothing more diabolical (especially as seen in Satan), nothing more destructive of man’s own God-given nature. Man was not made to “play God” but to worship Him, love Him, and serve Him gladly and freely. Anything else can but lead to a tragic end.

Nonetheless it is sad to relate that the human race continues to make the impossible attempt at being God. Since the first man and woman made the effort, mankind has followed in their footsteps, ever seeking not the glory of God but of man. People pridefully desire to throw off any traces that bind them to God, and to become their own gods.[47] They somehow imagine that to serve God is bondage, whereas to do as they please is freedom. Hence, we live in a world of petty gods and goddesses seeking their own ends, not God’s,[48] and going on their way to destruction.

Another way of describing the sin of pride from the beginning and throughout history is to speak of it as *self-centeredness* or *egocentricity*. To “play God” is to focus essentially on the self—its interests, desires, and goals. It is to say, “My nation, my people, my business, my concerns”—anything of which one is a part—and to make such the ultimate devotion in life. It is to declare, “Glory to Man in the highest,”[49] for all things focus on him. It is to turn everything away from its true center in God, to become off-centered in man.

There is a special danger today, it should be added, in the cult of *self-realization.*[50] Many within and without the church are stressing that man’s chief

need is for fulfilling his potential. He needs primarily a higher self-esteem,[51] a more vigorous pursuit of his own goals, indeed, a fuller self-realization. But all this is extremely subtle and misleading. To be sure, there is need for a realistic self-affirmation and self-expression, [52] but when self-realization, rather than God and His purposes, becomes the basic concern there is nothing but destruction ahead. Man was made to center his life in God, to seek first His kingdom, to accomplish His will. In such there is genuine human fulfillment, not self-fulfillment, but a fulfillment that comes from God Himself.

Here we may also speak of pride as *selfish desire*. For as the narrative continues in Genesis, we read, "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise …" (3:6). Let us pause at this point. The woman, wholly convinced that the serpent, not God, was right and now totally focused upon the forbidden tree, was filled with inordinate desire. In 1 John there is reference to "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" (2:16). These three parallel the scene in Genesis (i.e., the fleshly craving for the fruit, its enticement to the eyes, and the pride of gaining what the serpent had promised) and speak of selfish desire or lust for that which is not of God.

Another word for desire of this kind is *covetousness.* Covetousness contains the note of strongly desiring what does not belong to one. This is precisely the picture of the woman in Eden who, more and more bedazzled by the forbidden tree, began intensely to covet its fruit. "Covetousness," says the apostle Paul "is idolatry."[53] Clearly this is the case, for it is no longer God who is heeded but only what the woman passionately desires: it has become an idol.

With covetousness at the heart of mankind's [54] first sin, it is little wonder that the Scriptures speak so strongly against it. The commandment "Thou shalt not covet" (Exod. 20:17 KJV), which stands as the climax of the Ten Commandments, points to the internal desire that brings evil in its train. Covetousness signifies the avarice and greed that Jesus so frequently spoke against.[55] Covetousness, also sometimes called lust, is a craving for what does not belong to one and is the source of much of the misery in the world. Strife occurs when people covet other people's things. James writes, "You desire and do not have; so you kill. And you covet and cannot obtain; so you fight and wage war" (4:2). Covetousness is a desire that, coming to birth, can only bring forth death.

Now we may recognize how closely allied are pride and inordinate desire (or covetousness). At the heart of both is self-seeking and self-glorification. God is no longer truly believed in, for everything centers in man. Surely, here is the

heart of sin and the way of ultimate destruction.

Before proceeding further, we should comment on the fact that the forbidden tree was the tree of the *knowledge of good and evil.* Therefore, to eat of it would be to gain a hitherto unknown awareness of the realm of good and evil. Accordingly, the temptation was not only to be "like God" (which we have discussed) but also to be "like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). Here, quite significantly, the serpent apparently did not lie about this matter,[56] because later God Himself says, "The man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil" (v. 22). Another point: it is apparent that the woman was by no means aware of what that signified, for in the statement following the serpent's words (as we have noted) she viewed the tree "to be desired to make one wise" (v. 6). However, as the account unfolds, wisdom according to God's purpose for man was *not* to include the knowledge of good and evil.

Here we may briefly restate something of what has been previously said,[57] namely, that it was God's intention that man live out his life on earth ignorant of the realm of evil. God, of course, fully knew it, having long dealt with the evil of Satan; the angels in heaven knew it, having experienced the rebellion and casting down of a large number of their own. The sovereign God desired to have man know only the good and to spare him from this realm of knowledge that would have tragic results if he participated in it.[58] God in His grace would have the human race excluded from a knowledge of the irruption of evil into the heavenly spheres—all its malice and perversity—and live in a world that He had made "very good" (Gen. 1:31), with nothing but perfect fellowship with Himself and all else in His creation. This would not mean simple innocence but developed character; as the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" would be continuously spurned as man would partake of the "tree of life," living in the presence of God joyfully forever.

But such was not to be man's situation. By partaking of a knowledge that God would have foreclosed from him and viewing this as wisdom—something "to be desired to make one wise"—man thereby became a participant in the realm of darkness and evil. Such, tragically, has been the lot of the human race down through the ages.

C. Disobedience

Finally we read, “She took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her,[59] and he ate” (Gen. 3:6 NASB). It would be hard to exaggerate the tragic significance of this action, for through it sin now enters the human race. So Paul writes, “By one man’s[60] disobedience many were made sinners” (Rom. 5:19). “Many” includes the totality of humankind:[61] *all* have received the tincture of sin[62] from this primeval act of disobedience.

Disobedience is not the beginning of the fall but its fruition in the will. The progression, as we observed, is from unbelief to pride to disobedience.[63] Unbelief begins in the mind, then pride pervades the heart, and finally disobedience impels the will. Man disobeys by failing to take God at His word and thereby pridefully seeks to assume His place. When this has happened, disobedience is quick to follow.

But here we may ask, Does not the account in Genesis portray the man as involved only in the act of disobedience? Until the point when the woman gives the fruit to him and he likewise partakes, she alone is specified as in conversation with the serpent. Was she then the one who disbelieved and who allowed pride to come in, whereas the man entered the scene only at the point of disobedience? Now it is true that Paul later declares that “Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived” (1 Tim. 2:14); that is to say, the woman was the focal point of beguilement. Nonetheless—and here is the critical matter—the woman’s husband was with her. From the narrative there is no suggestion that she went somewhere else to give him the fruit; no, he was already there in her company. Further, as the God-given head of the woman (she was his “helper”—Gen. 2:18) and the one whom he had saluted as “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (v. 23), he shared responsibility for her actions. The very fact that he so readily took the fruit (there is no hint of hesitation or objection), thereby deliberately disobeying God, could scarcely have occurred without his own turn from faith in God and His word to pridefully elevate himself above God. Deception was the woman’s, but participation was the man’s. If anything, his was the greater sin and evil.

Sin in its issue, therefore, is the deliberate act of disobedience. God had spoken decisively: “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat”—but eat they did. They willfully contravened the commandment of God.

Later when God spoke, He put the question bluntly and unmistakably: “Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” (Gen. 3:11). However much they might try to evade this devastating question,[64] there was really no escape: they were sinners through and through.

In the Old Testament the call of God for obedience ever and again sounds forth. This is particularly the case in the establishment of God’s covenant with Israel: “Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession” (Exod. 19:5). Thereafter, God spoke the “ten words”[65] —the Ten Commandments—in the hearing of all Israel (Exod. 20:1—17; Deut. 5:4–22) and pronounced a great variety of ordinances and statutes (Exod. 21–23; Deut. 6–26). Obedience to God was necessary if Israel was to live: “You shall walk in all the way which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live” (Deut. 5:33). Although all commands of God were to be fulfilled that Israel might live, the central core was the Ten Commandments because they are specifically the words of the covenant[66] uttered by the voice of the living God.[67] Israel, following the pattern of mankind from the beginning, disobeyed God’s commandments and ordinances—not just once but countless times—and, accordingly, they were a sinful people.[68] No matter how much Moses or Joshua or the later God-given leaders of Israel called for obedience, there was only recurring failure and disobedience.

In the New Testament, declaration of God’s command is even more vigorous. Jesus proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount: “Till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law” (Matt. 5:18)[69] Therefore, he deepened and interiorized God’s command in these words: “You have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall not kill’ … But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment” (5:21–22). Similarly, Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (5:27–28). The summons to righteousness, therefore, is intense; no longer is the call to outward obedience only (as in the garden of Eden and in most of the commandments and ordinances to Israel),[70] but to inward: the motivation of the heart. The climax is “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (5:48). It would be impossible to imagine a higher commandment than that! Moreover, it is apparent in the light of Jesus’ words here and elsewhere that none—except Jesus Himself—can claim to be truly obedient.

Without going into the many other words—commands, injunctions—of Jesus

in the Gospels or those of the writers in the various epistles, it is apparent that the human race is a disobedient race. Paul declares that "God has consigned all men to[71] disobedience" (Rom. 11:32). Both Gentile and Jew are equally given over to disobedience. Elsewhere, Paul speaks of mankind in general as "sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2; 5:6). All mankind, Jew and Gentile alike, have been disobedient to God's command.

But how can this be? Israel received God's law at Mount Sinai and was unmistakably disobedient throughout her history. Further, the intensification of that law was given by Jesus to His own disciples. But what of the Gentiles? How are they too "sons of disobedience"? We have already observed that through the disobedience of "one man"—the first man and woman—"many were made sinners." However, the first man was given a law (or command) not to eat the forbidden fruit. Was there any law given after that for man in general (i.e., outside Israel), or is that disobedience simply, as it were, handed down? A tendency toward such surely was passed on, but is not some additional law or command necessary for actual disobedience to occur? The answer must be in the affirmative, and that primarily in terms of the so-called natural law.

Here we turn to Paul's discussion in Romans 2. In this chapter Paul is declaring both Jews and Gentiles to be under God's judgment, the former by the law God gave them. But also the Gentiles have a law; it is that which by nature is written within: "When Gentiles who have not the law[72] do by nature what the law requires,[73] they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires[74] is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them" (vv. 14–15). This natural law ("by nature") or moral law, as it is sometimes called, is essentially the same as the law given to Israel.[75] It is the moral consciousness engraved on man's innermost being (the "heart") and borne witness to by his conscience. Hence, even though the Gentiles do not have the law publicly given to Israel, they have it in all essentials privately.[76] Thus their obedience (or disobedience) is weighed against the moral law common to all mankind.

However, the Gentiles come off no better than the Jews. Although Paul intimates that some may be excused at the final judgment (for God surely will honor any genuine witness to truth), Paul proceeds to state in Romans 3 that "all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin … None is righteousness, no, not one" (vv. 9–10). Like the first man and woman, all mankind is disobedient to the law of God; therefore, truly, as earlier quoted, "God has consigned all men to disobedience."[77]

A further word might be added about the relationship between the natural law, the law of Israel, and the commands of Christ.[78] First, the natural or moral law, since it is an aspect of human nature, is basic to everything else. In the heart of all people there is a sense of moral responsibility, of lightness and wrongness, to which the conscience bears witness. This sense is by no means always clear, for a failure to heed the voice of conscience often means a lessening of sensitivity to the inner moral demands. Nonetheless, no person can escape the inward moral imperatives that point the way to right living and action. Failure here, accordingly, is disobedience to God's will just as much as it was the case for mankind in the beginning. Accordingly, the human race in general is disobedient to God's will; it is "consigned to disobedience."

Second, the law to Israel, as enshrined particularly in the Ten Commandments, may now be described as the publication of the natural law. Israel, to be sure, received the commandments and was bound to them in a special way as "the words of the covenant" between God and Israel. However, these commandments, spoken by the voice of the living God to Israel, are far more than statutes and ordinances (given through Moses). Also they are more than commandments for Israel alone; they are God's moral will for all mankind,[79] corresponding to the moral law on the heart. Failure in this regard on the part of any person is likewise disobedience to God's will. Indeed, since the moral law has now been published for everyone to read, disobedience becomes all the more reprehensible in God's sight.

Third, the commands of Christ, declared in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere in the Gospels, move still deeper into the center of God's will for humanity. While they were spoken often to His disciples,[80] they relate to all people[81] and represent the moral law of God as profoundly internalized. What sounds forth in the heart of every person (the natural law) and was declared to Israel now finds its climax in the words of Jesus. Here truly is the perfection of God, both outward and inward, required of all mankind. It scarcely need be added that under the impact of the words of Jesus the disobedience of all people is all the more manifest. Some rare persons might claim obedience in relation to the moral law and the Ten Commandments, but who dares make such a claim when Jesus is truly heard?[82] Verily, we are all "sons of disobedience."

Finally, within all this area of disobedience there is either implicitly or explicitly both unbelief and pride. We have observed how such was explicitly the case in relation to the beginning of the human race. But also with mankind generally throughout history there has been a prevailing atmosphere of unbelief

in the one true God and His Word. In relation to God Himself, Paul writes: “Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not glorify[83] him as God or give thanks to him” (Rom. 1:20–21). This universal failure to glorify and thank God signifies unbelief, faithlessness, and lack of trust, none of which is excusable, since God has never ceased to reveal Himself in His creation.[84]

So it continues to this day: the sin of mankind begins in turning from God in unbelief. Pride follows upon unbelief. Not glorifying God, men glorify themselves: “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen” (v. 25). Serving the creature means “playing God,” as man did at the beginning. It means self-worship, idolatry. Disobedience to God’s truth, displayed through creation and reverberating in the heart and conscience, is the inevitable consequence. Paul lists a wide array of human acts contrary to God’s law—for example, murder, strife, deceit, slander (vv. 29–31)—and then adds, “Though they know God’s decree[85] that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them” (v. 32).

We may summarily say in the case of Israel that disobedience to the commandments of God also stemmed from unbelief and pride. Israel, to be sure, believed in God in the sense of affirming His existence. However, their belief again and again slipped into idolatry so that, like mankind in general, they “served the creature rather than the Creator.” The Ten Commandments, of course, are more than a moral code; they are primarily prohibitions against everything that would pridefully exalt the creature above God: no other gods, no graven images, no taking of God’s name in vain, no desecration of the Sabbath.[86] For whenever people “play God,” disobedience to His moral precepts is sure to follow.

Similarly Jesus’ own teaching with its deepening of the law was not acceptable to most of His contemporaries. The many who did not become His disciples disobeyed primarily because they did not believe Him. For example, Jesus said to the Jews, “Because I tell the truth, you do not believe me” (John 8:45). Unbelief, accordingly, is at the root of disobedience. But then pride is the middle piece: “How can you believe, who receive glory from one another …?” (John 5:44). Among Jesus’ own disciples there was a constant struggle to obey and to keep His words because, though they believed in Him enough to follow Him, that belief often withered under the heat of difficult circumstances. Pride then could readily set in, so that even at the Last Supper the Twelve disputed

among themselves as to who was the greatest (Luke 22:24). Their desertion later that night—hence disobedience—was inevitable.

One further word: it was said earlier in this chapter that sin is not primarily against a law but against a person. This needs to be reexamined in the context of unbelief, pride, and disobedience, which are sins against the laws of God (many of these we have observed from the beginning of mankind to the time of Jesus). This I unhesitatingly repeat. However, the deepest dimension of such sin is realized in its personal alienation from God.

To put it more directly: sin in any of its aspects of unbelief, pride, or disobedience is *a betrayal of love.* God in His great love has placed man in the good and beautiful world He made and has given His immeasurable blessings. In His great love God has made man as male and female for sharing life and has given him neighbors to bless and be blessed by. Thus when man acts in distrust, pride, and disobedience, it is all against the incomparable love of God.

It follows that, in terms of commandments, the greatest is not to be found in the Ten Commandments but in the words that come shortly after their declaration: "Hear, O Israel: the LORD your God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:4). According to Jesus Himself, this is "the great and first commandment" (Matt. 22:38). This does not mean that love replaces the other commandments, but that love is chief. For surely if love for God is total, there will be the intense desire of the heart, the concentrated intention of the soul (or mind), and the powerful exercise of the will to do what pleases Him, namely to fulfill His will in every particular and specifically in the commandments He has laid down. But then Jesus proceeded to add another dimension to love: "And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.[87] On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:39–40). Similar to the love for God, the love of one's neighbor will provide the basic impulse for doing those things the commandments of God call for. How can one kill, steal, lie, covet, or whatever else if there is a genuine love for the neighbor? Truly, as Paul declares, love is "the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10).

With love the controlling motif, it is apparent that sin is not only an active transgression of God's will; it is also a coming short of what God intends. I have spoken largely of sins of commission, in which there is direct action contrary to God's intention whether outward (such as killing) or inward (such as anger or lust). But also there are sins of omission—the failure to do God's will. According to James, "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin" (4:17). In the parable of the Good Samaritan there is, of course, the

sin of the robbers who stripped, beat, and almost killed a man, but there is also (and to this Jesus was particularly speaking) the sin of failure to show love by the priest and Levite who simply passed by, leaving the man in his misery (Luke 10:30–32).

Ultimately, lack of love toward God is the heart of all sin. To be sure, disbelieving His word, pridefully placing oneself above Him, and actively disobeying His commandments are the very nature of sin. All such are active transgressions of God's being and will. But ultimately, there is no more heinous sin than that of utter and complete coldness to God and the things of God. "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people" (Rom. 10:21).[88] It is the love of God met by coldness of heart that is the inmost core of sin. It is Jesus crying over Jerusalem, "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!" (Matt. 23:37; Luke 13:34). "You would not!" is the great sin of mankind to this day. For in spite of God's total self-giving in His Son Jesus Christ, countless people simply pass Him by. Sin truly in its very essence is hardness of heart: it is to spurn the unlimited love of God.

[1]Much of this mood of estrangement, alienation, and anxiety has been expressed by twentieth-century existentialist writers such as Camus, Kafka, and Sartre. See,for example, Camus' Stranger, Kafka's Castle, and Sartre's Wall. In addition to such noyels and stories, philosophical analysis has been carried out particularly in the writings of Jaspers and Heidegger. See especially Jaspers' Reason and Existenz and Heidegger's Being and Time (also Sartre's Being and Nothingness).

[2]In my book Contemporary Existentialism and Christian Faith, I have summarized the existentialist thinking of Jaspers, Heidegger, Sartre, Tillich, and Bultmann and provided a Christian critique. The book was written in response to the frequent question, "What is the relationship of existentialism to Christian faith?"

[3]Through both adultery and murder.

[4]In the Old Testament the most common word for sin is hätä, to "miss" or "fail." It is equivalent to the most frequent New Testament word for sin: hamartia.

[5]Pāša in the Old Testament is the most important term that expresses the note of rebellion and revolt. New Testament terms that convey related ideas are paraptoma, "trespass"; anomia, "lawlessness"; and asebeia,

"impiety." Asebeia is often used in the LXX to translate pāša*.

[6]See the preceding chapter, "Man," pp. 206-8.

[7]The Greek word anomia is often translated "lawlessness" as in the rsv, nasb, and niv (see fn. 5). However, it also may be rendered "iniquity" and "wickedness" (Thayer). It also connotes "wrongdoing" or "sin" (TDNT, 4:1085).

[8]The latter is Paul's concern in 2 Thessalonians.

[9]Both "original sin" and "actual sin" will be discussed in some detail later.

[10]Recall our discussion of "man" as "man and woman" in the previous chapter, pp. 203–6.

[11]The accounts of Satan's temptation of Jesus display the same character of subtlety and attempted deception (see Matt. 4:1–11 and Luke 4:1–13).

[12]In Psalm 109:6 the Hebrew *sätän* is transliterated "Satan" (KJV) or translated "accuser" (RSV, NIV, NASB). Cf. also Numbers 22:22; 1 Samuel 29:4; Psalm 38:20; 109:4, 20, 29. In none of these cases, however, does *satan* refer to the figure of Satan.

[13]The name Satan is found thirty-four times. The designation of "the devil" also occurs thirty-four times. The latter nomenclature does not appear in the Old Testament.

[14]According to the apocryphal book The Wisdom of Solomon, it was "the devil's envy" that provoked the original temptation: "God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity [or "nature"], but through the devil's envy death entered the world" (2:23-24).

[15]NASB translates "has sinned"; niv has "has been sinning." The Greek verb hamartanei is actually in the present tense, hence "sins" ("sinneth" kjv). However, because of the expression "from the beginning," the rsv, nasb, and niv translations seem appropriate.

[16]In the biblical record there is no picture of an eternal dualism between good and evil, God and Satan. Satan is not another god: he has not always existed, nor will he continue his evil activities forever (see Rev. 20:10).

[17]These are the continuing words of 2 Peter 2:4.

[18]The Hebrew word is helel, literally, "shining one." It is rendered "Day Star" in rsv, "morning star" in niv, "star of the morning" in nasb. "Lucifer" means "light-bringer."

[19]"The dimensions of the God-defying ambition expressed in vv. 13, 14

surpass anything that could be put in the mouth of a mere human being (even hyperbolically). No human king is ever represented in any ancient Semitic literature, either Hebrew or pagan, as vaunting himself to set his throne above the heights of the clouds like the Most High God" (Harper Study Bible, rsv, in loco, fn.).

[20]A somewhat comparable passage to Isaiah 14 is Ezekiel 28:1-19, a denunciation of the king of Tyre. The king, formerly "blameless," was "cast … as a profane thing from the mountain of God … your heart was proud" (vv. 15-17). Here, to say the least, is a similar picture. In the pseudepigraphic writing known as the Slavonic Enoch there is a very vivid picture of the fall of Satan that, while similar to the statements in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, makes no reference to an earthly king: "And one from out of the order of angels, having turned away with the order that was under him, conceived an impossible thought, to place his throne higher than the clouds above the earth that he might become equal with my [God's] power. And I threw him out from the height with his angels, and he was flying continually above the bottomless [abyss]" (2 Enoch 29:4).

[21]James 1:13-"God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one."

[22]Reinhold Niebuhr writes, "To believe that there is a devil is to believe that there is a principle or force of evil antecedent to any human action…. The devil fell before man fell, which is to say that man's rebellion against God is not an act of sheer perversity, nor does it follow inevitably from the situation in which he stands" (The Nature and Destiny of Man, 1:180).

[23]Remember that the original word and command of Genesis 2:16-17 was spoken by God to Adam before Eve existed.

[24]The Greek word is epatethe.

[25]The Greek word is exapatetheisa.

[26]Eve's speaking to Adam is not mentioned at this point in the narrative. However, after they both sinned and God was meting out punishment to Adam, He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife …" (Gen. 3:17).

[27]Posse non peccare. See previous discussion in chapter 9, "Man," p. 217, fn. 79.

[28]Further on in the narrative God addressed the woman: "What is this that

you have done?" (Gen. 3:13). She unquestionably was responsible before God.

[29]Recall the later words of God to the man: "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife …" (3:17).

[30]Such consent may be echoed in Paul's words in Romans 1:32 about those who not only "know God's decree" but also "approve [or "give consent to"] those who practice" what is forbidden.

[31]In Milton's Paradise Lost (Book III) Almighty God declares, "Whose fault? Whose but his own. Ingrate, he had of me all he could have; I made him just and right, sufficient to have stood though free to fall."

[32]And, it should be added, throughout history (see below under discussion of "actual sin"). In 2 Esdras there is a statement about the continuing picture of people's deliberate choice for evil: "For they also received freedom, but they despised the Most High, and were contemptuous of his law, and forsook his ways" (8:56).

[33]Recall the earlier discussion of Job in relation to human suffering (see pp. 136-37). Of course, a major difference in the accounts of Satan's dealings with Adam and Eve and with Job lies in the results: Adam and Eve fell into sin, Job did not.

[34]Much more could be added, for example, concerning the revelation of God's holiness and righteousness. It is against the backdrop of sin and God's total opposition to it that holiness is blazoned forth. In His dealing with evil righteousness is wholly manifest.

[35]Revelation 4:11; 5:9-10.

[36]The Hebrew word is 9apkî, literally, "indeed really." The "indeed really" adds to the sinister character of the serpent's question. Luther wrote that "the serpent uses the aph-ki as though to turn up its nose and jeer and scoff at one" (quotation from von Rad's Genesis: A Commentary, 83, fn.).

[37]As in kjv, nasb, and niv, "certainly" in neb.

[38]Prior to God's command to man in Genesis 2:16–17, the Scripture declares that "out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (2:9). The tree of life, not the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, is specifically said to be in the midst of the garden. See previous chapter 9, "Man," p. 218, fn. 83. (Also see von Rad, Genesis, 76, where he states

that “the prepositional phrase betok haggan, ‘in the midst of the garden’ … refers back to the tree of life.”).

[39]From God’s “you shall die” to the serpent’s “you will not die.”

[40]The “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” is immediately at hand. This is clear from the fact that after the conversation with the serpent, the woman reached out and took some of its fruit (v. 6). Also her husband was “with her” (v. 6 kjv, nasb, niv).

[41]The words of Jesus “the Counselor [the Holy Spirit] … will convince [i.e., convict] the world of sin … because they do not believe in me” (John 16:7-9) point up the tension between sin and belief. The sin of the world is not vice, as ordinarily understood, but the failure to believe.

[42]Karl Barth puts it well: “Unbelief is the sin, the original form and source of all sins, and in the last analysis the only sin, because it is the sin which embraces all other sins” (Church Dogmatics, 4.1.414). Unbelief is the ultimate source of every sin of mankind.

[43]The Hebrew word is *“elohim*, which may also be read as plural, hence “gods” (as in kjv and neb). However, since ‘elohîm in the overall context of Genesis 3 regularly refers to “God,” not “gods,” and, quite importantly, since the significance of the satanic temptation is diminished by the plural “gods,” I am following the translation of “God” (as also in nasb and niv).

[44]Isaiah 14:14. Recall the previous discussion, page 226.

[45]Calvin writes, “Hence infidelity was at the root of the revolt. From infidelity, again sprang ambition and pride, together with ingratitude; because Adam, by longing for more than was allotted him, manifested contempt for the great liberality with which God had enriched him. It was surely monstrous impiety that a son of earth should deem it little to have been made in the likeness, unless he were also made equal to God” (Institutes, II. 1.4, Beveridge trans.).

[46]I use the word “insinuate” to point to the whole subtlety of the serpent as previously described. “Insinuate” also suggests the serpent’s venom that gradually penetrates the system of one succumbing to its attack.

[47]Jean-Paul Sartre has put it well in saying, “Man fundamentally is the desire to be God.” See, e.g., Sartre’s Being and Nothingness, 566.

[48]This is equally true of collectives-nations, ethnic groups, societies, etc.-as well as of individuals.

[49]These are Swinburne’s words in his poem “The Hymn of Man.”

[50]Erich Fromm, psychologist, declares bluntly that “virtue is self-realization” (Psychoanalysis and Religion, 37). Such an emphasis is typical of much contemporary devotion to self-realization or “self-actualization” (as in Abraham Maslow’s writings). So-called “New Age” thinking follows this pattern.

[51]See, e.g., Robert Schuller’s book Self-Esteem: the New Reformation. Schuller writes, “Where the sixteenth-century Reformation returned our focus to sacred Scriptures as the only infallible rule for faith and practice, the new reformation will return our focus to the sacred right of every person to self-esteem! The fact is, the church will never succeed until it satisfies the human being’s hunger for self-value” (p. 38).

[52]Here the word “pride” may have a proper function, such as to take pride in one’s work; however, the word is risky because it so readily lends itself to a false self-measure. Paul urges a person “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think” (Rom. 12:3). The word “pride” may suggest an exaggerated self-concern.

[53]Colossians 3:5. For “covetousness,” nasb and niv have “greed.” The kjv (like rsv) has “covetousness.” The Greek word pleonexia connotes “greedy desire,” hence “covetousness.”

[54]Although only the woman is mentioned thus far in this account, her husband cannot be excluded from culpability. We have earlier noted that he was with her at the scene of temptation, and therefore is also liable for whatever happens. The man is obviously consenting with her conversation and action, so shares her unbelief, pride, and finally disobedience. Possibly Paul’s words in Romans 1:32, earlier mentioned, are applicable: “Though they know God’s decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them.” The man’s approval of the woman’s actions makes him also “deserve to die.”

[55]See, e.g., Matthew 5:28; Mark 7:21-23; Luke 12:15.

[56]But see footnote 58.

[57]See chapter 9, “Man,” p. 218.

[58]From the perspective of man’s having partaken of the forbidden knowledge, Derek Kidner writes, “His new consciousness of good and evil was both like and unlike the divine knowledge (3:22), differing from it and from innocence as a sick man’s aching awareness of his body differs both from the insight of the physician and the unconcern of the

man of health" (Genesis, TOTC, 69). Hence, the serpent's statement about man becoming like God knowing good and evil was actually a distortion of the truth.

[59]"With her" (also kjv, niv) is omitted in rsv and neb; however, it is clearly in the Hebrew text. This omission is unfortunate, since it implies that the woman was alone in confrontation with the serpent. See page 231, fn. 40.

[60]In the Genesis account, to repeat, "man" is to be understood as man and woman or male and female (recall Gen. 1:27). Also unmistakably, both the man and the woman were disobedient: "She … ate … and he ate." Paul doubtless is thinking not of the male, but of man genetically.

[61]The word "many" contains the idea of totality. See, e.g., Romans 5:15-"For if many died through one man's trespass. …" There are no exceptions: "many" is "all," for all have died-without exception.

[62]This will be discussed in more detail under "Original Sin."

[63]To quote Calvin again: "Lastly, faithlessness opened the door to ambition, and ambition was indeed the mother of obstinate disobedience" (Institutes, 1.2.4, Battles trans.).

[64]Further discussion of this evasion follows.

[65]"And God spoke all these words, saying …" (Exod. 20:1). This is the preface to what is usually called the Ten Commandments. Thereafter "all these words" are spoken of literally as "the ten words" (Exod. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; and 10:4 neb) or "ten commandments" (kjv, rsv, nasb, niv; however, see margin in rsv and nasb). "The ten words" better retains the important motif that what is commanded therein was spoken by the voice of God Himself directly to the people. Only later are the words inscribed on tablets of stone.

[66]E.g., Exodus 34:28-"the words of the covenant, the ten commandments."

[67]The Ten Commandments alone are spoken by God and later placed on tablets of stone. The statutes and ordinances, while coming from God, were spoken by Moses to the people.

[68]Words spoken through Isaiah vividly depict Israel's situation: "Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the Lord" (Isa. 1:4).

[69]Jesus' use of the word "law," as, for example, in the immediately preceding words: "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets" (v. 17), may refer to the law of Moses in general, therefore including the Ten Commandments and all the various ordinances and

statutes. This is apparent in that the words of Jesus in Matthew 5 contain references to the Ten Commandments in verses 21-30 and to ordinances/statutes in verses 31-47. However, since Jesus first spoke of the law in relation to two of the Ten Commandments (the sixth and seventh), the priority seems to be there. It is significant that later when Jesus said to an inquiring young man, “If you would enter life, keep the commandments,” and his reply was “Which?” Jesus added, “You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ (Matt. 19:17-19). (Parallels in Mark 10:18-19 and Luke 18:19-20 do not contain the words about the neighbor.) It is apparent that for Jesus “the commandments” refers basically to the Ten Commandments.

[70]We have observed, however, that such a commandment as “Thou shalt not covet” moves beyond external to internal obedience.

[71]Or “shut up all in” (nasb), Greek synekleisen … tous pantas eis. The meaning may be best expressed in saying, “God has given them over to disobedience” (one interpretation in BAGD).

[72]I.e., the law given to Israel, particularly the Ten Commandments (as the verses thereafter make clear, especially verses 21-22; also cf. 7:7-12; 13:8-10).

[73]The Greek phrase is ta tou nomou, literally, “the things of the law.”

[74]The Greek phrase is to ergon tou nomou, literally, “the work of the law.”

[75]Specifically in the Ten Commandments (see fn. above).

[76]The fact that mankind in general recognizes such imperatives as those for example, against killing (i.e., murder), adultery, lying, and stealing, points to a universal moral consciousness. These are not merely social mores; they are basically aspects of man’s nature as a moral creature.

[77]The reason has become clearer. These words from Romans 11:32 are, in part, a finalization of what has been said in Romans 3:9-10.

[78]Here we reverse the order from our prior consideration (wherein we discussed the natural law last). Although mentioned later in the New Testament (i.e., in Romans), natural law has an actual priority over the law to Israel and that spoken by Christ. The human race, prior to Moses and Christ, already knew the natural/moral law.

[79]An ancient legend declares that after God spoke the “ten words” and wrote them down for Moses on tablets of stone, they were also written in

seventy different languages so that they could be quickly and easily distributed throughout all the nations of the world. However legendary this story is, it does point up the universal significance of the Ten Commandments.

[80]Note the preface to the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1-2): “His disciples came to him. And he … taught them, saying. …” However, Jesus’ words frequently are spoken to others (see, for example, the words in Matt. 19:17-19).

[81]The Sermon closes with the statement beginning: “Every one then who hears these words of mine …” (Matt. 7:24).

[82]One might claim obedience to the laws/commandments against killing and adultery (as declared through the natural law and the Ten Commandments), but who (except Christ) could say, “I have never been angry with my brother or lusted after a woman [or a man]”?

[83]Instead of “honor” in rsv. The Greek word is edoxasan.

[84]One may refer here back to the discussion of “General Revelation” in chapter 2, “The Knowledge of God,” pp. 33-36.

[85]I.e., from the law written on the heart (which Paul discusses later).

[86]The first four commandments.

[87]This is a quotation from Leviticus 19:18. The Old Testament injunction relates only to the attitude toward a fellow Israelite: “You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus extended this to include everyone, as is apparent from the parallel passage in Luke 10 where following the commandment and the question, “And who is my neighbor?” (vv. 27-29), Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan.

[88]Paul here quotes the LXX translation of Isaiah 65:2.

11
The Effects of Sin

Now that we viewed the nature of sin as unbelief, pride, and disobedience, we come to a consideration of the effects or results of sin. Here I will discuss, in order: futility of mind and action; guilt and punishment; then separation, estrangement, and bondage.

I. FUTILITY OF MIND AND ACTION

We continue briefly with the Genesis narrative of man and woman in the Garden of Eden. The lie of the serpent ("Your eyes will be opened" [3:5]) promised a knowledge beyond what God had given to man in his creation, and the woman interpreted this to be a higher wisdom ("The tree was to be desired to make one wise" [3:6]). So it was that both the man and the woman ate the forbidden fruit. "Then the eyes of both were opened," but the results were scarcely what they had contemplated: "They knew that they were naked" (3:7).

It is apparent that the thoughts of Adam and Eve were no longer of God, nor even of being like Him; and their actions after that demonstrate increasing confusion of mind. The man and the woman made aprons of fig leaves to cover their nakedness; they sought to hide themselves from God; they tried to avoid His direct questioning about their sinful deed (3:7–13). None of this makes good sense: they were operating out of a mind that had become vain and futile in its thinking—and to this their actions corresponded.

Here we may return to Paul and his words in Romans. Just following the statement concerning mankind in general that "although they knew God they did not glorify[1] him as God or give thanks to him," Paul writes, "They became futile in their thinking[2] and their senseless[3] minds[4] were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools" (1:21–22). In relation to the things of God because of sin, there is only futility, darkness, and folly.

It is a sad fact that the human race in turning from God through sin is plunged into confusion and darkness. There are vast numbers of people today who, seeking to forget God in their pursuit of every kind of human interest, become greatly confused about life and its meaning. Most would not claim to be atheists, but, for all practical purposes, the basic tenor of their lives is away from God to the things of the world. They hide themselves—or seek to do so—in a multiplicity of human pursuits.[5] Such, however, is futile, for God is always there and cannot really be shut out.[6] Sin blinds—and in that blindness, in which God seems to be less than real, perhaps even nonexistent, people often attempt the foolish, the impossible.

As a result idolatry becomes the prevailing condition of mankind. Paul continues, after the words "they became fools" (1:22), thus: "and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and

of birds and fourfooted animals and crawling creatures" (Rom. 1:23 NASB). Now, of course, this did not happen immediately with the first man and woman (although idolatry was implicitly present in their attempted self-elevation),[7] but it is apparent in the history of mankind at large. The people of Israel are the outstanding example, for, while God was giving the Ten Commandments and various ordinances to Moses, they made and worshiped a golden calf (Exod. 32:1–6)—a "four-footed animal." Thus they "exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God," which they had beheld at Mount Sinai, for an idol.[8] How "futile" their thinking, how "senseless" their action! Yet such was repeated again and again after Israel entered the Promised Land, for before long they were engaged in one act of idolatry after another. What Israel did was to participate in the universal idolatry of mankind, but all the more egregiously because she had been given the divine commandments: "You shall have no other gods before me" and "You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything …" (Exod. 20:3–4). Truly they "became fools."

Now let us view idolatry in the world today. There is, to be sure, much paganism in which idols are the focal point of worship. There is also within Christendom itself the semi-idolatry of "graven images" and "likenesses" in various forms of worship.[9] However, the prevalent idolatry, particularly in Western culture, is not that of literal idols fashioned like men and women or animals but such idols as mammon, pleasure, power, success, knowledge, and fame.[10] Whenever anything other than God Himself becomes the chief end in life, an idol (or idols) takes over. In the long run the result is futility about life, for idols serve only to destroy.[11] In all the actions of people there may be the pretense of knowing what they are about; yet, in the words of Paul again, they have become "fools." For actually they are on the way to destruction.

We might single out for particular attention the idol of wisdom or knowledge. This idol is suggested in the words of Paul: "Claiming to be wise, they became fools" (Rom. 1:22). When God is no longer truly glorified and given thanks and as a result the true knowledge of Him fades, there is then the tendency to seek after worldly wisdom. Such a search may follow upon a long period of pagan idolatry (i.e., literal worship of idols, polytheism), as, for example, in Greek culture in which the wisdom of the philosopher became the ultimate way of truth. "God" may even be included in the realm of philosophical thought, but as an intellectual concept and not as a living reality. Moreover, such concepts or ideas of God from Greek philosophy to the present day are as diverse and multiple and often as contradictory to one another as the times and cultures each philosopher represents.[12] There is, however, no agreement, no consensus. Paul

puts it quite bluntly: “The world by wisdom knew not God” (1 Cor. 1:21 KJV);[13] hence all the talk about God means absolutely nothing in terms of genuine knowledge. The “god” of philosophy is an abstraction devised from the world, and the wisdom that is embraced as the ultimate way to truth is foolishness: “Claiming to be wise, they became fools.” In another place Paul warns, “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world… .” (Col. 2:8 NIV).[14] Captivity to philosophy is captivity to deception: it is the way of worldly wisdom that leads, not to God, but to confusion. Wisdom has become an idol; knowledge, a fetish: both lead to vanity and nothing.[15] To make an idol of them is futility and senselessness.

Significantly, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have marked an increasing departure from God through the thought of such men as Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, and Sigmund Freud. The thought world of political revolution, of evolutionary science, of psychological analysis all served to view God, at best, as expendable, but more often as a liability. Thus atheism has become the compelling philosophy in all such systems of thought. Marxist communism has represented the most blatant form of atheism, for in this system there is the avowed intent to remove God from every arena of life. Any belief in God is viewed as debarring concentration on man in his economic needs. “Law, morality, religion are … so many bourgeois prejudices.”[16] So God as a “bourgeois prejudice” must be totally set aside for the working class to arise and win the world.

Now when we say that Marxist philosophy in its denial of God represents “futility of mind,” this, of course, does not mean that there is no power or significance in it. Indeed, the fact that communism is now the dominant politico-economic force in much of the world shows that it has engaged the loyalty and hopes of millions of people. Further, Marxism has recognized that religion may be “the opiate of the people,” lulling them with hopes of heaven and producing complacency about earthly conditions.[17] Nonetheless—and this is the crucial point—there is futility of thought at the vital center of Marxism, namely, in viewing the human need as basically economic (e.g., the “classless society,” collective ownership of all goods). But here the Scriptures speak: “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4 NIV).[18] When an economic concern is viewed as the basic need in society and God is neglected or, worse still, ruled out, then whatever economic shifts there may be, for better or worse, there is abject failure. “Bread alone” cannot suffice: man’s working conditions may be ideal, but his life is vain and

empty without God and His word. Marxist philosophy ultimately therefore is also “futility of mind.”

I should add some word about the rapid increase of secular humanism in the twentieth century. By “secularism” we mean various views of human existence that have no place for God. “Secular,” by definition, excludes the sacred, and “humanism” signifies that the object of concern is humanity.[19] Marxism, as discussed, is one potent example; however, especially on the American scene, even more pervasive is the ever-increasing force of other forms of secular humanism such as evolutionary humanism, pragmatic humanism, psychological (behavioral) humanism, and cultural humanism.[20] All together they make up a composite of humanism that has become increasingly vocal and aggressive.

As illustrations of the above, I will mention the two “Humanist Manifestos,” appearing in 1933 and the other in 1973, setting forth the views of a wide range of secular humanists.[21] The first manifesto contains fifteen affirmations, the first being “Religious[22] humanists regard the universe as self-existing and not created.” There is no mention of God throughout; rather, the whole concern is “the complete realization of human personality.”[23] The second manifesto in its preface declares, “As in 1933, humanists still believe that traditional theism, especially faith in the prayer-hearing God, assumed to love and care for persons and understand their prayers, and to be able to do something about them, is an unproved and outmoded faith.” A few other statements: “As nontheists, we begin with humans not God, nature not deity.” “We can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species.” “No deity will save us; we must save ourselves.” “Ethics is *autonomous and situational*, needing no theological or ideological sanction.” “*Reason and intelligence* are the most effective instruments that mankind possesses. There is no substitute; neither faith nor passion suffices in itself.”[24] In this mélange of statements in the two “Humanist Manifestos” it is apparent that God has been eclipsed by a concentration on the world and man: there is no creation by God, no One to whom prayer may be offered, no divine purpose or providence, no deity to save man, and there are no God-given ethical norms. Faith is insufficient and misleading; there is only reason and intelligence to guide.

What can we say to all this? Our answer must be that such humanistic thinking is again *an exercise in futility.* It represents the deliberate attempt to exclude God and thereby make man the center and measure of all things. Such thinking, such reasoning (which humanists acclaim so highly as “*reason*“ and “*intelligence*“) has therefore become futile.

To say that the universe is “self-existing” is sheer nonsense; to “begin with

humans not God" is the total opposite of the way to truth; to claim to be unable to discover "divine purpose or providence" betrays a turning from God and His word, making such discovery impossible; to say that we must "save ourselves" is a Promethean self-contradiction, since salvation by definition must come from outside and beyond the self; to claim that ethics is "autonomous and situational" is absurd in light of the inner law written on every person's heart. All of this is "futility in thinking," the result of the darkening of "senseless minds."

Why has humanism gone this way? The answer simply is that God is missing. To quote Paul again, in words also applicable to humanists: "They did not glorify him as God or give thanks to him." And because they do neither, God has become less and less real and man inevitably the center of their concern. But since their philosophy is a vast distortion of reality (not dissimilar to the outmoded and distant view of the earth being the center of the universe and all things revolving around it), all such thinking about both God and man has become empty and vain.

One thing further: every God-denying philosophy, ideology, or attitude runs counter to the actual human situation. Man is so made by God that at every moment he is encountered by Him and is responsible to Him. To deny God, accordingly, is to close one's eyes to reality and to run from truth. It is actually to suppress the truth. Let us look back again to Paul's words in Romans 1 that led up to his declaration about futility. Paul begins with a statement about how God's wrath is revealed in its opposition to those who "by their wickedness suppress the truth" (v. 18). Then Paul explains: "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse" (vv. 19–20). Then Paul adds (as previously quoted): "For although they knew God they did not glorify him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking …" (v. 21). The whole picture is one of suppression of truth and denial of God's own self-disclosure, shutting the eyes to His manifestation through the created world. Hence, when today—or at any time in history—people proclaim the nonexistence of God, they are without excuse; they are actually denying the evidence that constantly confronts them. Is it any wonder that their thinking becomes futile, nonsensical? If only they would but glorify and thank Him—give honor to the Creator—all things would come back into focus again! But until then, they only continue to move away into more and more folly. Thus these devastating words of Paul: "Claiming to be wise, *they became fools*" (v. 22).

But now we move on to observe that idolatry is followed by all kinds of immoral actions. It is significant that Paul, after speaking of idolatry (Rom. 1:23), next declares, “Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (vv. 24–25). The worship and service of the creature, whether through literal or spiritual idolatry (i.e., making man the center of all things—a lying phantasy) results in God’s delivering people over to the perversions of the flesh. When people do not truly honor God, honor of one another rapidly degenerates into dishonor. Perverseness toward God (abandoning Him for a lie) leads to God’s abandonment of people and to their perversion with one another.

It is striking that before Paul comes to dealing with such evils as murder, strife, covetousness, slander, and heartlessness (1:29–31)—all of which are contrary to God’s word in the Ten Commandments and the teaching of Jesus—he focuses at length on the matter of sexual perversion. We quote in part: “For this reason [i.e., serving the creature rather than the Creator] God gave them up to dishonorable passions.[25] Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another … since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base[26] mind and to improper conduct” (vv. 26–28).

It is quite significant that futility of mind not only includes a gross distortion about God—that man is to be worshiped and served rather than the Creator—but also generates a gross distortion in human sexuality. I have previously discussed[27] how people, male and female, are set by God in a beautiful and symmetrical relationship first to Himself and then to each other. Indeed, we might add that the very coming together of man and woman as “one flesh” is a kind of parallel to the spiritual relationship of man with his Maker.[28] When that spiritual relationship is distorted, distortion may set in on the human level. The “natural” toward God, which is fellowship with Him, is changed to the “unnatural,” namely, idolatry; the natural toward one another becomes the unnatural—namely, sexual perversion.

Here we must be quick to add that Paul is not saying that this condition of perversion immediately occurs. “God gave them up” has been called “judicial abandonment” by God, with the result that by their very idolatrous practices the way is paved for them to become sexually perverted.

This connection of perversion with idolatry is shown in the Old Testament, for

example, when the people of Judah "built for themselves high places, and pillars, and Asherim[29] on every high hill and under every green tree; and there were also male cult prostitutes in the land" (1 Kings 14:23–24).[30] Such "cult [or "shrine" NIV] prostitutes" were at the service of other males in relation to the worship of the Asherim. There were also female cult prostitutes.[31] This cult prostitution was a regular aspect of Canaanite worship with idolatry and homosexuality closely linked. And Israel was frequently drawn into it. In any event, all this illustrates the point that the obverse of idolatry, an unnatural relation with God, is homosexuality, an unnatural relation among men.

We should add immediately that homosexuality is strongly spoken against in both Old and New Testaments. Long before the Law was given to Israel, Scripture records the vivid story of Sodom and Gomorrah. The male inhabitants in their perversity attempted to "know" the two angels (assumed to be men) who visited Lot in Sodom: "Bring them out to us, that we may know[32] them" (Gen. 19:5). God had already heard the "outcry" against the two cities as "great" and that their sin was "very ["exceedingly" NASB] grave" (Gen. 18:20); this was its final abominable proof. The result: "The LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire" (19:24). No other cities were so devastated in the Old Testament—a further mark of the "exceedingly grave" sin that they represented.

Very strong language is used in Leviticus about homosexuality: "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them" (20:13).[33] In Deuteronomy there is the command: "You must not bring the earnings of a female prostitute or of a male prostitute[34] into the house of the LORD your God to pay any vow, because the LORD your God detests them both" (Deut. 23:18 NIV). In the New Testament Paul speaks against homosexuality not only in Romans but also in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10: "Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate,[35] nor homosexuals,[36] nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (NASB). Note that Paul adds: "Such were some of you; but you were washed … sanctified … justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God" (v. 11). We may simply interject a note of thanksgiving; homosexuality need not be permanent: "Such *were* some of you!" Likewise, there is reference by Paul to homosexuality in 1 Timothy 1:9–10 where "sodomites" (or "homosexuals") are listed among "the ungodly and sinners … the unholy and the profane." Finally, the Book of Jude makes reference to "Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which … acted immorally[37] and indulged in

unnatural lust";[38] they "serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire" (v. 7).

To summarize: from these biblical pictures and statements it is unmistakable that the biblical witness about homosexuality is that it represents the grossest of sins, the worst of perversions, and stands under the fierce judgment of God. There is hope, as Paul declares, through forgiveness in Christ and through purification by the Holy Spirit. But it is an abomination, and if not removed, can only lead to eternal destruction.

We should also recall the earlier point, namely, that such perversion is particularly an offspring of idolatry.[39] When God as the object of worship is replaced by man, all things get out of focus. Moreover, God's word in Scripture no longer is seriously regarded, for human thought has usurped its place. Homosexuality becomes, then, a "viable lifestyle"—a valid option—along with any other sexual expression between "consenting partners." Along this line the authors of *Humanist Manifesto II* write: "A civilized society should be a tolerant one. Short of harming others or compelling them to do likewise, individuals should be permitted to express their sexual proclivities and pursue their life-styles as they desire." Tolerance and permissiveness replace truth and righteousness; man, not God, is the measure of all things.

Idolatry, accordingly, is the source of human perversion.

The result of man's not acknowledging God, as earlier mentioned, is actually a whole spectrum of evil thoughts and actions. Here are Paul's words again: "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct" (Rom. 1:28).[40] The description that follows is vivid indeed: "They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless" (1:29–31). It would be hard to imagine a catalog of more heinous evil—all springing from a base or depraved mind. But such is the common lot of mankind that has turned away from God.

Futility of mind *and* action—this is the primary and all-pervasive effect of sin and evil.

II. GUILT AND PUNISHMENT

We turn to the account in Genesis 3 of the sin of the man and the woman and now observe the next effect—namely, guilt and punishment. Let us consider both aspects.

In the matter of guilt, it is apparent that this immediately follows upon the act of disobedience. Just after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, the Scripture reads, “The eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.” (Gen. 3:7).[41] Here there is both irony and tragedy. The serpent had told the woman that when they ate of the forbidden tree, their eyes would be opened. And opened they were, but *not* to beholding their divine status; rather, ironically, they beheld their nakedness and guilt. To be sure, they were naked already, but in beautiful interrelatedness and innocence. Now their nakedness was a matter of shame. They were exposed before God and each other and so sought to cover[42] their profound sense of guilt.[43]

Guilt signifies a deep sense of wrongfulness. Since sin is primarily an offense against the personal relationship to God, wrongdoing is no minor matter. While sin is the breaking of a divine law, prior to that it is the breaking of a divine-human relationship. God gives man a beautiful world and intends to walk in fellowship with His human creature. But man, disobedient to his Creator, strikes at the very heart of that relationship by pridefully seeking even more. Since sin is ultimately against the love and goodness of a holy God, it is all the more heinous and the guilt all the more profound.

A further vivid Old Testament illustration of this great sin occurred when Israel made and worshiped the golden calf.[44] God had graciously redeemed Israel from Egypt, had provided for their every need in a barren wilderness, and had personally spoken forth His “ten words” (Ten Commandments) for their keeping and direction. But even before Moses could bring down from the mountaintop the tablets containing these words, the people were crying out to the molten calf: “This is your God,[45] O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt” (Exod. 32:4). To be sure, this act of idolatry flagrantly contravenes both the first and second commandments, but it all the more signifies a terrible breach of relationship with Israel’s own God. This is *the* apex of sin, and the resulting guilt of Israel is so great that Moses offers his own life

as an atonement for the evil done:[46] "Alas, this people have sinned a great sin…. But now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written" (Exod. 32:31–32). So guilty was Israel—they had "sinned a great sin," and the sin was against the holy and loving God.

Note also the cry of God through Isaiah the prophet at a later time: "Hear, O heavens and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: 'Sons have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me…. Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the LORD'" (Isa. 1:2, 4). The sin of Israel is the sin against God as their Father: as "sons" they had "forsaken" Him. This is, again, the great sin—and the guilt all the more odious. Indeed, Isaiah himself in a dramatic vision of God in His holiness (Isa. 6)—"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts" (v. 3)—senses how much he is a part of a sinful nation: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (v. 5). Thereupon an angelic being with a burning coal touched Isaiah's mouth and said, "Behold this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven" (v. 7). The prophet was made so strongly aware of the personal holiness of God that he sensed the sinfulness of all his people and his own sinfulness. They were a guilty people and so was the prophet himself.

Let us emphasize again that guilt from sin arises primarily out of the breach of personal relationship. Earlier this was spoken of as a betrayal of love.[47] Surely it is centrally this, for God is a God of love. But also it is a violation of God's holiness and righteousness. Hence, He cannot simply overlook sin. Love betrayed is a tragic thing because it is the wounding of the very heart of God; holiness violated is a heinous thing because it strikes at the foundation of God's being.[48] Sin accordingly is against the holy love of God, and guilt is the result of that sin. As surely as the God of love is a holy and righteous God, guilt cannot be readily done away. Here we may return to Exodus and note the words of God spoken to Moses not long after Israel's sin of idolatry: "The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty' "[49] (34:6–7). Sin, the breach of personal relationship, brings profound guilt.

But now let us quickly add that even as sin is not only against God personally but also against His word, guilt results from any infraction of God's word—His truth, His commandment, His law. The guilt of the first man and woman, as we

have seen, was the result not only of the rupture of a personal relationship but also of the breaking of God's command. And although the first is primary, the second is also essential, for God cannot be separated from His word. Hence the breaking of God's command also brings guilt. Israel sinned by betraying and violating a personal relationship as well as by breaking God's law. It was an offense personally against God in their making the golden calf; but it was also a contravention of His word declared by Him in His first two commands. Thus we can by no means disregard the relation of guilt also to the commandments of God.

We have previously observed how the commandments of God are declared in the Ten Commandments, in the word of Christ, and in the natural law. Since sin is the result of failure to observe the commandments, guilt likewise follows. In regard to the Ten Commandments, the word spoken to Moses that God "will by no means clear the guilty" occurs as Moses is standing before God with the two tablets of stone in his hands and waiting to receive these commandments for the second time. Thus the breach of any of them will result in guilt.[50]

In the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus so deepens and interiorizes the law that word and thought may be more sinful than outward deed, guilt is all the more pronounced. In relation to the commandment "You shall not kill" Jesus adds: "But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before[51] the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,'[52] shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the hell of fire" (Matt. 5:22 NASB).[53]

Here guilt is not only a moral condition resulting from sin but also a legal condition: guilt sufficient to lead to hell itself. Similarly, Jesus spoke about lust —a matter of thought and feeling—whose sin and guilt are so great as likewise to merit hell (Matt. 5:28–30).

It cannot be overemphasized that according to Jesus the word spoken ("You fool") or the thought ("lust") is that which incurs the deepest guilt. This does not mean that the outward act is not also sinful and guilt-producing, for surely it is. But the most heinous sins are *not* those that would ordinarily bring a person before an earthly court of judgment or lead to a severe sentence if one were taken to court. Yet these sins could lead, not to a minor judgment, but to hell itself: "guilty enough to go into the hell of fire." In the same vein the worst sin of all, likewise of thought and word, is that of "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit": "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit[54] never

has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin—for they had said, 'He has an unclean spirit'" (Mark 3:28–30). This is sin so deep, so vicious, so demonic, and the guilt so vast, that there can never be forgiveness.[55] Again, here is sin of the spoken word and of the malicious thought to the nth degree: it is to be "guilty of an eternal sin."

Now let us turn again to the natural law. I have been speaking of the guilt that results from infraction of the Mosaic law and the words of Christ, but there is also an inward guilt resulting from failure to live up to the law written on the heart of every person. Paul's words concerning the Gentiles were earlier quoted, to the effect that "their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them" (Rom. 2:15). Since the moral law is written on the heart—essentially the same as published in the Ten Commandments and deepened by the words of Christ—there will also be a sense of guilt arising, not from outward words, but from the testimony of conscience.[56] "Conscience bears witness" means that there is an inward monitor, even an inner court of judgment ("conflicting thoughts" accusing or excusing), that pronounces "Guilty" or "Not Guilty." Since, as Paul later shows, Gentiles (without knowledge of the Ten Commandments and, by extension, the words of Christ) are also bereft of true righteousness,[57] then the inner judge, the conscience, will again and again be declaring, "Guilty."

Accordingly, there is universality of guilt.[58] But, one may rejoin, is that actually the case? We may declare such objectively (even as with the universality of sin), but do people really know and experience guilt? The answer is yes, even if only to a minimal degree. We have earlier observed that failure to heed the inner law often leads to a lessening of sensitivity to God's moral demands. But since people by their very nature are moral beings with a conscience, they can never totally elude the inner voice of righteousness. By failing to live up to it, they are bound to experience some inward guilt.

In looking at the contemporary scene, we often behold an inadequate view of guilt or an attempt to gloss over it. Among some psychologists the view has prevailed that any idea of sin and guilt leads away from healthy and happy living. Guilt has been blamed for countless cases of emotional misery, inward confusion, and crippling of the will. There may be guilt feelings, so it is said, because of childhood experiences, social constraints, and the like, but these need to be recognized for what they are, namely, neurotic. Perhaps through therapy these guilt feelings can be brought to awareness and thereby relieved. Guilt then

at most is a sign of emotional inhibition and disturbance. It certainly has nothing to do with sin; rather, it is a sign of sickness. Consequently, from this viewpoint, the truly healthy person is one who is free of guilt feelings and lives with no inhibitions whatever. Similarly, religion is frequently viewed as a repressive and guilt-producing force. By its regulations and taboos many persons are held in constraint, and if they try to break loose, it is only at a fearful price of anxiety and guilt. So, it is claimed, religion serves to increase people's neurotic condition.

By way of response to this viewpoint we may indeed agree that there is such a thing as neurotic guilt that belongs to the realm of mental and emotional illness, and also that religion sometimes exercises a repressive force. In the former case, there can be, and often is, a kind of pathological guilt that calls for therapeutic help. Such guilt needs relief so that a person may function more freely. In regard to the latter, we recognize that there is an authoritarian form of religion that demands consent to dogma and ritual and often inculcates fear to keep its devotees in line—putting unnatural constraints on normal behavior. All such is deeply guilt producing. Such guilt needs help and may call for counsel and therapy to bring about relief.

But—and now we come to the critical point—there is a guilt in all human beings so deep that no psychological techniques can avail to relieve it. This guilt is due to man's running afoul of God's law and order as set forth in man's own being. Compared with neurotic guilt, which is false guilt, this is true guilt.[59] It is the guilt that inheres in all people who as moral beings do not live up to genuine moral demands. Furthermore, true guilt is ever present in human nature even if a person gives no outward sign of any emotional or psychological problem. The only possible way to deal with it is through confession[60] and divine forgiveness.[61] Guilt—true guilt, moral guilt—is coextensive with mankind. However, even as with the first man and the first woman, there continues to be the effort largely to cover it over. This is primarily guilt before God, and, though they may not sense it, people are ever seeking to protect themselves from that guilt.[62] But it is there as surely as all people are sinners: there is no escape.

This brings us back to the narrative in Genesis and to the second aspect of punishment. Hardly had the man and woman in their guilt sought to cover their shame before they sensed the coming judgment of God. "And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden" (Gen. 3:8). They were seeking to hide from God! What a sad and

sorry picture this is: man and woman, created to have fellowship with God, now running from Him. Doubtless many times before this, God had walked in the garden "in the cool of the day" (a beautiful and refreshing expression), and they had been delighted in His presence as He drew near. But suddenly all was different: they foolishly and vainly did everything possible to elude His presence.

Then came the unavoidable moment with the searching, penetrating question from God to the man: "Where are you?" (3:9). Next, the sad, sad reply: "I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself' (3:10). The man (as we have observed) was not aware of his nakedness before, but now there is a sense of shame and guilt and *fear*. This is by no means the fear of God that is reverential, awesome, and always proper in the presence of Almighty God. Rather, it is the anxious fear that springs from the heart of one who senses the coming punishment of God and seeks to evade it.

Momentarily there is the vain attempt of both the man and the woman to put the fault elsewhere—the man accusing his wife: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate" (3:12) and the woman blaming the serpent: "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate" (v. 13). But of course this is to no avail, for immediately God's punishment (vv. 14–19) falls upon

1. The serpent—a curse plus continuing enmity between man and serpent (representing Satan), with man having the final victory.
2. The woman—multiplication of pain in childbearing and domination by her husband.
3. The man—the ground accursed with thorns and thistles so that he will have to toil throughout life for his daily sustenance.

In all of this it is apparent that creation was from that time on to bear a curse upon it, that woman's joy in childbearing and in her role as helper to her husband would be accompanied by suffering and domination, and that man's delight in his work would be suffused with toil and drudgery. Such is the punishment of God upon the world and mankind in the beginning of the human race.

Now beyond this is the far more severe punishment of *physical death.* For after all the punishments and tied in with the last about toil, God declared, "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19). Man, who had been inbreathed by his Maker with the breath of life and had been invited to eternal life by partaking of "the tree of life," was instead to return to the ground. This does not mean that man gave up immortality, for that he did not

yet have;[63] the "tree of life" was indeed at hand, but before he ate of it he had forfeited the possibility of living forever. Man, invited to an intimate communication with God that, by its very nature, would be unending, tragically chose rather the way of death.

Let us be quite clear. Physical death is by no means portrayed as the "natural" issue of man's existence. "Returning to dust" is not the result of man's being human and finite, rather it is the result of finite man's failure to partake of God's own self-offering and instead to seek his own prideful ends.

But now we move on to recognize that wherever and whenever sin occurs, punishment is sure to follow. Subsequent to the sin of the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, their older son Cain murdered his brother Abel, and Cain was condemned to be "a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth" (Gen. 4:12). Several generations later, when the wickedness of man had become so great that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (6:5), God sent the judgment of the Flood so that, except for Noah and his family, no one survived. Again, as people later arrogantly sought to build a tower "with its top in the heavens" (11:4), God punished them by confounding their language and scattering them across the earth. Particularly vivid is the still later account of Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction by God for their "gross sin" with "brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven" (19:24). Sin is inevitably followed by punishment.

We need not continue this rehearsal of the innumerable biblical accounts of similar incidents. Although Israel was chosen by God and called to be a holy nation, the people sinned again and again, with punishment invariably following. It may be a brief punishment as when Israel worshiped the golden calf and three thousand men were put to death (Exod. 32:28); it may be forty additional years of wandering in the wilderness for their faithlessness (Num. 14:33–34); it may be prolonged captivity by foreign powers because of Israel's and Judah's many acts of disobedience to God (Jer. 9:13–16). God also brought the other nations of the world into judgment, but He was particularly severe with His own people: "You only have I known[64] of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2).[65]

The New Testament provides the same picture. Some of the severest strictures are against the church. Peter speaks of judgment as beginning "with the household of God" (1 Peter 4:17); in Hebrews are the words "the Lord disciplines him whom he loves" (12:6); and in Revelation there is this warning: "Because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my

mouth" (3:16). This punishment is, of course, by no means limited to the church. Indeed, Peter adds that "if it begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17). Similarly the Book of Revelation, after focusing first on the church, contains many a picture of God's coming judgment upon the world. God does—and will—punish sin wherever it is found.

In the earlier discussion of guilt we observed that, in relation to the law of God—whether in the Decalogue, the Sermon on the Mount, or man's own God-given nature (the natural law)—people are profoundly guilty and even guilt-ridden. Now we need only to add that punishment invariably follows. In many cases when the moral law of God is also a matter of civil law (e.g., in cases of murder and stealing), society will impose its own punishment. In other instances where the contravention of God's law belongs to inner thoughts and motivations (e.g., through idolatry or lust), the ensuing punishment may be less obvious or immediate. Nonetheless, one simply cannot break the commandments of God with impunity, for they belong to man's very structure as a religious and moral being. Man, whether he realizes it or not, is always related to God (he was made in God's image and is responsible to Him) and to his neighbor. Thus when he sins against God or his neighbor, he actually brings judgment upon himself. In one sense God visits him with punishment, but in another sense man brings it on himself by the reaction of his own God-given being. According to Paul, "God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

Let us pursue this last statement a bit further. Paul adds, "For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption"[66] (v. 8). This means that sin, i.e., "sowing to the flesh," *from itself* will bring about the deterioration and destruction of a person. As an illustration of this, we note the words of Paul elsewhere: "He who sins sexually sins against his own body" (1 Cor. 6:18 NIV). It is not only that one sins against another person—as in adulterous or homosexual liaisons, or in relation to a prostitute[67] —but also that the sin rebounds against one's own body. Corruption, deterioration, destruction set in—even if (we might add) the process occurs over many years. The body was made by God for proper and pure sexual activity; hence when that is breached, dysfunction and disease often occur. In our present day perhaps the most vivid representations of sexually related diseases are genital herpes[68] and AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome).[69] "God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows… ."

This is true on every level of human existence. If a person's life, for example, is fraught with hostility and bitterness there is frequently the external result of

impoverished human relationships and the internal effect of manifold illnesses. It is well known today that the constant drive by many for success, money, and fame—with all the pressures such drives bring about—frequently leads to mental and physical breakdowns. Man was simply not made by God to center everything on his own existence; hence the judgment of God comes by way of man's self-destruction. Punishment may be delayed for a time, but the day of reckoning is ever at hand.

Now we come to the final important fact about punishment, namely, that it is not only a reality in present life but may also be experienced in the life to come. Not only is there the punishment that all mankind shares as sons and daughters of Adam and Eve (the resulting pain and labor in both the origination of life and in the living of it). Not only is there the punishment that is received in daily existence when people abuse God's laws. But there will also be punishment for many in the life to come.

We have already noted Jesus' words about those who are "guilty enough to go into the hell of fire." Such a statement obviously means the severest possible punishment in the world to come. Jesus also frequently speaks of "the day of judgment,"[70] "the judgment,"[71] or simply "that day."[72] In one of His strongest statements Jesus declares, "I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matt. 12:36–37). Paul speaks of "a day on which he [God] will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed" (Acts 17:31). This will be the day when "God's righteous judgment will be revealed": to some "he will give eternal life," for others "there will be wrath and fury" (Rom. 2:5, 7–8). As a result of this judgment there will be both the blessing of eternal life and the punishment of God's furious wrath.

Indeed, it needs to be said forcefully that Scripture attests to a punishment that is eternal. Jesus refers to this in His portrayal of the final judgment scene in which those at his left "go away into eternal punishment," whereas "the righteous [go] into eternal life" (Matt. 25:46). Paul speaks of "those who do not know God and … do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus." Then he adds, "They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction" (2 Thess. 1:8–9).

We can scarcely leave this section on guilt and punishment without a joyful expression of thanks to Almighty God that in His Son Jesus Christ He has provided One who has vicariously received it all upon Himself. For those who belong to Him all guilt is removed, all punishment done away. Thanks be to God

for the inexpressible gift of His love!

III. SEPARATION, ESTRANGEMENT, BONDAGE

In the account of the initial sin we observe that the progenitors of the human race were sent forth from Eden. There is first a beautiful touch of the Lord's mercy, for we read, "And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them" (Gen. 3:21). Shortly afterward came the banishment: "The LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man;[73] and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life" (vv. 23–24). The Lord is truly merciful, but there is also an unmistakable sense of His righteousness and anger in driving man out of Paradise.

It is apparent that man had now become totally separated from "the tree of life": "cherubim"[74] and a "flaming sword" stood between them. There was no way for man to reenter. Hence life—immortal life—was cut off from him. The reason for this is stated by God just prior to the punishment: "'Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever'—" (Gen. 3:22). God's intention for man was that he know only the realm of good,[75] but now that he had experienced evil as well, God did not want man to live for ever in that condition. The result: man has by his sin forfeited the possibility of eternal life.[76] His sin has separated and alienated him from the living God.

This separation means nothing less than *spiritual death*. Recall that God had said in regard to "the tree of knowledge of good and evil": "In the day that you eat from it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17 NASB). The serpent in turn had flatly contradicted God's assertion by declaring, "You surely shall not die!" (3:4 NASB). From outward appearances the serpent's counterclaim was seemingly vindicated, since man and woman continued to exist many days and years after their fall into sin. However, the basic matter was not physical but spiritual death. To be sure, there was physical death at some point after that as an aspect of the punishment of death[77] —"to dust you shall return." But the ultimately critical matter was the spiritual death that man experienced the very day of his disobedience to God. For it was spiritual death indeed to be shut away from the life-giving presence of God.

The Old Testament is the continuing story of man's alienation from God. An

abyss had been opened up by man's sin and fall. God is shown as One who revealed Himself to an Abraham, a Moses, an Isaiah, and many others, but there was always distance. This is vividly illustrated by the fact that the Holy of Holies of God's presence in tabernacle and temple was virtually closed off[78] from access to Israel. The later physical exile of Israel and Judah to foreign lands was a final concrete expression of Israel's spiritual separation from God.

If this was true of God's people, how much more of mankind at large. Paul speaks of the Gentiles as hitherto "separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). The words "having no hope and without God" are a graphic portrayal of the universal human condition. This is spiritual death indeed.

Now we need quickly to add that man can never really be satisfied in this separation from God. There remains in the human race generally and each person particularly a haunting sense that things ought not to be that way. Hence, there is the vast proliferation of religions in the world, representing mankind's search after God. Countless gods and goddesses abound, idols of multiple kinds, cultic practices of almost endless variety: all are attempts to relate to ultimate reality. Yet since the primeval expulsion of man from Paradise and "the flaming sword" turning "every direction," there has been no human way for man truly to get back to God and to partake of the tree of life.

The fact that many people today claim no religion at all does not alter the basic situation. Secularism, namely, the attempt to function in life without recourse to any religious faith, is a desperate attempt to make do without God and is also bound to fail. For man is so constituted by God that there can be no meaningful life except in relationship to Him. There are, to be sure, multiple temporary satisfactions in the things of the world—various pursuits and accomplishments-but none deeply satisfies.

Often underneath the surface of modern man's worldly orientation lurks a sense of pervasive unhappiness. After the development of "the death of God"[79] mentality, the liberation that many assumed would occur has not occurred. Rather the "passing" of God has often led only to a deeper sense of anxiety. There is a growing fear that life is really without significance (despite the manifold round of activities) and that death is the only reward for life's accomplishments. A sense of emptiness and meaninglessness[80] operates not far below the surface of contemporary humanistic culture, and the result often is that of profound despair. Without God, one is without hope.

But man is not only separated from God, he is also estranged from his

neighbor. Here we return again to Genesis and move on from the narrative of man's expulsion from Paradise to the subsequent account of the murder of Abel by his brother Cain (Gen. 4:8–16). Cain and Abel, the first sons of Adam and Eve, both brought offerings to the Lord. Cain's was not accepted, and in fierce anger he rose up and killed his brother. Thus the parents' separation from God was antecedent to the antagonism of brother against brother that led to murder. Moreover, even upon the immediate questioning by God—"Where is Abel your brother?"—Cain gave this harsh reply: "I do not know; I my brother's keeper?" (v. 9). Indifference, estrangement, antagonism so quickly enter the human situation.

Fratricide was soon followed by homicide. Lamech, sixth in the line of Cain, boasted to his wives: "I have slain a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold" (Gen. 4:23–24). This is unmistakably murder—killing without due cause (even as with Cain)—but added to that is a spirit of vengeance and vindictiveness that shows even more vividly the increasing separation of man from his neighbor.

By the time of Noah violence abounded. According to Genesis 6, "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and … every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually … the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence" (vv. 5, 11). That this violence included murder is apparent from words addressed by God to Noah after the Flood: "For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning … of every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image" (9:5–6). All murder is essentially fratricide, and anyone who takes another's life thereby forfeits the right to his own.

These early accounts of violence, with murder at the heart, vividly demonstrate man's estrangement from his brother. And, of course, such estrangement does not end with the Flood,[81] for though Noah was a righteous man, he was nonetheless of the seed of Adam through whom sin had entered the human race. Hence, the descendants of Noah to the present day are a fallen race—cut off from the life of God and basically alienated one from another. This, to be sure, does not always mean murder, for there are many other sinful acts such as stealing, adultery, and lying that exhibit this condition of tragic estrangement. There is also the multiplication of human attitudes with no necessary outward violence—some of these being covetousness, jealousy, and hatred—that on a still deeper level demonstrate alienation. Moreover, even where people seem to live in harmony with one another, again and again evidences of this deep-seated alienation emerge.

The Ten Commandments in their ethical section[82] are in themselves a declaration of the darkened human condition, as are many of the statutes and ordinances laid down for Israel. These are all proscriptions relating to man's negative relationship to his neighbor and are restraints on the universal tendency to violence. Yet man's sinful nature is still there—unchanged. So does the psalmist cry forth: "Help, LORD; for there is no longer any that is godly…. Every one utters lies to his neighbor" (Ps. 12:1–2). The prophet Jeremiah declares, "Every one deceives his neighbor…. with his mouth each speaks peaceably to his neighbor, but in his heart he plans an ambush for him" (Jer. 9:5, 8). This human situation is all the more highlighted in the New Testament, especially in many of the words of Jesus that go directly to the inner source: "Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander" (Matt. 15:19). Man is deeply at variance with his neighbor. The apostle Paul, quoting the Old Testament, declares, "None is righteous, no, not one…. All have turned aside…. Their throat is an open grave, they use their tongues to deceive…. Their feet are swift to shed blood … and the way of peace they do not know" (Rom. 3:10–17).[83] Especially do the words "all have turned aside" bespeak the alienated condition of mankind since the fall of Adam and Eve.

The natural[84] human condition, therefore, is that of aggressiveness against one's neighbor. James writes, "What causes wars, and what causes fightings among you? Is it not your passions that are at war in your members? You desire and do not have; so you kill. And you covet and cannot obtain; so you fight and wage war" (4:1–2). Warfare, whether on a large scale or small, is the history of mankind. Times of peace turn out to be only pauses between renewed fighting. Aggressiveness, rooted in alienation, is at the heart of the human condition.

What then, one may inquire, of the many forms of human association: is this condition true of all? The answer must be yes, even though persons may find much value in them. For even where people come together in various fellowships and enterprises, there is still an underlying alienation that at any time may break out into overt antagonism and negative action. Common interests often bring about human associations and mutual benefits, but since self-interest lies at the heart of all such, there is ever present the lurking force of inner destructiveness. Other people, even those whom one has known for a long time, may on occasion become a threat[85] to personal satisfaction and fulfillment. Hence, even the seemingly most stable of human relationships—family and marriage in particular—are interlarded with ego concerns that constantly threaten to bring into play violent disruptive forces. As long as there is individual satisfaction (that is, each person finding personal advantage),

relationships may hold up. But if this mutuality wears thin, the natural condition of alienation reemerges with all the consequences of strife and warfare.

Hence, in all of this is demonstrated, in addition to separation from God, man's estrangement from his neighbor. This is one of the tragic effects of sin, namely, that man who was made by God to live in fellowship with his neighbor is constantly riven by forces of alienation. Nonetheless, he is commanded by God to love his neighbor as himself. In the words of Jesus, this is next only to the command to love God: "The second [commandment] is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). Indeed, says Paul, "the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Gal. 5:14). Man is not commanded to love himself; it is not necessary since he does that naturally (and selfishly) as the result of sin, but he is commanded to love his neighbor *as* himself. The command in itself bespeaks the broken condition of human life, for people are commanded to do what should be the basic fact of human existence, namely, to live in glad and harmonious relationship with one another.

Finally, it needs to be emphasized that man is totally incapable of restoring himself to a right relationship with God and his neighbor. We have already observed that when the man and the woman were driven from Eden, "cherubim" and "a flaming sword" barred the way to their return. Now unavailable to them and likewise to all people thereafter is the life of continuing fellowship with God and with one another. Shut out by their sin from what they had formerly known, there is no human way of returning.

Now we may view this in terms of bondage. For the human situation is not only one of exile from Paradise but also one of human bondage. Any and every attempt on the part of man to restore what has been lost only meets with failure. The human search after God, though it is world-wide, never really achieves success: God always remains unknown.[86] The effort for true community, despite many a hopeful beginning, never obtains the desired results.[87] The basic fact is that man has fallen into bondage. This bondage of the will has incapacitated man from truly turning to God and his neighbor. The bondage, most apparent in the inability of the will, is rooted however in the whole of human nature. Through sin that nature has become futile in thought and action, guilty in heart and conscience, and now is utterly incapable of turning back to its pristine condition.

This verily is bondage to sin. In the words of Jesus, "Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). Sin cannot be committed and then easily turned away from: it quickly becomes the master. Cain was warned by God: "Sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it" (Gen. 4:7

NASB). Cain did not master it; he proceeded to kill his brother, and thereby the "crouching" sin immediately overmastered him. Or looking back again at Adam and Eve, it is apparent that sin in the guise of a serpent was likewise "crouching" in wait for them. But they did not, any more than Cain did later, master it. So sin became master, and both the man and the woman became its bondservants, even to this present day.[88]

Accordingly, man as sinner is no longer a truly free person. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve knew no bondage of any kind. They were free for God, free for each other, free to work without toil—even free not to sin. They were able to do God's will, able not to sin.[89] But when they sinned, they were no longer able not to sin[90] : their freedom had become bondage.

One of the saddest illusions is the attitude of many people that freedom is to be found in breaking way from God and His commands and living as they please. It is often assumed that if we deliberately set out to "do our own thing"—regardless of God and His will or our effects upon others—we will find emancipation and self-fulfillment. Why not give vent to one's own desires and concerns and live freely? This, despite outward show, is the real attitude of natural man. But it is the attitude actually of a slave, not a free person, for such a one is in bondage to his own passions. Peter speaks about those who "entice [others] with licentious passions of the flesh…. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption." He then adds, "For whatever overcomes a man, to that he is enslaved" (2 Peter 2:18–19). There is no freedom in giving vent to desires and passions, for in so doing a person is enslaved by them and is in no sense a free person. It is folly to think otherwise.[91]

To summarize this section on estrangement and bondage: the final effect of sin is that man is both alienated from God and his neighbor and totally incapable of recovering what has been lost. He can only follow the way of the world, which is the way of slavery and death. He is dominated by "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). Even if he should desire to alter his situation, it is impossible for him to do so. He cannot by any act of will turn from the way of self-serving and begin to love God and his neighbor. The Edenic state is *gone,* and man on his own can *never* find it again.

EXCURSUS: ORIGINAL AND ACTUAL SIN

It may be helpful to add some words about the relation between the sin of Adam and Eve and all subsequent sins. Throughout what has been written in the previous pages on sin—its origin, nature, and effects—I have made clear that there is a close connection between them. Let us note several matters.

First, and this by way of background, sin is unmistakably *universal*. It is not just that the first man and woman sinned, but likewise do all those who follow them. So does the psalmist speak: "No man living is righteous before thee" (143:2); in Proverbs is the question "Who can say, 'I have made my heart clean; I am pure from my sin'?" (20:9); and Ecclesiastes declares, "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins" (7:20). In similar vein are the words of Solomon in his prayer of dedication of the temple: "There is no man who does not sin" (1 Kings 8:46). All such Old Testament statements declare the universal sinfulness of man: there is no person who never sins, no one can claim to be pure from sin, no one is finally righteous before God.[92] Such statements in God's Word undoubtedly are not only there by divine revelation, but also represent the profoundest apprehensions of human experience.

In the New Testament the universal sinfulness of people is everywhere shown. For example, we are told in John's Gospel that though many believed in Jesus as a result of His "signs," He "did not trust himself to them … for he himself knew what was in man" (2:23–25). Jesus knew that evil was "in man"—any person, every person. He also addressed His own disciples as "evil": "you then, who are evil …" (Luke 11:13).[93] Most dramatically, this evil (with implications for all generations to come) is shown forth in the death of Jesus. For by His own closest disciples He was betrayed, denied, and deserted; by the Jews and Romans He was tortured and crucified; *no one* stood with Him at the end. Paul later writes in reference to Jew and Gentile alike: "None is righteous, no, not one…. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong: no one does good, not even one" (Rom. 3:11–12).[94] Verily (as the NIV vividly translates), "the whole world is a prisoner of sin" (Gal. 3:22).

We hardly need belabor the declaration of universal sinfulness. This, of course, does not mean that man is a sinner by virtue of his creation (only good can come from the hand of God) or that there are not degrees of sinfulness.[95] But it does mean that wherever man is found, sin will also be present. The most

upright of persons is “a prisoner of sin” in the sense that even his outwardly good acts are derivative of an a ego-centered concern. Sin is as universal as the human race.

Second, sin is clearly a *disposition* or *state* of mankind. It is not only that men everywhere sin but also that they are sinners. In one sense this may be described as a habitual mode—the act becoming a way of life or condition;[96] in another sense it is an endemic fact of the human situation—the condition preceding and prompting the act.[97] Both of these statements represent aspects of the complexity of sin in relation to man, but now our focus is on sin as an inherent condition. The psalmist declares, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (51:5). Such a statement, probably by David, points to the fact that from birth a person has the mark of sin upon him. Also we may note the words of another Psalm: “The wicked[98] are estranged from the womb; These who speak lies go astray from birth” (58:3 NASB). Man who is “brought forth in iniquity” is “estranged from the womb,” which is to say that his natural condition is that of sinfulness. In a similar vein Paul writes that we are “by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3). It is not that we have become such simply by our actions, but it is a given fact of nature.”[99] It is a matter of *being*[100] not only of action. Sin and evil are the prevailing condition of mankind.

We might add that this is further underscored by the fact that natural man is spiritually dead—as Paul puts it, “dead in … trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1 NASB). Again, due to the “sin which dwells within,” the body is a “body of death” (Rom. 7:20, 24). Accordingly, sin and death are *already* present in the human condition as a predilection for all that people do. The fact also that the New Testament speaks the language of a new birth (“You must be born anew” [John 3:7]), of a new creature (“if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation” [2 Cor. 5:17]), and of a new life (“new life of the Spirit” [Rom. 7:6])—all this signifies that the natural person needs a radical alteration. Why? The answer is unmistakable: the “old” person is a sinner, not simply one who sins; he must become new.

Third, and here we come specifically to original sin, this condition or state of sin and death that inheres in all mankind goes back to *the action of the first man.* In the words of Paul, “Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin” (Rom. 5:12). Again, “Because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man” (v. 17). Paul is undoubtedly referring to Adam, for, as Paul further specifies elsewhere, “in Adam all die” (1 Cor. 15:22). The condition of sin and death in all mankind is the result of the primal sin of one man. Through this sin all people experience sin and death.

Here also the word *condemnation* should be mentioned. Paul teaches that the sin of Adam brought condemnation not only on himself but also on all people who were to come after him: “For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation [i.e., upon Adam]” (Rom. 5:16); also “one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men” (v. 18). Hence, the sense of condemnation and guilt that is universal[101] finds its ultimate root in the sin and condemnation of the original one man.[102] Although actual sins may and do compound this sense of guilt and condemnation, it is there in primordial fashion[103] in all human existence.

Consequently sin and death, guilt and condemnation, are not, first of all, realities because of the actions of individuals after Adam who bring it on themselves. Rather, they inhere in the very existence of every person. No one is born without the taint of sin, the reality of guilt, the mark of death upon him. To be sure, there may not be conscious awareness of these things, but they are nonetheless there. And, of course, the fact that this is true of everyone means that all people need salvation. This is the case regardless of actual sins,[104] for “in Adam *all* die.” So it is, to quote Paul further, “through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners” (Rom. 5:19 NIV). All people have been constituted sinners by the original act of sinful disobedience of Adam. Obviously mankind was not made sinful by the Creator, but has become that through the disobedience of the first man. For when Adam shut himself off from God by his disobedient action, all who are children of Adam are born into that condition of separation and lostness from God. We have been “made sinners” through the primal act of disobedience.

This may be understood, first, in the fact that we are all *heirs* of Adam, and thereby inherit his sinful nature. What Adam became through the Fall has been passed down to all his successors. It is not simply a matter of biological transmission, for sin and fall belong primarily to the spiritual and ethical realm; it is a spiritual condition[105] that is passed on to everyone. There is in all mankind from birth both the taint of sin and the bent to sin, so that neither infant nor child is innocent any more than is a youth or an adult. There is a perverted tendency in human nature that does not rise out of a person’s own actions but lies behind and affects all his deeds.

It is more, however, than the first man Adam making others sinners through his disobedience. For although we have all descended *from* Adam, we are also in a real sense *in* Adam. Hence, it is not only because of Adam that we sin and die, but also because we exist in him. “*In* Adam all die”; or, as the old saying puts it: “In Adam’s fall we sinned all.” When Adam sinned, we sinned; when Adam fell,

we fell; when Adam was condemned, we were condemned.[106] It is not only that we have inherited Adam's sinful, fallen, guilty nature but also that we *are* that very nature. There is an organic unity between Adam and the entire human race.[107]

We may, accordingly, speak of the *solidarity* of mankind, and this becomes even more apparent when we look ahead to Jesus Christ. For even as there is a union between Adam and all other people (we all have the Adamic nature), there is also a union of all believers with Christ. We earlier quoted Paul's words that "in Adam all die"; now we are ready to add his further words: "in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22). The word "all" applies to both cases, and in each instance there is the preposition "in." Hence, in Adam there is solidarity in sin and death; in Christ there is solidarity in righteousness and life. A further word from Paul relates to solidarity: "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners [previously quoted], so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19 NIV). Thus even as our sin stems from union with Adam in his disobedience, so is our righteousness found in Christ's act of obedience. There is solidarity in both Adam and Christ.[108]

A further word might be added about our solidarity also with all other persons. No one exists alone—"No man is an island" (Donne). Not only do I participate in the sin of Adam, but also I am ineluctably involved in the sinfulness of the human race. We are cosinners as human beings. Sin is not just something committed through individual acts; rather, we share in it together. Every person's sin in some sense is *my* sin: his guilt, my guilt; his condemnation, my condemnation.[109] "None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself' (Rom. 14:7). For we are all human beings possessing the same humanity and basically the same sins. We are, as a human race, sinners one with another.

In the several preceding paragraphs we have been discussing "original sin" in its various aspects. If we now were to seek, by way of summary, a definition, we might suggest simply that "original sin" refers to the fact that *the human race is sinful in nature*. This by no means refers to human nature as God made it—or makes it—but to the fact that before man commits any sin he is already a sinner.[110] This situation has been described in terms both of sin (death, guilt, condemnation) being passed on to all people from the first man and our identification with primal man in his sin. However depicted, the important feature is that man does not come into the world as an innocent or neutral creature[111] but is affected by sin in all aspects of his being. Indeed, by virtue of this fact, man is vitiated in every area of his nature—body, soul, spirit[112] —so

that he is utterly incapable himself of restoration and salvation. His only hope is in Jesus Christ.

One further word about original sin: this is by no means a doctrine that is limited to a few verses in Paul's writing.[113] It is actually implied, even if not always directly stated, throughout the Scriptures. We have earlier noted numerous biblical references to the universality of sin and to sin as a disposition or state of mankind, both of which—if nothing else—point in the direction of original sin. If all people are sinners (universality) and sin is a matter of being (state), whence did all this derive? It cannot be from God, since He is the Author only of good; it cannot be the result of His creation of man, since God could not make an evil creature. It can be understood only in terms of a fall of primal man-a fall that has radically affected all those who derive from it. Moreover, it becomes increasingly apparent in the Old Testament that the sin of Israel, which is so deeply ingrained[114] is not something that has newly arrived on the scene; it goes far back even to the beginning of human history. Sin, whether of Israel or peoples of earth at large, is not only universal and endemic—going to the roots—but it also goes far back into the past. Unfaith, pride, disobedience (the very components of sin): when was there a time that man did not manifest all these things?[115] It has to be from the *first* appearance of man—and from there on somehow pervading the whole human race. A doctrine of original sin (in light of the preceding factors) is inevitably called for.

Fourth, every one is *responsible* for his sins. However true it is that everyone is a sinner from birth, it is also important to emphasize that this does not deny personal responsibility. Man is a sinner not only because of his Adamic nature but also because he knowingly and freely commits sins. *Actual sins*, it is important to add, arise from the state of original sin but are *not necessitated by it.* There doubtless is a paradox here, for man is unable not to sin and at the same time willfully sins. Accordingly, such an effect of sin as death, while inhering in original sin, is also a reality transmitted through actual sins. We have already observed the words of Paul that "sin came into the world through one man and death through sin," hence death is due to the "one man." But Paul then adds, "and so death spread[116] to all men because all men sinned" (Rom. 5:12). In other words, although death—physical and spiritual—is the result of original sin, it is conveyed by man's sinful activity. Thus every person is responsible for the results of sin, in this case the spreading of death, in his own life.

In this matter of actual sin it is significant to observe that mankind at large repeats in varying ways the fall of primal man. What Adam did, so do all people of their own volition. Here we refer to that other account of the origin of sin in

Romans 1:18–32 where, not Adam, but people in general are mentioned. To summarize briefly: Paul speaks of the "ungodliness and wickedness of men [all people] who by their wickedness suppress the truth" (v. 18). This truth is the knowledge of God that He Himself has manifest; for "ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made" (v. 20). Hence people are "without excuse, for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him" (vv. 20–21). As a result futility of thinking, senselessness of heart, and immorality of action occur with divine judgments following.[117] Now all of this is a parallel to the sin of Adam and Eve, so much so that the account in Romans may be properly used to explicate in various ways the Genesis narrative.[118] Yet the Scripture in Romans 1 (unlike Romans 5) does not assign responsibility to Adam but to mankind at large: *they* are "without excuse." These are people of all times and places, who on their own account and to their own guilt and judgment, turn away from the living God. Paul later (in Romans 5) speaks of *original* sin, tracing all things back to Adam. But this is not to excuse people's *actual* sins, for on the basis of their own sins they are "without excuse." Perhaps Paul first discusses actual sins before original sin lest his readers seek to blame it all on Adam!

We must underscore, then, that no one is judged or punished for any sin other than his own. The fact that man *is* a sinner, and invariably sins because of original sin, must not be allowed to undercut human responsibility.[119] In the word of the Lord spoken through Ezekiel the message is emphatic: "The soul that sins shall die" (Ezek. 18:4, 20).[120] We are responsible as a human race for what happened in Adam; we are also responsible for the sins we commit in our own life and activity.

Finally, since sin is the personal act of turning away from God,[121] both original and actual sin are to be understood as profoundly personal. Although it is proper to say that *man is a sinner* (his sinfulness being in that sense a universal condition), it is never a static fact of man's creaturely existence: *man is one who sins.* For mankind's sin from the beginning has been, and continues to be, a violation of a personal relationship to God. It is always, no matter what the exact nature of the sin, *against* God.

Thus we may appropriately close with the psalmist's personal confession "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight" (51:4), but let us also add some of his further words as our own:

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a
new and right spirit within me.
O LORD, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall
show forth thy praise" (51:7, 10, 15). Amen.

[1]"Glorify" is the nasb translation in the margin. Cf. niv: "neither glorified him"; kjv: "glorified him not."

[2]The nasb reads, "futile in their speculations"; kjv has "vain in their imaginations." The Greek expression is emataiothésan en tois dialogismois, which could also be rendered "empty in their reasonings." According to Thayer, Romans 1:21 relates "to the reasoning of those who think themselves to be wise" (see under dialogismos).

[3]Or "foolish" (niv, nasb); the Greek word is asynetos.

[4]The Greek word is kardia, often meaning "heart"; so kjv, niv, and nasb translate. However, kardia may also signify "the faculty of thought, of the thoughts themselves, of understanding" (BAGD). The neb vigorously translates: "Their misguided minds are plunged in darkness."

[5]For example, in pseudo-sophistication, constant busyness, or an incessant search for pleasure.

[6]We may recall again Francis Thompson's poem "The Hound of Heaven"; see page 48, fn. 3.

[7]See my prior discussion in chapter 10, III, B, under "Pride."

[8]Cf. Psalm 106:19-20: "They made a calf in Horeb and worshiped a molten image. They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass."

[9]Particularly in many of the more liturgical traditions.

[10]See my work The Ten Commandments, "The First Commandment," 5-9, where I speak of the "other gods" as Possessions, Pleasure, Prestige, and Power.

[11]*The Westminster Confession of Faith* teaches that "the first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience" (chap. VII, "Of God's Covenant with Cf. Hosea 8:4-"With

their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction." See also Herbert Schlossberg, Idols for Destruction, in which the author discusses idols of history, humanity, mammon, nature, power, and religion (chaps. 1-6).

[12]Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese, eds., Philosophers Speak of God, contains a helpful compilation of classical and modern views of God (from Plato and Aristotle to Whitehead and Wieman). The concepts run the full range from theism to pantheism, with many shades in between.

[13]Paul is speaking generally, but also he particularly says of the Greeks that they "seek after wisdom" (1 Cor. 1:22 kjv).

[14]Also, cf. Paul's words to Timothy: "O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the godless chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge" (1 Tim. 6:20).

[15]The full range of philosophy also includes skepticism and atheism (e.g., in recent philosophy: Hume, Feuerbach, and Nietzsche). The tendency to nihilism seems implicit within the wisdom of the world.

[16]A statement in Marx's Communist Manifesto (1848).

[17]I say "may be" in this sentence. True religion-i.e., Christianity-provides the proper balance between "hopes of heaven" and justice on earth.

[18]These are Jesus' words, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3.

[19]The word humanism has not always meant an exclusive preoccupation with man. There is a long tradition of so-called Christian humanism that seeks to uphold both true Christian faith and genuine human values. (See e.g., Joseph M. Shaw, ed., Readings in Christian Humanism.) However, humanism has in our time become more and more identified with secular humanism. Hence, in what follows I will often use the word "humanism" to signify "secular humanism."

[20]These forms are illustrated, for example, in Julian Huxley (evolutionary), John Dewey (pragmatic), B. F. Skinner (behavioral), and Corliss Lamont (cultural). See Norman L. Geisler, Is Man the Measure? for an elaboration of these and other humanistic positions.

[21]See Humanist Manifestos I & II, ed. by Paul Kurtz. Signers have included Dewey (H.M. I), Skinner, and Lamont (H.M. II).

[22]The word religious drops out of the second manifesto.

[23]H.M. I, Eighth affirmation.

[24]H.M. II. Quotations from the opening sections of "Religion" and

"Ethics." Italics are those of the document itself.

[25]The Greek phrase is pathe atimias, "vile affections" (kjv).

[26]Or "depraved" (niv, nasb, neb), "reprobate" (kjv). The Greek word is adokimon.

[27]In chapter 9, "Man," pp. 203-6.

[28]Genesis 2 includes both a beautiful picture of man intimately constituted by the breath of God (v. 7) and made to be intimately "one flesh" as husband and wife (v. 24).

[29]Wooden images of a female Canaanite deity.

[30]Cf. also 1 Kings 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7. These passages show kings Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Josiah in turn seeking to get rid of male cult prostitutes. Josiah finally destroyed their houses, which were in the house of the Lord!

[31]For reference to "female cult prostitutes," see Deuteronomy 23:17.

[32]"Have intercourse with" (neb), "have sex with" (niv), "have relations with" (nasb). The Hebrew word wenede'ah from the root yada', translated in rsv above (and kjv) as, e.g., in Genesis 4:1, as "know' " ("Adam knew his wife, and she conceived"), unmistakably means "to have sexual relations with." One can by no means agree with D. S. Bailey's claim in Homosexuality and the Western Tradition that the sin God punished on this occasion (and also Judges 19:13-20:48) was a breach of hospitality etiquette without sexual overtones. Such gross misreading of both passages is in keeping with the contemporary attempt by many to remove homosexuality from biblical censure.

[33]See also Leviticus 18:22.

[34]The Hebrew word is *keleb*, literally, "a dog." Reference here is made to both female and male homosexuality, with "dog" (a pejorative term suggesting the degraded character of such a one) referring to the male.

[35]"Effeminate by perversion" (nasb mg). The Greek word is malakoi. According to BAGD this word is used "esp. of catamites, men and boys who allow themselves to be misused homosexually. ' '

[36]The Greek word is arsenokoitai, "abusers of themselves with mankind" (kjv) or "pederast, sodomite" (BAGD).

[37]"Indulged in gross immorality" (nasb). The Greek word is ekporneusasai; "the prefix kek* seems to indicate a lust that gluts itself' (Thayer).

[38]The Greek phrase apelthousai opiso sarkos he retas literally means "going away after different flesh." nasb has "went away after strange flesh."

[39]It is possible that this perversion also followed upon the idolatry of Israel with the golden calf. After the calf had been made and the people had sacrificed various offerings, “they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry” (Exod. 32:6 niv). According to the nbc, in loco, this “was not true holiness but the play, or orgiastic dance which characterized pagan religions.” IB, in loco, makes reference, along with other Scriptures, to 1 Kings 14:24 (which, as earlier noted, speaks of “male cult prostitutes”).

[40]This follows upon Paul’s words concerning homosexual practices in Romans 1:24-27.

[41]Or “loin coverings” (nasb), “loinclothes” (neb). The Hebrew word is hagorâ.

[42]The sewing of fig leaves together and making loin coverings shows also that futility of mind and action (see preceding section) that is the result of sin. What they were doing made no sense; their “senseless minds were darkened” (recall Rom. 1:21). Thus futility of mind and guilt are closely associated.

[43]Obviously the guilt here has nothing to do with nakedness as somehow in itself evil and shameful. Before sin entered, man and woman were already together in complete nakedness without the least sense of there being anything wrong about it. Indeed, the last verse in Genesis 2, and just prior to the temptation and sin of Genesis 3, reads: “And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed” (Gen. 2:25).

[44]Recall our prior brief discussion of this.

[45]Or “These are your gods” (as in rsv, niv, neb, similarly kjv; nasb, niv mgn. read: “This is your God”). The Hebrew text, reading “elleh ‘éloheyka, suggests the plural translation. Also “gods” would be in accord with Israel’s long familiarity in Egypt with the many gods there. Thus the plural wording would be a throwback to their Egyptian days. However, since there is only one calf in the story, the singular translation seems in order.

[46]Moses said to the people just before the words quoted above: “Perhaps I can make atonement for your sin” (v. 30).

[47]See the previous chapter.

[48]Recall chapter 3, pp. 59-63.

[49]Or “leave the guilty unpunished” (nasb, niv). The kjv translates as rsv above. The Hebrew phrase is lo’ yenaqqeh.

[50]The same could also be said for failure to keep any of the other many statutes and ordinances. However, since the Ten Commandments are the essence of God's word-"the ten words' "-guilt is highlighted by their infraction.

[51]The three instances of the use of "guilty" (Greek: enochos) with a preposition in this verse are translated "liable to" in rsv. The rsv translates this word "guilty" in Mark 3:29-"guilty of an eternal sin"; also in 1 Corinthians 11:27-"guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord"; and James 2:10-"Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it." In Matthew 26:66 and Mark 14:64 it is translated "deserves" and "deserving"; in Hebrews 2:15, "subject to." BAGD (with nasb) translates the last clause above as "guilty enough to go into the hell of fire."

[52]Aramaic term of contempt or abuse suggesting "empty-headed," "numbskull," "good for nothing."

[53]The Greek word is *geennan*, from which Gehenna is derived. The Hinnom Valley, south of Jerusalem, was the site for pagan rites such as child sacrifice (2 Kings 16:3; 23:10). Jeremiah prophesied that judgment would fall on Judah and Jerusalem there (Jer. 19: Iff). The later association of "hell fire" resulted from the garbage fires that constantly burned in the Valley.

[54]"Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit," as the context shows, is the sin of attributing what is of God to the devil. It is "a perversion of spirit which, in defiance of the truth, chooses to call light darkness" (William Lane, The Gospel of Mark, NICNT, 145). Even the grossest sins against the Ten Commandments or the words of Jesus-of thought, word, or action-may receive forgiveness, but never this sin. Moreover, it is worse than atheism or even denying Christ (both of which, upon repentance, may receive forgiveness), for it is the ultimate, wholly deliberate, and utterly perverse ascription of the work of God to Satan. It can still happen today.

[55]This would surely preclude the preceding sins mentioned-anger and lust (they warrant hell but do not necessarily lead to it). Of course, there is no carte blanche forgiveness for any sin; there must also be repentance (as Jesus-and the New Testament at large-teaches elsewhere).

[56]Of course, there may be both. But the point here is that whether one knows the Ten Commandments and/or the Sermon on the Mount or has never even heard of them, there is still the witness of conscience.

[57]"All men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is

written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one* “ (Rom. 3:9-10).

[58]Max Warren in his book Interpreting the Cross speaks of “all-pervading guilt”: “The recognition of an all-pervading guilt is the beginning of realism about oneself, about society, about the nation, about the world-and about the Church” (p. 31).

[59]Paul Tournier, Swiss psychologist, in his book *Guilt and Grace*, uses this terminology. For example, “‘false guilt’ is that which comes as a result of the judgments and suggestions of men. ‘True guilt’ is that which results from the divine judgment” (p. 67). The only hope for the latter is the grace of God: “The answer … comes from God, not from man, in the forgiveness He grants to those who confess their inevitable guilt instead of justifying themselves” (p. 121).

[60]In Albert Camus’ book The Fall, Jean-Baptiste Clamence, the speaker throughout, is continually confessing his vices and at one point states that “we cannot assert the innocence of anyone, whereas we can state with certainty the guilt of all” (p. 110). What is interesting is that Camus writes as an atheist, but, at the same time (through Clamence), confesses universal guilt. This book, accordingly, is a severe indictment of contemporary viewpoints that would seek to minimize guilt. Incidentally, for Camus there is no forgiveness, no salvation; the only hope is to get others to confess their sin and guilt, so that all can be “in the soup together” (p. 140). Still the book is an extraordinary confession of the all-pervasiveness of guilt simply on the human level, since God is not taken into consideration.

[61]This I will discuss in chapter 14, “Atonement.” Guilt must be expiated (I recall the words of a psychologist who spoke some years ago of “the hell of neurosis and psychosis to which sin and unexpiated guilt leads us” [O. O. Mowrer, Time (Sept. 14, 1959), 69]), and this occurs only through the sacrifice of Christ in which sins are totally forgiven and guilt is no more!

[62]Tournier speaks of “the sense of guilt which is so intolerable that men feel an overpowering need to preserve themselves from it” (Guilt and Grace, 127). This is guilt before God (and, incidentally, is far deeper than that which Camus recognizes).

[63]Man was “immortable” but not immortal. Recall our discussion in chapter 9, p. 216.

[64]The niv has “chosen.” The Hebrew word is yàda’ttî.

[65]The background for this statement is God’s judgment and punishment of many surrounding nations (see Amos 1 and 2).

[66]The niv has “destruction.” The Greek word is phthoran, “ruin, destruction, dissolution, deterioration, corruption” (BAGD).

[67]It is against the background of adultery, homosexuality, and prostitution (vv. 9-17) that Paul makes the statement quoted above.

[68]This occurs particularly among persons indulging in carnal and multiple heterosexual relationships.

[69]AIDS occurs especially among practicing homosexuals.

[70]See Matthew 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36.

[71]See Matthew 12:41-42; Luke 10:14; 11:31-32.

[72]See Matthew 7:22; 24:36; Mark 13:32; Luke 10:12, 17:31.

[73]“Man” is understood here, of course, as man and woman.

[74]Cherubim are later depicted symbolically as guardians of the Holy of Holies. Recall our discussion in chapter 8, pp. 183-85.

[75]See our previous statement in chapter 9, on “Man,” that the intention was that man would not even be aware, as was God, that there was another realm of evil (p. 219).

[76]“Forfeited” refers only to the original God-given possibility that man did not fulfill-viz., he never ate of “the tree of life.” “Eternal life” does, however, become a possibility again through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[77]See our prior discussion.

[78]The high priest alone once a year was allowed to enter, but even then only after many careful preparations and precautions (see Lev. 16).

[79]As proclaimed by Nietzsche in the nineteenth century and such successors as Altizer and Hamilton in the twentieth century. See, e.g., the articles by William Hamilton and Thomas Altizer in Radical Theology and the Death of God.

[80]Paul Tillich has written significantly of “the anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness” in his book The Courage to Be, 46-51. “This anxiety is aroused by the loss of a spiritual center, of an answer … to the question of the meaning of existence” (p. 47).

[81]Such is implied in the words quoted above from Genesis 9:5-6.

[82]Commandments five through ten, from “Honor your father and your mother” to “You shall not covet.”

[83]These quotations of Paul are from various Psalms and Isaiah.

[84]“Natural” in this sense does not mean the original, God-given condition of man-righteousness, justice, goodwill, etc.-but what man has become; it

refers to his nature as sinful man.

[85]I think here of Sartre's oft-quoted pronouncement: "Hell is-other people" (see his play, No Exit, found in No Exit and Three Other Plays, 47). If "man is fundamentally the desire to be God" (Sartre's words earlier quoted), other people only stand in the way of his promethean desire: it follows that "hell is-other people."

[86]Recall that at Athens Paul said, "What… you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you" (Acts 17:23).

[87]Here I might mention, in passing, the many Utopian attempts to achieve harmonious forms of human society. Among the more recent was the "hippie" establishment of communes in the 1960s and 1970s. Whatever the laudatory intentions to achieve true and continuing fellowship, such efforts have never lasted for long.

[88]This, of course, does not apply to those who belong to Christ. In the same passage where Jesus says, "Every one who commits sin is a slave to sin," He adds shortly thereafter, "if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). A Christian has a new Master and is in bondage no longer. Paul writes to the Romans that they "were once slaves of sin … [but] having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness" (6:17-18).

[89]In traditional theology this is often spoken of as the situation of posse non peccare, "able not to sin" (see p. 217, fn. 79).

[90]Non posse non peccare, "not able not to sin."

[91]Again, for the Christian all this has basically changed. Thus Paul writes Titus: "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by men and hating one another; but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us" (Titus 3:3-5).

[92]Such men as Noah and Job are not exceptions. Genesis 6:9 records that "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation," and over against the world around him ("the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and … every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" [v. 5]), this was surely the case. Yet after the Flood he "became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent' (9:20). Job was described by God as "a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil" (Job. 1:8; 2:3), but later (40:2) he was called by God a "faultfinder" ("one who contends with the Almighty" niv). Finally Job repented, saying, "I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (42:6).

[93]The Greek phrase is poneroi hyparchontes, literally, “being evil” (as in kjv, nasb).

[94]These are quotations, freely translated by Paul, from the LXX of Psalm 14:1-3 (or Ps. 53:1-3).

[95]E.g., Jesus spoke of a “greater sin” in John 19:11. Also according to 1 John 5:16-17 there is sin that is “mortal” (lit. “unto death”), also sins that are not “mortal.” The sin of the betrayer of Christ is so heinous that “it would have been better for that man if he had not been born” (Mark 14:21). There are clearly different degrees of sin and, it follows, of punishment.

[96]Recall my earlier reference to this.

[97]Here of course I do not refer to man in the beginning (Adam and Eve), for sin was not a preceding condition. Our concern is with man in his continuing history.

[98]Though “the wicked” are distinguished from “the righteous” in this Psalm (see v. 10), this hardly means that only wicked persons are “estranged from the womb.” Derek Kidner says it well: “The difference between such people and David himself, as he confessed in 51:5, was one of degree rather than kind. He too was a sinner from the womb” (Psalms 7-72, TOTC, 208).

[99]“Nature” here refers to man’s “fallen” nature. This will be discussed further below.

[100]Jesus’ words, earlier quoted, about “being evil” are relevant here.

[101]Recall our earlier discussion.

[102]Pascal in his Pensées (Thoughts, 434) has written of the offense of this kind of statement: “For it is beyond doubt that there is nothing which more shocks our reason than to say that the sin of the first man has rendered guilty those who, being so removed from its source, seem incapable of participating in it…. Certainly nothing offends us more rudely than this doctrine, and yet without this mystery, the most incomprehensible of all, we are incomprehensible to ourselves.”

[103]Martin Heidegger, existentialist philosopher, speaks of “a primordial Being-guilty” that inheres in all human existence (Being and Time, 329).

[104]See below.

[105]Donald Bloesch writes in this vein, “Original sin is not a biological taint but a spiritual contagion which is nevertheless, in some inexplicable way, passed on through biological generation” (Essentials of Evangelical

Theology, 1:107).

[106]Accordingly, it is not only that like Adam we have sinned, but also that as Adam we have sinned.

[107]Adam and his posterity are one, and, by virtue of their organic unity, the sin of Adam is the sin of the race" (A. H. Strong, Systematic Theology, 593). Recall that "Adam" (Heb. 'ädäm) is the name both of an individual and of man in general. In Genesis 2 and 3, where the word occurs a number of times, it is often difficult to know which is the better translation. This is the case because both ideas are included: mankind and a particular man.

[108]Christ is called by Paul "the last Adam [who] became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45). The very use of the word "Adam" in connection with Christ suggests that even as Christ was one who brought life, so the previous Adam brought death. And in each case we participate in that life or death in relation to the "Adam" with whom we are in solidarity.

[109]Jonathan Edwards is quoted as once saying: "I will take it for granted that no one is so evil as myself; I will identify myself with all men and act as if their evil were my own, as if I had committed the same sins and had the same infirmities, so that the knowledge of their sins will provoke in me nothing but a sense of shame" (Strong, Systematic Theology, 594). This is surely a profound and moving statement of solidarity with mankind in its sin and evil.

[110]Adam, of course, is the lone exception. He was not a sinner before committing sin.

[111]Reference here could be made to various Pelagian interpretations, all of which view man as being born in an uncorrupted, innocent state as Adam was. From this perspective there is no original sin-only sin that we actually commit: we sin like Adam, but not in Adam. (Pelagius was a British monk [ca. a.d. 360-420] whose views were vigorously attacked by Augustine [a.D. 354-430] in his many anti-Pelagian writings.)

[112]This is often spoken of as the "total depravity" of human nature.

[113]Most of my quotations, you may have noticed, have come from Romans and 1 Corinthians. It is sometimes said that without Paul the doctrine would never have developed.

[114]Jeremiah, for example, speaks of "the sin of Judah" as "written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond it is engraved on the point of their heart" (Jer. 17:1).

[115]Karl Barth puts the sense of this well: “There never was a time when he [man] was not proud. He is proud to the depths of his being. He always was” (Church Dogmatics, 4.1.495).

[116]Or “passed” (kjv). The Greek word is dielthen, literally, “went through.”

[117]Recall our precious discussion on these matters.

[118]This we have done in our earlier presentation.

[119]Reinhold Niebuhr, in his Nature and Destiny of Man, vol. 1, chap. 9, sect. 5, has an interesting section entitled “Responsibility Despite Inevitability.” Niebuhr is concerned not to allow inevitability to attenuate responsibility. Although I would prefer to speak of man as invariably a sinner rather than inevitably, Niebuhr sets forth in marked fashion the “dialectical truth” (p. 263) of both emphases.

[120]Ezekiel 18:20 adds: “The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son.”

[121]As previously defined.

12
Covenant

I. INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of a study of Jesus Christ and salvation, we need first to consider the meaning and significance of covenant. For it was Christ Himself who at the last Supper said concerning the cup: “This is my blood of the covenant,[1] which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt. 26:28). Christ is described as “the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15; cf. 12:24). Thus clearly the concept of covenant is related to Jesus Christ and His work of salvation.

The importance of the term “covenant” is apparent from the very fact that the Scriptures are divided into two main sections: the Old Testament (or Covenant) and the New Testament (or Covenant).[2] The word “covenant,” furthermore, is found 286 times in the Old Testament, 33 times in the New Testament.[3] It would be no exaggeration to say that a proper understanding of covenant is essential both to an apprehension of the whole Bible and specifically as preparation for a study of the work of Christ in salvation.

II. MEANING

The word “covenant” may be defined as a formal, solemn, and binding contract between two parties. The essential elements are those of two *parties*, a *promise* solemnly given, and an *obligation* in the covenant’s maintenance and fulfillment. Because of the solemnity and binding character of the promise, a *seal* or *ratification* of the covenant is often attached. The *fulfillment* of the covenant may thereafter be described.

III. KINDS OF COVENANTS

There are basically two kinds of covenants. Let us observe each of them in turn.

A. Human Covenants

Human covenants are mutual, voluntary promises or agreements, usually between two persons. Illustrations of this may be found in the covenant between Abraham and Abimelech (Gen. 21:31), Jacob and Laban (31:44), David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 20:8). In another instance, the covenant is between one man and a people—Joshua with the Israelites (Josh. 24:25). In all these cases, there is a mutual agreement, a contract of commitment, freely entered into by both parties of the covenant. Further, both sides obligate themselves to fulfill all the terms of the contract faithfully.

B. Divine Covenants

A divine covenant is a binding contract sovereignly established by God. There are, as in human covenants, two parties; however, there is no mutual agreement of terms. A divine covenant is a one-way matter: God Himself totally makes the promise and sets the terms. It is essentially *God's covenant* with man, not God and man covenanting with each other. Thus in Scripture the language frequently is "my covenant." The covenant is still bilateral, even though the covenant itself is God's sovereign disposition.

Divine covenants also differ from human covenants in that they may or may not carry a human obligation. God may obligate Himself to fulfill all the terms of the contract, with man obliged to do nothing. In that situation there is no way man can break the covenant. In other cases there is an obligation that man is required to fulfill. If he fails, he thereby breaks the covenant and consequently does not receive the promise offered by God.

Divine covenants always contain some blessing of God. They declare His goodness and benevolence to His creation, and His unswerving intention to fulfill what He promises. God's covenants, while they are essentially His ("my covenant"), invariably are for mankind's benefit. God is always *for* man, never against him, and seeks only his well-being.

IV. COVENANTS OF GOD A. The Covenant With Adam

The first covenant in history is the covenant of God with Adam, or man.[4] God spoke to Adam saying, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it you shall die" (Gen. 2:16—17). The first part of the statement, "You may freely eat …," included "the tree of life … in the midst of the garden" (Gen. 2:9).

The word "covenant" is not found in the Genesis account in reference to God's relation with Adam. However, the word is used in a later passage in Hosea where, regarding the transgression of Ephraim and Judah, the prophet says, "Like Adam,[5] they have broken the covenant—they were unfaithful to me there" (Hosea 6:7 NIV). An interesting passage is found in the apocryphal Book of Sirach (Ecclus.) where the creation of man is described: "He bestowed knowledge upon them, and allotted to them the law of life. He established with them[6] an eternal covenant, and showed them his judgments ["decrees"—NEB]" (17:11–12). Thus it seems clear from both canonical and noncanonical texts that the primary covenant of God was with original man—Adam.

That this is a *divine* covenant is shown both in the fact that God Himself sets all the terms (see below)—man in no way participates in what God establishes—and that it is *His* covenant with Adam. One translation of Hosea 6:7 reads: "… they have broken my covenant."[7] The covenant of course includes Adam, but it is not Adam's or man's covenant: it is God's covenant with man.

Moreover, the components of a covenant are present. First, there are two parties: God and man; second, there is a promise; third, there is an obligation or demand. Concerning the first of these, we may now further observe that this is a *universal* covenant. Although it is made with a particular man, Adam, it is universal in that Adam is man and the progenitor of the human race. Thus the covenant affects all mankind. In reference to the second, the covenant promises *continuing life:* the "tree of life" is included among the trees of which man may eat. If he does eat of it, he will "live for ever" (Gen. 3:22).[8] Hence, there is the promise of eternal life. True life is to be found outside man in God. As man partakes of this life, physically represented or sealed[9] in the tree of life, he will never die. This then is the "law of life."[10] Regarding the third, the covenant calls for *obedience* on man's part: he is commanded not to eat of the "tree of

knowledge of good and evil." Disobedience will result in death, for God said, "In the day you eat of it you shall die." Disobedience to God's will, here represented in the partaking of another tree, is thus to cut oneself off from God with the inevitable result: eternal death.

This original covenant of God with man may be called *the covenant of life.* For life—eternal life—is the promise. Moreover, it is to be understood that such is not earned by man's efforts; it is there, available to man for his partaking. To be sure, man may forfeit that life by his disobedience, but his obedience does not earn it or merit it. Thus it is not a "covenant of works" in the sense that man is granted life on condition of obedience,[11] as if to say that eternal life would be achieved by *not* eating of the forbidden tree. Rather, this life is granted to man through his continuance in fellowship with God and partaking of the "tree of life."

It is important to recognize that through Adam the human race as a whole is in a covenant relationship to God. Long before there was a covenant with Israel or Abraham or even Noah, God had already entered into a covenant with man in which life was promised through fellowship with Him.[12] Thus creation itself is the outward form, of which covenant is the inward substance.[13] God's entering into a covenant of life with man is His primary action on the stage of the world:[14] the declaration of His will to have eternal fellowship with man. It is for this that the world was made and man placed within it.

Since it is God Himself who has made the covenant, it will surely be *fulfilled.* Man may—and tragically does—prove faithless on his part, and punishment follows, but God's intention for life in communion with Himself remains the same. At the consummation of history it will at last be fulfilled, for then a voice will ring forth: "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people" (Rev. 21:3), and once more the "tree of life" will be there (22:2). Thus is God's covenant completed in the glory of the eternal city.

Hence from Genesis to Revelation there is *one* overarching covenant of God: the covenant of life. There can be no adequate understanding of the Bible as a whole or of the intervening covenants unless this covenant is constantly recognized. God will not abrogate this covenant, no matter what man may do. Even man's sinful disobedience wherein he succumbed to Satan's temptation and was disfellowshiped from God, driven out of Eden, and thus became a creature of death, by no means alters God's intention. Indeed, just after man's sin but before he was driven out, God pronounced a curse upon the serpent (Satan's disguise), and declared that the seed of woman would "crush"[15] his head (Gen.

3:15 NIV). Thus the evil force to which man has succumbed, with ensuing spiritual and physical death, will some day be destroyed and God's promise of eternal life at last fulfilled. In the promise of the "crushing" of the serpent's head is found God's immediate response to the inroad of death. Already the "seed" of woman is promised to be victorious, and the gospel thereby prefigured. This is the *proto-evangelium*, the first glimmer of a coming salvation through Him[16] who will restore man to life. Thus the later so-called "covenant of grace" is foreshadowed, even though distinctive lineaments have yet to be marked out.

B. The Covenant With Noah

The second covenant in history is with Noah and all creation. Following the Flood, God spoke to Noah and his sons: “Behold, I establish my covenant with you, and your descendants after you, and with every living creature … that never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth” (Gen. 9:9–11).

Now that sin and death had entered through Adam’s defection, the human race, despite some instances to the contrary, moved increasingly in an evil direction. So by the time of Noah Scripture records “that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). Noah alone was “a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God” (6:9). Noah’s walk with God—which is God’s desire for all mankind[17] —and his faith whereby he built the ark[18] resulted in the physical salvation of man and all the living creatures (birds, cattle, and beasts). After the Flood God then made the covenant with Noah and all creation.

Note that the covenant is God’s covenant—“my covenant” (see above). Furthermore, the elements of the covenant are as follows: (1) parties—God with Noah, his descendants, and all living creatures (9:9–10); (2) promise—never again will the earth be destroyed by a flood (9:11); (3) ratification—the rainbow, “I set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth” (9:13); (4) obligation—none on man’s part, for God binds Himself to maintain the covenant regardless of what man may or may not do (9:15–16); (5) fulfillment—the covenant is constantly being fulfilled as rains come and go but never to the extent of destroying the earth.

Like the Adamic covenant, the Noachic covenant shows forth God’s goodness and proclaims a blessing, even if in this case it is a negative one: never a total deluge again. But, to be sure, this is a blessing, for it implies positively that physical life will continue through the ages. In that sense the covenant with Noah and all the earth is, like the covenant with Adam, a covenant of life.

The Noachic covenant is unlike the Adamic in that there is no obligation on man’s part. Adam was under obligation to keep God’s command; if he did not, death would ensue. But neither Noah nor his descendants were obligated to do anything to carry out their side of the covenant. God took the total obligation to fulfill the covenant, regardless of what mankind might do.

Truly this Noachic covenant is a blessing for the whole human race. Torrential

rains may, and do, come; rivers overflow their banks; tidal waves and hurricanes sweep in; but we know with absolute certainty that no flood will ever again devastate the earth. For God Himself has assumed the total obligation to fulfill the covenant. And even though the whole world becomes evil again, there will be no destruction by water.

But it is also an omen of something else. Just as a flood will never occur again, destruction by fire is sure to happen. Peter writes “that by the word of God heavens existed long ago, and an earth formed out of water and by means of water, through which the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.” He continues: “But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept unto the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:5–7). The destruction by water of an evil world is a portent of the destruction by fire that will occur on the day of judgment. Again, on the positive side, even as the Flood brought in a clean and fresh earth, so the destruction by fire will be the dawn of “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13). Even amid the certainty of fire to come, we may rejoice in this realization: although the rejuvenated world after the Flood was soon polluted by man again, the world after the destruction by fire will be totally new. It will be the dwelling place of God and redeemed people throughout the ages to come.

C. The Covenant With Abraham

The third covenant in biblical history is with Abraham. The first explicit reference is found in Genesis 15:18: "On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your seed[19] I give this land [Canaan], from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.'" Later God again said to Abraham,

> I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly…. Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham…. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your seed after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your seed after you. And I will give to you, and to your seed after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God (Gen. 17:1–8).

The human background for God's initiation of this covenant in Canaan was the faith and obedience of Abraham. Many years prior, God had commanded Abraham: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing … by you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"[20] (Gen. 12:1–3). The next words reveal Abram's single-minded response: "So Abram went, as the LORD had told him" (Gen. 12:4). Here is obedience, grounded in faith—faith-obedience or the obedience of faith. The writer of Hebrews later depicts the result: "By *faith* Abraham *obeyed* … and he went out not knowing where he was to go" (11:8). On the evening before the covenant was made, God said to Abraham, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them…. So shall your seed be" (Gen. 15:5). The response of Abraham was again that of complete faith: "And he believed[21] the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness" (15:6). Against that background God made His covenant with Abraham, saying,

"To your seed I give this land… ." Previously we noted God's preface to the covenant: "Walk before me and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you… ." Hence, walking before (or with) God[22] and living blamelessly (or obediently) is a demonstration of faith and is essential for the covenant God was to make with Abraham. Abraham's faith-obedience (with the emphasis on obedience) is climactically demonstrated in his willingness to offer up his only son Isaac. God responded to Abraham, saying, "Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore … and by your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice" (Gen. 22:16–18). According to Hebrews, "by faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac" (11:17). Thus here again is demonstrated the marvelous unity of faith and obedience.

One final word about God's promise to Abraham later spoken to Isaac: "I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and will give to your seed all these lands; and by your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed: because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Gen. 26:4–5). The promise to Abraham was against the background of a faith that demonstrated itself in obedience.[23]

As we move on to a consideration of various elements in God's covenant ("my covenant"),[24] we will again observe parties, promises, ratification, obligation, and fulfillment.

1. Parties

The parties in the covenant are God and Abraham: "The LORD made a covenant with Abram" (Gen. 15:18). We need to add, however, that the covenant was made not only with Abraham but also with Isaac, Jacob, and Abraham's physical seed thereafter, and with Jesus Christ and those who belong to Him—Abraham's spiritual seed.

The biblical record emphasizes that the covenant was also with *Isaac and Jacob*. Abraham, having no son by his wife Sarah at the time when God promised that he would be "the father of a multitude of nations," pleaded for his son Ishmael, born of Sarah's maid, Hagar, to carry the covenant promise. However, God replied, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his seed after him" (Gen. 17:19). Abraham later had other sons

(Gen. 25:1–2), but it is only through Isaac that the covenant line continued. Then Isaac had twin sons, Esau and Jacob, but it was through the second son Jacob that the covenant was continued (Gen. 25–28). Thus the covenant is also with Jacob, later to be known as Israel (Gen. 32:28). As the Book of Exodus later sums it up, the covenant is with all three—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: "God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and Jacob" (2:24).

Thus it is apparent that the covenant is not with all the sons or grandsons of Abraham; God made a selection. As Paul writes: "Not all are children of Abraham because they are his seed…. This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned as seed" (Rom. 9:7–8). Hence, it is through the children of promise—the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and therefore through the Israelites (the sons of Jacob) that the promise continues and the covenant is maintained.

The covenant is also with Abraham's *seed in generations to come*. "I will establish my covenant between me and you and your seed after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant" (Gen. 17:7). Thus the heirs of Abraham through the line of Isaac and Jacob are likewise those with whom God made His covenant. They are also "the children of promise."

But this means, even more, that children of promise are actually children of faith. Although the promise is carried through a select physical line of descent—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the true sons are those who, like Abraham, possess faith. So Paul writes to the Galatians: "Abraham 'believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness' [quoting Gen. 15:6]. So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham" (3:6–7). Hence the true line is not exclusively racial; it broadens out to include all who believe.

Finally and climactically, the covenant is made with *Jesus Christ* and *those who belong to Him.* Paul emphasizes, first, the singularity of the word "seed" in God's promises to Abraham; second, that the one to whom reference is ultimately intended is Christ; and third, that all who are Christ's are Abraham's heirs. "Now the promises were made to Abraham and his seed.[25]

It does not say, 'And to seeds' referring to many; but, referring to one, 'And to your seed,' which is Christ…. And if you are Christ's, you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:16, 29). Hence, the amazing climax is that the covenant of God with Abraham finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ and all who belong to Him. Thus any racial distinctive is totally abandoned. Whether one be Jew or Gentile, to belong to Christ is to share in the covenant of God with Abraham!

2. Promises

The covenantal promises to Abraham are several. We may observe, in order, the promise of a multiplicity of descendants, the land of Canaan as an inheritance, and spiritual blessings.

We have already noted God's word concerning *multiplicity of descendants:* "I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly" (Gen. 17:2). Earlier God had said to Abraham: "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them…. So shall your seed be" (15:5). Still earlier God promised, "I will make your seed as the dust of the earth; so that if you can count the dust of the earth, your seed also can be counted" (13:16). Later God said, "I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore" (22:17). Similar words were stated to Isaac (26:4) and Jacob (28:14). Whatever the imagery, whether stars, dust, or sand, the multiplicity of Abraham's seed is vividly declared.

The second promise concerns *land.* This refers, in the first place, to *physical land.* In announcing the covenant to Abraham, God declared: "To your seed I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. 15:18). Later He reiterated the promise: "I will give to you, and to your seed after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession" (Gen. 17:8). Similar words were spoken to Isaac (Gen. 26:3) and Jacob (28:13). Years later when the Israelites were in Egyptian bondage, God spoke to Moses about the land: "I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan…. I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (Exod. 6:4, 8). At the very heart of God's covenant promise is the land—the land of Canaan.

But something else must be added. For although physical land is undoubtedly intended in God's promise, there is also a deeper intimation—a *spiritual land* or realm. This is clear from the Book of Hebrews where it is said that Abraham, "living in tents with Isaac and Jacob … looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (11:9–10). This signifies more than an earthly land. That it does so becomes clear in the verses that follow: "They [the patriarchs] were strangers and exiles on the earth … seeking a homeland … they long for[26] a better country, that is, a heavenly one" (11:13–14, 16). No physical land of Canaan, no earthly city could ever fulfill that longing, for it is profoundly spiritual. One can, and does, prepare the way for the other, but since man's deepest nature is spiritual, all earthly satisfactions must fall short. Hence the climax of the promise is not an earthly realm or city but a

heavenly one—the homeland of the spirit. Further, only this homeland, this heavenly city, has foundations that will endure. While all others may be ravaged and destroyed, its "builder and maker is God."

Thus the promise of God to Abraham, while pointing to the land of Canaan, goes far beyond into the spiritual realm. This does not mean simply beyond this life into a future heaven, but into a realm promised to Abraham and his seed that may be entered now.

Accordingly, we must guard against any idea that this spiritual land is simply "otherworldly." Viewed from a slightly different perspective, what Abraham and his seed were promised is a spiritual realm that transcends the physical or natural world. Thus Paul speaks of "the promise to Abraham and his seed, that they should inherit the world" (Rom. 4:13). The expression "inherit the world" is lacking in God's original statements to Abraham; however, when understood spiritually, such was undoubtedly God's covenant promise. For the whole world will be possessed in the spiritual realm. Paul could triumphantly say to the spiritual sons of Abraham who belong to Christ: "All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3:21–23)!

The third promise, though it might well have been listed first, is the promise of *spiritual blessing.* The first words spoken to Abraham were: "Go from your country … to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you … and by you all the peoples[27] of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:1–3). Hence, the blessing will be to Abraham, then through him to all the peoples of the earth.

How may this spiritual blessing be described? Primarily it is the blessing of God's own personal commitment. To the promise "I will establish my covenant between me and you and your seed after you …" He adds, "to be God to you and to your seed after you" (Gen. 17:7). The God of the whole universe and of all creation thereby makes the stupendous promise of being in a special way Abraham's God and the God of his seed. Thus the Abrahamic covenant is a covenant of God's continuing presence and commitment to Abraham and his seed through the generations to come.

Again, the promise is that through Abraham and his seed all peoples of earth will be blessed. While the promise focuses first on God's own special commitment to Abraham and his seed, a fact that might seem to narrow God's sphere of concern, it is for the intention of providing a blessing to all mankind. Initially it was through Abraham himself that all people will be blessed (Gen. 12:3), subsequently it will be through the seed of Abraham (22:18), of Isaac (26:4), and of Jacob (28:14).

It is wondrous that the ultimate intention of God's covenant with Abraham and his seed is not only their own blessedness but also that of all mankind.

3. Ratification

God announced on the day of His covenant with Abraham: "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess" (Gen. 15:7). When Abraham then asked for some assurance that this would happen—"How am I to know that I shall possess it?" (v. 8)—God instructed him to bring various animals and cut them in half, laying the halves opposite each other. Then while Abraham fell into a deep sleep, with a dreadful and great darkness coming upon him, God spoke to him of the oppression his descendants would endure in Egypt. After the sun had gone down, in the darkness an extraordinary event occurred: "Behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces" (v. 17).[28] Thereupon God announced for the first time his covenant with Abraham: "To your seed I give this land… ."

Thus Abraham was granted an awesome certification that God would fulfill His promise. The dreadfulness of God's own personal presence, with the strange and mysterious smoking fire pot and flaming torch moving among the torn pieces, doubtless representing God's immediate presence in coming sufferings and privations—such was the vivid ratification of the covenant God made with Abraham. God's answer to Abraham's "How am I to know?" was not a word but a presence. God was to be in it—all the way.

4. Obligation

The obligation of the covenant consisted of one thing: *circumcision.* At the conclusion of the second announcement of the covenant (Gen. 17:1–8), God declared to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your seed after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant which you shall keep…. Every male among you shall be circumcised … it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you…. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant" (17:9–11, 13).

Circumcision was the requirement. If there was failure in this regard, such a person had to be "cut off from his people"; he had broken God's covenant (v. 14). Thus there would be no place for him in the land, no inheritance of God's

promise, no blessing for him or his offspring. God would not renege on His covenant, but man by disobedience could break it and forfeit his place in the land. He would be tragically cut off.

It is significant that God did require this one thing to keep the covenant. In regard to the Noachic covenant, there was no obligation on man's part; in regard to the Sinaitic covenant (which will be discussed next) there were many ethical requirements. The sole obligation with Abraham—but unmistakably crucial—is circumcision.

Such circumcision represented a peculiar, personal, perpetual sign of God's covenant with Abraham and his seed. The Israelite thereby bore the mark in his flesh that he was an heir to the land God had promised and to all the spiritual blessings God would share with him and his seed.[29]

But we must also bear in mind that ultimately what God intends in His covenant with Abraham is not material blessing but spiritual, not the land of Canaan but a spiritual realm (see above). To inhabit this land calls for a circumcision, not of the flesh, but of the heart. To the Israelites in the wilderness Moses later said, "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn" (Deut. 10:16). Jeremiah the prophet much later spoke similarly: "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem" (Jer. 4:4). However, it is not until the New Testament that such spiritual circumcision became a fact—through Jesus Christ: "In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh" (Col. 2:11). Without such a circumcision there is no place in God's spiritual realm.

Circumcision truly is the one requirement for God's covenant promise to be carried out. Circumcision in the flesh is completed in the circumcision of the heart. Thus it continues to be "an everlasting covenant."

5. Fulfillment

We may observe, first, the fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham concerning both a multiplicity of descendants and the land of Canaan. Moses addressed Israel after forty years of wilderness wanderings: "Go in and take possession of the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob … the LORD your God has multiplied you, and behold, you are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude" (Deut. 1:8–9). Later, after the land was occupied and Solomon was king, "Judah and Israel were as many as

the sand by the sea; they ate and drank and were happy. Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates … to the border of Egypt”[30] (1 Kings 4:20–21). Thus were fulfilled both promises given to Abraham when God made a covenant with him.

We do well to pause for a moment to reflect on the marvelous faithfulness of God to His promise. When the covenant was made with Abraham, he was childless and living in tents as a nomad. Although a multitude of descendants and ownership of land seemed only remote possibilities, Abraham through his seed became a vast multitude, ruling over the land and its kingdoms from the Euphrates to Egypt!

However, this is only the physical or material aspect of God’s covenant with Abraham. For the land of Canaan, no matter how wide its extent or how happy its people, cannot satisfy the deep longings of an Abraham or his seed for a spiritual homeland. Thus the covenant of God with Abraham extends far beyond Canaan: indeed, according to Romans (as we have noted), the promise to Abraham and his seed is “that they should inherit the world.” As we have observed in Hebrews, Abraham was looking for more than an earthly place; rather, he was looking for a “city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God”—hence eternal foundations; he was seeking an enduring “homeland … a better country … a heavenly one.” Thus “the world” that Abraham and his seed were to inherit was not primarily a physical realm but a spiritual one. Furthermore, this was to happen through Christ, *the* seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16) and those who belonged to him. Thus the great climax: “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to promise” (v. 29).

Heirs according to promise! It is those in Christ to whom the promise belongs. No longer are the heirs those who descend from Abraham according to the flesh, not even from a selected line within Abraham’s seed.[31] No longer is it physical Israel that inherits the promise,[32] but it is those from any race and people who have faith in Jesus Christ. An extraordinary thing has happened. The true Israelite (or Jew) is no longer a racial figure; no longer is circumcision of the flesh the means whereby the covenant obligation is exercised. Let us hear Paul again: “For he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal”[33] (Rom. 2:28–29). Thus those who belong to Christ whether Jew or Gentile are “Abraham’s seed, heirs according to promise.” We—Jews or Gentiles, whatever our race and nationality—are inheritors of the promise; it is fulfilled in us. We have become

“the Israel of God” in the truest and deepest sense, and to us in Christ belongs the world! What an extraordinary and amazing fulfillment of the ancient promise to Abraham!

EXCURSUS: THE QUESTION OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

One of the frequent questions about the Abrahamic covenant concerns the land of Canaan. Does this covenant continue until the present day? If so, is the existence of the modern state of Israel a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham?

Several factors seem to argue against this viewpoint. First, there is recognition in the Old Testament that the promise of the land to Abraham was fulfilled in the conquest and occupation of Canaan. A climactic statement in the Book of Joshua reads: "Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land which he swore to give their fathers…. Not one of all the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass" (21:43, 45). Much later at the time of Israel's return from captivity and exile, the priest Ezra prayed to God concerning Abraham: "Thou didst find his heart faithful before thee, and didst make with him the covenant to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanite … and thou hast fulfilled thy promise, for thou art righteous" (Neh. 9:8). Ezra continued his prayer, rehearsing Israel's disobedience to the laws given at Sinai (see below), their later captivity by Assyria, and their return to Palestine. It is significant that he does not speak of this return to the land as a continuing fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham (see vv. 9–27).[34]

Second, in the New Testament we find not a single reference to the Abrahamic covenant continuing through Israel and Judah's present or future living in the land. The emphasis is totally shifted from a physical to a spiritual fulfillment. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, rejoiced in the Christ soon to be born and prophesied that Christ's birth would be the fulfillment of God's intention "to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us, that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life" (Luke 1:72–75). Thus the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham will not be a physical land but a spiritual estate: the estate of fearlessness, holiness, and righteousness.[35] Also Simon Peter, looking back on the coming of Christ, said to an audience of Israelites, "You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' God having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you in turning every one of you away from your

wickedness" (Acts 3:25–26). Thus God's covenant with Abraham again is fulfilled, not by an earthly, but by a spiritual blessing—namely, to be at last turned away from evil and accordingly (as Zechariah prophesied) to holiness and righteousness.

Third, other Scriptures we have already cited in Paul's letters and, particularly, in the Book of Hebrews, unmistakably point to a spiritual or heavenly fulfillment. It is not a single country but the whole world that is the land inheritance of the covenant with Abraham. *Nowhere*, it should be added, does any New Testament reference to the covenant with Abraham even suggest an earthly fulfillment. I have previously commented on all the relevant New Testament passages. All others that speak of covenant relate to either the "old covenant" made at Sinai or the "new covenant" in Christ. The conclusion seems unmistakable: the New Testament simply assumes that the land aspect of the Abrahamic covenant has long been fulfilled (as the Old Testament had already affirmed). The spiritual, however, is an unending covenant and is continuously fulfilled through the blessings found in Jesus Christ.

Because in the covenant with Abraham God promised the land of Canaan as an "everlasting possession" (Gen. 17:8), some conclude that it must continue beyond Israel's initial occupation after the Exodus from Egypt.[36] However in the same chapter (actually the same address of God to Abraham), circumcision is also said to be "everlasting": "So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant" (v. 13). But, as all would agree, what is "everlasting" in regard to circumcision is not the physical but the spiritual—a possession therefore not of a limited earthly blessing, but of spiritual blessings untold in Jesus Christ!

To conclude: If there are Scriptures that point to a final possession of "the land of Canaan" by Israel as in the present day, they are not to be found relative to God's covenant with Abraham. In regard to the latter covenant, Jew and Gentile —and Arab, for that matter—all stand on the same ground. *Together*, in Christ Jesus, we are the heirs of this everlasting covenant.

D. Covenant With Israel

The fourth divine covenant described in the Scriptures is the covenant with Israel. Since it was made through Moses as God's spokesman, this covenant may also be termed the *Mosaic;* since it was made at Mount Sinai, it may also be called the *Sinaitic.* More broadly still, it is this covenant from which the Old Testament or Covenant derives its name. Hence, in a special sense it is the *Old Covenant.* It is the "old covenant" (2 Cor. 3:14) when compared with the "new covenant" in Jesus Christ; it is also the "first covenant" (Heb. 9:15)[37] when viewed in relation to the covenant in Christ.

The first declaration of the covenant with Israel occurred upon Israel's arrival at Mount Sinai. God spoke to Moses from the mountain: "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:3–6). The covenant was renewed by Moses forty years later upon Israel's preparation to enter the promised land: "The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb [Sinai]. Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive this day" (Deut. 5:2–3).

Before considering the various elements of the covenant, it is important to note the background of God's goodness and lovingkindness. This is already underscored in the words preceding the covenant: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians," referring to the plagues upon Egypt and the destruction of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea—all totally God's doing for Israel's benefit. The verse movingly continues: "I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself'—the vivid imagery of a living God who, like a parent eagle, brought Israel safely to Himself at Mount Sinai. Thus it is God's love for Israel that stood behind the covenant. Moses spoke at the covenant renewal: "It was not because you were more in number than any other people … for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because the LORD loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (Deut. 7:7–8). Reference is also made here to the oath sworn to their "fathers"—the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But the

prevailing note is God's love for Israel. This is the background not only for His deliverance of Israel from Egypt but also for the covenant He made with them.

Let us now turn to the various elements of the covenant, considering again parties, promises, obligation, ratification, and fulfillment.

1. Parties

The parties of the covenant are God and the people of Israel. The people of Israel are the lineal descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who for some four hundred years[38] were bondservants in Egypt. After their deliverance God entered into covenant with them at Mount Sinai and with their children forty years later at the border of the promised land. Thus it was a continuing covenant with all Israel.

2. Promises

The promises of God in the covenant are essentially twofold. First, Israel was to be God's "own possession[39] among all peoples." Israel was to be a special possession unto God, a people peculiarly His own, having a place occupied by no other nation or people. God, to be sure, is God of all the earth and thus has a concern for all mankind, but His own "possession" was Israel. The reason is clear: God promised Abraham that through his seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed. Israel was God's own possession not for her own sake but for the sake of the world.

Second, Israel was to be to God a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Israel was to have a special place before God, namely, to offer sacrifices to Him, to stand in a unique relationship to God, to be set apart as a holy people. The existence of an official priesthood (as with Aaron and his descendants) did not thereby exclude the rest of Israel from a special relationship to God; indeed it only confirmed that relationship. Nor was holiness the mark of a few set apart; it was to be the hallmark of an entire nation. In a world where evil and corruption, idolatry and wickedness existed on every hand—including the land of promise—Israel was to stand forth as a holy and righteous people. Israel was chosen to be kings and priests before God and to the world.

3. Obligation

There was, however, an obligation on the part of Israel. For the promise was preceded by a condition: "*if* you will *obey* my voice and *keep* my covenant." The promises of God, pledged on His part, were to be realized through Israel's obedience. When Moses came down from the mountain and spoke the words about the covenant, the people responded, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Exod. 19:8). Thus the covenant was consummated through Israel's acceptance of God's words and their response of obedience.

Two days after the Israelites had consecrated themselves, an awesome divine theophany occurred atop Mount Sinai. God spoke forth the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:1–17). By means of this law Israel's covenant obligation was to be particularly carried out. As is stated elsewhere, the Ten Commandments (the Decalogue) were *the* way by which God's covenant was to be fulfilled: "And he [God] declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the ten commandments"[40] (Deut. 4:13). These words inscribed on the two tablets are later called "the words of the covenant": "And he [Moses] wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments" (Exod. 34:28). God also gave various ordinances (Exod. 21–23) related to the Ten Commandments. But the Ten Commandments are peculiarly the words of the covenant that had to be performed if the people of Israel were to maintain their part in the covenantal obligation.

The Ten Commandments are to be understood as an expression of God's own holy and righteous character and are thus the very foundation of a kingdom of priests and a holy people. The loving God is also a God of consuming fire against any infraction of His holy word. For example, the second commandment prohibits graven images, and Moses later says, "Take heed … lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God, which he made with you, and make a graven image…. For the LORD your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God" (Deut. 4:23–24).

Let it be emphasized again that the love of God is the primary fact in God's relation to Israel. But as the holy and righteous One, He will not and cannot overlook evil. One of the most memorable statements in this connection is made just prior to God's renewing the covenant. Moses for the second time[41] had tablets of stone in hand for the writing of the commandments when suddenly "The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and

transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty'" (Exod. 34:6–7). The covenant accordingly was set against the background of God's redemptive love for Israel, His mercy, and graciousness. But since He is holy, He cannot "clear the guilty": Israel had to fulfill His commandments.

Recall that there was no obligation on Noah's part for God to carry out His promise of never again sending a flood of total desolation: God Himself solemnly pledged to carry out the obligation. In the covenant with Abraham, to inherit the land of Canaan the sole obligation was circumcision. If circumcision was not performed, an Israelite would be cut off from any right to the land. But now much more was required of Israel: a faithful fulfilling of God's words. If this were not done, Israel would forfeit the extraordinary promise of God that they would be His own treasured possession, a holy kingdom and nation, and would be cast away from His presence.

Thus the covenant with Israel is truly a covenant of law.[42] *Unless* Israel were obedient to God's commandments, there would be no possibility of receiving what God has promised. There is no suggestion that this was an onerous imposition upon Israel, for if Israel truly responded in faith and gratitude, she would be zealous to carry out the LORD's commands. Nonetheless—to repeat—it was a covenant of law. And the "bottom line" is this: "It will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us" (Deut. 6:25). It is the righteousness of law—the righteousness of works.

4. Ratification

The ratification of the covenant is by *blood.* After God had given the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20) and ordinances (Exod. 21–23) to Israel, the people replied: "All the words[43] which the LORD has spoken we will do" (24:3). Thereupon Moses built an altar at the foot of Mount Sinai and erected twelve pillars (representing the twelve tribes). Oxen were offered up as burnt offerings and peace offerings. Then he threw half of the blood against the altar and half upon the people, saying to them: "Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words" (v. 8).

By sprinkling blood on the altar and the people, there was the expression of a deep covenantal relationship between God and the people of Israel. Thus there was a solemn establishment and ratification of the covenant. As the Book of Hebrews says, "Hence even the first covenant was not ratified[44] without blood"

(9:18). Moreover the very sprinkling of blood also signified both purification and forgiveness. As Hebrews continues: “Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (9:22).

Thus in God’s covenant with Israel there was the sacrifice of animals and the sprinkling of their blood. Thereby the covenant of God with His people was confirmed. God Himself was deeply involved—the sprinkled blood on the altar[45] and also on the people. Subsequently God established the sacrificial system with Israel (see especially the Book of Leviticus), a system that culminated in the Day of Atonement, whose purpose is purification and forgiveness.

Returning to the scene at the foot of Mount Sinai, we observe that the sprinkling of the blood followed upon the commitment of the people to do *all* the words the Lord has spoken. Doubtless they meant what they said and were surprised when Moses did the extraordinary thing of building an altar, killing oxen, and sprinkling blood. But they were ignorant of how soon they would be turning away from God’s word, of how much they would need purification and forgiveness, sin offering and atonement. For the heart of Israel’s need (here representing all nations) would be the need for salvation.

5. Fulfillment

From God’s side the covenant He made with Israel would never be broken. God is faithful to His covenant (“my covenant”), even if Israel should prove faithless and disobedient and be punished by going into captivity again. One of the most beautiful statements to this effect reads thus: “Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not spurn them, neither will I abhor them so as to destroy them utterly and break my covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God; but I will for their sake remember the covenant with their forefathers, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the LORD“ (Lev. 26:44–45).

There would also come a time after disobedience and exile when, said the Lord speaking to Israel, “you will return to the LORD your God and obey his voice, for the LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not fail you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers which he swore to them” (Deut. 4:30–31).

God is a God of covenant; He will remain faithful to his promises. Eventually His people will be obedient and His covenant fulfilled. “I am the LORD!”

On Israel's side the covenant would be broken. Prior to the passage quoted above from Leviticus, God says, "If you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my ordinances, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant…" (26:15). Thus it was possible for Israel to break the covenant.

The course of Israel's history, despite periodic reforms, was one of increasing disobedience. Hosea later cried out on behalf of the Lord: "Set the trumpet to your lips, for a vulture is over the house of the LORD, because they have broken my covenant, and transgressed my law" (Hosea 8:1). Nehemiah spoke to God of how the people of Israel "were disobedient": They "rebelled against thee and cast thy law behind their back" (Neh. 9:26). The words of the Lord, spoken through Jeremiah, represent the sad climax: "The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant which I made with their fathers" (Jer. 11:10). Indeed, the situation was so far gone that God said, "Though they cry to me I will not listen to them…. Therefore do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf' (vv. 11, 14).

Perhaps one can but wonder at Israel's perfidy. Did she not sincerely promise to do "all the words" of the Lord? Had she not seen God work on her behalf in ways beyond that of any other nation or people? Was she not miraculously delivered from misery in Egypt? Was she not granted the blessings of the land previously promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Were not God's laws so clearly spelled out that none could fail to understand? Yes, all this is true, but *Israel did not have a heart* to do the will of the Lord.

An extraordinary passage in Deuteronomy illustrates this point. Following Moses' rehearsal of the Ten Commandments and the people's vow of obedience, God said, "I have heard the words of this people … they have rightly said all that they have spoken.

Oh that they had such a heart[46] as this always, to fear me and to keep all my commandments" (5:28–29). The problem lies in the heart, echoed in the words following shortly thereafter: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart" (6:4–6). This truly was *the* answer to Israel's keeping God's commandments. For if the Lord God was totally loved, then Israel would keep His commandments: they would "have a heart" to do so. But this they did not have and thus would surely break God's covenant. As the psalmist later says, "Their heart was not steadfast toward him; they were not true to his covenant" (78:37).

In closing this discussion of God's covenant with Israel, it is important to say three things: first, regardless of Israel's failure, even to breaking God's covenant,

they could not annul the covenant; for it was God's covenant, not Israel's. Israel might, and did, violate the conditions, but the covenant remained firm. Second, since God's covenant remains firm and the problem rests basically in the heart, God will provide a way for the changing of the heart. Much else will be needed, including a remission of sins that animal sacrifices cannot mediate and a deeper knowledge of God, but God as the LORD will surely bring it about. Third, since Israel as a nation finally proved intractably disobedient, God did not hesitate to move beyond national Israel to claim a people out of all races and nations. The time has come—as the New Covenant unfolds—for the unveiling of a new Israel of God!

E. The Covenant With David

The fifth divine covenant is the covenant with David. God spoke to David through Nathan the prophet: “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you … and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever…. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever” (2 Sam. 7:12, 13, 16).[47] This covenant was made soon after David had become king over all Israel.[48]

1. Parties

The covenant was obviously between God and David. Throughout the years of his kingship David had this covenant assurance from God, for among David’s last words spoken were these: “He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure” (2 Sam. 23:5). “He”—God, with “me”—David. Many generations later God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah of this covenant as “my covenant with David my servant” (Jer. 33:21).

2. Promise

The promise is that of an *everlasting kingship.* To put it more inclusively: it is the establishment of a perpetual dynasty, a throne, a kingdom. Much of this is set forth in Psalm 89. The psalmist declares: “Thou hast said, ‘I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant: “I will establish your descendants for ever, and build your throne for all generations” ‘” (89:3–4). Later are these words: “My steadfast love I will keep for him for ever, and my covenant will stand firm for him. I will establish his line for ever and his throne as the days of the heavens…. His line shall endure for ever, his throne as long as the sun before me. Like the moon it shall be established for ever; it shall stand firm while the skies endure” (89:28–29, 36–37).

Words of God through Jeremiah are further confirmation: “David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel…. If you can break my

covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne" (Jer. 33:17, 20–21).

These passages unmistakably promise a continuing kingship, indeed, one that will forever endure.

3. Ratification

The ratification of this covenant is by *God Himself.* In Psalm 89 (just quoted) is also this promise: "I will not violate my covenant, or alter the word that went forth from my lips. Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David" (vv. 34–35). God swore by Himself, His holiness, and thus by an oath. In another Psalm are these words: "The LORD swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back" (132:11). The ratification of the covenant could not possibly be any higher or more certain, since it is God who swears by Himself.[49]

4. Obligation

In a basic sense the covenant obligation was wholly of God. From the Scriptures already cited it is apparent that the covenant with David was entirely God's doing. He asked nothing from David[50] by way of response, He declared the perpetuation of David's kingship, and He confirmed this in swearing by Himself.

We may observe several other factors. First, this covenant is firm, regardless of any possible default by David's son Solomon. Just after saying to David, "I will raise up your offspring after you … and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever" (supra), God added: "I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him … but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you" (2 Sam. 7:14–15). Then the Lord continued: "And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever" (v. 16). Thus no matter what Solomon might do, either good or ill, the perpetuity of kingship was forever assured.

Second, the kingship would endure regardless of how far David's later descendants might depart from God.[51] After God had promised, "I will establish

his [David's] line for ever and his throne as the days of the heavens," He immediately added these words: "If his children forsake my law and do not walk according to my ordinances, if they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments, then I will punish their transgressions with the rod and their iniquity with scourges; but I will not remove from him my steadfast love, or be false to my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant, or alter the word that went forth from my lips" (Ps. 89:30–34).

From all the Scriptures thus far quoted it is evident that God assumes the full responsibility for maintenance of the covenant. Hence the everlasting kingship—the dynasty, the throne, the kingdom—is absolutely assured. This will be the case regardless of the good or evil in David's sons after him. The throne of David will endure forever. But (and here we come to a critical matter) this assurance by no means rules out human obligation. We have earlier noted the words of covenant spoken to David early in his reign: God promises an eternal kingship and declares that regardless of any iniquity in David's son Solomon the promise will not be voided. However, many years later in his final charge to Solomon David included these words: "'If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail you a man on the throne of Israel' "[52] (1 Kings 2:4). In these words a definite obligation is stated; furthermore, a condition is set forth for the first time: "If your sons… ." Psalm 132 similarly declares, "The LORD swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: 'One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne. If your sons keep my covenant and my testimonies which I shall teach them, their sons also for ever shall sit upon your throne" (vv. 11–12). Again, that condition: "*if* your sons… ."

Solomon later expressed this same conditional obligation. While dedicating the temple, he prayed these words: "O LORD, God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father what thou hast promised him, saying, 'There shall never fail you a man before me to sit upon the throne of Israel, if only your sons take heed to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me'" (1 Kings 8:25)[53] Here too are the words "*If* only your sons… ."

Clearly both aspects of the covenant are true: first, David's kingship will endure forever regardless of what man may do; second, David's sons are obligated to walk in God's ways or else they will no longer sit on David's throne. But, one may inquire, is there not a contradiction here? If the kingship is eternally secure, how can David's sons—his continuing line—fail to obey God, since disobedience means the forfeiture of the throne? Or, contrariwise, if the sons of David should turn away from God with the resultant abdication of the

throne, then would not God's sworn promise of an everlasting kingship be invalidated?

In any event (without yet seeking to answer these questions) there is both the promise of an everlasting kingship that will endure regardless of what man may do, and the requirement of faithfulness to God for the continuance of men upon the throne.

5. Fulfillment

The fulfillment of the promise is to be found in Jesus Christ. Surpassing all the other Old Testament statements thus far recounted are the memorable words of Isaiah the prophet:

> For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
> And the government will rest on His shoulders;
> And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
> Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
> There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,
> On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
> To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
> From then on and forevermore
>
> (Isa. 9:6–7 NASB).

Extraordinarily, the One to come would do something no son of David had ever before done: He Himself would "establish" and "uphold" the throne of David "from then on and forevermore." He Himself will reign forever! There will be no need for further kings after Him. His will be an everlasting kingship. Moreover—and even more amazing—the One who is to come will be called "Mighty God"! He who is to reign on the throne of David will be the Lord Himself.

But how then does all this fit in with the line of David? The promise of God had been made to David that *his* house, *his* throne, *his* kingship would be established forever. How can One to be called "Mighty God"—for all His amazing character—fulfill this promise? For that answer, of course, we must turn to the New Testament, and there the message is clear: the One to be born will at the same time be of the lineage of David *and* the Son of God! Jesus the

Christ by genealogy was of the line of David (as, for example, the genealogy in Matthew 1 specifies)[54] and also "the Son of the Most High." In the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary: "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end" (Luke 1:32–33 NASB).

As the New Testament unfolds, it is apparent that the fulfillment of this promise occurred climactically with the resurrection and exaltation[55] of Christ when Jesus entered fully into His kingship. Peter in his Pentecost message spoke of David as foreseeing the ultimate fulfillment of the promise to him in the resurrection of Christ and declared regarding Jesus: "For David says concerning him, 'I saw the Lord always before me… .'[56] Being therefore a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants[57] upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption"[58] (Acts 2:25, 30–31). David, accordingly, looked beyond his own earthly line for the fulfillment of the covenant[59] —even to the Lord who was yet to come.

One further question, however, remains. Since the sons of David (as the Old Testament record later shows) did turn from God's ways, and the line of kings did therefore come to an end (the last king being Zedekiah [597–587 B.C.]), how can it be said that David's kingship was a perpetual one? The answer is clear, namely, that during these six centuries, although no descendant of David was on the throne, there was still the continuation of the line as the genealogies demonstrate. Hence, there was never lacking a man (we may recall the words: "David shall never lack a man… ."); the potential was always there. Of far more importance is the fact that God's covenant with David ("your throne shall be established for ever") was fulfilled through Jesus Christ in a way that no earthly kingdom ever could be. *No* merely human kingdom can be established forever, because all things earthly and human are limited by time and circumstances.

This also enables us to give reply to two earlier questions[60] thus: David's sons could (and did) disobey God and thereby forfeit the earthly line, since the eternal kingdom does not depend on human faithfulness. Accordingly, we may say that the continuation of the earthly line was *conditional*, based on David's sons' obedience and disobedience, but the ultimate fulfillment was *unconditional*, based on the covenant promise of God.

We can but marvel at the amazing way God moved to fulfill the covenant with David. But even more, we can but rejoice in the fact that since His resurrection from the grave, Jesus Christ, Son of David and Son of God, has been exalted to

the right hand of God and reigns over the kingdoms of the world.

F. The New Covenant

The sixth and climactic divine covenant is the covenant of which Jesus Christ is the mediator. He is "the mediator of a new covenant" (Heb. 9:15; 12:24). It is the covenant in His blood: "the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20[61] ; 1 Cor. 11:25). The new covenant is centered in Jesus Christ.

1. Parties

The parties in the new covenant may be viewed in various ways. Preliminarily, they are God with Israel (or Israel and Judah)—the same parties as in the prior Sinaitic covenant. Here we return to the Old Testament, particularly to the words spoken through Jeremiah: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke …" (Jer. 31:31—32).[62] Hence, it will be the same people, but God promises to make a new covenant with them.

When we turn to the New Testament, however, it becomes apparent that Israel's relation to the new covenant is understood as extending far beyond national or ethnic Israel. The words of Jeremiah 31 are quoted in Hebrews 8—"a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (v. 8)—but it is clear from the whole context of the passage that this covenant relates to *all who are called.* For Hebrews later speaks of "those who are called" as the ones related to the new covenant: "he [Christ] is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive …" (9:15). The New Testament unmistakably affirms that the "called" include Jews and Gentiles alike: "… those who are called, both Jews and Greeks" (1 Cor. 1:24). Truly the marvel of the New Testament is that the Gentiles are now included. Formerly, they were "alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise" (Eph. 2:12)—even the promise of the new covenant as declared in Jeremiah. Now the "called" Gentiles of every nation, race, and culture receive the promise of the new covenant.

Hence the new covenant is not with Israel according to the flesh but with Israel according to the Spirit. It is not for the few but for the many. In the words

of Christ, His "blood of the covenant … is poured out for many" (Matt. 26:28). Thus the covenant reaches out to include a vast multitude from all races and nations.

2. Promises

The promises of the new covenant may be summarized in a fivefold manner. Among the references cited, we will particularly note the language in Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8.

First, there is the promise of *the law within the heart:* "I will put my law within them ["into their minds"—Heb. 8:10[63]], and I will write it upon their hearts" (Jer. 31:33). The law will no longer be an external matter written on tablets of stone but inscribed on the mind and heart. The compulsion to do God's command will no longer be from without but from within: it will stem from a willing heart.

All of this means, therefore, that a critical alteration is promised in the new covenant. Instead of God's law being written upon the heart, sin was engraved there. As Jeremiah earlier said: "the sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart" (17:1). A new engraving is needed, and this calls for radical surgery.

On a deeper level, what is really called for is a new mind, a new heart, a new spirit: and such is the promise. This stands out especially in the prophecy of Ezekiel: "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit[64] within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes …" (36:26–27). The prophecy goes one step beyond a new heart and a new spirit, as extraordinary as that is; God places His own Spirit within.

This radical spiritual surgery also implants the law within a new heart to be indwelt by the Spirit of God! God will place His Spirit within so that the new heart will ever be strengthened and directed to do the will of God.

Second, there is the promise of a *unique relationship between God and a people:* "I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10). In the covenant at Mount Sinai God promised that Israel would be His special possession if they obeyed His voice and kept His covenant (Exod. 19:5). Israel, as we have recounted, failed to obey; they broke God's covenant. Thus the promise in the new covenant of a unique relationship is no longer to the Israelite nation or race but to those—whoever they may be—who are called by

God.

These people will have the law within their hearts as the people of God who fulfill His purpose and His commands willingly and gladly.

Third, there is the promise of *the knowledge of the Lord.* "And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest" (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:11[65]). In the Old Testament there is the oft-stated grievance of God that Israel does not really know Him. Although He has revealed Himself to the people of Israel in manifold ways and although there has been continuing instruction about Him, the people remain ignorant. "The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people does not understand" (Isa. 1:3). "There is … no knowledge of God in the land…. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:1, 6).

I have earlier discussed the vast importance of this knowledge.[66] What has been so grievously lacking in the old covenant will be totally present in the new. The people of God will be a people of knowledge: *all* will know "from the least … to the greatest." Nor will it be basically knowledge through instruction—teaching one's "neighbor and … brother"—but knowledge as an immediate certainty. In such a direct and personal knowledge of God, all of life will find its profoundest meaning and fulfillment.

Fourth, there is the promise of *the forgiveness of sin.* "For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:12).[67] The great barrier between man and God is sin. As Isaiah declares to Israel, "Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you" (Isa. 59:2). Although God is merciful and compassionate, "forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exod. 34:7), there is no forgiveness and removal of sin without expiation. Under the old covenant God established a pattern of animal sacrifice as a channel for the cleansing and forgiveness of sin. However, the very repetition of these sacrifices plus the fact that animals were the offering for sin signified that there was no full cleansing and abolition of sin.[68]

The promise of forgiveness of sins is a glorious promise. Jeremiah does not state how this will be done. But that it stands at the heart of the new covenant is unmistakably declared.

Fifth, there is the promise of an *eternal inheritance.* Here we must turn to the New Testament since the promise is not specifically included in Jeremiah. Hebrews 9:15 reads, "He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promise of an eternal inheritance".[69] Hence the

climax of the new covenant is the promise of an eternal inheritance.

In this connection the word "covenant" takes on the further significance of "testament" or "will." Hebrews 9:15–16 continues: "… since a death has occurred which redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant. For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established."[70] Because the terms of a will cannot go into effect until the testator has died, the same is true in the covenant (will, testament) mediated by Jesus Christ. The vast difference, of course, is that His covenant or will has to do with far more than earthly possessions: it is the promise of an eternal inheritance.

3. Ratification

The ratification of the new covenant is in *the blood of Jesus Christ*. Christ Himself affirmed this at the Last Supper: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (1 Cor. 11:25). The cup of wine that the apostles drank signified His outpoured blood and His coming death. Hence, in the blood of Christ was the ratification of the new covenant.

Once more, continuing words from Hebrews: "For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. Hence even the first covenant was not ratified[71] without blood" (9:17–18). But here it is not the blood of animals as in the first or old covenant, but the blood of Jesus Christ —His death on the cross—that ratifies and puts into effect the new covenant.

Thus in extraordinary manner we behold the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. It is wholly God's doing. Without any participation or contribution on man's part, God establishes the covenant and then seals it through the blood of His own Son. Truly here is an act of sovereign grace that beggars the imagination—the ratification of the new covenant in the death-blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

4. Obligation

The one obligation for the fulfillment of the new covenant is *faith in Jesus Christ.* Paul writes of how "what was promised to faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe" (Gal. 3:22); nothing else is required. The Book of Hebrews speaks of "those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (6:12). Thus faith is a continuing reality—persevering, longsuffering—in those who inherit the promises: it is the one requirement.

This does not mean that by faith we achieve what God has promised; rather we *receive* the blessings He has in store. Faith is not a work or activity by which we lay claim to God's promise. It is rather a laying aside of all claims and looking totally to Jesus Christ.

Through faith in Jesus Christ all the promises of God are fulfilled. "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him" (2 Cor. 1:20). By looking to Christ and Him only, we find the fulfillment of every promise in God's Word.

5. Fulfillment

In reviewing the promises of the new covenant we may now observe how all of them are completely fulfilled. Let us note these briefly.

First, there is the promise concerning the law within the heart (or the new heart and spirit). This is fulfilled through the Spirit of God. Paul told the Corinthians that they were "a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor. 3:3). Thus through Christ and faith in Him, the question is no longer of tablets of stone (as in the old covenant) on which the law is written but of tablets of the heart inscribed by the Holy Spirit. Thus—to continue—it is "a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life" (3:6). This signifies in the new covenant an inner compulsion to do God's command, no longer an external constraint. The result is life rather than death.

Another description of the new covenant is that of a "new birth," which includes a new heart and spirit. Jesus declares, "You must be born anew" (John 3:7). This is to be "born of the Spirit" (v. 8). In the language of Paul, it is a matter of "regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). This "new birth" may also be described as a birth "from above,"[72] which depicts the action of the Spirit as coming from above to indwell the person of faith in Jesus Christ. So Paul can write: "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2).

This brings us full circle: the promise is fulfilled in the new covenant. The law truly is within the heart, but it is no longer a law that leads only to sin and death. It is a fresh engraving of the Spirit, a new birth from above. It is the Spirit of life indeed!

Second, there is the promise concerning a unique relationship between God and people. The fulfillment again is to be found in the New Testament. Paul

quotes Hosea thus: “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘my beloved’” (Rom. 9:25),[73] and Paul sees the fulfillment in the Gentiles coming to salvation. Peter writes, “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people…. Once you were no people but now you are God’s people” (1 Peter 2:9–10). These are “exiles” scattered through Asia Minor, persons “born anew” (1 Peter 1:3)—thus a new people of God. It matters not whether they are Jew or Gentile; what counts is that through faith in Jesus Christ there is a new birth, a new relationship. God is their God and they are His people.

Third, there is the promise concerning the knowledge of God. This is beautifully fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ who in His own person makes God known. Jesus said to His disciples in the Upper Room: “Henceforth you know him and have seen him…. He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:7, 9). Paul writes, “[God has] shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

Hence, through Jesus Christ all who belong to Him through faith have a true knowledge of God. All “from the least to the greatest” now share in this firsthand knowledge of God.

Fourth, there is the promise concerning forgiveness of sins. The fulfillment of this great promise is vividly declared in the new covenant in Jesus’ own words: “This is my blood of the [new] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt. 26:28). It is through the redemption[74] wrought by Jesus Christ that sins are totally forgiven—“we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses” (Eph. 1:7).

Thus the great barrier of sin between God and man is overcome. Sins are fully forgiven-cleansed and removed—through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It all happens out of God’s vast mercy and grace. This truly is the heart of the gospel.

Fifth, there is the promise of an eternal inheritance. All other promises we have discussed—the law in the heart, a new relationship and a new people, the knowledge of God, and the forgiveness of sins—are immediately fulfilled in the new covenant in Jesus Christ. We have noted each in turn. The eternal inheritance, however, is a future promise of the new covenant: it cannot be fulfilled for the individual until after this life. To be sure, a person has eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ (e.g., John 3:16)—he has passed from death to life (e.g., 1 John 3:14)—but the inheritance itself remains yet to be received.

[1]The kjv reads “new testament.” The word “new” is not found in most of the ancient transcripts, and therefore is not included in the rsv (quoted

above), nasb, niv, neb and many other modern translations. The word translated “testament” in kjv, diatheke, is uniformly translated “covenant” in modern versions.

[2]See below for a discussion of how the more inclusive word “covenant” contains within itself also the meaning of “testament.” Although “covenant” is generally a more adequate translation than “testament,” I will use the traditional terminology when referring to the Bible itself as composed of Old and New “Testaments.”

[3]The Hebrew word is berit, the Greek, diatheke.

[4]As noted in chapter 9, “Adam” and “man” are the same Hebrew word, “ädäm.

[5]The Hebrew phrase is ke* ädäm. The kjv reads “like men,” rsv “at Adam,” the neb “at Admah.” The footnote of the neb, however, states that the Hebrew is “like Adam.” We will stay with that rendering of the text, despite the apparent difficulty of the verse suggesting a place location-“there.” I submit that both person and place are contained in the establishing of the first covenant.

[6]Them” includes man and woman, or mankind at large. Sirach 17 begins: “The Lord created man out of the earth, and turned him back to it again. He gave to men [literally, “to them”] few days” (v. 1).

[7]This is the wording of the neb. The word “my” is implied however the text is translated, since the continuation reads, “They were unfaithful to me there.” The neb reads, “There they played me false.”

[8]The quoted words follow the sin and fall of man, wherein God banishes man from Eden “lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever” (Gen. 3:22). Hence, the “tree of life” was the tree of eternal life.

[9]The “tree of life” is sometimes also spoken of as a “sacrament”: “In paradise the tree of life stood out eminently … as a splendid sacrament particularly of heavenly life and of Christ Himself, the author of life” (Heinrich Heppe, Reformed Dogmatics, 297).

[10]To use the language of Sirach quoted earlier.

[11]Man,” sect. 2). The emphasis is, I believe, misplaced, as if man earned life by obedience to the command “You shall not eat.” To be sure, such “eating” of the forbidden tree meant the forfeiture of life, but the “not eating” of it was not the condition or requirement for life. Indeed, life was there already for the taking and partaking-all this freely given by the

goodness of God. This mistaken emphasis is repeated in such a work of Reformed theology as Herman Bavinck's Our Reasonable Faith, wherein he writes: "Before the fall the rule was: through works to eternal life" (p. 272).

[12]" … man as a creature in God's image was created for covenant communion with God" (Heppe, Reformed Dogmatics, 281). Heppe adds, "The doctrine of God's covenant with man is thus the inmost heart and soul of the whole of revealed truth" (ibid.).

[13]" … creation is the outward basis of the covenant, covenant the inward basis of creation" (Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, 4.11.27).

[14]"God's fundamental act in history is the establishment of a covenant. His will is a will to community" (Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption [Dogmatics, II], 215).

[15]The Hebrew word is süp. The nasb, like kjv and rsv, reads "bruise" but has "crush" in the margin. The translation of "bruise" is time-honored; nonetheless it does not seem adequate to express the full force of the text. The neb and the Anchor Bible read "strike at." While this conveys a strong action (perhaps more than "bruise"), it does not sufficiently convey the note of accomplishment, much less that of victory, that is found in the translation "crush." The jb also reads "crush."

[16]Although the mt of Genesis 3:15 reads "it shall crush your head," the lxx has a masculine pronoun "he," a clear Messianic interpretation. The Vulgate mistakenly translated the pronoun as "she," thus suggesting the Roman Catholic view of Mary.

[17]Of only one other man between Adam and Noah was it said that he walked with God-Enoch. Genesis 5:24 reads, "Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." According to Hebrews 11:5, "by faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was attested as having pleased God." Assumably Enoch in his 300-year walk with God (see Gen. 5:21-24) represented such a unique fellowship with his Creator in a world of increasing evil that God would not let him die: He simply "took" him. Enoch's father Jared and his son Methuselah lived over 900 years, but they both physically died. Enoch at the relatively young age (for that time) of 365 was taken out of a sinful and dying world. Enoch was the great-grandfather of Noah.

[18]Hebrews puts it vividly: "By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events yet unseen, took heed and ["in reverence" nasb]

constructed an ark for the saving of his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith" (11:7).

[19]The kjv reading. Most modern translations read "descendants." However, the Hebrew is in the singular and thus suggests a collective, not individuals. Hence "offspring" might be the best modern translation. Nonetheless, I am retaining "seed" here and in the verses to follow as quite adequate (cf. Gal. 3:16, where a translation in the singular stands at the very heart of what Paul is teaching).

[20]The rsv margin; similarly kjv, niv, and nasb. The rsv reads "will bless themselves." The Hebrew word nibrku here and in 18:18 may have reflexive force like the hithpael hitbàrkû in 22:18 and 26:4b. However, the lxx translates both tenses as a passive eneulogethesontai, and it is the reading "be blessed" that Paul follows in Galatians 3:8. See F. F. Bruce, Commentary of Galatians, NIGTC, 156, 171.

[21],Or literally, "believed in" (so kjv, nasb).

[22]Recall similar words about Enoch and Noah.

[23]The relation between faith and works (or obedience) is dramatically set forth in James 2:14-26, where Abraham is the focal figure. The climax comes in verse 26: "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead." It was "faith … completed by works" (v. 22) that is the glory of Abraham's life, the background for God's covenant with him-and the paradigm for true Christian living.

[24]The Hebrew word is berîtî. The expression, "my covenant," is used nine times in Genesis 17.

[25]"Offspring" in the rsv. The Greek word sperma is translated "seed" in kjv, niv, and nasb; neb reads "issue."

[26]So neb, similarly niv. The kjv and rsv have "desire." The Greek word orego contains the deeper note of "longing for."

[27]Thus niv. The Hebrew word is mispâhâh. Although the translation "families" (kjv, neb, rsv, nasb) is possible, it obscures the universal scope of the promise in the present context (see BDB, 1046-47).

[28]Jeremiah 34:8ff., particularly vv. 18-19, describes a similar covenant ceremony. See Nahum Sarna, Understanding Genesis, 125-27, for the historical background of the ritual.

[29]Circumcision did not originate with Abraham but was an ancient ritual also practiced by the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, and Egyptians

(see Jer. 9:25-26).

30 "From the Euphrates … to the border of Egypt" is, accordingly, the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:18-"from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates." If "the river of Egypt" means the Nile, as some have supposed, then the prophecy of Genesis 15:18 would need to be understood in general terms (since the Nile is not on the border but in the center). That is to say, Abraham's heirs possess the land from the Euphrates to Egypt (the Nile), hence the fulfillment according to 1 Kings 4:21 (cf. 2 Chron. 9:26) in Solomon's reigning "from the Euphrates … to the border of Egypt." In regard to the Euphrates, Solomon's kingdom extended over the region of Hamath to the northwest Euphrates.

Another more specific understanding views the Nile in terms of its easternmost arm in the delta region, namely, the Shihor (see e.g., Isa. 23:3 for a parallelism of "Shihor" and "Nile"; cf. Jer. 2:18 kjv, niv, neb). The Shihor, according to Joshua 13:3 is described as "east of Egypt" (literally, "before Egypt"), hence its easternmost border, and also as a boundary for the land yet to be possessed by Israel. By the time of David's reign, the boundary of Israel did reach to the Shihor: he "assembled all Israel from the Shihor of Egypt to the entrance of Hamath" (1 Chron. 13:5), i.e., the Euphrates. Hence, if the "Shihor of Egypt" is the "river of Egypt" referred to in Genesis 15:18, then by David's time the promise of God to Abraham had been fulfilled. Further, Solomon's rule over "all the kingdoms from the Euphrates … to the border of Egypt" (understood as the Shihor Nile) completes the fulfillment of God's promise.

Another (perhaps best) understanding of the "border of Egypt" identifies the "Brook [or "river" kjv] of Egypt" with the Wadi el-Arish (which often becomes a torrential river) about ninety miles east of the most populated Nile area. The "Brook of Egypt" is depicted several times as the southwestern boundary of the land promised to Israel (see, e.g., Num. 34:5; Josh. 15:4, 47; 1 Kings 8:65; cf. Isa. 27:12 for a future promise). It is possible that the "Brook of Egypt" and the "river of Egypt" (as in Gen. 15:18) are the same (niv here footnotes its translation of "river" suggested also "wadi"). From this perspective, the promise to Abraham about the land extending "from the river of Egypt … to the river Euphrates" is clearly fulfilled in Solomon's time (see, e.g., 1 Kings 8:65, where Solomon holds a "great assembly, from the entrance of Hamath to the Brook of Egypt.").

In conclusion, whether the “river of Egypt” is to be understood as representing Egypt in general, the Shihor-Nile, or the brook of Egypt, God’s promise to Abraham was completely fulfilled in Israel’s land occupation during the Davidic-Solomonic period.

[31]That is, the line of Isaac rather than Ishmael, Jacob rather than Esau.

[32]This does not mean that physical Israel is without promise, but the promise is the same as for all other people: a spiritual inheritance through Jesus Christ (see especially Rom. 11).

[33]“Real” and “true” are not in the Greek text. They have been added to that verse by rsv (similarly neb, which has “true” in each instance) to draw out Paul’s clear differentiation between a racial Jew and a spiritual Jew, namely a Christian, and between physical and spiritual circumcision. However, there is much to be said for not using “real” and “true,” since Paul is deliberately making a break from any and every physical connotation and thus radically affirming that to be a Jew is to be one “inwardly,” in the heart. Hence a Christian is a Jew spiritually! We may note also that Paul speaks of “the Israel of God” in Galatians 6:16, where the “new creation” context points to Christians.

[34]Indeed, quite the opposite, for Ezra concluded his prayer by making a “firm covenant” with the princes, Le vites, and priests to walk again according to God’s law. He does not thank God for bringing them back to the land as if it were assured by God’s covenant with Abraham. No, according to Ezra, that promise had long ago been fulfilled.

[35]Although the deliverance of which Zechariah initially spoke might seem to refer to political enemies, Rome in particular, the goal of fearlessness, holiness, and righteousness is surely a spiritual estate. Also the succeeding verses (76-79) point clearly to a spiritual fulfillment. Norval Geldenhuys writes, “In this, therefore, we have one indication given by the Holy Ghost Himself that the Old Testament prophecies and promises regarding Christ are to be taken by us not in a literal and materialist sense but in a spiritual sense” (The Gospel of Luke, NICNT 94).

[36]E.g., “But the promise of the land is obviously related to the temporal and will be fulfilled as long as the present earth lasts” (John Walvoord, Israel in Prophecy, 40). See also pages 25-26, 48.

[37]The Greek words are prote diatheke. In Hebrews 8:7; 9:1, 18 he prote has clearly a substantive meaning of “first covenant” and is so translated in the rsv.

[38]Cf. Genesis 15:13; Exodus 12:40-41; and Acts 7:6. Galatians 3:17 has

"four hundred and thirty years."

[39]The Hebrew phrase is li segullâ. The kjv reads "a peculiar treasure unto me"; niv, "my treasured possession"; neb, "my special possession." Such translations seek to express the special quality of God's attachment to Israel. "My own possession" (rsv and nasb) is the more literal Hebrew; however, the other translations doubtless convey the particular significance of God's commitment to Israel beyond all other peoples and nations.

[40]The Hebrew phrase is 'aseret' haddebarîm, literally, "the ten words."

[41]Moses had previously broken in pieces the two tablets inscribed with the commandments when he came down the mountain and found Israel committing idolatry with the golden calf (Exod. 32:19).

[42]It is a mistake, I believe, to call this a "covenant of grace" (as does, for example, Herbert M. Carson in Basic Christian Doctrines, 119). It is true, as I have emphasized, that God's love of Israel lay behind the covenant, and God is also loving and gracious in all His ways. But it confuses the old covenant and the new covenant to speak of both as covenants of grace. As the Gospel of John emphasizes: "The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (1:17).

[43]The Ten Commandments, as earlier noted, are literally "the ten words." The preface to the Ten Commandments in Exodus reads, "And God spoke all these words, saying …" (20:1). Hence, the people's reply to Moses, "All the words … ," seems to focus on the Ten Commandments.

[44]The Greek word is enkekainistai, translated "put into effect" (niv), "inaugurated" (nasb, neb), "dedicated" (kjv). All these translations in addition to "ratified" (rsv), reveal various aspects that are helpful to keep in mind.

[45]We may recall God's presence moving as the smoking pot and flaming torch among the sacrificial animals in the ratification of the covenant with Abraham.

[46]Thus kjv, neb, Niv, nasb. The Hebrew word is lebâb. The rsv has "mind," which is possible, but the deeper meaning of "heart" is preferable.

[47]Cf. 1 Chronicles 17:11-14. The word "covenant" is not used here (or in 2 Sam. 7); however, such is unmistakably implied. As will be noted, "covenant" appears in other related passages.

[48]A clear connection with the previous Sinaitic covenant is shown in David's prayer of response: "And thou didst establish for thyself thy

people Israel to be thy people for ever; and thou, O Lord, didst become their God. And now, O Lord God, confirm for ever the word which thou hast spoken concerning thy servant and concerning his house" (2 Sam. 7:24-25). The covenant of God with Israel to be His continuing people now extends to the Davidic kingship. Both are assured "for ever."

[49]It is interesting that Peter on the Day of Pentecost spoke of David's "knowing that God had sworn on an oath with him" (Acts 2:30). However, in Peter's message the oath is seen to relate more to a specific descendant, namely, "that he [God] would set one of his descendants upon his throne." Peter, of course, referred to Christ. See infra.

[50]The fact that David was a man very close to God-whose heart was "wholly true" (note 1 Kings 11:4; 15:3) to the Lord-doubtless provided important background for God's covenantal action. However, there is no suggestion in the covenant that God required anything of David.

[51]Two notable examples of apostasy are Ahaz, who "did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord, like his father David" (2 Chron. 28:1), and Manasseh, "who seduced Judah … so that they did more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the people of Israel" (2 Chron. 33:9).

[52]These words, quoted by David, were originally spoken by God when the covenant was established. However, the record in 1 Samuel 7 does not include this obligation and condition. (This will be further discussed later.)

[53]Similarly 2 Chronicles 6:16.

[54]Also in Luke 2:4, Joseph, Jesus' legal father, is described as being "of the house and lineage of David."

[55]See chapter 15, "The Exaltation of Christ," for more extensive consideration.

[56]Peter quoted the lxx of Psalm 16:8.

[57]The Greek phrase is ek karpou tés sosphyos autou, literally, "of the fruit of his loins." A literal translation is more in accord with the Old Testament promise given to David, which Peter here freely quoted from the lxx of Psalm 132:11 and 2 Samuel 7:12-13.

[58]Psalm 16 continues (in v. 10): "For thou dost not give me up to Sheol, or let thy godly one see the Pit." In this Messianic Psalm David (according to Peter) first sees the Lord "always before" him (v. 8), and then the Messiah Himself speaks in v. 10.

[59]In the Old Testament passages earlier cited there is apparently no suggestion of David's foreseeing such. However, according to Peter, since David was also a prophet, he actually foresaw more than the historical narrative suggests. It is in Psalm 16 (not a historical narrative) that the vision is contained.

[60]See supra, pp. 296-97.

[61]This verse is not included in the main text of the rsv and neb. It is retained in the kjv, niv, and nasb.

[62]Cf. also Jeremiah 32:40; 50:5; Ezekiel 16:60; 37:26.

[63]From the lxx of Jeremiah 31 (38):33.

[64]So niv and nasb. The kjv, rsv, neb have "spirit." Since the text unmistakably refers to God, His Spirit, the capitalized S is preferable.

[65]The lxx reading is quoted in Hebrews 8:11.

[66]See chapter 2, "The Knowledge of God."

[67]Again the lxx is followed in Hebrews 8:12.

[68]We will consider this in more detail in chapter 14, "The Atonement."

[69]The rsv has "the promised eternal inheritance" (similarly niv). The Greek is ten epangelian … tés aioniou kléronomias. Hence, the translation above (found in neb and nasb, similarly in kjv) is more accurate. It is not that those in the new covenant receive the promised inheritance but the promise of the inheritance.

[70]The Greek word is diathéké for both "covenant" and "will."

[71]See footnote 44 for comment on the Greek word translated "ratified."

[72]The Greek word translated "anew" in John 3:7 is anothen. It may also be translated "above." This may be preferable in light of John 3:31-"He who comes from above where the Greek for "above" is anothen.

[73]Paul is quoting freely from Hosea 2:23 (lxx), a passage that speaks of the restoration of Israel (cf. also Hosea 1:10), and views this in much broader perspective.

[74]The method of this redemption will be discussed in chapter 14, "The Atonement.'

13
The Incarnation

We may appropriately begin our study of the Incarnation with the words in the Gospel according to John: “The Word became flesh” (1:14). This is the mystery of the Incarnation,[1] namely, that the Word who was “with God, and … was God” (1:1), took upon Himself flesh: He became man. Without ceasing to be God through whom all things were made, He concurrently became man by assuming our flesh. Thus is He Emmanuel—“God with us” (Matt. 1:23)—in the person of Jesus Christ.

Before proceeding further, we must pause a moment to reflect on the wonder, the awesomeness, the utterly amazing character of the Incarnation. This event is a fact of such proportions as to transcend human imagination: the God of the universe, the Creator of all things invisible and visible—angelic hosts as well as countless galaxies and stars—has in Jesus Christ come to this minute planet called Earth and taken upon Himself our human existence. If the original creation of the universe out of nothing is an immeasurably vast and incomprehensible act of Almighty God, the Incarnation is surely no less stupendous. Superlatives will not suffice. Perhaps best are the words of Paul: “Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion:[2] He was manifested in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16). Great indeed!

And the purpose of the Incarnation (again one is carried beyond adequate words to declare it) is the redemption of the human race. Jesus was born to die and in dying to bear the awful weight and punishment of the sins of all mankind. He came as the Mediator of the covenant of grace,[3] the “one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:5). In the words of the Fourth Gospel, the Word who “became flesh” was “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14) and “from his fulness have we all received, grace upon grace” (1:16). Verily, it is the unfathomable grace of God bringing eternal salvation.

It will be our concern in this chapter on the Incarnation to reflect on the conjunction in Jesus Christ of both God and man, deity and humanity. We will first discuss His deity, Christ “the Son of God,” then His humanity, Christ “the Son of man,” and finally we will consider how Christ is both deity and humanity

in one person.

That this matter of the personhood of Christ is of signal importance is evidenced by the fact that Jesus inquired of His own disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” (Matt. 16:15). How one answers this question is far more than theoretical or of little practical consequence. Rather, it relates to the ultimate issues of life and eternity.

I. THE SON OF GOD

The opening verse of the Gospel according to Mark reads: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”[4] This is surely the place to begin, for the gospel, the good news, is primarily that God has come in Jesus Christ for mankind’s salvation. Christ is first of all God manifest in the flesh. He is the eternal Word who in conjunction with humanity is the Son of God and as such is the Savior of the world.

A. Factuality

One of the continuing emphases in the Gospel accounts is that Christ's being the Son of God is a basic fact of His existence. It is attested at the outset of the Gospel,[5] is declared thereafter by supernatural forces, is made known through personal revelation, and is perceived in faith.

1. Supernatural Declaration

The Gospel according to Luke, particularly in the early chapters, sets forth the truth of Jesus being the Son of God by supernatural declaration. First, it was an angel who said (to Mary): "… the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (1:35). Second, at the baptism of Jesus, God the Father declared: "Thou art my beloved Son …" (3:22). Third, Satan twice addressed Jesus in the wilderness: "If[6] you are the Son of God …" (4:3, 9). Fourth, as Jesus in the beginning of his ministry cast out many demons, they "came out of many, crying, 'You are the Son of God'" (v. 41). All these declarations were from the supernatural realm: whether good (the angel and God the Father) or evil (Satan and demons). There is no question about Jesus' being "the Son of God"—the divine dimension of His person—from the vantage point of the supernatural.

What about Jesus Himself? Significantly, in this Gospel account He does not directly declare Himself to be the Son of God.[7] However, in the last week of His ministry Jesus told a parable about the owner of a vineyard who sent his "beloved son" (Luke 20:13), who was put to death; thus Jesus indirectly identified Himself as the Son of God. And finally, upon the persistent questioning of the chief priests and scribes, "Are you the Son of God, then?" Jesus replied, "You say that I am," meaning "Yes" (22:70).[8] Hence, we have the final supernatural authority, Jesus Himself, declaring that He is the Son of God.

2. Personal Revelation

The fact that Jesus is the Son of God is personally made known in the Gospels to Jesus' contemporaries through His own self-revelation. Early in Jesus' ministry John the Baptist declared, "I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God" (John 1:34). When he baptized Jesus, John heard God the Father declare of Jesus, "Thou art my beloved Son," and he also saw the Holy

Spirit descend and remain. Thus John's witness to the divine Son-ship of Jesus is based on a revelation he had experienced. Shortly after that at John's behest, two of his disciples, Andrew and John, followed Jesus. After staying with Him for a time, Andrew found his brother Simon Peter and said to him, "We have found the Messiah"[9] (v. 41). Thus Jesus had revealed Himself to them.[10] On the next day Jesus summoned Philip, who, after following Him for a time, declared to Nathanael, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote …" (v. 45). Thus again Jesus had made Himself known to one who followed after Him; He revealed Himself by His own presence. These early encounters culminate with Nathanael to whom Jesus declared, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" (v. 47). Following Jesus' next statement, Nathanael responded, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the king of Israel!" (v. 49). To this guileless Israelite, there was a clear and immediate disclosure by Jesus that He is truly the Son of God.[11]

Later in His ministry Jesus disclosed Himself as the Son of God when His disciples were in a boat on a storm-tossed sea and several extraordinary events occurred. First, Jesus came walking on the sea to them; second, Peter at Jesus' invitation walked momentarily on the water; and, third, the storm suddenly ceased. The result of all these events was that "those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God'" (Matt. 14:33). This recognition and affirmation of Jesus as the Son of God sprang clearly from events so supernatural as to be unmistakable disclosures of His divine Son-ship.

The climax was reached at Caesarea Philippi where Jesus asked the question (earlier mentioned) of his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" To this Simon Peter replied: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."[12] Jesus thereupon significantly declared: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 16:15–17). In other words, this was not a fact or a truth somebody else stated;[13] it was more than a declaration arising out of a miraculous occasion: it was an affirmation stemming from immediate personal revelation. Other events had doubtless prepared the way, but ultimately the recognition of Jesus as the Son of God came only by revelation from God the Father.

Finally, in this connection we may call to mind the words of Paul that God "was pleased to reveal his Son to"[14] him (Gal. 1:16). Paul, of course, was referring to his experience on the road to Damascus when he fell to the ground under the impact of a brilliant light from heaven, whereupon Jesus spoke directly to him (Acts 9:1–6). Thus did God "reveal His Son" to Paul. Three days later at Damascus Paul was "filled with the Holy Spirit" for the ministry of the gospel

(9:8–19), and “in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, ‘He is the Son of God’” (v. 20). Hence it is clear that Paul, like Peter and others before him, came to know Jesus as the Son of God by personal revelation.

An excellent summary statement is set forth by John the apostle: ‘We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true”[15] (1 John 5:20). This is knowledge that has come from God Himself, a revelation of the Son of God that is profoundly personal.

3. Perception of Faith

The preceding quotation from 1 John leads to the next point, namely, that the knowledge of Jesus Christ as the Son of God is a perception of faith. If faith is present, there is the inner certitude that Jesus is the Son of God: “He who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself’ (1 John 5:10). Where there is vital faith, there is inward assurance.

We may here recall the personal revelation of the risen Jesus to doubting Thomas:[16] “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing” (John 20:27). Thomas replied in exclamation: “My Lord and my God!” (v. 28). All his doubts were gone, for Jesus had made Himself known. But the account does not end there; rather, Jesus rejoined immediately: “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (v. 29). The blessing is on those to whom there is no visible disclosure of Jesus, but who rather accept Him in faith,[17] for they know with the inner certitude born of faith that Jesus is the Son of God.

But how, one may inquire, does this faith come about? Is it merely a “plunge in the dark,” a decision of mind and will perchance to acclaim Jesus as the Son of God? No, we have not left the sphere of revelation behind, for faith is possible only through God’s disclosure. However, it is important to observe, the disclosure is through God’s *word* and *Spirit.*

We speak, first, of the Scriptures as God’s word. Jesus Himself said, “The scriptures … bear witness to me” (John 5:39). Reference here of course is made to the Old Testament. On another occasion Jesus spoke of “everything written about [Him] in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms” (Luke 24:44), the divisions of the Hebrew Old Testament. Indeed, there is more than enough evidence in God’s ancient word to identify Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.

In the New Testament, the word of witness is far more weighty, almost everywhere present. As the epilogue of the Fourth Gospel puts it: "… these [words] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31). What the Gospel writer says about his purpose would apply generally throughout the New Testament: all that is written are testimonies of, and to, faith in Jesus Christ as God's Son.

There are also the words of Jesus in the New Testament, and they are strong testimony. Although Jesus seldom spoke of Himself as the Son of God,[18] there are occasional references to Himself as "the Son,"[19] and one instance when Jesus said, "I am[20] He who bears witness of Myself' (John 8:18 NASB). The context clearly shows that Jesus was referring to His divine origin and nature.[21] In addition to statements that refer to or imply His divine Sonship, Jesus' very utterance throughout His ministry conveys a weight and an authority that is more than human. Jesus did not hesitate to say, "You have heard that it was said … but[22] I say to you" (Matt. 5:21–22, 27–28, 31–32, 33–34, 38–39, 43–44). In such statements Jesus commandingly spoke out and placed His word on no lower a level than that of the ancient words—indeed even placing them on a higher level. Jesus does this with a sovereignty and freedom that can belong to no one who stands merely on the human level. "When Jesus finished these sayings,[23] the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes" (Matt. 7:28–29). On another occasion it was said of Jesus, "No man ever spoke like this man" (John 7:46).[24] Truly, Jesus' every word came freighted with sovereign authority from beyond.

So it is today that any open reading of the scriptural testimony about Jesus, Jesus' own self-witness, or the authority coming through His words should prepare the way for an affirmation of faith. Such biblical testimony cannot itself create faith (one can always refuse to accept the evidence given), but it does provide a firm basis.

Now we should quickly add that in Scripture there is also the testimony of Jesus' works: His mighty deeds climaxing with His resurrection from the dead. On one occasion Jesus spoke of the testimony of John the Baptist and then added: "But the testimony which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has granted me to accomplish, these very works which I am doing, bear me witness that the Father has sent me" (John 5:36).[25] In a similar vein Jesus replied to John (who had been imprisoned and was asking, "Are you he who is to come,[26] or shall we look for another?") thus: "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk,

lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them" (Matt. 11:2–5).[27] These mighty works bear witness to Jesus as the Coming One, the One "the Father has sent"—to Jesus as the Son of God.

But the greatest testimony is Jesus' own resurrection from the dead.[28] In the words of Paul, Jesus "was declared with power[29] to be the Son of God by[30] the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness" (Rom. 1:4 NASB). This is the climactic declaration through an utterly unprecedented display of power: He was raised from the dead never to die again. Moreover, it was not simply a resurrection brought about by God the Father[31] or by God the Holy Spirit,[32] but by Jesus Himself. By referring to His body as a temple, He early asserted, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). Only He who is equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit could possibly make such an astounding statement.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is affirmed with unambiguous certainty throughout the New Testament: in all four Gospels, many times in the Book of Acts, and repeatedly in the Epistles and the Book of Revelation. Peter's declaration on the Day of Pentecost regarding Christ's resurrection—"of that we all are witnesses" (Acts 2:32)—is a continuing theme. Although such witness does not—indeed cannot—automatically bring about belief, it undoubtedly does provide a very solid foundation.

Next we recognize that in addition to the testimony of Scripture to Jesus' divine Sonship set forth through word and deed, there is the further testimony of the Holy Spirit. Shortly before Jesus' death and resurrection He spoke of the coming of the Holy Spirit and declared: "When the Counselor[33] comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me" (John 15:26). Again, "He [the Holy Spirit] will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16:14). Thus the Holy Spirit in unique fashion bears witness to the reality of Christ. Finally, in 1 John there is this summary statement: "The Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth" (5:7). In the context this refers clearly to Jesus as the Son of God.[34]

What is significant about the witness of the Holy Spirit is that it is the divine means of confirming communication through the word. The first epistle of John speaks of "three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood" (5:8);[35] but it is the Spirit who inwardly confirms what water and blood outwardly show forth. Indeed, as 1 John adds and as we earlier observed, "He who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself" (5:10). It is now fully apparent that this

inward testimony is none other than that of the Holy Spirit.

The point, then, is this: for all that may be said (and has been said previously) about the word as basis and foundation of faith, faith is truly awakened only when the Holy Spirit comes on the scene. Paul declares that 'no one can say 'Jesus is Lord'[36] except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). Even as it required a personal revelation in the presence of the living Jesus for the early disciples to recognize the hidden divinity of Jesus,[37] so for all subsequent disciples it takes the illumination of the Holy Spirit. It is He who makes effective the word relating to Jesus by opening the eyes and sensitizing the heart so that the deity of Christ is truly apprehended.

Moreover, it is not only that the Holy Spirit applies the word so that faith may be awakened, but, in addition, He deepens and confirms faith by His internal witness. Jesus also said concerning the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, the Spirit of truth who was to come: "You know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you" (John 14:17). The Spirit dwelt "with" the disciples in the presence of Jesus as the Christ, but He was to dwell "in" them after that. When at last they came to a full faith in Christ as the Lord, the One who died and was alive again, He breathed into them the Holy Spirit, saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). In this action the Holy Spirit, dwelling without but steadily quickening their faith, now came to dwell within as the abiding internal witness. It is the Spirit dwelling within who makes possible the aforementioned declaration of faith, "Jesus is Lord."[38]

To sum up: the knowledge that Jesus Christ is the Son of God belongs finally to the perception of faith. This perception is by no means the result of a human activity such as a decision to believe, but stems from the activity of the word and the Spirit. What the word begins to awaken, the Spirit brings to full consciousness. Faith is not sight, but it is "the conviction[39] of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). It is a certitude more compelling than any visible perception, surely far more compelling than that resulting from any attempted logical proof.[40] By faith we know for a certainty that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

B. Meaning

Now that we have recognized the factuality of Christ as the Son of God, we proceed to the consideration of the meaning of His divine Sonship. This may be done by highlighting, in turn, three words in the title of "the Son of God."

1. The Son of God

Christ is the Son of God, first of all, in the sense that He is God the Father's *Chosen One*. God the Father spoke from heaven: "This is my Son, my Chosen"[41] (Luke 9:35). "Chosen" therefore is an implication of the phrase "my Son." Jesus Christ is the "Chosen" Son in the sense here of being God's "Elect[42] One," God's "Called One."

There is, accordingly, a vital connection with Old Testament Israel. Israel was God's "Son" in a particular sense: "Thus says the LORD, 'Israel is my firstborn son'" (Exod. 4:22). Also Israel is frequently referred to as a "chosen" people; for example, "the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth" (Deut. 7:6). Thus Israel is God's "son," His "first-born," God's "chosen," His "own possession." There is clearly a parallel between Israel and Christ. As an illustration, certain words of God through Hosea the prophet that unmistakably refer to Israel—"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (Hosea 11:1)—are also applied in the New Testament to Christ. For at the conclusion of the account in Matthew about the flight of Joseph, Mary, and the Christ child to Egypt are these words: "[They] remained there until the death of Herod … to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt have I called my son'" (2:15). Israel and Christ are both God's son/Son in the sense of being "chosen" by God to fulfill His purposes.

There is, of course, a great difference between Israel and Christ. Israel at best proved invariably to be wayward. The Lord speaks of them as "faithless sons" (Jer. 3:22), but Jesus is the Son who is constantly faithful: "I always do what is pleasing to him" (John 8:29). So does Jesus throughout His years fulfill His vocation as One chosen of God.

Jesus Christ, we need to add immediately, does not become God's Son at a particular point in His life and ministry. It has sometimes been assumed that

Jesus at His baptism was chosen or adopted[43] as God's Son since the voice from heaven declared, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22).[44] However, this is patently not an occasion of being chosen or adopted, but one of disclosure or revelation. John the Baptist declared, "I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel" (John 1:31). Thereafter John adds, "I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God" (v. 34). There is no suggestion here, or elsewhere, that Jesus at some point along the way became the Son of God. Likewise, the Transfiguration scene with the words from heaven, "This is my Son, my Chosen," obviously cannot be the occasion of Jesus' choice or adoption by God the Father. Indeed, the reason for this proclamation is not to announce an adoption but to declare that Jesus, who is *already* God's Son (as attested at His baptism), is *alone* to be listened to; for the next words are: "listen to him!"[45] To return to the time before Jesus' baptism and His transfiguration—to His very birth—we recall that the angel had already declared that the One to be born of the Virgin would be *even then* the Son of God: "The child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Hence, all later statements referring to divine Sonship, whether at baptism or transfiguration or resurrection,[46] are to be understood not as announcements of a new stage of sonship in Jesus' life and ministry, but as declarations concerning Him who is already the Son of God.

But now let us return to the matter of the Son being the "Chosen One." It is significant that in the parallel passages to Luke 9:35 with its reading "This is my Son, my Chosen," both Matthew and Mark have "This is my beloved Son" (Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7). Since the word "chosen" is not used in these parallel passages, it seems apparent that the aspect of "chosenness" inheres in the word "Son." God's "beloved Son" is God's "Chosen One." The two are inseparable in that to come into the world as the Son of God is to come as One who is not only God's beloved Son but also as One to fulfill a mission.

This brings us back again to the connection with Israel of old. Israel among all the peoples of earth was singularly God's beloved. Just following Moses' words "the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth"[47] is this statement: "It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set His love upon you and chose you … but it is because the LORD loves you" (Deut. 7:7–8). Israel then was God's "son," His "beloved," and commissioned to be a holy people, a nation obedient to His will and purpose, His law and commandments. But Israel tragically failed. Jesus Christ, accordingly, in His own person is the bearer of the calling of Israel, and as the Son—the Beloved,

the Chosen—He does not fail. As Son He perfectly and completely fulfills the high calling of God the Father.

To be the *Son* of God is to be the Chosen One of God: "This is my Son, my Chosen." The Son is God's Elect One, fulfilling in Himself the Father's ancient purpose for Israel and preparing the way for a people who are chosen in Him.[48] The Son stands at the center, between the chosen people of old and new: He is the Chosen One of God.

2. The Son of God

Second, Christ is the Son of God in that He is God the Father's *unique* Son:

He is *the* Son of God. According to the memorable words of John 3:16, "God so loved the world that he gave his only[49] Son." Jesus Christ is uniquely the Son of God: He is God's one and only Son.

It is true that believers in Christ are also called "sons of God." So Paul writes: "In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith" (Gal. 3:26). However, the sonship of believers is a matter of adoption.[50] "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son … that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:4–5). Thus it is not correct to say that both Christ and believers are sons of God in the same way. He was *born* as the Son of God,[51] for believers it is a matter of *becoming* sons or children[52] of God. But even then there is a qualitative difference.[53] For Christ is uniquely the Son of God and therefore related to the Father as no other person is. In the Gospels He frequently speaks of "my Father" and "your Father" but never "our Father" in the sense of including himself in the "our."[54] For even though His disciples were "sons," none of them was "*the* son."

This all points up the singularity of Jesus Christ. Superlatives by no means can reach Him. To speak of Jesus as the greatest of the prophets, or the supreme teacher, or the noblest of all mankind, while indeed tributes of an unparalleled kind, actually fall far short of the mark.[55] He is indeed all of these and more; yet, strangely perhaps, in His case superlatives seem like diminutives. The reason is clear: Christ is *the* Son of God; hence there is a transcendence about Him that goes beyond the highest of earthly designations.

Thus, here we move to a level beyond this world. In the preceding section we noted the parallel between Israel and Christ as son/Son of God. Also we observed that Christ's sonship did not begin at a certain point in His ministry but

was a basic fact from His birth onward. He was, as noted, born the Son of God. But now we take the additional step of viewing Him as the Son of God *far above and beyond* His life on earth. Let us examine this further.

First, Christ is the *preexistent* Son of God. John 3:16 undoubtedly implies this: God "gave" His Son for the sake of the world; hence the Son must have existed prior to this world. That such is the case is clearly stated in the opening chapter of John: "The only Son from the Father" was "the Word [who] became flesh" (v. 14). Through this "Word" all things originally had been made: "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (v. 3). Hence the Son (or Word)[56] existed before all creation. This is also stated in similar fashion in Hebrews: "In these last days he [God] has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world" (1:2). In Colossians, after a statement about our having been "transferred … to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (1:13), Paul proceeds to say, "In him all things were created, in heaven and on earth … all things were created through him and for him" (v. 16). Finally, in language referring directly to Christ, Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians of "one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (8:6). In sum: the preexistence of Christ, the Son, the Word, is an assured teaching of Scripture.

This preexistence of the Son of God, moreover, is to be understood as eternal. There never was a time when the Son was not:[57] He exists from eternity. His sonship to the Father does not mean that at some moment prior to creation He came into being. Rather the Son is the eternally begotten (not created)[58] Son of the Father.[59] As surely as God is eternal, He is the great "I AM" (Exod. 3:14); likewise Christ said, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). The "I am" points to eternal preexistence.

Second, Christ, the Son of God, is *equal* to God the Father. Although He is the Son of God, sonship does not imply subordination. According to John 5:18, Jesus "called God his Father, making himself equal with God." Thus Son and Father are equal. Christ's equality with God the Father is set forth in vivid manner by Paul: "who [Christ], being in the form of God, thought it not robbery[60] to be equal with God" (Phil. 2:6 KJV). For anyone else except Christ it would be "robbery"—stealing from God and His glory—but not so for Him who was already "in the form of God."[61] Christ, the Son of God, is equal to God the Father.[62]

The equality of Christ with God is apparent also through His ministry. This is especially shown in the Fourth Gospel by such statements as this: "For as the

Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will" (John 5:21). Thus equally do Father and Son give life. In regard to the final resurrection it is not only the Father who does this, but several times Jesus declares that He Himself will do it: "I will raise him [one who believes] up at the last day" (6:40, 44, 54). Hence, again, there is equality in activity between Father and Son. Jesus also speaks of equality in honor: "The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father" (5:22–23).

One further illustration of the equality of Christ with God the Father is found in the words of the Great Commission at the close of Matthew's Gospel: "… baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (28:19). Herein is declared total equality of all persons in the triune godhead.

Third, Christ is *distinct* from God the Father. He is *the* Son of God, unique and equal to the Father, but is not to be identified with Him. The Son is not the Father but is distinct from Him. Although the Son is God (see hereafter), He is also "with God"—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God" (John 1:1)—hence a separate person. When our world of space and time began —"the beginning" (as in Gen. 1:1)—the Son was "with God." Before there was a world, the same was true, for Jesus speaks elsewhere to the Father about "the glory which I had with thee before the world was made" (John 17:5). Hence, eternally the Son is with the Father in His own distinctness and personhood.

This means also that the Incarnation was of the Son in distinction from the Father. "The Word became flesh and … we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14). It was not the Father who became flesh but the Son. Moreover, it was the Son who died on the cross;[63] for even in His last moments He cried out: "Father into thy hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:46). Again, since Jesus has returned to heaven, He still remains distinct from the Father—indeed at His right hand.[64] As the Apostles' Creed declares it: "He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty." The same Christ will some day return from there for the final judgment and after that will occupy the throne with the Father through all ages to come. According to Hebrews, "of the Son he [God] says, 'Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever'" (1:8).

This eternal distinction that exists between Father and Son means that whereas the Son is equal to the Father,[65] He does *not* equal the Father; whereas the Son reveals the Father, He is *not* the Father He reveals; and whereas the Son is (again according to the Book of Hebrews) "the exact representation of his [God's] being" (1:3 NIV), He is *not* merely a mode of being or action of the Father.[66]

Christ was, is, and will be the Son of God forever.

3. The Son of God

Third, Christ is the Son of God in that He is *God*. He is God the Father's *personal embodiment.* We have just emphasized that the Son (the Word) is forever "with God" (the Father). Now we move on to the climactic statement, namely, that the Son is identical with God: "The Word was God"[67] (John 1:1). Hence we may now speak of the *deity* of the Son of God.

First, it is apparent that many of the *words and actions* of Jesus bear testimony to His deity. In the Sermon on the Mount (as we have observed) Jesus quoted certain of the Old Testament commandments given by God and then forthrightly declared, "But I say to you… ." He unmistakably spoke with the authority of God, indeed exercising a divine prerogative. Early in His ministry, Jesus pronounced forgiveness of sins to a paralytic: "My son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5). Such a pronouncement in the eyes of the scribes sitting by was blasphemous because it could be made by none but God: "It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (v. 7). Thus indirectly the scribes bore witness to the divinity of Jesus.[68] Again, at a later time when Jesus' disciples in a boat were storm-tossed, He came to them, walking on the sea, and then "those in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God'" (Matt. 14:33). Jesus did what no mere man could possibly do, and He also accepted worship that only God may rightly receive. The most direct expression by Jesus Himself of His own deity is found in the Fourth Gospel where He declared, "I and the Father are one" (10:30).[69] That this is a declaration of His own essential deity is apparent from the fact that when they heard it, the Jews took up stones to stone him, proclaiming it "blasphemy; because you, being a man, make yourself God" (10:33). This was more than declaring Himself "equal with God" (as in John 5:18); this was indeed, in Jewish eyes, the ultimate blasphemy: it was to "make" Himself God.[70]

It is also significant to observe that Jesus did not hesitate to use such expressions about Himself as the Bridegroom, the Light, the Good Shepherd, even the First and the Last—all related to Old Testament designations of God. In Isaiah 62:5 are these words: "As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." According to Mark 2:19, Jesus said "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?" Jesus of course is the bridegroom—as is God in Old Testament language. In Psalm 27:1 the psalmist

says, “The LORD is my light and my salvation”. In John 8:12 Jesus said of Himself: “I am the light of the world.” According to Psalm 23:1, “the LORD is my shepherd,” and in Ezekiel 34:15 God declared, “I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep.” Jesus took up the Old Testament words by saying, “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11). Thus again Jesus identified Himself with God. On three occasions in Isaiah God speaks of Himself as “the first” and “the last” (41:4; 44:6; 48:12); likewise Jesus declares of Himself in the Book of Revelation, “I am the first and the last” (1:17).[71]

One further instance of an identification of an action of Jesus with that of God is to be found by comparing Joel 3:12, where the LORD says, “I will sit to judge all the nations round about,” with Matthew 25:31–32, where Jesus declares that “the Son of man … will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations.” The Judge is the LORD, whether understood as God or Jesus Christ.

In both words and actions[72] there is the unmistakable New Testament witness that Jesus truly is God.

Second, various *titles* of Jesus are evidence of His being divine. Here we may observe particularly the title “Lord.” Although the word “Lord” does not necessarily refer to God,[73] there are instances in regard to Jesus where it clearly does. At the very outset of Jesus’ ministry are the words “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (Matt. 3:3), quoted from the Greek version of Isaiah 40:3—“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” The “Lord,” referring to Jesus, and the “LORD,” referring to God, are one and the same. Later the words of Simon Peter to Jesus, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8), bespeak the realization that somehow the Holy God is confronting man in the person of Jesus.[74] “O Lord” here means no less than “O God.”[75] A further striking example of this is found in Hebrews 1:10, which reads: “Thou, Lord, didst found the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of thy hands.” This is a quotation from Psalm 102:25—“Of old thou didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands”—which unmistakably refers to God.[76] The background for Hebrews 1:10 is “But of the Son he says …” (v. 8). Hence the Son is called God, and, referring back to Psalm 102, the Lord is God.

Actually there is no need to give other specific examples in which the designation of Jesus as Lord points directly to His deity. For there is the even more impressive fact that by the title of Lord—as in “the Lord Jesus Christ”—there is implicit recognition of Him as one with God. For under that title, there is the transference to Christ of whatever is said in the Old Testament about God

Himself as "the LORD."[77] Christ is recognized in the New Testament as the continuing Lord and therefore God.[78]

This may further be observed in relation to such Old Testament titles of God as "Savior" and "Redeemer" in that they are also applicable to Christ. Frequently in the Old Testament God is referred to as Savior; e.g., "I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior" (Isa. 43:3).[79] Of course, the title also applies to Jesus as in the words "for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). The recurring New Testament title of Jesus as "Savior"[80] accordingly identifies Him with God. In regard to God as Redeemer, there are also a number of Old Testament references, e.g., "Your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. 41:14).[81] Christ is not directly called "Redeemer"; however, the many passages that refer to redemption through Him —such as "in him [Christ] we have redemption through his blood" (Eph. 1:7)[82] —point unmistakably to Him as Redeemer. Thus, again, there is the identification of Christ with God.

One further word on titles. There is no higher statement about God than that He is "the God of glory" (Ps. 29:3; Acts 7:2), for such is the splendor and majesty of His being.[83] Moreover as God, He will not share this glory: "I will not give My glory to another" (Isa. 42:8 NASB, cf. 48:11). Yet in the New Testament Christ is shown to share in that glory, for He prays to the Father: "And now, Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made" (John 17:5). Moreover, both Paul and James call Jesus Himself "the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8; James 2:1). Thus in extraordinary manner Christ is identified with the supreme word about God: glory. He and the Father truly are one.

Third, in the New Testament there are a number of references to Christ in which He is *directly identified* with God.[84] By way of background there is the prophecy in Isaiah that the Messiah to come will be "Mighty God"—"His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God" (9:6). In turning to the Gospels we find no specific designation of Christ as God in the Synoptics;[85] however, we do find such designation in the Fourth Gospel. According to John 1:1, not only was the Word "with God" but also "the Word was God." Whereas "with God" indicates equality, "was God" expresses identity. He was, therefore, "very God of very God."[86] John 1:18 further emphasizes this: "No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him" (NASB).[87] Finally, in the climax of this Gospel there is again the assertion of Christ's deity as spoken by Thomas to Jesus—an assertion that

Jesus accepted: “My Lord and my God!” (20:28). Christ verily is declared to be God.

In turning to the Epistles, we find a number of declarations relating to the deity of Christ. Paul writes in Romans about “the Christ … who is over all, God blessed forever” (9:5 NASB).[88] In Philippians Paul speaks of Christ as being “in the form of God”[89] —“Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself’ (2:5–7). In the latter statement “form” suggests “nature,”[90] hence the nature of God Himself. According to Colossians 2:9, “in him [Christ] the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily”; thus Christ is fully divine.[91] Titus 2:13 speaks of “our blessed hope, the appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ”[92] —thus God and Jesus Christ are one in essence. In Hebrews are the words, “But of the Son he says, ‘Thy throne, O God is for ever and ever’” (1:8). This unambiguous declaration[93] underscores the essential deity of Christ. Peter, in his second epistle (1:1), attests to “the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ,”[94] thus again pointing to Christ as both God and Savior. We may also note these words in 1 John 5:20—“We are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.” The deity of Christ is again roundly declared.

Finally, in the Book of Revelation there is striking testimony to the deity of Jesus Christ. In the opening chapter it is God who declares Himself to be “the Alpha and the Omega” (1:8); in the last chapter, however, it is Christ who declares, “Behold, I am coming soon…. I am the Alpha and the Omega” (22:12–13). In Revelation 3:21 Christ says of Himself, “I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne”; in Revelation 22:1, 3 there is the eschatological picture of only one throne: it is “the throne of God and the Lamb.” The Father and the Son—God and the Lamb—while distinct in person are ultimately the one God occupying the one throne.

Some statements in Scripture, however, might seem to contravene the deity of Christ. In this connection the words of Jesus in Mark’s Gospel are often noted: “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone” (Mark 10:18). Jesus seems to deny his own goodness, even sinlessness,[95] and points beyond Himself to another who is God. However, Jesus’ statement is a denial neither of His goodness nor of His divinity; indeed, it is quite the contrary: to call Him good is an ascription that belongs *only* to God. To call Jesus “good” as a mere title is an affront to God *unless* Jesus be God Himself![96]

Another statement that might suggest lack of divinity in Jesus is His cry from the cross, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46; Mark

15:34). How could God forsake Jesus if Jesus is also the Son of God, God Himself? Here I can say only briefly that this outcry is no denial of His divinity. Rather, in the moment of this awful cry of dereliction from the cross He became so totally identified with human sin and evil as to be forsaken by the holy God. There is unfathomable mystery in this, but in some very real sense Jesus was forsaken by the God above Him and the God who He was in the depth of His being.

In the Pauline letters reference may be made to such statements in 1 Corinthians as "The head of Christ is God" (11:3) and "When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one" (15:28). Do not such texts imply subordination of Jesus to God? Yes, but not in the sense of ontological subordination, for Paul is speaking of relationship, not being. The Son as Son is eternally subject to the Father yet without in any way disaffirming His essential deity. The same holds true for these Pauline statements. A further declaration of Paul in Philippians may be noted again: "… who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,[97] but emptied[98] himself, taking the form of a servant" (2:6–7). Would these words suggest that Christ in his self-emptying (or *kenosis)* gave up His divinity? Such, of course, would in fact be a denial of the Incarnation.[99] Paul's words rather are to be understood as the surrender of His heavenly glory[100] and riches[101] and the taking on of the form of a menial servant or slave.[102] The Incarnation, far from being a surrender, a *kenosis*, of deity,[103] actually was a profound expression of the love and compassion that is the central reality of God's nature.

In sum, it is apparent that the New Testament throughout bears witness to the deity of Christ. Moreover it should be added that there is no suggestion of deification—the gradual movement from a purely human Jesus to a divine being. There is, to be sure, in the synoptic Gospels an increasing human recognition of Jesus' divinity, but this by no means signifies a growing divinization of Christ. He is the Son of God from the beginning[104] with all that this implies about His divine nature. There is not the development from a "low" to a "high" Christology.[105] For if such later New Testament books as John and Hebrews do contain many references to Christ's deity, there are also, as we have seen, many references in the Synoptics and in Paul's letters to His being God or the Son of God. Accordingly, Christian faith, as founded on the biblical witness, at no point speaks of apotheosis, but in its total perspective it affirms incarnation.[106] Jesus Christ was Emmanuel—"God with us"—from the moment of His conception. It

was the Word become flesh all the way.

A further word before proceeding. We need to emphasize that what has been said in the preceding pages about Jesus Christ as the Son of God is universally corroborated by Christian experience. As we earlier observed, the fact that Jesus is the Son of God, while grounded in Scripture, is received and confirmed in faith. Hence, while it is of first importance to know that the Scriptures declare the fullness of deity in Christ and to recognize that His words (including His mighty resurrection from the dead) are bedrock evidence of His divine Sonship, it is of consummate importance that this biblical witness also become a matter of living experience.

One may hear all of these things about Jesus Christ, even give mental assent to them, and still not really *know* Christ as the Son of the living God. It is at this point that the activity of the Holy Spirit in opening both mind and heart to a vital realization and creating the faith that truly perceives is unquestionably needed.

To believe that Christ is the Son of God is the foundation of Christian faith. This belief, however, is far more than a matter of affirming with the mind, for even the demons can do that.[107] It is the recognition and trust of the heart.

C. Significance

In our consideration of the significance of Jesus' being the Son of God, let us observe the following three points.

1. Jesus is the Revelation of the Nature of God

Since Christ is the Son of God (in all that this means in terms of oneness with God), He is the very representation of God in His incarnation. According to Hebrews 1:3, Christ as Son "reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp[108] of his nature." God's complete character—His holiness, love, and truth—is expressly imaged in Jesus Christ. In human flesh Christ is the exhibition of God's righteousness and justice, His grace and mercy, His constancy and faithfulness. Whatever may be said about the nature of God is shown forth in the person of Jesus Christ.

One of mankind's persistent questions has been and continues to be: "What is God like?" The answer of Christian faith is simple and direct: *He is like Christ.* Nowhere is this more vividly stated than in the Fourth Gospel where in reply to Philip's request, "Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied," Jesus says, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:8–9). The desire of Philip, as one speaking for all the disciples—and beyond that for all men—to behold God is satisfied at long last in the figure and person of Jesus Christ.[109]

The fact that God is invisible to mortal man makes the revelation in Christ all the more meaningful. John declares in the prologue of his Gospel, "No one has seen God at any time," but then he immediately added, "The only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him" (1:18 NASB). Paul speaks similarly of Christ as "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15);[110] thus the invisible God has His visible manifestation in the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ.

To this we should surely add that the revelation of the nature of God in Christ is not only in His person, which of course is primary, but also in His words and deeds. Whatever Jesus *said* in His earthly ministry, whether in teaching, in commands given, or in response to questions, was the completely faithful

declaration of the mind of God. Whatever Jesus *did*, whether in compassionate ministry to others, in anger and wrath against the enemies of truth (for example, in cleansing the temple), or in suffering and dying on the cross, was the exact and compelling representation of the will of His Father.

Accordingly, even though we do not have Christ in His incarnation present with us now and thus cannot behold Him face to face as Philip and the others did, we do have the New Testament that gives us the essential record of Christ's life and ministry. In this portrayal of His words and deeds we have the delineation of the very activity of God. Thus to the possible question, "What does God will?" the answer is centrally given in the words and deeds of Jesus Christ.

One further and important comment. This revelation of the nature and character of God through Jesus Christ is not only something that happened almost two thousand years ago among those who could say, "We have beheld his glory"[111] (John 1:14). It is not only to be found in the gospel record, which we may read and seek to comprehend. It is also profoundly a matter of this revelation occurring within believers' hearts. In the memorable words of Paul, "God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness' … has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). For as surely as God has illumined our hearts and Christ now dwells within us, there is the inward, continued revelation through Christ of the glory of God.

Truly, the more that Christ is "formed"[112] in us, the more we will know of the very nature of God. Therein is the climactic disclosure of God in His ineffable glory.

2. Makes Redemption a Possibility

Because Christ is the Son of God, the salvation of mankind can take place.

Because He is the eternal Son, one with the Father yet also distinct from Him, the Incarnation can happen and redemption be brought about.

Let us observe this more closely. We will consider later the essentiality of Christ's being a man for salvation to be accomplished;[113] but now we emphasize first that if Christ is not one with God, man cannot be redeemed. Only one who is equal to God, indeed identical with God, can enter into the human plight and bear the imponderable weight of all the sins of the world. The one who saves from sin must be no less than God Himself. This has been brought out dramatically in Matthew's Gospel when the angel said to Joseph about the child to be born of Mary: "You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (1:21). Later Matthew, quoting from Isaiah, wrote, "His name shall be called Emmanuel" and added "(which means, God with us)" (1:23). The

Savior will be “God with us,” in the person of Jesus Christ. Because Jesus is “very God,” there can be salvation.[114]

This is basically why the Incarnation is so important. If the Son of God as God Himself did not actually come from heaven and take upon Himself our flesh,[115] then we are still in our sins. No matter how noble or spiritual or eminent He might be as a man, even a man raised up to divine status, there could be no accomplishment of salvation. Only one who is eternally God can save.[116]

It is also important to affirm that redemption was possible because Christ, though God, was also the Son of the Father.[117] Hence it was not the Father who was incarnate but the Son. According to Paul, “when the time had fully come, God [the Father][118] sent forth his Son” (Gal. 4:4). God the Father did not Himself become flesh, for He indeed is the fountainhead and source of all things both internally (as begetter of the Son and emanator of the Holy Spirit) and externally (as creator and sustainer).[119] In that sense it seems proper to say that God the Father could not have become incarnate; hence it was the Son who was “sent forth” by the Father. There is without doubt an unsearchable mystery here because the Son is also God; yet the mystery becomes utterly confused if we do not recognize that the Incarnation was of the Second Person (not the First) of the Triune God. Hence, it follows that even while the Son of God was on earth, the Father was still in heaven with all things under His control. Thus the Son of God could become wholly incarnate[120] and in the person of Jesus be the Savior of mankind.

Accordingly, it is to be recognized that because Jesus was the Son of God and thus distinct from the Father, the Incarnation could occur and Christ could become the Redeemer of mankind. “God sent forth his Son … to redeem” (as Paul continues in Gal. 4:4–5). For it is through the mysterious and marvelous interrelationship between Father and Son, in both their heavenly and earthly activity, that redemption is accomplished.

To conclude: The fact that the Son of God is *both* God and Son and that it is He, the Son of God, who became flesh sets the stage for the outworking of salvation.

With Paul we can but say, “Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: He[121] was manifested in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16). There is mystery to be sure, but it is the reality springing forth from the mystery that is the heart of the Christian faith.

3. By Faith in the Son of God There Is Salvation

Finally, unless one recognizes that Jesus is the Son of God and not merely a human being, there can be no salvation for him. This is why the Fourth Gospel with its opening stress on the Incarnation—"the Word became flesh"—climaxes in John 20:31[122] with these words: "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." By believing that Christ is the Son of God, there is entrance into eternal life.

In one sense this is an intellectual affirmation—that "Jesus is … the Son of God." And such is basically important. For unless there is recognition of Him as the Son of God and therefore as God able to save, there can be no opening up to receive Him as Savior and Redeemer. This is why there is no more serious damage to Christian faith than that of denying that Jesus Christ came in the flesh; indeed, according to 1 John 4:3—"This is the spirit of antichrist."[123] Hence (to change the wording a bit) faith begins with the recognition that we have to deal with God in the person of Jesus Christ.

But the word "believing" also contains the note of commitment and trust: it is a "believing in." Again to quote from the Fourth Gospel: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). It is a believing "in" God's Son, a trusting, that is more than a matter of intellectual recognition. Indeed, to refer to a still earlier verse in John's Gospel, it is also a "receiving": "To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (1:12). To believe *in* Christ as the Son of God is to receive Him *into* one's total life.

To believe is also to confess. Turning again to 1 John, we find this statement: "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in Him, and he in God" (4:15). Paul puts it a little differently by saying, "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9). To confess Jesus is to confess Him as the Son of God, the Lord, who, because of who He is, is able to save to the uttermost.

One final word: We began with this question of Jesus, "Who do you say that I am?" And the answer of true faith cannot be put in more compelling words than those of Simon Peter: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

By faith in Christ as the Son of God there is eternal salvation.

II. THE SON OF MAN

Under this heading we now come to a consideration of the humanity of Jesus Christ. For it is the assured witness of the biblical record and of Christian faith that He who came in the Incarnation was not only divine but also a human being. He was “the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). Let us first consider the biblical expression “the Son of man.”

A. Jesus' Self-designation

The expression "the Son of man"[124] occurs frequently in the four Gospels as a reference of Jesus to Himself. Eighty-two times the phrase occurs[125] and on more than forty occasions. It is used invariably as Jesus' own self-designation. No one else ever addresses him by that title.[126] It is as open a statement about Jesus' identity as "the Son of God" was a hidden one made known supernaturally by revelation.[127] Beyond the four Gospels the expression is found only three times: Acts 7:56; Revelation 1:13; 14:14.[128] It is apparent that "the Son of man" is largely Jesus' own self-declaration.

So close is this identification of Jesus with "the Son of man" terminology that on occasion it simply represents another way of saying "I" or "me." For example, Jesus asks His disciples on one occasion, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" (Matt. 16:13). Following their reply, He questions, "But who do you say that I am?" (16:15). Obviously in this account, "the Son of man" and "I" are interchangeable. The person of Jesus seems to merge with the nomenclature of "the Son of man."

1. The Basic Meaning

The phrase "the Son of man" means basically "the man" or "man." All men are "sons of men,"[129] that is, mankind. Even so Jesus "the Son of man" is a man,[130] a human, a member of the human race.[131] "Son of man" and "man" basically are equivalent terms.[132]

This equivalence may also be observed in several Old Testament passages. Best known perhaps is Psalm 8:4—"What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?" Also we may note Psalm 80:17—"But let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, the son of man whom thou hast made strong for thyself!" Isaiah 51:12 has similar words: "Who are you that are afraid of man who dies, of the son of man who is made like grass?" "Man" and "the son of man" are obviously Hebrew parallelisms with identical meaning.

Also in the Book of Ezekiel God frequently addresses the prophet as "son of man." Beginning with Ezekiel 2:1—"Son of man, stand upon your feet, and I

will speak with you”—the expression is used over ninety times. It is apparent that the prophet is addressed by God as a man.

Such Old Testament usages of “son of man” language serve to reinforce the fact that Jesus used the same expression basically to refer to his own reality as a human being. He is likewise a man.[133]

2. Mystery

There is also a certain mystery about the way Jesus used the phrase “the Son of man.” Although He thereby unmistakably identified Himself with all mankind, there is often an enigmatic character in Jesus’ use of the expression.

This may be illustrated from the Fourth Gospel. “The crowd” asked Jesus, “How can you say that the Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man?” (John 12:34). These questions are raised against the background of certain statements of Jesus: “The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified” (12:23) and “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself’ (12:32). Although it seems obvious to us that Jesus was speaking about Himself, the crowd was baffled by His words about glorification and being lifted up. Accordingly, they were not able to relate them to Jesus as “the Son of man.” There is bewilderment all around.

Often in the Gospels Jesus’ language about “the Son of man” carries with it this overtone of mystery. Others may be called by Him “the sons of men,”[134] but He calls none “the Son of man” except Himself. Hence, although Jesus identified Himself as a man in His use of the phrase “the Son of man,” there is a certain aura of mystery, an inexplicable uniqueness, to which this expression points.

RENEWAL THEOLOGY

Here we do well to turn back to the Book of Daniel and observe another use of “son of man” terminology. Whereas “the son of man” expression means simply “man” elsewhere in the Old Testament,[135] it is clear that in Daniel there is a heightened picture. Daniel writes, “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom” (7:13–14). In Daniel’s vision the one “like a son of man” is an eschatological figure who, after dominion has been taken away from earthly kingdoms and powers, is given dominion, indeed (as the Scripture continues) “an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (7:14). Doubtless, this heavenly “son

of man" is also represented in "the Son of man" language of Jesus, since Jesus speaks of "the Son of man" (i.e., Himself) as likewise coming "with the clouds of heaven." Note, for example, Matthew 24:30—"They will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."[136] Jesus, accordingly, is no ordinary human being, but is the mysterious and unique Son of man, who will be given an everlasting kingdom.

Now we may go one step further by observing that in the Fourth Gospel Jesus' use of the phrase "the Son of man" takes on additional significance; it refers also to Jesus' preexistence. Two passages stand out: "No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven" (John 3:13) and "Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before?" (6:62). In these cases Jesus was *not* saying that His human nature existed prior to the Incarnation, for it was not until Jesus came from heaven that "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14). Rather, Jesus was declaring that He, "the Son of man," existed prior to His Incarnation.

In spite of all that we may say on this subject, there remains a certain enigmatic quality about Jesus' many references to Himself as "the Son of man." While the phrase is a simple one, and may (as noted) refer simply to Jesus as man, there are overtones of mystery in this expression. He never ceases to be the Mysterious One in all of His earthly existence.[137]

3. Identification With Others

From the overall consideration of the biblical texts we may conclude that by speaking of Himself as "the Son of man" Jesus identified Himself with all mankind. Whatever else may and must be said about Him as "the Son of God."[138] He is verily One who has voluntarily taken upon Himself human existence: He is likewise "the Son of man."

Thereby Jesus expresses His oneness, indeed His solidarity,[139] with all people. He did not come simply to minister to mankind, but He came as a human being giving Himself wholly to His fellow human beings. "He himself likewise partook of the same nature" (Heb. 2:14), and in so partaking and so ministering was able to devote Himself totally to all humanity. With this understanding, some words of Jesus take on all the more meaning: "the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45 KJV). He was the Man for all men.

We may conclude this section about Jesus' self-designation by emphasizing

that the phrase “the Son of man” underscores Jesus’ humanity. Indeed, this could be called its deepest meaning.[140] Even as the expression “the Son of God” underscores Jesus’ deity, so the expression “the Son of man” underscores His humanity.[141] Hence, we shall proceed in the following pages with a fuller discussion of the humanity of Jesus Christ.

B. The Humanity of Jesus—the Man Christ Jesus

Under this heading I will make a number of observations toward further definition and specification of the humanity of Jesus Christ. In dealing with His manhood our concern will also be to guard against various misunderstandings.

1. Representative Man

We observe, first, that Jesus represents all mankind. In Him as "the Son of man" all people are represented. He is not only the son of David, the son of Abraham, He is also the son of Adam.[142] Indeed, according to Paul, Jesus was "the last Adam," "the second man" (1 Cor. 15:45, 47). Hence even as Adam (= "man") represented the human race, so does Jesus Christ, the second man (= "Adam"), represent all humanity. The priority actually belongs with Christ, since, in Paul's further words, He is "the man of heaven" (v. 48). Thus does His person exemplify manhood as God originally intended it to be. In that sense Jesus, though relatively late in time, is the true representative of the human race.[143]

Jesus Christ, accordingly, is archetypal man. In Him is the pattern or model of genuine humanity. To be sure, Jesus is a particular human being—born of Mary, growing up in Nazareth, ministering in Judea and Galilee. But also, and of profound importance, He is the prototype of true manhood. We may, and do, speak of the first Adam in Eden's paradise as manhood in its pristine reality reflecting God's dominion, being, and character.[144] But this manhood is far distant, brief of description, and quickly distorted by sin. Now that the "last Adam" has come, He is truly the first; for in Him God's original pattern for human existence stands forth.

Here we call to mind the scene of Jesus standing before Pontius Pilate. Jesus had been scourged, a crown of thorns placed on his head, and then was brought out to the frenzied crowd. Pilate then said, "Behold, the Man!" (John 19:5 NASB).[145] Here for all the world to see stands *the* Man, showing forth the majesty of true manhood. This, of course, is the climax; for throughout His life and ministry, at every turn and on every occasion, He demonstrated what it meant to be a man. In Him was the confluence of dignity and humility, of righteousness

and compassion, of forthrightness and longsuffering: all of this, and more, that makes up a truly human existence. “Behold, *the* Man!” In so beholding, we see man as given by the hand of God.

Let us add one further word about Jesus as representative man. Although He was a first-century Jew, growing up in a particular culture, and ministering in a limited area, it is apparent that Jesus totally transcended His own time and age. He seems to belong to all people, the whole human race, so that people throughout the ages have again and again identified Him as one of their own. Jesus has often been portrayed with slant eyes by Orientals, with a black face by Africans, with blond hair by Caucasians, etc. All such is a remarkable demonstration of the fact that Jesus belongs to all mankind. In such a way Jesus is universal man[146] with no limits in His outreach to the whole human race.

Jesus Christ “took upon Himself *man’s* nature”: verily He is the man for all men.

2. Real Man

We next observe that Jesus Christ is a real man. Although He is the Son of God, hence divine, he is also truly a man. One of the most striking New Testament statements to this effect is found in the opening words of 1 John: “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life …” (v. 1 NASB). This hearing, seeing, and handling Him—“the Word of Life”—is a vivid underscoring of Jesus’ truly human nature.

This is another way of saying that “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14). Although He was the Word “with God” and the Word that “was God” (John 1:1), nonetheless that same Word “became flesh,” that is, a true human being. Whatever the difficulties in comprehending such an occurrence, the biblical witness is clear. Paul spoke of Jesus as “descended from David according to the flesh” (Rom. 1:3); Hebrews refers to “the days of his flesh” (5:7); and in 1 Timothy is the statement: “Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh” (3:16). In all these cases “flesh” means human nature[147] and hence a truly human Incarnation.

It is important to emphasize this matter, first, because of the opposition of many even in New Testament times to the truth that the Son of God had actually come in the flesh. John in his second epistle strongly speaks against them: “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the

coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist" (v. 7). On the one hand this is a denial of Jesus Christ's coming as the Son of God,[148] but it is also a denial that in coming he took upon Himself a real human nature. "Flesh," so it was claimed by these "deceivers," was like all matter—intrinsically evil—and so could not have been assumed in the coming of Christ.[149] At most his coming was a "seeming"[150] Incarnation: the Word of God could not actually have become flesh.

What must be emphasized here is the true corporeality of "the Son of man." To be sure, in Paul's language Christ was "the man from heaven." But this does not mean that his human nature was heavenly. Two other Pauline passages must also be properly understood: Romans 8:3 and Philippians 2:7–8. In Romans Paul speaks of God "sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh," but this does not mean that He had only a likeness to flesh. Rather, it was a likeness to *sinful* flesh, in that Christ so identified Himself with all people that His flesh even seemed[151] to be sinful. In Philippians Paul speaks of Christ's "being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form… ." Whereas "likeness" might suggest only an apparent Incarnation, it is clear from the addition of "in human form"[152] that His humanity was no illusion. Indeed, Paul's whole point is the amazing self-humbling of Christ whereby (as the verse continues) He "became obedient unto death, even death on a cross." If Christ had not become truly a man, He could not have known death on the cross.

The true humanity of Jesus Christ needs continual emphasis. Sometimes even today, well-intentioned believers lay such stress on the deity of Christ as to derogate from His humanity. This may be due to such devotion to Him as the Son of God, Savior, and Lord, that the fact of His humanity is almost totally ignored. In some instances this overemphasis is a kind of defensive reaction against the liberal view of Christ as only a man: "*You* say he was just a human being; *we* say He is truly God." Over against such seemingly pious exaggeration, we much need to reclaim the biblical and Christian understanding of the real humanity of Jesus Christ.

That Christ was and is a real man has too often been neglected in the history of the church. Many an artist has depicted Christ in heavenly terms (halo and all!), but seldom has there been the portrayal *also* of His genuine humanity. He was no wimp of a man, no pale Galilean; He did not play second fiddle to the real men of the world. Far from it: *In Jesus Christ true manhood has once and for all been realized on earth.*

Indeed, measured by His humanity, all others fall far short. Truly, He is "the man," namely, "Christ Jesus."

3. Total Man

The last statements above lead next to the affirmation of the total humanity of Jesus Christ. He was completely human, just as much a man as any other who ever lived. According to Hebrews 2:14, "since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature." It was a human "flesh and blood" nature in its totality.

In every way Jesus lived a fully human life. He came into the world by a *human birth.* As Paul says, He was "born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4 NASB, NIV). There was *human growth* from childhood to manhood: "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). There were *human activities:* He became hungry (Luke 4:2) and ate (Luke 5:30); He became thirsty (John 19:28) and drank (John 4:7); He became tired (John 4:6) and slept (Mark 4:38); He worked first as a carpenter (Mark 6:3) and then throughout His ministry (John 9:4); He paid taxes (Matt. 17:24–25); He prayed (e.g., Mark 1:35; Luke 3:21); He cared for His mother (John 19:27). He had *human emotions:* He experienced joy (Luke 10:21), sorrow (Matt. 26:37–38), anger (Mark 3:5), grief (John 11:35), indignation (Mark 10:14), astonishment (Luke 7:9), great pain and anguish (Matt. 27:46).[153] On one occasion Jesus groaned deeply in His spirit[154] (Mark 8:12); on another, He was deeply moved (John 11:33); on still another, He was much troubled (John 13:21).

A word should be added about Jesus' *knowledge.* The scriptural record shows Him growing in wisdom (Luke 2:52) and inquiring for information (Mark 9:21).[155] On one occasion He stated His ignorance about a matter—His future return: "But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32). It is also true that Jesus is frequently depicted as knowing the thoughts of people (see, e.g., Luke 6:8; 9:47), of knowing someone without introduction (John 1:48), indeed of knowing what was in every man: He "knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man; for he himself knew what was in man" (John 2:25). However, it is apparent, as we have observed, that there were limitations to Jesus' knowledge. In His human existence He did not know all things,[156] and thus He shared fully in our human and finite existence.[157]

One further aspect of Jesus' total humanity is found in His being subject to temptation. As Jesus began His ministry just following His baptism, He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, and for forty days He was tempted by Satan (Mark 1:13; cf. Matt 4:1; Luke 4:1–2). His temptations were not limited to those He experienced on that occasion, for, according to Hebrews, Jesus was "one who

in every respect has been tempted as we are" (4:15).[158] The very fact that Jesus experienced temptation is a further evidence of his humanity, for according to James, "God cannot be tempted with evil" (James 1:13). Hence if Jesus were only God or the Son of God, He could not possibly have known temptation.

It should be emphasized that the temptations for Jesus were very real. The fact that He was also the Son of God does not alter the fact that as the Son of man He was sorely tempted and tried. Significantly, Mark 1:13 concludes, "And the angels ministered to him." The ministry of angels implied that Jesus experienced physical and emotional wear in the wilderness struggle with Satan's temptations. A similar picture is found later in Luke 22:43, which, in the midst of Jesus' travail in Gethsemane, declares: "And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him." This evidently occurred in relation to Satan's last-ditch effort to turn Jesus from the way of the cross (the drinking of "the cup")[159] —the horrible way of bearing in His death the full weight of sin and punishment for the whole world. The temptation must have been vast, beyond all imagination, for the stakes of success or failure were so incredibly high. Indeed no other man who ever lived was so terribly tempted as this one man Christ Jesus.

In summary: Jesus from birth to death was total man. He was "made like His brethren in all things" (Heb. 2:17 NASB). Jesus was man in every dimension of His human nature: body, soul, and spirit.

4. Perfect Man

Jesus Christ was also perfect man. In His human nature He was the perfection of manhood.

If the perfection of humanity may be described as a person in proper relation to God and fellow human beings,[160] Jesus demonstrated this to the ultimate degree. His whole life was that of unwavering devotion to His Father and of limitless concern for all persons. On the one hand Jesus could say, "I always do the things that are pleasing to Him" (John 8:29 NASB); on the other, "The Son of man [came] … to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45 NASB). Love of God and love of neighbor—the two great commandments for all mankind—were perfectly fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

A special word should be said about the humility of Jesus. We call to mind one of the great prophetic sayings of the Old Testament: "He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and

to love kindness [or "mercy"], and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). Jesus surely embodied justice in every relationship, showed mercy to all in need, and walked constantly in humility. This last—walking humbly with God—lies at the very heart of a truly human existence; pride is precisely its opposite and brings destruction. This was first demonstrated in Eden when man and woman, rather than walking humbly with God, pridefully sought to be "like God" (Gen. 3:5) and in so doing brought on their own tragic fall.[161] Jesus, on the contrary, walked a lowly human road, at no time vaunting Himself, never seeking the praise of men, but ever giving all glory to His Father in heaven. Indeed, already in the original act of Incarnation, Christ had taken the initial step; in the words of Paul, "Though he was in the form of God … [he] emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." And now in His actual life on earth, "being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:6–8). "He humbled himself '—self-humbling is the expression of the profoundest act of a genuinely human existence. Indeed, in the very act of His incarnation was demonstrated the perfection of manhood.

This leads to the observation that the perfection of Jesus was not simply a given fact of His earthly existence, but it came through suffering. According to Hebrews, "For it was fitting for Him [God], for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings" (2:10 NASB). Hence the perfection of Christ was a matter of continuous development—a perfection—as He went through many sufferings. This does not mean that He was at one time imperfect or sinful and only later came to perfection through the endurance of suffering. Quite the opposite, it was much more a matter of maturation in perfection that came about as He suffered. Moreover, He did not suffer only during His last days; suffering was a part of His life and ministry from the beginning.[162] Through Christ's lifelong process of suffering, God was perfecting the Author of our salvation.

Here I should add a word about Jesus and obedience. A mark of His perfect manhood was His total obedience to the will of God. The words "he was obedient unto death," imply obedience throughout His lifetime. However, there was nothing automatic about His obedience, as if by virtue of His being the Son of God it was a simple matter. No, He had to *learn* obedience. According to Hebrews, "although He was a Son,[163] He learned obedience from the things which He suffered" (5:8 NASB). Obedience truly was a costly matter, often occurring through "loud crying and tears" (5:7 NASB), but He remained faithful to the end.

We may now speak of the *sinlessness* of the man Jesus Christ. All that has been said thus far about the perfection of His love, humility, and obedience points to a life with no touch of sin on it. Jesus was without sin. One of the most extraordinary questions in the Bible is that of Jesus Himself to His adversaries: "Which one of you convicts Me of sin?" (John 8:46 NASB). The question is extraordinary not only because of its implicit claim to sinlessness[164] but also because of its challenge to His opponents to come up with a valid charge against him. None came; His claim was basically indisputable.[165]

Elsewhere in the New Testament there is the continuing witness to Jesus' sinlessness. Paul writes, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:21 NIV); Peter declares, "He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips" (1 Peter 2:22); John testifies, "In him there is no sin" (1 John 3:5). All these statements, made so unambiguously, point up the amazing fact that in a world of sin and evil Jesus stands forth in utter purity and righteousness.

I have previously quoted the statement about Jesus that He was "one who in every respect has been tempted as we are" (Heb. 4:15). Now we note that these words are added: "yet without sinning." Here is another testimony to the sinlessness of Jesus; however, the additional point is made that His sinlessness was no light matter. It is too simple to say that, of course, Jesus did not sin because he was the Son of God, and since the holy God cannot sin, neither could Jesus. Contrariwise, the New Testament never depicts Jesus as sinless because He was God and therefore could not sin. Rather, His sinlessness is shown to be a continuing victory over every kind of temptation. The fact that Jesus never sinned is not portrayed as deriving from His divine nature[166] but as a continuing fact of His human life and action. Sinlessness was His deed.

But now there may be some remaining questions about the facts of Jesus' life. Even though He attested to His own sinlessness (as we have observed), what is to be said, first, about His baptism by John? Was not John's baptism for the forgiveness of sins? Truly it was, for John the Baptist came "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4). However, when Jesus came for baptism, John tried to prevent him and consented only when Jesus said, "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). In other words, Jesus was not coming to be baptized for His own sins, but to identify Himself with sinful humanity in its need for repentance and salvation. Second, it is sometimes alleged that there are some undeniable evidences of sin in Jesus' life. For example, at times Jesus became quite angry (Mark 3:5; cf. 11:15), and yet did He Himself not speak against anger as an evil worse than murder (Matt. 5:21–22)? The answer to this is simply that the anger of Jesus was

a righteous anger against sin—an anger that God Himself often expresses. It was not the anger of sinful man,[167] an anger that springs out of an evil heart, but the anger of a righteous One whose whole being cannot tolerate evil.

We need not pursue this matter further. There is simply no way of ascribing sin and evil to Jesus. He shines forth in His person, speech, and action as the transparently[168] sinless Jesus Christ: the beauty of true holiness and righteousness.

Jesus Christ: the perfection of God in the perfection of manhood.

5. Anointed Man

Finally, Jesus Christ was an anointed man. Indeed the very word "Christ" means "the Anointed One."[169]

Here we observe that as Jesus began his ministry in Nazareth, He affirmed an anointing from God: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news" (Luke 4:18). This anointing had occurred earlier just following His baptism by John. We read, "Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him" (Luke 3:21–22). Thus at the very beginning of His ministry Jesus was anointed by the Spirit of God.

It is important to recognize that this anointing was basically for *power* to minister. Peter, in a sermon many years later to the Gentiles at Caesarea, declares that "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power … he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil" (Acts 10:38). These words of Peter point back to the day when the anointing of the Spirit came upon Jesus, so that thereafter He "went about" ministering in the power of the Spirit.

Hence the preaching of Jesus, His healings,[170] the various deliverances from Satan's oppression[171] —all resulted from this spiritual anointing.

The anointing described relates specifically to the *man* Jesus. Peter in his first sermon at Pentecost had also spoken of "Jesus of Nazareth," but then he further called Him "a man": "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth,[172] a man attested to you by God with mighty works[173] and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst" (Acts 2:22). It was Jesus the man who was anointed with the Spirit of God, and in the power resulting from that anointing He wrought manifold wondrous works of God.

We now emphasize that the ministry of Jesus, in terms of His preaching the

Good News, healings, deliverances, and many miraculous deeds, flowed out of His anointing by the Holy Spirit. It would be a mistake, therefore, to assume that Jesus did such mighty works because He was the Son of God.[174] Rather, it was His Spirit-anointed humanity and the power resting on that humanity that lay behind His ministry in word and deed.

In a real sense Jesus as the Anointed One may be spoken of as "charismatic."[175] He moved constantly in the power of the Spirit, and, as noted, frequently there were spirituell operations such as healings, miracles, deliverances. Paul later called such operations "gifts" (*charismata*) of the Spirit: "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:4).[176] Jesus, accordingly, through the anointing of the Spirit moved in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Because of the fullness of His anointing and this continuous spiritual outworking, Jesus could be called "the charismatic Christ."

The man Jesus truly was the Anointed One of God.

C. Significance

Now let us reflect on the significance of Jesus Christ as the Son of man. We may observe three things.

1. Jesus Reveals the Nature of Man

We have previously noted that Jesus Christ as the Son of God is the revelation of the nature of God. As the Son of man He is also the revelation of the nature of man. This may be viewed from the perspective of man as created as well as man as sinner.

First, when we speak of man as created, this means man in his original God-given nature. This refers, accordingly, not only to Adam but also to all human beings since the beginning. Although sin has perverted the human race, there is still a basic humanity that is not destroyed by sin (a person is still a human being even though wholly a sinner). What that basic nature is, Jesus Christ fully embodies in Himself. Jesus Christ is *the* Man.

Now this means that in Him is the total definition of manhood. Everyone has within himself a vague, somewhat confused notion of what human nature truly is, but it is only when confronted by Jesus Christ that this is finally revealed. Here is Man as the "last Adam" fulfilling man's original nature—i.e., our true nature, walking in holiness and righteousness, love and mercy, truth and faithfulness. The great persons of history may manifest many such traits, but in comparison with Jesus Christ they are dim lights in the presence of the noonday sun.

Second—and this follows from the first—the humanity of Jesus makes us all the more aware of our sinfulness, indeed, our inhumanity. When Jesus stood before Pilate, who said, "Behold, the Man," it was actually Pilate and the world in its gross inhumanity—jealousy, bitterness, hardness of heart—on trial before Jesus. In the presence of the Man Jesus—a Person of majestic nobility, profound compassion, total self-sacrifice—the horrible darkness of perverted human nature was forever exposed.

In the person of Jesus Christ, Man has finally arrived on the scene. We need never ask again what it is like to be truly human, or to pretend that any man outside of Christ is fully human: Christ is the Son of Man—for all mankind.

2. Jesus Prepares the Way for Salvation

Jesus Christ, in taking on Himself our human nature, makes salvation a possibility. If He is to be truly the Mediator, He must be human as well as divine.

Here we emphasize His humanity as Paul does in 1 Timothy 2:5–6: “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all.” “The man Christ Jesus”: He cannot be a mediator if He does not become one of us;[177] moreover, since at the heart of salvation is the paying of a ransom,[178] He will accomplish this in His own flesh.

The basic point is that only one who shares in humanity is able to offer a sufficient sacrifice. In the words of Hebrews: “He had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation[179] for the sins of the people” (2:17). Christ could not be a “high priest” to make atonement if he were not totally a man, a human being. Only one who is a man in all respects can totally identify Himself with our humanity and offer the appropriate sacrifice. Nothing less than a man will do, for as Hebrews further says, “it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins” (10:4).

Since the first man fell by his disobedience and brought the human race under condemnation, only another human being living in full obedience could alter this tragic situation. So Paul writes, “As one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous” (Rom. 5:18–19). It was the life-long obedience of the man Jesus even to the final act on the cross that brought about our “acquittal and life,”[180] Hence, again it is clear that only by Jesus being wholly a man could our salvation be accomplished.

One further word: it was necessary that Jesus Christ be a man in order to bear man’s punishment and receive the judgment of God upon Himself. Only One in human flesh—“in every respect” a human person—can vicariously represent other men. He could die in man’s place as only a man can do. So by His coming in human flesh the way is prepared for the salvation of mankind.

3. Jesus Affords an Example for Christian Living

Finally, the human life of Jesus is a continuing example for all believers. Many times during Jesus’ ministry He said to people, “Follow me.” Whereas this

meant a literal following at that time, it also implies that the true disciple is one who ever seeks to follow Jesus' example.

Doubtless the most memorable portrayal of Jesus giving His followers an example is that of the Upper Room where he washed the feet of His twelve disciples. At the conclusion Jesus said, "I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (Jolh 13:15). In this scene there is a marvelous demonstration of both humility and love. But Jesus' basic purpose was to give such a vivid example to His disciples that they would feel compelled to do likewise.

Earlier I commented on the words of Paul about the self-emptying of Jesus, how He took the form of a servant and "being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death" (Phil. 2:8). What we now note is that this whole statement is preceded by the words, "Have this mind[181] among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus" (v. 5). The entire drama of the Incarnation from heaven to earth even to the Cross, while it is essentially the bringing about of man's salvation, is also (and in this passage primarily) *the* example of the way true believers are expected to live. Jesus, by humbling Himself, "in human form," is the example for all who follow Him.

We may properly close this section with some words from Peter. Peter, speaking first about the need of the believer to endure suffering with patience, adds, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). To "follow in his steps"—whatever the cost—is the challenge to every disciple of the Master.[182]

III. THE SON OF GOD AND THE SON OF MAN

We come to the final consideration that Jesus Christ is both the Son of God and the Son of man. He is God and man in the one person of Jesus Christ.

At the outset we should recognize how the Scriptures maintain this emphasis. One of the best-known prophecies of Isaiah reads, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God …” (9:6 KJV). The Messiah to come will be from human stock—a child to be born—and at the same time Almighty God. The New Testament in many places stresses the same. Examples include John 1:1, 14—“The Word was God…. The Word became flesh”; Romans 1:3—” … the gospel concerning his [God’s] Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh”; Galatians 4:4—“When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman”; Philippians 2:6, 8—“though he was in the form of God … found in human form”; Hebrews 1:2; 2:14—“in these last days he [God] has spoken to us by a Son…. Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature.” In all of these passages there is unmistakable reference to both the humanity and the deity of Jesus Christ.

A. The Ultimate Paradox

We may speak of this as the ultimate paradox.[183] It is a paradox in that the statement declaring both Christ's deity and His humanity is a seeming contradiction; it is ultimate in that there can be no higher paradox than the union of the infinite God and finite man in one person.

1. Two Natures

One side of the paradox is that Jesus Christ is both God and man, divine and human. This is to be understood as a fact of the Incarnation from the beginning. "The Word became flesh" does not mean that the Word ceased to be the Word and became flesh.[184] Such would be metamorphosis rather than incarnation. The Word, the eternal Son, remains the Son of God. Nor, on the other hand, did the human Jesus, the Son of man, at some point become more than human, that is add to Himself deity. Such would be divinization rather than incarnation. Throughout His whole ministry Jesus remained God *and* man.

A striking illustration of Jesus' concurrent humanity and divinity may be found in His own words in John 8. In the same conversation with certain Jews, Jesus first spoke of Himself as both man and God. He said, "You seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God" (v. 40) and shortly after that He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am" (v. 58). Jesus Christ is at the same time "a man" and the eternal "I am."

It is important, therefore, to emphasize that Jesus Christ indeed has two natures: deity and humanity. There is no confusing of the two natures nor is one ever absorbed into the other.[185] The fact that Jesus Christ is one Person does *not* mean He has only one nature.[186] Rather, in the Scriptures the integrity and separateness of the two natures is emphasized throughout. Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man.

2. One Person

The other side of the paradox is that Jesus Christ is one person. Throughout

His life and ministry it is apparent that Christ was not two persons. He spoke always as an "I," not as a "we." In everything He did there was a unity of will and purpose. There is no biblical evidence of His being two persons.

Thus, though there were two natures in Christ, there was only one person. The two natures did not exist alongside each other so that Christ was in effect two persons.[187] He did not operate as a divine Person at one moment and as a human person at another. Rather, everything flowed out of one personal center, expressing itself through the union of the two natures. Hence there was more than a conjunction of the Word, the eternal Son, with the man Jesus: they came together in the unity of personhood. Jesus Christ was not God and a man—two persons, but the God-man—one person.

Thus do we emphasize the unipersonality of Jesus Christ.

3. The Continuing Paradox

No matter how concerted the effort, there is no way of truly apprehending the unity of the divine nature and the human nature in one person. It would be easier perhaps to view a third reality as emerging from the Incarnation, namely, a being who is neither wholly God nor wholly man but, as a composite of the two, a kind of semidivine, semihuman entity. However, this would be no real Incarnation—that is to say, the eternal Word while remaining the Word becoming a true human being.

One possible help toward understanding this paradox is to reflect on the operation of God's grace in a Christian's life. Paul writes, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20). On the one hand, the believer can say that he is dead and by grace Christ now "lives in" him (hence, he partakes of the divine nature),[188] but, paradoxically, by grace the believer "in the flesh" (his human nature) is alive and lives by faith in Christ. In a sense there are two natures operating in the believer; however, he is only one person.

This "paradox of grace,"[189] while only an analogy, may help us to appreciate the Incarnation, since at every moment Jesus as one person functions through both a divine and a human nature.

The essential matter is to maintain the full paradox of the Incarnation. Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man in one person.[190] Any abridgment of either His divinity or His humanity, or any dilution of His personhood, only brings about

distortion. The paradox must be maintained not only for a proper appreciation of the reality of Jesus Christ but also for a true understanding of His work in redemption.[191]

We should always remember that we are dealing with a paradox that, no matter how much it is described, discussed, and analyzed, is ultimately beyond all human comprehension. For in the Incarnation a new reality has entered the world—the God-man, Jesus Christ. As human beings this is too high for us: it is finally a paradox of *mystery.*

B. The Marvel of the Incarnation

We come now to a consideration of the biblical witness that the birth of Jesus Christ came about through His conception by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. It is to this marvel that we now turn.

The basic scriptural texts are Matthew 1:18–25 and Luke 1:26–35. The narrative in Matthew reads (in part): "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit … behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him [Joseph] in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit… .' All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel' (which means, God with us) … he [Joseph] took his wife, but knew her not until she had borne a son." In the Lukan account the angel Gabriel addresses Mary: "And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus…. And Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?'[192] And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God'" (vv. 31, 34–35 NASB). In both Matthew and Luke there is clear testimony that Jesus Christ was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary.

These accounts are affirmations of the marvelous way in which the Incarnation occurred. The primary marvel is that the Son of God became flesh; now follows the marvel that it happened by way of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary.[193]

1. Conceived by the Holy Spirit

We begin with the conception by the Holy Spirit. According to the Scriptures quoted, Jesus Christ has no human paternity. Although Joseph was betrothed[194] (engaged) to Mary, and Mary was with child, the child conceived in her womb was not from him but from the Holy Spirit. It was by the "overshadowing"[195] of the Holy Spirit that this came about. Hence, it was by the power of the Holy

Spirit that Mary was enabled to conceive the Son of God.[196]

This is the same Holy Spirit who at the beginning hovered over the waters (Gen. 1:2 NIV) in the bringing forth of creation, who now hovered over the human form, that of Mary, to bring forth the Son of God. Previously it was the mighty work of the Holy Spirit in creation; now in a still more marvelous way the Holy Spirit is at work in the Incarnation.

God alone was able to accomplish this through the Holy Spirit. Man is obviously not capable of procreating one who is the Son of God. Even if man were as sinless as Adam in the beginning, this would still by no means be a possibility. Here, accordingly, in the Incarnation is a radically new event in history: the conception by the Holy Spirit of the Son of God.[197]

This means that Jesus Christ is not the Son of God by adoption or achievement, but by original endowment. He was from the beginning what in some sense through Him we may become: "To all who received him … he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12–13). However, Christ is the unique Son of God both by virtue of His eternal being and in the Incarnation through His conception by the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, since the human race is sinful, it took the Holy Spirit to bring forth a holy Child. Man can bring forth only sinful, rebellious man who needs salvation. Hence, by the action of the Holy Spirit not only is the Son of God conceived but also the human egg of Mary is sanctified at the moment of conception. Thus, as the angel said, she will bring forth a "holy offspring."[198]

All of this means that, on the divine side and in terms of a given holy nature, Jesus Christ is other than the rest of mankind. In this sense there is discontinuity between Him and all other persons. He *is* the holy Son of God.

2. Born of the Virgin Mary

In the Gospel accounts of Matthew and Luke there is express testimony to the Virgin Birth of Jesus. It is significant also that the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew (1:1–16) concludes: "And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom[199] was born Jesus, who is called Christ" (v. 16 KJV). Although Jesus is in the legal line of Joseph (back to David and Abraham), Joseph was not said to have "begotten" Jesus;[200] rather, He was born only of Mary. Hence this is a further affirmation of the Virgin Birth.

Matthew also (as we have noted) says that what took place was to fulfill a prophecy: "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son." The reference is to Isaiah 7:14. Hence, there is also Old Testament preparation for the Virgin Birth of Jesus.[201] It may be significant also that in Mark 6:3 Jesus is called "the

carpenter, the son of Mary." Since there is no reference to Joseph, this text may imply the Virgin Birth.[202]

First, we may reflect upon the fact that Jesus Christ was born of *Mary.* As Paul puts it simply, "born of woman" (Gal. 4:4).[203] This serves to emphasize that Christ had a true human birth. He was the Son of man born of the substance of humanity. He did not come into the world as an aerial man or simply pass through Mary "as water through an aqueduct."[204] He was the real son of a real mother.

Mary is shown on the occasion of the Annunciation to be a person of humble and receptive faith. At the conclusion of the angel's message to Mary, she replied: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Elizabeth, mother-to-be of John the Baptist, later addressed Mary: "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Luke 1:45). Mary thereupon replied: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden" (vv. 46–48). It is such a humble, receptive, joyful, and believing person that becomes the human vessel for the marvel of the Incarnation.[205]

Second, let us consider the fact that Jesus Christ was born of the *Virgin* Mary. This means, for one thing, that Christ was uniquely born. For although He had a truly human birth (sharing such with all mankind), His birth was unique. No other person has ever been born without parentage by both male and female.[206] Hence whereas Jesus was totally human, He was also uniquely human: He alone was born of a virgin.[207]

Thus we are again in the realm of marvel. Prior to the birth of Jesus, the Scripture records the miraculous birth of John the Baptist from the barren and aged womb of Elizabeth. But Jesus' birth is of a still higher order: it is not birth of a barren womb but of a virgin womb! Hence this is the climactic marvel in human birth. This does not make Jesus other than human (for He is fully that), but because of the virgin birth, it does emphasize His extraordinary position within all humanity. He is "*the* Son of man" in a unique manner for the sake of all mankind.

It is important to add that Christ's having been born of the Virgin Mary does not bestow some special blessing on virginity, as if, so to speak, it were a higher spiritual level appropriate for the bearing of the Son of God. Such a misunderstanding may be the result of the idea that the sexual relationship is in itself either sinful or somehow less than proper and therefore necessitated Christ's birth of a virgin. We need to emphasize that there is no suggestion in the

Scriptures that virginity is a holier or higher status than marriage,[208] or that virginity is a special status for the operation of divine grace. It was not Mary's virginity as such, but God's own gracious decision—shown by the angel's greeting to her, "Hail, O favored one,[209] the Lord is with you!" (Luke 1:28), and her subsequent reception of God's word in faith that prepared the way for her conception of Christ.[210]

Perhaps the most important thing to say about Christ's being born of the Virgin Mary is that it points to the mystery of the Incarnation. It is a sign of God's having done something radically new in the history of the world. The Virgin Birth is the affirmation of miracle and wonder but, most of all, of the mystery of God's coming in human flesh. "A *virgin* shall *conceive* …"*!* Such is the grand affirmation on the human level of God's mysterious and wondrous deed.

3. Conclusion

I conclude by emphasizing that the conception of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit and His birth of the Virgin Mary are important facts of Christian faith. The biblical evidence is unmistakable,[211] and the church universal in her creeds and confessions has continued to affirm these truths. The best-known declaration, the so-called Apostles'

Creed,[212] contains this simple statement about Jesus: He was "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary." This creed—regularly repeated in countless churches, especially throughout Western Christendom—is continuing evidence of the importance of this truth of faith.

The Incarnation, however, it should be added, does not depend on the Spirit's conception and the Virgin Birth. The Word becoming flesh is the *primary reality*,[213] whereas the *means* whereby this is accomplished is the supernatural conception and birth. Christ did not become the Son of God through a marvelous birth but already as the Son of God He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary.[214] Thus the mystery of the Incarnation does not rest on the marvel of the birth but the marvel on the mystery. The Incarnation itself is the primary mystery: it is fundamental to Christian faith.[215]

The importance of the affirmation about Christ's conception by the Spirit and birth of the Virgin Mary is that of underscoring the reality of the Incarnation. On the one hand, the deity of Christ is attested by the Holy Spirit's activity; on the

other, His humanity is asserted through the role filled by Mary. It is through the marvel of this *twofold* operation that the *one* person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of man, appears on the earthly scene. For those who truly believe that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, the biblical testimony of the marvelous birth is a further confirmation.[216]

Jesus Christ "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary": this we gladly and joyously affirm—and give God the glory!

C. Significance

Finally, let us consider the significance of Jesus Christ being both the Son of God and the Son of man.

1. The Revelation of the Nature of the Relationship Between God and Man

We have previously observed how Christ as the Son of God reveals the nature of God and, as the Son of man, the nature of man. Now we are ready to observe that through the unity of the two natures in one person there is the ultimate disclosure of the God-man relationship.[217]

Jesus Christ in his total existence as Son of God and Son of man, first of all, reveals the beauty of a life totally committed to the will of God. He could say (and demonstrate His statement), “I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me” (John 5:30). Thus His relationship to the Father was that of constantly doing His will: “I always do what is pleasing to him” (John 8:29). Even in the anguish of Gethsemane He did not falter but cried forth, “Not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). Such devotion to the will of God the Father was also declared by Christ to be the goal of those who follow Him. He spoke of His own spiritual family thus: “Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Mark 3:35). Furthermore, He taught His disciples to pray, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done” (Matt. 6:10). So Jesus demonstrated in His own life and ministry the perfect relationship between God and man. His constant fulfillment of God’s will is the model for every divine-human relationship.

We may put it thus: God directs, and man freely responds, God guides, and man gladly follows; Jesus shows this to be the true way of living. Paul states it variously: “doing the will of God from the heart” (Eph. 6:6) and being “mature and fully assured in all the will of God” (Col. 4:12). John declares that “he who does the will of God abides for ever” (1 John 2:17). With Jesus as the exemplar of all this, it is clear that we find our highest fulfillment in making the staple[218] of our life doing the will of God.

Second, Christ in His total existence as Son of God and Son of man reveals a

life wholly devoted to the service of others. He declared about himself, “the Son of man came not to be served but to serve” (Matt. 20:28) and “I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:27). Christ’s entire life was that of ministry, of service—so much so that Paul writes about His “taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:7). Christ’s servant form was so basic that Paul lists it even prior to listing His human existence!

Corresponding to this, Jesus summoned His disciples to a life of servanthood. This was dramatized particularly in the incident where, after assuming the low and menial place of washing His disciples’ feet, He said: “I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15). Hence, to be a servant is our highest calling in relation to people around us. In the words of the apostle Paul: “Through love be servants of one another” (Gal. 5:13).

Thus, in summary, the ultimate relationship between God and man displayed by Christ is that of unlimited devotion to the will of God and to the service of other people. As the Son of God and the Son of man He was the perfect example of both. It was the life of God in the life of man—the fullness of life; and for all who walk that way it is, indeed, life abundant.

2. The Accomplishing of Reconciliation Between God and Man

We have previously discussed how Christ’s being the Son of God makes redemption a possibility and His being the Son of man prepares the way for salvation. Now we may view these two together and recognize that through the operation of the two natures in the one person reconciliation between God and man is accomplished.[219]

The Incarnation was basically for only one purpose, namely, to effect reconciliation. Revelation of the nature of God, of the true nature of man, or the dynamic relationship between God and man[220] is undoubtedly important, but Christ came for the central purpose of reuniting God and man. The wonder is that He came as God and man in one person, and in that one person He restores the harmony of a broken and divided creation.

In the words of Paul, “God … through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18). This reconciliation and this ministry are the gracious and glorious goal of the Incarnation!

3. The Establishment of God’s Kingdom

Finally, Jesus Christ as both God and man thereby is able to bring in God’s kingdom. It was the Incarnate Christ—both Son of God and Son of man—who

declared at the beginning of His ministry: “The kingdom of God is at hand” (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15). The kingdom of God was a constantly recurring theme even to the last days with His disciples (see Acts 1:3).

It is important to realize that the kingdom of God, which means primarily God’s rule in the hearts and affairs of men, could be established only through One who was both God and man. On the one hand, God who rules over all things through His eternal Son is capable of subjecting men and nations to Himself. On the other, it could be done only by His Son’s entrance on the human scene, taking upon Himself flesh (as the Son of man), winning the battle against Satan, and rising triumphant from the grave. Now exalted at the right hand of the Father, as Son of God and Son of man, He exercises kingdom rule until all His enemies are subdued and God’s reign is forever established.

There can surely be no better way to close this chapter on the Incarnation than to hear the triumphant words of Revelation 11:15:

> “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever”!

[1]The word “incarnation” means literally “en-fleshment” (from Latin in- + earn-, caro, “flesh”).

[2]The Greek word is eusebeias, translated “godliness” in kjv, nasb, niv. Whether we use the word “religion” (rsv, neb) or “godliness,” the greatness of the mystery cannot be exaggerated.

[3]See the preceding chapter for a discussion of this covenant.

[4]Some ancient manuscripts do not contain the phrase “the Son of God.” However, as EGT, in loco, says, “It is every way likely to have formed a part of the original text.” The kjv, rsv, nasb, neb, and niv all retain the expression. Note also Mark 1:11.

[5]As specifically noted in the Gospel of Mark. Also in the Gospel of John the Word that “became flesh” is described as “the only Son from the Father” (1:14), hence the Son of God.

[6]The “if’ is by no means an expression of uncertainty. Satan had no doubts about Jesus’ identity!

[7]Likewise in the other synoptic Gospels. In John’s Gospel Jesus rarely refers to Himself as “the Son of God” (5:25; 10:36; 11:4 are the only

instances), though “the Son” and “the Son of man” are frequently used.

[8]The NIV translates, “You are right in saying I am.” Cf. Mark 14:62, where the answer is simply, “I am.”

[9]This declaration does not speak directly of Jesus as “the Son of God”; however, in the context of John’s Gospel, it points definitely in that direction.

[10]After Andrew and John had inquired, “Where are you staying?”, Jesus said to them, “Come and see” (vv. 38-39). The result of the “coming” and “seeing” was surely more than to view a place of residence: they “came” and “saw” Him. In that experience Jesus revealed enough of Himself for them to declare: “We have found the Messiah.”

[11]Jesus had earlier said to Nathanael, “Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree [in answer to Nathanael’s ‘How do you know me?’], do you believe?” (1:50). This cannot mean only that Nathanael’s faith stemmed from Jesus’ recognition of where he was. In addition it is who Nathanael was-an Israelite without guile-that basically undergirded his recognition of Jesus’ divine identity. One thinks of these words of Jesus elsewhere: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8).

[12]The shorter forms of Peter’s reply in Mark 8:29, “You are the Christ,” and Luke 9:20, “The Christ of God,” point to the same affirmation of Jesus’ divine Sonship.

[13]It was Peter’s brother Andrew who first testified to Peter that Jesus was the Messiah (see above).

[14]The Greek word is en, translated “in” in kjv, nasb, and niv.

[15]The repeated word “true” is a translation of the Greek phrase ton alethinon, literally, “the true [one].”

[16]We could have noted this in the prior section, “Personal Revelation”; however, since this narrative goes beyond accounts of revelations to the early disciples into an emphasis on the faith of later believers, it seems appropriate to consider it at this point.

[17]Peter, in one of his letters, wrote, “Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy” (1 Peter 1:8). Peter, of course, had seen Jesus and had come to believe in Him as the Son of God through personal revelation (see above); but here he speaks of the blessing on those who have not seen but who have believed: they indeed “rejoice

with unutterable and exalted joy." I like the kjv wording: "joy unspeakable and full of glory"!

[18]Recall the earlier discussion of this matter.

[19]Especially in John's Gospel (see 5:19, 20, 22, 23, 26; 6:40;N8:36; 14:13; 17:1). Also see Matthew 11:27.

[20]The Greek phrase is ego eimi. This is the same language as in John 8:58-"before Abraham was, I am." Leon Morris writes that " 41 am' may be meant to recall the style of deity" (The Gospel According to John), 442.

[21]Jesus had just said, "If I do bear witness to myself, my testimony is true, for I know whence I have come and whither I am going" (v. 14). He also added, immediately after the words quoted from John 8:18, "And the Father who sent me bears witness to me."

[22]The adversative "but" (de) in the verses mentioned is not a contradiction to or setting aside of the ancient commandments, but a "fulfilling" of them. Jesus, before any of these statements were made, had already said, "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17).

[23]That is, the sayings above quoted plus all the others in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7).

[24]These are the words of the officers who were sent by the chief priests and Pharisees to capture Jesus. Their words echo the impact of Jesus on all who were open to His message.

[25]Cf. also John 10:25, 38; 14:11.

[26]The Greek phrase is ho erchomenos, "the coming one" (nasb).

[27]Cf. Luke 7:18-22.

[28]Jesus, as stated, raised the dead Himself, but these "resurrections" were only temporary: the persons raised were to die again (until the final resurrection).

[29]The Greek phrase is en dynamei, "in an act of power" (nasb margin).

[30]The Greek word is ex, "as a result of' (nasb margin).

[31]"As, e.g., according to Acts 2:32-"This Jesus God raised up. … "

[32]As, e.g., according to Romans 8:11-"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead. …" Also Romans 1:4 (quoted above)-"according to the Spirit of holiness"-probably refers to the same thing.

[33]The Greek word is parakletos, "Paraclete," which is translated, in addition to "Counselor" (also in niv), "Comforter" (kjv), "Helper" (nasb),

"Advocate" (neb). "Paraclete" literally means "one called alongside to help" (nasb margin).

[34]See particularly verse 5.

[35]"The water, and the blood" may refer either to the whole of the Incarnation- viz. from Jesus' baptism in water to His death in blood-or to the symbolism of water and blood in the ordinances of water baptism and the Lord's Supper. Either way, they are the outward testimony of what is inwardly witnessed by the Holy Spirit. (See F. F. Bruce, The Epistles of John, 120-21).

[36]The Greek title is Kyrios Iesous. The word "Lord" doubtless bespeaks His divine status.

[37]Recall what was earlier said about John the Baptist, Andrew, John the apostle, Philip, Nathanael, Peter, and Paul.

[38]Paul earlier in his letter to the Corinthians spoke of how the body of the believer is "a temple of the Holy Spirit…" (1 Cor. 6:19). Thus it is this same indwelling Spirit by whom the declaration "Jesus is Lord" is made.

[39]The Greek word is elenchos, "certainty" (lb).

[40]Rational "proofs" for the deity of Christ (which we have not attempted above) always come short of bringing about faith. Faith itself, realized through Word and Spirit, is its own proof. The word elenchos (translated "conviction" or "certainty") may also be translated "proof' (see BAGD). Faith is (and alone is) "the proof of things not seen."

[41]Spoken (as we earlier observed) on the Mount of Transfiguration.

[42]The word translated "Chosen" (in Luke 9:35) is eklelegmenos, a form of eklegomai from which the English word "elect" comes.

[43]As in Adoptionism. Adoptionism refers to the view, held at various times in church history, that Jesus became the Son of God by adoption at some point in His life: either at His baptism, His transfiguration, or His resurrection. Ebionism (ca. a.d. 107) is an early form of Adoptionism, viewing Jesus as chosen to be the Messiah-hence endowed with divinity-because of His moral and spiritual preeminence. Adoptionism fails to recognize Jesus' essential deity as the Son of God.

[44]Matthew 3:17 reads: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

[45]Moses and Elijah, doubtless representing the Old Testament law and prophets, departed from the scene despite Peter's attempts to detain them. After that came the voice out of an overshadowing cloud: "This is my

Son, my Chosen; listen [only] to him!”

[46]The passage in Romans 1:4 has sometimes been viewed adoptionistically, viz., “declared … to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead” being understood as a declaration of adoption. Since the word translated “declared” (horisthentos) may also be rendered “designated” (rsv) or “appointed,” an adoptionist reading might seem feasible. However, as mentioned earlier, the proper understanding is that this is the climactic “with power” declaration of the sonship of Jesus.

[47]See above, p. 312.

[48]Paul writes that God “chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4).

[49]The Greek word monogenes is translated as “only begotten” in kjv. The nasb also has “only begotten,” but in the margin “or, unique, only one of His kind.” The niv translates it “one and only.” The neb (like rsv) has “only.” Cf. John 1:14, 18; 3:18; 1 John 4:9.

[50]This is true “adoptionism.” We, not Jesus, are sons of God by adoption.

[51]E.g., according to Luke 1:35, “the child [Jesus] to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.”

[52]According to John 1:12, “to all who received him [Christ], who believed in his name, he gave power to become the children of God.”

[53]I recall hearing a Unitarian minister saying, “Certainly Christ is the son of God, but so are we all.” While this statement contains an element of truth, it badly errs in failing to recognize the qualitative difference between Christ and us.

[54]The only biblical instance of Jesus saying “our Father” is in Matthew 6:9 where He tells His disciples, “Pray then like this: Our Father who art in heaven. …” Jesus does not include Himself in the prayer. Later in Matthew are these words, “No one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (11:27). This statement further underscores the uniqueness of Jesus’ relationship to the Father.

[55]We are dealing with incarnation, not apotheosis. The singularity of Christ is not a matter of elevation to unique status but of His being that from the beginning.

[56]It would be a mistake to assume that only the Word but not the Son preexisted. “Word” is the expression used in the Fourth Gospel until the statement in 1:14 that “the Word became flesh.” Since “the Son” is used thereafter, some have viewed préexistence as belonging only to the Word

or Logos, who, when incarnate, is only then properly referred to as "the Son." However such a view is mistaken for several reasons: (1) Since the statement in v. 14, "the Word became flesh," continues "and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father," it is clear that the Word did not become the Son, for the Son was (even as the Word) "from the Father." (2) Only personal pronouns are appropriate to translate the activity of the Word in verses 2-4: "He was in the beginning … all things were made through him … in him was life." Since the Word (ho logos) is masculine gender, "he" and "him" make for a natural transition to "the Son." (3) Later statements in John's Gospel imply or forthrightly declare the Son's préexistence; e.g., Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am" (8:58), and later He prayed, "Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made" (17:5).

[57]Arianism, a fourth-century heresy, declared that there was a time when the Son did not exist: "There was a time when the Son was not." Arius did not deny Christ's préexistence insofar as the world and man were concerned, but he did hold that at some time prior to creation He came into being.. The very nature of sonship, Arius held, implies a preexisting Father. Christ, accordingly, was "first among creatures" and the one through whom the Father created all else. The Creed of Nicaea (a.d. 325) declared in opposition to Arius and his followers: "Those who say, Once he was not, or he was not before his generation, or came to be out of nothing … or that he is a creature … the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes them." Contemporary Arianism is most clearly represented by Jehovah's Witnesses who speak of Christ as "the first and direct creation of Jehovah God" (The Kingdom Is at Hand, 46).

[58]"Begotten not created" is the language both of the Nicene Creed and the later Constantinopolitan Creed (a.d. 381).

[59]For a more detailed discussion of this, see chapter 4, "The Holy Trinity."

[60]The Greek word is harpagmon. The rsv and nasb translate it "a thing to be grasped." I will use this translation later.

[61]See below for a discussion of this phrase.

[62]Gnosticism (an early Christian heresy) generally viewed Christ, the Logos, as an intermediary between God and man and therefore not on a par with God the Father.

[63]Of course also as a man, in our flesh (as will be discussed a little later). The only point now is that it was not the Father who suffered and died

but the Son. A doctrine known as “patripassianism” [literally, “father-suffering”] was held by some early third-century theologians who, viewing the Son and Father as identical, asserted that it was thus proper to say that the Father was born, suffered, and died. This doctrine did not long retain favor, for though it upheld God’s activity in the Incarnation and Atonement, it confused the persons of Father and Son.

[64]E.g., Romans 8:34-“Christ Jesus … is at the right hand of God.” Also see Acts 2:33-34; 7:55-56; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22.

[65]Recall the preceding section.

[66]As in “modalism.” Sabellius (also in the early third century) held that “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit” were merely names applying to successive modes of revelation of the one God, rather than signifying eternal and intrinsic distinctions within the godhead.

[67]The Greek phrase is *theos en ho logos*. This is to be translated not as “God was the Word,” but “the Word was God” (the subject has the article, the predicate nominative does not). Neither should the translation be “the Word was divine” (as in the Goodspeed and Moffatt Bibles), for the word is *theos*, “God,” not *theios*, “divine” (cf. 2 Peter 1:3 where *theios* is used in the expression “His divine power”). Nor should the translation be “the Word was a god” (as in the *New World Translation* of the Jehovah’s Witnesses). *Theos* without the article occurs thereafter in John 1:6 (“There was a man sent from God”—*para* theou), 12, 13, and 18-in none of which could the word possibly be translated “a god.” (Refer also to a brief discussion of this in chapter 4, “The Holy Trinity,” n. 15.)

[68]Walter Wessel writes, “In Jewish teaching even the Messiah could not forgive sins. That was the prerogative of God alone. Their [the scribes’] fatal error was in not recognizing who Jesus really was-the Son of God who has authority to forgive sins” (EBC, 8:633).

[69]Some have held Jesus’ words to represent not a unity of essence with the Father but only a unity of will. I agree, however, with Donald Guthrie that “it is insufficient to regard the meaning as moral agreement. The identity of security in both the Son and the Father bears witness to a more basic identity” (NBC, 952).

[70]The fact that Jesus later in the Fourth Gospel says, “The Father is greater than I” (14:28), should not be understood to derogate from His oneness of essence with the Father but rather to emphasize that the Begotten is

secondary to the Begetter. Jesus' words in John 14:28 are also in accord with those in John 13:16-"Nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him."

[71]"Also cf. Revelation 2:8-"The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life" and 22:13-"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

[72]One further word about Jesus' actions in regard to His resurrection, might be added. Not only did Jesus rise from the dead, but also, as we have earlier noted, He spoke of raising Himself up: "Destroy this temple [i.e., the temple of His body], and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). Such a prerogative and power can belong only to God Himself.

[73]The Greek word for Lord, kyrios, in a given situation may also be used of any person in a superior position, e.g., a master or nobleman. The word may even be used to signify little more than respectful address such as our "sir." The context in which kyrios occurs is therefore decisive in determining its proper meaning.

[74]Leon Morris puts it well: "Peter's words remind us of the experience of great saints in the immediate presence of God, such as Abraham (Gen. 18:27), Job (Job 42:6), or Isaiah (Isa. 6:5). Cf. also Israel's 'Let not God speak to us lest we die (Exod. 20:19).' " (The Gospel According to St. Luke, TNTC, 113.)

[75]This does not mean that Peter at this juncture had a full understanding of the deity of Christ (especially since he did not until later affirm Jesus, in Luke's words, to be "the Christ of God" [9:20]); however, Peter's sudden realization of sinfulness in the presence of Jesus and calling Him Lord strongly suggests that he was aware of God's holy presence in Him.

[76]See verse 24 that begins, "O my God. …"

[77]Of course, "Lord" in the Old Testament stands for "YHWH" or "Yahweh." Because of the sacredness of the name Yahweh, what was written (the ketib) was read as "Adonai" (the qeré) or "Lord." "Lord," with all four letters usually capitalized in English, carries forward the tetragrammaton of " YHWH."

[78]"One consequence of the application of the Kyrios ["Lord"] title to Jesus is that the New Testament can in principle apply to him all the Old Testament passages which speak of God … on the basis of the designation kyrios early Christianity does not hesitate to transfer to Jesus everything the Old Testament says about God" (Oscar Cullmann, The Christology of the New Testament, 234).

[79]Cf. also 2 Samuel 22:3; Psalm 106:21; Isaiah 45:15, 21; 49:26; 60:16; 63:8; Jeremiah 14:8; Hosea 13:4. In her Magnificat Mary also says, “My spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (Luke 1:47).

[80]E.g., John 4:42; Acts 5:31; 13:23; Ephesians 5:23; Philippians 3:20; 2 Timothy 1:10; Titus 1:4; 3:6; 2 Peter 1:1, 11; 2:20; 3:2, 18; 1 John 4:14. Interestingly, God Himself continues to be called “Savior” in certain New Testament passages. See 1 Timothy 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Titus 1:3; 2:10; 3:4; Jude 25.

[81]There are thirteen references to God as Redeemer in Isaiah alone. Also see Job 19:25; Psalm 19:14; 78:35; Proverbs 23:11; Jeremiah 50:34.

[82]Also cf. Romans 3:24; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Colossians 1:4; Hebrews 9:12.

[83]See chapter 3, “God,” Epilogue: “The Glory of God.”

[84]See also the discussion of this matter in chapter 4, “The Holy Trinity.”

[85]However, as we have already observed, by the use of such expressions as “Son of God” and “Lord,” there is clear implication of divinity.

[86]Language of the Nicene Creed (as enlarged in a.d. 381): “We believe, in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father. …” Both the original Nicene Creed of a.D. 325 and the enlarged Creed (sometimes called the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed) of a.D. 381, which speak of Christ not only as “Very God of Very God” but also as one substance or one essence (homoousios), stood over against the Arianists’ claim that Christ was only similar in substance or essence (homoiousios). Thereby the essential deity of Christ was vigorously affirmed. See chapter 4, “The Holy Trinity.”

[87]The rsv renders “only begotten God” as “only Son”; however, the Greek text is monogenes theos.

[88]The kjv and niv similarly translate. The rsv renders “God blessed for ever” as a separate sentence: “God who is over all be blessed for ever.” John Murray states that “the most natural rendering … [is] ‘who is over all, God blessed for ever’ so that ‘God blessed for ever’ stands in apposition to what precedes” (The Epistle to the Romans, NICNT, 248). Cullmann in Christology of the New Testament, 312-13, and F. F. Bruce in The Epistle to the Romans, TNTC, 186-87, adopt generally the same position, namely, viewing “God blessed for ever” as referring to Christ.

[89]The Greek phrase is en morphe theou.

[90]The niv translates thus: “being in very nature God.” EGT, in loco, states that morphe “always signifies a form which truly and fully expresses the being which underlies it,” hence the being of God.

[91]Colossians 2:2-3 also suggests this same fullness or totality in speaking of “God’s mystery, of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” If all these “treasures” are in Christ, we may add, He can be no less than God.

[92]Similarly NASB, NIV, NEB. The KJV translates the phrase in this way: “the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.” Although the Greek text may also be rendered as the KJV does, the context in two ways makes such rendition unlikely: first, “God our Savior” is an expression often used in reference to God in the Pastoral Letters (see 1 Timothy 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Titus 1:3; 2:10; 3:4), hence “God” should not be distinguished from “Savior Jesus Christ” here; second, eschatologically, God and Jesus Christ are never depicted in Scripture as both appearing, or appearing simultaneously. (See IB, in loco, on this latter point.)

[93]The rsv margin does read “Or God is thy throne.” F. F. Bruce, as I have noted in chapter 4, footnote 14, calls such a reading “quite unconvincing” (The Epistle to the Hebrews, NICNT, in loco). See also Cullmann’s Christology of The New Testament, 310, for the statment that “Hebrews unequivocally applies the title ‘God’ to Jesus.”

[94]The kjv reads “the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ.” The nasb, niv, and neb are similar to rsv. “The grammar leaves little doubt that… Peter is calling Jesus Christ both God and Savior” (EBC, 12:267).

[95]See under the heading “The Son of Man” for a discussion of Jesus’ sinlessness, pages 336-38.

[96]According to EGT (1:248), the case is parallel to the unwillingness of Jesus to be called Christ indiscriminately : “He wished no man to give him any title of honor till he knew what he was doing.” William Lane writes, in regard to Mark 10:18, that “Jesus’ intention is not to pose the question of his own sinlessness or oneness with the Father, but to set in correct perspective the honor of God” (The Gospel of Mark, NICNT, 366).

[97]Thayer suggests “to be held fast.”

[98]The Greek word is ekenosen.

[99]“As earlier noted, the Incarnation means that God became man (“the

Word became flesh") without ceasing to be God.

[100]According to John 17:5, Jesus in His prayer to the Father used these words: "the glory which I had with thee before the world was made." It is that glory that He gave up in coming to earth.

[101]Note Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 8:9, where he speaks of "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor." This is surely another aspect of Christ's self-emptying.

[102]The Greek word translated "servant" in rsv is doulos, basically meaning "slave." The nasb renders doulos "bondservant."

[103]In nineteenth-century so-called Kenotic theology, there were various attempts to define the kenosis of Christ in terms of a surrender of such divine attributes as omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence (see article "Kenosis, Kenotic Theology" in EDT). However, it seems unlikely that Paul in Philippians 2:7 is speaking of such attributes. It is far more a matter of His eternal glory. Philippians 2:9-11 suggests this also, stressing His exaltation to the glory of God the Father. (For further discussion of Christ's kenosis see page 342, note 184, below.)

[104]Recall again Mark 1:1-"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

[105]I.e., from a mere human being to an exalted Christ.

[106]James D. G. Dunn in his book, Christology in the Making, states that "only in the Fourth Gospel can we speak of a doctrine of the incarnation" (italics his), 259. Although this may be true in so many words, I would urge that the doctrine is implied throughout the New Testament.

[107]Recall the earlier citation from Luke 4:41-"demons also came out of many, crying, 'You are the Son of God!' " Cf. also Mark 1:24 where a man with "an unclean spirit" cried out, "Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." The demons know that Christ is the Son of God, but that knowledge is a long way from a living faith.

[108]The Greek word is charaktèr. The kjv reads "express image"; nasb and niv translate as "exact representation."

[109]There come to mind the eloquent words of David to Saul in Browning's poem, "Saul": 'Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for! My flesh, that I seek In the Godhead! I sèek and I find it. O Saul, it shall be A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me, Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever: a Hand like this hand Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ stand!

[110]Also cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4, where Christ is spoken of as "the image of God" (kjv, niv, nasb). The neb has "very image."

[111]Or, in the even more concrete words of 1 John 1:1-2: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands … the life was made manifest, and we saw it."

[112]This is in line with Paul's concern for the Galatians that Christ be "formed" in them (Gal. 4:19).

[113]See below: "The Son of Man."

[114]The Nicene Creed shortly after speaking of Jesus as "Very God of Very God" adds that "for us men, and for our salvation, [He] came' down from heaven, and was incarnate… ." If Christ is not "Very God of Very God," if He is only a lesser divinity (as Arius held), then "our salvation" is impossible. Only God can redeem man from His lost condition of sin and misery.

[115]It has become tragically fashionable in some theological circles to view the whole matter of the Incarnation as a myth. Rudolf Bultmann some years ago wrote, "What a primitive mythology it is, that a divine Being should become incarnate, and atone for the sins of men through his own blood!" (Kerygma and Myth, 7). In John Hick, ed., The Myth of God Incarnate, a number of British theologians, in a little less flagrant manner than Bultmann's, described the incarnation as "a mythological or poetic way of expressing [Jesus'] significance for us," but declared that it is not a literal truth. The tragic fact, however, is that if the Incarnation is a myth, we remain locked in our sinful estate. (For an excellent reply to The Myth of God Incarnate see Michael Green, ed., The Truth of God Incarnate. One valuable statement among many is that of Stephen Neill who declares that in The Myth of God Incarnate "we are being offered a God who loved us a little, but not enough to wish to become one of us," 68.)

[116]Hence the significance of the New Testament references that not only speak of God as Savior but also declare Christ to be Savior. (For a list of these references, see note 80.) The two come together in such affirmations as "our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13) and "our God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:1 nasb).

[117]In the language of John 1:1 (to reverse the order) He "was God" and was also "with God."

[118]"Father" is implied in this statement. This is evident from Paul's opening salutation in Galatians: "Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3).

[119]See chapter 4, "The Holy Trinity," for a discussion of God's internal properties and external acts.

[120]Calvin held that in the Incarnation the Son of God also remained outside human flesh: "For although the boundless essence of the Word was united with human nature into one person, we have no idea of any enclosing. The Son of God descended miraculously from heaven, yet without abandoning heaven … to live on the earth, and hang upon the cross, and yet always filled the world as in the beginning" (Institutes II.8.4). Calvin's view of Christ "outside" (later to be called the extra Calvinisticum) hardly seems to do justice to the fact that the Word wholly became flesh, that the Son was wholly sent by the Father. If He did not "abandon heaven," the kenosis is no longer a full "self-emptying." Despite the difficulties in comprehending the inner-Trinitarian realities during the Incarnation, it is a critical error to fail to recognize a total incarnation of the Son of God.

[121]'The kjv, following a weaker manuscript tradition, reads "God." All modern translations concur with the rsv in reading "He."

[122]There is, to be sure, another chapter in the Gospel of John; however, John 21 is largely epilogue.

[123]This statement occurs against the background of John's words: "Every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God" (1 John 4:2). John puts it even more strongly in 2 John 7 than 1 John 4:3 (above) in speaking of "deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh" by adding that "any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist" (niv).

[124]The Greek phrase is ho huios tou anthropou.

[125]Sixty-nine times in the Synoptics and thirteen in the Fourth Gospel.

[126]Luke 24:7 and John 12:34 are apparent exceptions. However, in both instances, though Jesus does not himself speak the words, others use them only in reference to Jesus' self- declaration.

[127]Recall the previous discussion under "the Son of God" heading.

[128]However, in the Book of Revelation the phrase is "a son of man" (the definite article is absent).

[129]In Mark 3:28 Jesus speaks of "the sons of men"-"all sins will be forgiven

the sons of men"-clearly referring to mankind in general. Cf. Paul's words in Ephesians 3:5 where he refers to "the sons of men in other generations."

[130]Cullmann comments that the phrase huios tou anthropou (Son of man) is the translation of the Aramaic expression barnasha. Bar = son, e.g., in such names as Barnabas, Bartholomew, and Barsabbas. Cullman adds, "barnasha refers to one who belongs to the human classification; that is, it means simply 'man'…. barnasha should be translated simply as anthropos" (Christology of the New Testament, 138).

[131]Anthropos = man as a human being, not man as a male.

[132]F. F. Bruce writes, "The phrase 'son of man' is a Hebrew and Aramaic idiom meaning simply 'a man,' 'a human being.' In Aramaic, the language which Jesus appears normally to have spoken, 'the Son of man' would have meant 'the Man' " (The Gospel of John, 67).

[133]It may be observed that Jesus refers to Himself as "a man" (or simply "man") in John 8:40-"You seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth."

[134]As, before noted, in Mark 3:28.

[135]As we have previously observed.

[136]See also Matthew 26:63-64 where Jesus answered the accusation that He claimed to be the Christ, the Son of God, by referring to the Daniel passage (along with Psalm 110:1).

[137]Albert Schweitzer, at the end of his book *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, writes movingly: "He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: 'Follow thou me!' and sets us to tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is" (p. 403).

[138]As in the preceding section.

[139]David F. Wells writes, "As 'Son of Man' he affirmed his essential solidarity with mankind" (The Person of Christ, 80).

[140]As, for example, Cullmann does: "According to its deepest meaning, which is clear from the word itself, 'Son of man' represents humanity" (Christology of the New Testament, 161).

[141]It is noteworthy that in some of the early noncanonical church writings this is recognized. Ignatius in his letter to the Ephesians speaks of “the one Jesus Christ, who after th^flesh was of David’s race, who is Son of Man and Son of God” (J. B. Lightfoot, ed., The Apostolic Fathers, 68). Similar references may be found, inter alia, in Barnabas, Justin, and Irenaeus (see Dunn, Christology in the Making, 65, for specific references).

[142]As the genealogical table in Luke 3:23-38 shows. The climax is “the son of God,” but this is not without first denoting Jesus as “the son of Adam.”

[143]Cullmann stresses that “the idea of the Son of Man at its ultimate source … includes the idea that the figure of the Man represents all men” (Christology of the New Testament, 161).

[144]See chapter 9, “Man.”

[145]The Greek phrase is idou ho anthropos. The rsv and Niv read, “Here is the man!” This is also a possible translation; however, the nasb (similarly kjv and neb) seems to capture John’s meaning better. As Leon Morris puts it, “The expression need mean no more than ‘Here is the accused,’ but it is likely that John saw more in it than that. Jesus is THE man, and in this dramatic scene gives expression to this truth” (The Gospel According to John, NICNT, 793).

[146]There is no description of Jesus’ appearance in the New Testament. This may seem strange in light of all that the four Gospels have to say about Him. However, the fact that such details are not included all the more underscores the point that He is universal man.

[147]The Greek word for “flesh” is sarx. Sarx has a number of meanings, ranging from mere “body” (physical nature) to “sin” (sinful nature). However, it may also mean “human nature” (as in all the Scriptures above quoted). See BAGD, sarx 4: “human and mortal nature.”

[148]As was discussed in the previous section.

[149]Gnosticism of the first century viewed all matter as evil; therefore, an actual assumption of flesh by a good and holy God was impossible. God could have no contact with matter. The earliest Gnostic known by name was Cerinthus, a man vigorously opposed by the apostle John. John’s epithet “such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist” may have been meant to describe Cerinthus and his followers. Gnosticism flourished for many centuries in opposition to genuine Christian faith.

[150]Docetism, a form of Gnosticism, held that the humanity of Christ was only apparent: he seemed to be human ("docetism" is from the Greek word dokeo, "to seem"). He had no real human body. Some later Docetics held Christ's body to be a phantom, a mask of a man (e.g., Marcionites in the second century), and a celestial or aerial body despite its apparent earthiness (e.g., Manichaeans in the third century). Docetists had no basic problem with the divinity of Christ: it was his humanity they could not accept.

[151]This would be true Docetism! The seemingness is not the flesh, but the sinfulness of that flesh.

[152]Literally, "in form as a man," the Greek phrase is schemati … hos anthropos. The translation of the nasb and niv, "in appearance as a man," while possible from the word schéma, may mislead in a Docetic direction. (Cf. 1 Cor. 7:31, the only other use in the New Testament of schéma, where the translation "form" is obviously more accurate than "appearance" would be.)

[153]Many of the emotions mentioned are, of course, not simply human. For example, God Himself may rejoice and express anger; however, the sum total of Jesus' emotional expressions belongs to real human existence.

[154]Apollinarianism, a heresy of the fourth century a.d., claimed that whereas Jesus had the soul and body of a man, His spirit was divine. Apollinaris and his followers held that the infinite and perfect God could only have existed in human flesh if somehow the central core of man's being, his spirit, was occupied by the divine Logos. Hence Christ, in a sense, was viewed as two-thirds man (body and soul) and one-third God (spirit). This "modified Docetism" is contrary to a complete Incarnation, misrepresents Jesus' humanly spiritual expressions (as illustrated in the quotations above from Mark 8, John 11 and 13), and fails to recognize Jesus as totally man.

[155]Jesus asked the father of the demon-possessed son, "How long has he had this?" The question implies that Jesus was asking about something He did not know. (To say that Jesus already knew and was simply carrying on conversation with the father would be a distorted reading of the text.)

[156]On one occasion it is recorded that Jesus' disciples said to Him, "Now we know that you know all things" (John 16:30). This was said against the background of Jesus' profound Upper Room discourses (John 13-16) and expressed the disciples' conviction of His full spiritual knowledge.

However, it would be a mistake to turn this into a theological statement of Jesus' omniscience in every matter, a claim Jesus Himself never made.

[157]Ignorance should by no means be viewed as error. There is no witness in the New Testament that Jesus was ever wrong about anything. Limitation in knowledge does not equal error. For a good discussion of this see Leon Morris, The Lord from Heaven, chapter 3: "Jesus the Man."

[158]Cf. also Hebrews 2:18.

[159]Jesus had prayed, "Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

[160]In chapter 9, "Man," I wrote, "Man is not truly man unless he is open to both God and his neighbor in a continuing relationship of receiving and giving, obeying and blessing. As man rejoices both in God and in the one set besides him, he fulfills his true humanity" (p. 206).

[161]Such pride and haughtiness invariably result in self-destruction and fall. As Proverbs 16:18 puts it: "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

[162]At the outset of His ministry (as we have noted) He suffered the attacks of Satan in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13). Shortly after that there was the bitter opposition of His own townspeople who sought to kill Him (Luke 4:16-30). Such attacks and opposition continued throughout Jesus' ministry.

[163]"A Son" here clearly means God's Son. The background of verses 5-7 makes this apparent.

[164]Morris writes about this "staggering assertion of sinlessness," adding, "It betokens a clear and serene consciousness. Only one who was in the closest and most intimate communion with the Father could have spoken such words. It is impossible to envisage any other figure in history making such a claim [italics mine]" (Gospel according to John, 465).

[165]Jesus' words in John 14:30 are also noteworthy. There He declared that "the ruler of the world [i.e., Satan] is coming, and he has nothing in Me" (nasb). This is the second notable assertion by Jesus of His own sinlessness.

[166]There is, to be sure, a paradox here. In one sense it is correct to say that Jesus was not able to sin because He was God or the Son of God; but, to repeat, the biblical emphasis is on the sinlessness of victory over temptation rather than divinity essentially untouchable by evil. The Latin expression non posse peccare, "not able to sin," has sometimes been

understood as applying to Jesus' inability to sin because of His being the Son of God. However, non posse peccare may also refer to the inability of One who in His human life lived so close to God and man that He could not actually sin against either. This may be described as the inability of perfect love to violate either God or man.

[167]James says that "the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God" (1:20). Such anger is not the anger of God.

[168]The poet Sidney Lanier writes vividly of Jesus the man in "The Crystal":

O man's best Man, O love's best love,
O perfect life in perfect labor writ,
O all men's Comrade, Servant, King, or Priest-
What if or yet, what mole, what flaw, what lapse,
What least defect or shadow of defect,
What rumor, tattled by an enemy,
Of inference loose, what lack of grace
Even in torture's grasp, or sleep's, or death's-
Oh, what amiss may I forgive in Thee,
Jesus, good Paragon, Thou Crystal Christ?

[169]The word "Christ" derives from the Greek word chrio, "to anoint."

[170]In regard to healing Luke 5:17 reads, "The power of the Lord was with him [Jesus] to heal." This is a further reference to Jesus' anointing by the Spirit.

[171]On one occasion, after Jesus had brought deliverance to a demon-possessed man, He spoke of this as being done by the Holy Spirit: "If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons …" (Matt. 12:28).

[172]Literally, "Jesus the Nazarene" (as in nasb).

[173]The Greek word is dynamesi, "miracles" nasb, niv, kjv, neb.

[174]This is not to deny that there were works of Jesus accomplished by Him in His divine nature. A clear instance of this may be seen in His walking on the water and stilling a storm. After this "those in the boat worshiped him, saying, Truly you are the Son of God' " (Matt. 14:33).

[175]James D. G. Dunn in his book Jesus and the Spirit writes: "He [Jesus] was charismatic in the sense that he manifested a power and authority which was not his own, which he had neither achieved nor conjured up, but which was given him, his by virtue of the Spirit/power of God upon him" (p. 87).

[176]Later Paul spoke of these gifts as "the manifestation of the Spirit" (v. 7)

and then listed a number of gifts (or manifestations) including healings and miracles (vv. 8-10).

[177]The title of chapter 12, book 2, of Calvin's Institutes reads: "Christ, to Perform the Office of Mediator, Behoved to Become Man" (Beveridge trans.).

[178]For a discussion of this "ransom" see the next chapter, "The Atonement."

[179]Or "make atonement" (as in niv). The Greek word is hilaskesthai.

[180]The Greek phrase is eis dikaiosin zoes, literally, "to justification of life" (as in nasb mg.).

[181]The Greek word is phroneite; "attitude" in nasb, niv.

[182]The Christian classic by Charles Sheldon, In His Steps, is based on this principle.

[183]Donald M. Baillie in his book God Was in Christ writes, "The Incarnation presents us indeed with the supreme paradox" (p. 106).

[184]The self-emptying of Christ, He "emptied himself' (Phil. 2:7), His kenosis, should not be understood to mean that Jesus emptied Himself of His divinity or of such attributes as omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence (see earlier footnote). In regard to these attributes, it would be better to say that there was a limitation in their use by Christ in His humanity. Millard J. Erickson calls such "functional limitations" (see Christian Theology, 2:735).

[185]Eutychianism, a fifth-century heresy, held to a mingling (confusing, confounding) of the two natures of Christ with the result that the human was absorbed by the divine. Eutyches taught that Christ was of two natures before the union, but after the union one nature. Over against Eutychianism the Council of Chalcedon (a.D. 451) declared Christ to be "perfect in Godhead and perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man … to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably…" (Philip Schaff, ed., The Creeds of Christendom 2:62).

[186]Opponents of Chalcedon came to be called "Monophy sites," those who (like Eutyches) affirmed "one nature" (monos, "one," physis, "nature"). Although they gave up the Eutychian view of absorption, the Monophysites held that there was only one composite nature of Christ, namely, His divinity. Similar to the Monophy sites were the later "Monothelites" who held to only one will (monos, "one," thelema, "will"). Monothelitism was declared heretical by the Third Council of Constantinople (a.d. 681). (Also see the Second Council of

Constantinople [a.D. 553] for prior anathemas against, inter alia, Arianism, Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, and Eutychianism.) Monophysitism survives today among the Syrian Jacobites, the Coptic and Ethiopian churches, and some Armenian churches.

[187]Nestorianism, another fifth-century heresy, was the opposite of Eutychianism. Whereas Eutyches mingled the two natures, Nestorius divided the one person. Christ became in effect a double person. The Council of Chalcedon spoke against Nestorianism in words immediately after "inconfusedly, unchangeably" (in reference to Eutychianism) by adding "indivisibly, inseparably… concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons. …" The word "subsistence" in the Greek is hypostasis. From that term the expression "hypostatic union" has often been used to express a union so intense that the two natures are one hypostasis or person.

[188]Peter speaks of our becoming "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).

[189]Baillie makes use of this expression and writes that "this paradox in its fragmentary form in our own Christian lives is a reflection of that perfect union of God and man in the Incarnation … and may therefore be our best clue to the understanding of it" (God was in Christ, 117).

[190]It is important neither to confound (confuse, mingle) the natures nor to divide (separate) the person. Hence, the Chalcedonian "inconfusedly" and "unchangeably" relating to the natures, and the "indivisibly" and "inseparably" relating to the person must be maintained. Actually, one might add, the Chalcedonian formula does not really express who Christ is in His nature and person, but what He is not. However, these four negative words remain important as protections and guidelines for the church through the ages. G. C. Berkouwer writes, "The four negatives of Chalcedon are the riches of a believing church. Its pronouncement is comparable to a double row of light beacons that mark off the navigable water in between and warn of dangers to the left and to the right" (The Person of Christ, 85). Operating within these negatives there is much "navigable water" for the church to reflect again and again on the reality of Jesus Christ.

[191]We will discuss this later.

[192]Literally, "since I know not a man" (as kjv).

[193]J. K. S. Reid writes, "The really improbable thing is not that the Son of God in taking flesh should be born of a virgin. It is rather that the Son of

God should take flesh at all" (A Theological Word Book of the Bible, article on "Virgin [Birth]"). Reid is not questioning the reality of either the Incarnation or the Virgin Birth, but is saying that the greater marvel ("the really improbable thing") is that God would take upon Himself human existence.

[194]Betrothal at that time constituted a marriage relationship though the sexual union had not yet been consummated. Note that Joseph took Mary as his wife (but without sexual relationship prior to Jesus' birth), so that when Jesus was born, Joseph was legally His father. Of course, in the eyes of people at large Joseph was both legally and actually Jesus' father. This is doubtless why Luke in his genealogy of Jesus writes of His "being supposedly the son of Joseph" (Luke 3:23 nasb). Although Jesus was not a physical or natural son of Joseph, He was a legitimate and legal son.

[195]The Greek word for "overshadow" is episkiazo. The same word is also used later in regard to the cloud that "overshadowed" those on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:34; see also Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7).

[196]This does not mean that the Holy Spirit was the father of Jesus. Jesus had but one Father in heaven. The Holy Spirit did not impregnate the womb of Mary but by His overshadowing power brought about the miraculous conception. Jesus Christ, therefore, was conceived, not begotten, by the Holy Spirit.

[197]There is no parallel to this in pagan religions. Many are the accounts of conceptions occurring through gods copulating with women. The offspring are depicted, however, as prodigies, half-gods and half-men. Jesus Christ, contrariwise, is wholly God and wholly man.

[198]It would be a mistake to say that Joseph could not be the father of Jesus because sin is passed down from the father rather than the mother. Calvin puts it well: "We do not hold Christ to be free from all taint, merely because he was born of a woman unconnected with a man but because he was sanctified by the Spirit, so that the generation was pure and spotless, such as it would have been before Adam's fall" (Institutes, II. 13.4, Beveridge trans.).

[199]The Greek word is hes, feminine gender. According to Robert H. Gundry, "The feminine gender of hes prepares for the virgin birth by shifting attention from Joseph to Mary" (Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art, 18).

[200]Recall these words: "He [Joseph] took his wife [or "took her as his wife"

nasb], but knew her not [“kept her as a virgin” nasb] until she had borne a son” (Matt. 1:24-25).

[201]Isaiah 7:14 in RSV and NEB reads “young woman” rather than “virgin” but KJV, NASB, and niv have “virgin.” The Hebrew word falmâ in the Old Testament means “young woman,” but, according to TWOT, “one of whose characteristics is virginity” (see, e.g., Gen. 24:43, where ‘almâ, translated “young woman” in rsv and “maiden” in nasb and niv, doubtless refers to a young woman who is still a virgin [so kjv translates it]). Incidentally, the lxx renders ‘almâ as parthenos in Isaiah 7:14, a Greek word that invariably means “virgin.” This is the same Greek word used in Matthew 1 for “virgin.”

[202]William Lane says that this text is “an important piece of evidence in support of the historicity of the Virgin Birth” (The Gospel of Mark, NICNT, 203n.).

[203]Some commentators have seen in Paul’s words a reference to the Virgin Birth. The Greek word translated “bora” in reference to Christ is ginomai. Later in Galatians 4:23, 29 where Paul speaks of Hagar’s son as “born according to the flesh” the Greek word is gennao. Paul never says Jesus was generated. (However, gennao is used in Matthew 1:20 of Christ.)

[204]This is the language of Docetism. Docetism held that Jesus was just apparently born; i.e., He received nothing from His mother, but merely passed through her. Contrariwise, Jesus was born a genuinely human being of the substance of true humanity.

[205]For all her extraordinary qualities there is no suggestion of Mary’s being sinless. She spoke of God as her “Savior”; hence she herself needed salvation. The Roman Catholic dogma of Mary’s “Immaculate Conception,” stating that Mary herself was conceived without sin (hence immaculately) and so was sinless when she bore Jesus, has no basis in Scripture. Incidentally, the Roman Catholic dogma of the “Blessed Assumption of Mary,” that at death she was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory, flows from the idea of her sinlessness. These Roman Catholic dogmas do serious disservice to the biblical picture of Mary. Even more radical terms such as “Mary, Queen of Heaven” and “Mary, Co- Redemptrix” are likewise prevalent. It is obvious that such departures from Scripture also have a critical negative effect on the place and work of Jesus Christ.

[206]Adam and Eve had no human parentage; however, neither of them was

born.

[207]In the Chalcedonian Creed (a.d. 451) the Virgin Mary is described as Theotokos, “God bearer” or, as often translated, “Mother of God”: “born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood” (Creeds of Christendom, 62). The intention of the Theotokos terminology was both to emphasize the deity of Christ (that Christ was God from the moment of His conception, hence Mary “the Mother of God”) and the fact that it was not the eternal God whom the Virgin mothered but God incarnate in human flesh, hence, “according to the Manhood.” This statement about Mary, not originally intending to exalt her, has unfortunately led to increased veneration and exaltation (see n. 210). It is far better and less misleading, I might add, to speak of Mary as mother of “the Son of God” (Luke 1:35), “mother of the Lord” (see Luke 1:43), or simply “the mother of Jesus” (John 2:1, 3; Acts 1:14).

[208]To be sure, according to Scripture, a person may choose to remain a virgin; indeed celibacy may be God’s calling for someone (see Matt. 19:12; 1 Cor. 7:7). But such a status is not more religious, holy, or honorable than marriage. In the words of Hebrews, “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled” (13:4 kjv).

[209]These words are used as a basis for Roman Catholicism’s “Hail, Mary, full of grace.” The critical Greek word, however, is charitoo, meaning “bestow favor upon, favor highly, bless” (BAGD). Mary therefore is a recipient of grace, not one who is herself “full of grace.” “Full of grace” leads to the misconception that Mary is a bestower of grace and therefore occupies a place between God and man to bestow blessings. Mary undoubtedly was highly favored by God to become the mother of Jesus Christ, but she was not thereby “full of grace.”

[210]Here a word may be added about Mary as “ever-virgin.” In the Creed of the Second Council of Constantinople (a.D. 553) Mary is described as “the holy, glorious, Theotokos, ever-virgin Mary.” Thus within approximately a century (from Chalcedon, A.D. 451), there is creedal development from Theotokos “Mother of God” to “ever-virgin” (aeiparthenos). Here a rapid growth in Mariology is already evident. Mary as “Mother of God” is now seen as too “holy” and “glorious” to have other children, indeed, even to enter into a sexual relationship; hence she is “ever-virgin.” That Mary was “ever-virgin” is flatly contradicted by Scripture. As was earlier quoted, Joseph “knew her not [that is, had no sexual relations with her] until she had borne a son”

(Matt. 1:25). Further, there are a number of New Testament references to Jesus' brothers and sisters (Matt. 12:46; 13:55-56; Mark 3:31; 6:3; Luke 8:19-20; John 2:12; 7:3-5, 10; Acts 1:14; Gal 1:19). Roman Catholics teach with no real biblical justification that these were cousins of Jesus (e.g., see jb footnotes on Matt. 12:46 and Acts 1:14). Such misinterpretation (obviously to shore up Mary's supposed perpetual virginity) is unconscionable.

211 There are those who claim that the biblical evidence is largely, if not wholly, drawn from portions of Scripture that are poetic, even legendary, hence should not be understood literally. Bultmann, e.g., speaks of "the legend of the Virgin birth" (Kerygma and Myth, 35), claiming that the Gospel accounts of such a birth are wholly mythological. These are nonhistorical stories that cry out for "demythologizing" in our scientific time. Contra Bultmann (and other similar writers), there is no suggestion in the Gospels that such accounts were written as legend or myth (Luke specifically claims his Gospel was based throughout on eyewitness accounts and careful investigation [1:1-4]). To be sure, there is mystery in these accounts, but mystery is by no means legend.

212 "So-called" because it was not written by the apostles. It probably dates to the sixth or seventh century in its final formulation.

213 The Fourth Gospel lays total emphasis on the eternal Word (John 1:1) becoming flesh (John 1:14). There is nothing said about the role of the Holy Spirit and Mary. Incidentally, this does not mean that John gives another way of viewing the Incarnation (as some have thought) but it emphasizes the eternal background and the historical fact of its occurrence.

214 Barth puts it thus: "The man Jesus is not the true Son of God because He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. On the contrary, because He is the true Son of God … He is conceived by the Holy Spirit and bora of the Virgin Mary" (Church Dogmatics 1.2.202).

215 For faith and salvation what basically counts is belief that God sent His Son (John 3:16), that God has come in the flesh (1 John 4:2-"every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God"). In New Testament preaching (the kerygma) there is no statement that belief in the miraculous birth is essential to salvation; indeed it is not mentioned at all. This is not to deny the importance of the doctrine, for it is surely biblical and important (as the next paragraph in the text above will stress), but it is not essential to the proclamation of the gospel.

[216]Contrariwise, to deny the miraculous conception accounts (now that they are declared in the biblical record) is not only to deny clear biblical teaching but also to jeopardize belief in the Incarnation. One who claims that the miraculous birth accounts are legend is not likely to believe in the Incarnation (e.g., Bultmann again: “What a primitive mythology it is, that a divine being should become incarnate” [Kerygma and Myth, 7]).

[217]In what follows I am not saying that there is only a unity of relationship that makes up the person of Christ. He is not merely a man perfectly related to God; He is primarily God and man, one person. However, Christ also as the Son of God discloses the perfect relationship with God the Father and as the Son of man with all men.

[218]Jesus on one occasion declared: “My food [“meat” kjv] is to do the will of him who sent me” (John 4:34).

[219]See the next chapter, “Atonement,” for a more detailed study.

[220]As discussed in prior pages.

14
The Atonement

At the heart of the Christian faith is the doctrine of the Atonement. All that has been said about the Incarnation now points in the direction of the Atonement, for “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15) —and the way by which that salvation became possible was through atonement.

I. MEANING

Quite literally and truly, the word atonement is “at-one-ment.”[1] It means to be, or cause to be, at one. It may refer to the end realized, an accomplished oneness, or the process whereby oneness is achieved. It is the latter which is more clearly the focus of the doctrine, namely, how the oneness is brought about. Certain obstacles stand in the way: it is only by their removal through some “at-one-ing” action that oneness can again be a reality.

To look a bit further: atonement is related particularly to overcoming a serious breach between two parties. It signifies taking some action that can make satisfactory reparation for an offense or injury and to cancel out the evil effects so that the two parties can be together again.

Atonement thus means “reconciliation.” For to reconcile is to restore to harmony; it is to bring together those who are estranged from each other.

The word “atonement” takes on its profoundest meaning only when it refers to the relationship between God and man. There is a wide and deep separation, brought about by man’s sin, that man cannot overcome. God Himself at fearful cost stepped into the situation and through His Son Jesus Christ provides the way to restoration of unity. In this way He brings about atonement or reconciliation.

Thus the apostle Paul writes, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself’ (2 Cor. 5:19). Again, “when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son … not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement”[2] (Rom. 5:10–11 KJV). Atonement, reconciliation through Jesus Christ, is indeed reason for great rejoicing!

II. PROBLEM

The basic problem to which atonement is related is twofold: *who God is* and *what man has become.* A careful consideration of each aspect is essential in viewing the wonder of the Atonement.

A. Who God Is[3]

God is a God of *love and mercy* in Himself and in all His ways. Hence, He looks with great compassion on His sinful creatures, feels all their weaknesses and infirmities, and takes no delight in their punishment. This divine love and mercy has been evidenced from the beginning when, after the first sin and fall, God Himself clothed the man and the woman with "garments of skins" (Gen. 3:21); this was a token of His tender love and care. In relation to Israel God declared Himself through Moses: "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exod. 34:6). Later, despite His punishment of Israel even to their foreign captivity, God cried out through the prophet Hosea: "How can I give you up, O Ephraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel! … My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender…. I will not again destroy Ephraim" (Hosea 11:8–9). God is ever loving and merciful toward His sinful and disobedient people.

In the New Testament God's love is further emphasized in that it relates to all mankind. The climactic statement of this undoubtedly is John 3:16—"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." This love is all the more shown in that the world God loved is sinful and evil. In the words of Paul: "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8 NIV). God's love is beyond all comprehension.

The love of God in relation to sinful man reaches out across the chasm to embrace all people. Yet how is that possible, since God is also holy and righteous? Let us turn to this next.

God is a God of *holiness and righteousness* in Himself and in all His ways. He finds sin and evil intolerable. He is "of purer eyes than to behold evil" (Hab. 1:13); hence He cannot overlook sin. When man and woman originally sinned, though they were clothed by Him after their fall, they were severely punished and removed from His presence: God "drove out the man [= man and woman]" (Gen. 3:24). As the Old Testament unfolds, God is shown to act in vengeance against a world filled with violence by sending a flood; in relation to Israel He at times was angered to the point of nearly destroying them. Also there is frequent reference in both the Old and New Testaments to God's fierce judgments coming on sinful nations and peoples.

In this sense God is a God of wrath. Paul writes in Romans: “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men” (1:18). So it is that all mankind stands under God’s wrath, for as Paul later declares: “None is righteous, no, not one” (3:10). Indeed, as Paul says in Ephesians, “We were by nature children of wrath” (2:3), and “The wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience” (5:6). The Book of Revelation again and again depicts the wrath of God being poured out upon an evil and unrepentant race.[4] The wrath of God is the continuing expression of God’s holiness and righteousness against sin and evil.

The holiness of God over against the sinfulness of man has created a vast breach. Hence, despite God’s love and mercy, reconciliation would seem all the more impossible.

God is a God of *truth and faithfulness* in Himself and in all His ways. Accordingly, He does nothing in relation to man that is out of conformity with His own character and the sinful condition of man. As the God of truth He cannot minimize either love or holiness. He acts in total integrity and is faithful to maintain every promise.

Therefore, when God provides an atonement for the human race, there is no compromise. He does not hold back His love because of His own purity and righteousness, nor does He slight His holiness (for example, by winking at sin) in order to embrace His sinful creatures. Rather, God acts true to Himself in total love and holiness.

How God does this is the wonder of the Atonement.

B. What Man Has Become[5]

Man is *a sinner* before God. In relatipn to God, man's thoughts and actions are futile, his heart is insensitive, and he walks in disobedience. He is prey to innumerable sicknesses and infirmities, to many worldly harassments, and there hangs over him the ever-present threat of death. Hence, despite the many positive things in life, there is a deep undercurrent of anxiety and fear, rooted in man's sinful situation.

Man has become an idolater—one who, whatever the lip service to God, is deeply committed to the things of this world. Likewise, there is an ingrained self-centeredness that, whatever the show of concern for others, pervades his every action. Man neither truly loves God nor his neighbor, and so again and again breaks the commandments in relation to both. Dishonoring God—having other gods before him—and making use of other people: such is mankind's continuing situation. Out of this prevailing condition flows every manner of evil: from hostility toward God to violence against humanity.

Man is a *guilty sinner meriting punishment.* As soon as the first man and woman had sinned against God, they felt shame and guilt, seeking to cover their nakedness (Gen. 3:7) and hiding themselves from God (v. 8). Immediately after the Fall they were punished: the woman was subjected to pain in childbearing and the man to toil on cursed ground (Gen. 3:16–19). Later God declared about Himself: "He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished" (Exod. 34:7 NASB). Guilt and punishment go together.

Deep within the human race is a sense of guilt and condemnation that is ineradicable. Man knows, however much he may try to cover it up, that he is deeply in the wrong before God and stands under God's fierce judgment.

Physical death is in itself an aspect of God's punishment. God's words to man after the first sin also include the declaration "You are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19). Beyond physical death is the far worse punishment of spiritual death, which results in eternal punishment.[6] Death, physical and spiritual, grips all mankind.

Man is a *sinner in bondage.* He is actually a slave of sin, subject to its dictates and unable to be freed from its domination. The exile of the first man and woman from Eden with the "flaming sword" (Gen. 3:24) barring reentrance points up their estrangement from God and the impossibility of return. The Old

Testament is the continuing record of a human race that is totally corrupt (Gen. 6—at the time of the Flood) and vain (Gen. 11—the tower of Babel), and of a people (Israel) who, despite deliverance from earthly bondage in Egypt, constantly turned from God and His commandments. Thus are they in spiritual bondage. Accordingly, even the law that God gave them was, because of their bondage to sin, not a way of life but of death.

It is increasingly apparent that the root of bondage is the evil power, Satan, that first tempted the man and the woman. By succumbing to temptation then and thereafter, the human race lives under his dominion. In the New Testament Jesus calls Satan "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31), signifying that humanity was under Satan's authority.

Man as sinful and fallen is man helplessly in bondage.

The problem that emerges from who God is and what man has become is great indeed. First, God, who is loving and gracious, does not desire the punishment and death of any of His creatures. Yet in His holiness and righteousness He cannot tolerate their sin and evil. This does not mean a tension within God, as if there was a conflict between love and holiness, for God is *wholly* love and *wholly* righteousness. Hence when He acts, He does so without conflict or compromise. So is He also *wholly* true in His every action toward sinful man. Second, man cannot change his sinful condition, cleanse his guilt, or overcome his bondage. He cannot truly keep God's commandments—or return to His presence. Death, both temporal and eternal, is his tragic destiny. The human situation is utterly hopeless unless God provides a way out.

Thus the way that God does act to bring about at-one-ment—the reconciliation of the world—is beyond all human devising. For in it is displayed the infinite wisdom of God, in which mercy and righteousness and truth are conjoined; the eternal power of God, by which the act of atonement is put into operation; and the unaltering presence of God that carries His plan through to ultimate fulfillment.

III. METHOD

The way God worked out the reconciliation of the world was through *the death of Jesus Christ.* I repeat again the words of Paul: "We were reconciled by the death of his Son." In this simple statement is found the amazing, humanly inconceivable way that God has taken to bring about atonement. In the death of Christ is our at-one-ment with God.

The death of Christ is the primary focus of the gospel, the good news of salvation. "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received," says Paul, "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). For it is in Christ's death for our sins that God brought about our reconciliation to Himself.

Let us recall for a moment who it was who died. On the one hand it was the eternal Son of God, who had become flesh; on the other hand, it was the Son of man totally identical with all mankind except for sin. As the one person, Jesus Christ, He lived a life of complete obedience to the Father's will so that His death was that of One who is holy and righteous. Hence, His death was not the result of His sin, as with all others of mankind; it was, as Paul says, "for our sins."

Thus we come to the critical center of the death of Christ. Since it was for our sins, His death was a *sacrifice.* It could not be for His sins, for He had none, but for ours; thus it was a sacrificial death. The New Testament rings with the note of this sacrifice. John the Baptist, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, cried: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). In the Book of Revelation myriad voices in heaven acclaim, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain" (5:12). Paul speaks of Christ as "our Passover Lamb [who] has been sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7 NIV). Hebrews identifies Christ as our great High Priest who "has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself' (9:26). Christ as the Lamb who was slain and Christ as the High Priest who offered Himself: such representations are images of sacrifice.

Let us look more closely at several aspects of Christ's sacrifice. It was *once for all.* In the figure of the great High Priest, "he entered once for all into the Holy Place" (Heb. 9:12); He "appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself' (v. 26). Paul writes, "The death he died he

died to sin, once for all" (Rom. 6:10). Thus the yearly repetition of sacrifices called for in the Old Testament is no longer necessary. The Day of Atonement (Lev. 16) on which the high priest annually entered into the holy place to make sacrifices has been replaced by the one great sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ! It has been done, and no further sacrifice for sin can ever be in order again.

It was the *sacrifice of Himself.* Again Hebrews declares, "He has no need, like those [Old Testament] high priests to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people: he did this once for all when he offered up himself' (7:27). The amazing, incredible fact is that Christ was both priest and victim, both sacrificer and sacrifice. Thus even as days of sacrifice are no more, so animal sacrifices have been eliminated. Christ, the eternal Son of God in human flesh, died on our behalf.

It was a *sacrifice without blemish.* Christ "through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God" (Heb. 9:14). He was "a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Peter 1:19).[7] This was the climax of His whole life of obedience and purity: His death was the offering of a holy and perfect sacrifice.

Finally, we may observe the biblical emphasis on the *blood of Christ.* It is "the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:14); it is the high priest "taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood" (Heb. 9:12). Indeed, it is "by the blood of the cross" that God has made reconciliation: "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Col. 1:19–20).

Through the blood of Christ's sacrificial death God has wrought the mighty work of reconciliation.

IV. CONTENT

What happened in the death of Jesus Christ that made possible the reconciliation of all things? How through Christ's sacrifice was atonement brought about? In answering these questions, we will observe three things.

A. Identification—He Shared Our Lot

Christ was identified with all of sinful mankind in His death. Paul writes that "for our sake he [God] made him [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). Again Christ became "a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree'" (Gal. 3:13). All of this was voluntary on Christ's part—to be identified with sin, to become a curse for all mankind.

We may look back before the death of Christ through the Gospels and observe how Jesus was constantly identifying Himself with people. Love and compassion were the keynote of His life. "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt. 9:36). He reached out to the sorrowing, the diseased, the blind, the lame—sensing their deep need, sharing their pain, becoming one with them. The prophet Isaiah spoke of the coming Messiah: "Surely he has borne our griefs[8] and carried our sorrows"[9] (Isa. 53:4). This was true throughout His life. He reached out to physical and spiritual infirmities, touching blind eyes, deaf ears, withered hands. As He identified with their misery, His healing was poured into them.

Moreover, He was always where the sinners (the tax collectors, the harlots, etc.) were, feeling their sin and shame in Himself. To the woman taken in adultery He declared, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again" (John 8:11). Without approving her sin, He identified with her situation, her self-condemnation and guilt, and forgave her. He was "numbered with the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12)[10] not only in death but also throughout life.

Doubtless, the most incredible identification of all was with His enemies: hailing Judas as "friend" (Matt. 26:50) even in the hour of Jesus' betrayal, healing the ear of the high priest's servant at His arrest (Luke 22:50–51), and climactically crying out from the cross concerning those who tortured him; "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). The very moment of their most intense hostility was the supreme moment of His identification with them.

But it was in His death on the cross that He became totally identified with all the sin of the human race. He died as a criminal between two thieves as a token of His identification with all the evil and wickedness of the world. Christ became the one great Sinner. As the Son of God He could reach out to the whole world

in its sinfulness and death and embrace it as His own; as the Son of man He could do this not from afar but in our own flesh.

All of this means that Christ in His great love and compassion was taking the place of the evildoer. Thus it was—incredible to relate—Christ in our place, Christ our substitute, Christ dying for you and for me. It was Christ a vicarious sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. There was nothing mechanical or forced about this. In one sense "the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6), but in another He was voluntarily taking it to Himself. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24).

For herein God in His infinite love and mercy, and in our flesh, was made a curse for us that we might be forever blessed.

B. Subjection—He Bore Our Punishment

As we focus yet more intensely on the cross, we recognize that it was not simply Christ's sharing our sin but also bearing our punishment. Is this possible to believe? Listen: "He was pierced[11] for our transgressions, he was crushed[12] for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him" (Isa. 53:5 NIV). One step more: "it was the LORD's will to crush him" (53:10 NIV). But how could this be? The answer is unmistakable. As the one great Sinner—the one who had become sin, the one who was accursed beyond all that ever lived—all the wrath of God Almighty was poured out upon Him. The head of the serpent was someday to be crushed (Gen. 3:15),[13] but at this moment Christ had become so identified with evil that the crushing was on Him. This weight of the divine fury directed against sin at the cross is humanly inconceivable. For at Calvary all the sin of all the world was receiving the outpoured vials of divine wrath. It was for Christ alone to bear that awesome punishment and to experience its indescribable torment and anguish.

So did He cry forth the most agonizing cry the world has ever heard: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). The Son of God, having so become sin that the Father could not look upon Him, now experienced the horrible God-forsakenness that belongs to hell itself. Please, this was not a bloody sacrifice to placate a vengeful deity who in sadistic evil was venting His malice upon an innocent victim. But (listen!) this was God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, enduring our condemnation and punishment, dying for the sins of all mankind.

Christ bore our punishment! Our wholly deserved judgment and death He has fully borne. This is vicarious punishment—beyond all human measure. Christ experienced (who can comprehend it?) the full consequences of our sinful condition—forsakenness, abandonment by God, damnation itself.[14] He has taken our place, He has received the judgment upon Himself, He has gone all the way.

Hence, there is no longer need for anyone to live in fear or anxiety about the judgments of God. To be sure, He is a God of holiness, righteousness, and purity who cannot tolerate even an iota of sin, whose wrath is a consuming fire against all evil, and who will not allow sin to go unpunished. But now out of His great mercy and love shown through His Son, He has totally received upon Himself the punishment that is our due. Thus we need have no fear. As Calvin has put it: "We must especially remember this substitution that we may not live out our

lives in anxiety and trepidation."[15]

All people know deep inside, if they are honest with themselves, that they are in the wrong with God. There is an inescapable sense of guilt and condemnation leading to death and judgment. They may seek to cover it over,[16] try to forget it, or run from it, but it is there in all its inward torment. This is far more than a psychological matter; it is profoundly spiritual. They feel themselves to be on the verge of hopelessness and despair. There is no way out, humanly speaking, from the oppressing guilt and its accompanying judgment and condemnation. Something is wrong deep inside.

Nor does it help to speak of following God's commandments, doing His will, as a possible solution. Realizing who God is in all His awesome holiness and righteousness can only make one cry out as the prophet Isaiah did: "Woe is me! For I am lost!"[17] (Isa 6:5). Nothing a person may *do* will suffice; for he is guilty through and through, and on the way to condemnation and death.

Here, then, we return to the astounding message of the Bible, spoken to man in his misery and despair: There is One, like unto all of us, a man, verily "the Son of God" but also "the Son of man," who has assumed our guilt (in all its staggering proportions—every single bit of it), taken upon himself our condemnation, and received the awful punishment that is our due. God in His grace through Jesus Christ has done all this that we might be saved.

We now arrive at the biblical term that vividly sums up this whole divine action: *expiation.* Paul writes of how "God put forward [Christ] as an expiation[18] by his blood"[19] (Rom. 3:25). In Christ's death there is both the extinguishing of the guilt of sin and the payment of the penalty. There is cleansing in Christ's blood—our guilt and pollution are done away—and the reception of God's just judgment and His condemnation on sin and evil. The letter to the Hebrews speaks of Christ as great high priest "to make expiation for the sins of the people" (2:17). According to 1 John, Christ is "the expiation[20] for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (2:2; cf. 4:10). In the Old Testament an animal was slain as a vicarious substitute, thus receiving the penalty of death that was due the Israelite. But such a sacrifice was inadequate to deal with the totality and depth of human sin[21] —something only Christ—representing both God and man—could accomplish.

How amazing the New Testament message! In the words of Paul, God "did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32). It is grace all the way! Christ Himself has borne the full weight of my sin. The sin is no longer mine; it is His. He has taken my guilt to Himself; my punishment He has received. Christ in my place has done it all. Hence, the wondrous message of the

gospel: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). To God be the glory and thanksgiving!

C. Completion—He Took Away Our Sin

We now press on to the climax. Not only did Christ identify with our lost condition, not only did He receive the just punishment our sins deserved, but also in His death He freed us from our sin. John the Baptist proclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). John prophetically announced Christ's mighty work to be wrought at Calvary's cross. In His death not only did He endure the curse and receive the divine judgment on our behalf, but also He set us free from our bondage to sin and evil.

Here we may first note the word *ransom.* During His ministry Jesus proclaimed that "the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom[22] for many" (Matt. 20:28; cf. Mark 10:45). Hence his life poured out in death ransomed those in bondage; it was the price paid that people might be set free. Paul writes that "there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom[23] for us all" (1 Tim. 2:5–6). The death of Him who was Son of God and Son of man was the price paid to set us free from captivity.

The bondage of the sinner is a tragic thing indeed. He is enslaved to the ways of the world, to the power of Satan, and to death itself. There is utterly no way he can liberate himself. Since the fall of Adam man has known no freedom from the domination of his own impulses and the seductions of the world. His will leaves him powerless to live a righteous and a holy life. Without the grace of God surely man is utterly lost. The gospel message is truly glorious news: Christ has come for the one purpose of ransoming mankind by His death on the cross. No longer, therefore, are we in bondage to the past. As Peter graphically puts it: "You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers … with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Peter 1:18–19).

Truly, in the language of Paul, we have been "bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23). The price was the death of Christ, His very blood. The heavenly song in the Book of Revelation rings forth: "Worthy art Thou … for Thou was slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (5:9 NASB). Such was the purchase price—our ransom: the blood of Christ.[24]

Another expression similar to ransom is *redemption.*[25] Christ by His death on

the cross has not only ransomed mankind and paid the price of sin's captivity but He has also brought about release. The opening words of Jesus' ministry contain the statement "He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives" (Luke 4:18). On the Mount of Transfiguration when Moses and Elijah appeared, they spoke of Jesus' "departure [literally "exodus"[26] —hence deliverance] which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31). Accordingly, at the cross Christ accomplished that exodus, that vast deliverance and release. In the words of Paul, "He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption" (Col. 1:13–14). How great the deliverance, the release, the redemption not only *from* but also *to:* from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of Christ!

Moreover, the death of Christ brought this all about. He not only bore the just judgment of God for our sin so that we do not have to receive it, but He has also delivered us from our bondage to sin. And it results from expiation in the blood of Christ. Paul speaks of "the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood" (Rom. 3:24–25). For, to say it again, not only has God in Christ cleansed away our guilt and endured our punishment and condemnation through expiation in His blood, but also He has wrought our deliverance. He has redeemed us at vast cost, the bondage is no more—we are free in Christ Jesus!

In this connection it is important to emphasize that the death of Christ was a victory over the *dominion of Satan.* In the Book of Hebrews is the strong statement that Christ partook of our human nature "that through death He might render powerless[27] him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver[28] those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives" (2:14–15 NASB). According to 1 John, "the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy[29] the works of the devil" (3:8). Thus the death of Christ was a victory over Satan.[30] Although Christ's death was a seeming defeat, He actually broke Satan's power over death. For in Christ's vicarious death the fear of death was removed for all men. He submitted Himself to what had awaited every person at death—all hell's fury. Having borne that fury totally, He nullified the devil's power so that mankind thereafter may be released from all fear.

Let us speak further of the great importance of this release from the fear of death. Everywhere people are haunted by the realization that they are moment by moment moving toward death and the grave. However, what really disturbs them —even though they may seek to cover it over—is not death itself, but the deep fear about what it means, what may await them "on the other side." It is Death *and* Hades, the grave *and* "him who had the power of death," that causes

profound, often deeply hidden, anxiety and foreboding. What a glorious realization—what freedom and joy—to know and believe that in Christ there is nothing, absolutely nothing, to fear. On the other side of the grave it is Christ who awaits us, who has gone ahead to prepare a place for us. Satan has been rendered powerless; he no longer can grasp us at death to escort the soul to his abode. All fear is gone, because Christ has in His death received all hell's fury, and there is *nothing* left to vent upon us. To God, to Christ, be eternal praise and glory!

There is yet a further word about the freedom that Christ's death has brought about. By His death Christ has set us free from *the demands of the law.* Paul wrote the Galatians: "Christ redeemed[31] us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (3:13). The law is thereby depicted as a curse from which Christ has redeemed us (or bought our freedom), Himself becoming a curse in His death. Or to change the imagery somewhat, Paul speaks in Colossians about how Christ has "cancelled the bond which pledged us to the decrees of the law.[32] It stood against us, but he has set it aside, nailing it to the cross" (2:14 NEB). The picture is that of the law and its decrees as a bond—hence a bond with "legal demands"[33] —that has been nailed to the cross in the death of Christ. No longer does the bond threaten us, demand payment, and thus enslave us. The bond has been canceled by the death of Christ. In Ephesians Paul speaks of how Christ "is our peace who has made us both one [referring to Jew and Gentile] … by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances" (2:14–15). Although the imagery of a "bond" is not used here, the idea is the same. Christ has set aside the accursed demands of the law, thereby bringing freedom and salvation for all people.

All of this is cause for great rejoicing! The law given by God, whether engraved on the conscience of man, enshrined in the Old Testament commandments, or even spoken by Jesus in the Sermon of the Mount, is truly God's way of righteousness for all mankind. However, man, because of his sinfulness, is unable to live up to the demand of the law. And so the law, which is God's way of life, becomes the way of death.[34] Hence, what is good has become a curse, a threatening bond, a demanding taskmaster. No matter how hard one tries—and people have often striven mightily—there is no way to measure up. How amazing then the message of the gospel! Christ in His death on the cross has become the curse, canceled the bond, and set us free![35]

So in all these ways, Christ has taken away our sin. The price of our captivity to sin has been paid, we have been released from the chains of evil, and have been set free from bondage to Satan, the power of death, and the demands of the

law. Such is the great deliverance wrought through the atoning death of our Lord Jesus Christ.[36]

V. SUMMARY

Thus “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.” He has performed a mighty work by which the world is restored to unity and oneness with Him. This was made possible through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us briefly summarize the whole picture: in terms of the situation, the solution, and the cost of forgiveness.

A. The Situation

God Himself is the One sinned against in all the actions of mankind. Man may, and does, commit many an evil against his fellow man, but ultimately every sin is against God. The psalmist captures this profound truth: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight"[37] (Ps. 51:4). Sin is heinous indeed, since basically it is faithlessness and rebellion against the God of holy love. Each sin is a betrayal of the God who has made man, provides for his every need, and shows him the way to abundant life. It is a spurning of the vast love of God when man turns against his Maker—like an arrow that plunges into the very heart of God. The cry of God through the prophet Isaiah—"Sons have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people does not understand" (1:2–3)—is also the cry of the God of love over the whole human race. God—we cannot stress it too much—is the One who is sinned against in all mankind's sin and evil.

Man as a result carries within himself a fearful load of guilt and misery. This is due to the fact that there is no sin greater than that against love. Since sin—every sin—is a breach of faith with infinite love, man can but contain deep within himself a huge deposit of guilt. This may not always be recognized, for people usually do almost anything to avoid the truth about themselves. Hence many a palliative for guilt is sought after,[38] but the guilt remains, for to betray love is the ultimate evil. But also man is in a miserable plight because in his sin he has contravened the holiness and righteousness of Almighty God. His every sin, no matter how small or how large, is utterly contrary to the holy God and therefore stands under His wrath and judgment. Man consequently not only has deep feelings of guilt within but also a profound sense of condemnation. "*Woe* is me; for *I* am *lost*!" Again he may, and often does, seek to avoid this condemnation—to excuse himself, to blame others, to pretend it is "only psychological," and on and on—but it is still there. If he is honest with himself, man knows that he deserves only the fires of the divine wrath against sin: the penalty of judgment and death. He is doomed to destruction.

God and man therefore are separated by the vast gulf brought about by human sin. God in His infinite love and compassion, despite His constant wounding by man, yearns to save His creature. But in His infinite holiness and righteousness He hates and condemns the sin that has pervaded His creature's being. Man on

his part can do nothing to alter his situation: he *is* a sinner through and through. He continues to spurn and betray the God of holy love, he carries a heavy inward weight of guilt and misery, and he is under an unrelievable weight of condemnation. It is in this seemingly impossible situation—from both the divine side and the human side—that God in His great wisdom moves to bring about reconciliation. We can but cry with the apostle: “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Rom. 11:33). God’s way of atonement, in which the breach is overcome, far transcends all human imagination.

B. The Solution

God in Jesus Christ by His sacrificial death on the cross—the shedding of His blood—has made atonement. For we behold in His agony on Calvary, first, the figure of One who receives to Himself all the bitterness, the antagonism, the malice of the world without fighting back. The greatness of God's love is yet further shown in that Christ reaches out in mercy to His tormentors, calling for the Father's forgiveness of their wicked deeds. He even (marvelous to relate) shares their lostness, their guilt, and their misery by becoming so identified with them in His humanity that their guilt, their lostness, and their misery become His own. The world's agony is the agony of Jesus Christ!

Next is the very heart of the atonement: Christ our Lord on the cross with love incomprehensible so voluntarily identified with sin and evil on the cross as actually to *become* sin (2 Cor. 5:21), thereby willingly subjecting Himself to the wrath of Almighty God. For the God of infinite love and compassion who receives man's vicious attacks and yet goes on loving, the God who identifies Himself with the agony of the world, is at the same time the God of holiness and righteousness. Therefore when His only Son becomes wholly identified with the sin of all mankind with its accompanying guilt and misery, the God of "purer eyes than to behold evil" (Hab. 1:13) pours out on Him the judgment and condemnation that all people deserve. Jesus Christ as the Son of man—man of every time and place—alone could take the place of every man who ever lived. As the Son of God and therefore one with Almighty God, He alone could receive the total weight of the divine judgment. So did He—the Lord Jesus Christ—suffer *our* sin, *our* judgment, *our* condemnation, *our* death, *our* destruction.

The glorious result: in Christ and through Christ we have been set free! Jesus Christ in our place has done it all. In bearing our judgment and condemnation we have been liberated—ransomed, redeemed, bought with a price—from the ravages of sin and evil. Through the blood of Christ our guilt has been expunged, our sin taken away. We no longer are in bondage to death, the devil, or the curse of the law. Throughout time and eternity we will ever sing: "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift" (2 Cor. 9:15) in our Lord Jesus Christ.

C. The Cost of Forgiveness

Another way of summarizing the whole matter of atonement is to view it in terms of divine forgiveness. Here we begin by recalling the words of Jesus: "This is my blood of the [new][39] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28). The pouring out, or shedding,[40] of Jesus' blood was for forgiveness of sins. We may, accordingly, speak of the death of Jesus—the shedding of His blood—as the cost of God's forgiveness. Let us observe several things.

First, it is important to recognize that only the one sinned against is in a position to forgive.[41] Christ was supremely sinned against because in His suffering and dying on the cross He endured the attack of evil, not only of those who directly put Him to death but of sinful man of every race and age. As God in human flesh He could and did receive this total attack. If there was to be forgiveness, it could come only from Him. But it would be at a terrifying cost.

Second, Christ in His great love received the assault of mankind's sin and evil without fighting back. In the fulfilled words of Isaiah 53: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth" (v. 7). He accepted the gibes and mockery of those around the cross, He suffered the pain and anguish of the crown of thorns and the spikes of nails, He did not call down legions of angels from heaven to scatter and destroy the vicious foe. He simply took it all—all the evil of mankind reinforced by the powers of darkness. The agony of Christ dying on the cross therefore is beyond all comprehension; His affliction without retaliation transcends all that mankind has ever known.

Third, not only did Christ receive all of evil's bitter onslaught, but He also reached out in compassion to bear evil's shame, guilt, and condemnation. Although He was wounded by the transgressions of the world, His even greater anguish was that of sensing the utter loss, misery, even damnation of those attacking Him, and (marvel beyond marvels) in infinite compassion receiving that misery and condemnation as if it were His own. "He was pierced for *our* transgressions; he was crushed for *our* iniquities; the punishment that brought *us* peace was upon him …" (Isa. 53:5 NIV). As a result, in His great love and mercy He took away the sin, the guilt, the punishment of the world and gave us His peace and salvation.

In the latter point the full meaning of forgiveness now stands out. Forgiveness is the way of love that not only receives every attack without fighting back but,

even more, it actively reaches out to the transgressor to identify with his lostness, his guilt and condemnation, and to make that its own. Love may indeed suffer much from the assaults of evil even to anguish and death, but love is the more fully demonstrated when its concern is for the inward torment of those perpetrating the assaults.

A loving earthly father, for example, may be deeply hurt by a son who turns against him and attacks him. But if that father is full of compassion, he will suffer most of all for the son's own resulting condition of bitterness and guilt. Indeed, the father deep within will bear it as his own and take upon himself his son's resulting self-condemnation. This is the meaning of forgiveness.[42] And it occurred supremely at the cross, for there Christ endured the attack, not of one person, but of all mankind. Rather than retaliate, He assumed to himself the world's misery, guilt, and punishment.

Through the forgiveness of Christ—His blood "poured out"—there is atonement. God has thereby reconciled the world to Himself. We earlier quoted Paul's words "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." Now we hear Paul as he continues: "… not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Cor. 5:19). "Not counting" means forgiving. Indeed, Paul's further statement that "for our sake he [God] made him [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin" (v. 21) expresses what happens in not counting, that is, in forgiveness. For God in Christ totally identifies with the sinners, not counting their trespasses against them but against Himself. Thus did Christ in forgiving become sin, suffering its hideous effects of guilt and punishment "so that [as Paul adds] we might become the righteousness of God."

It is apparent that forgiveness is no light-hearted indulgence or winking at sin. It is not some casual "you are forgiven" that costs little or nothing to say and has little or no results. God's gift of forgiveness, quite the contrary, is costly beyond measure because its price was Christ's enduring our torments.[43]

Nor does forgiveness replace the wrath of God. Indeed *it endures that wrath*, the wrath a sinful world knows in its guilt and condemnation and which Christ experienced in His suffering and dying on the cross. Forgiveness bears the weight of God's fierce judgment on the sin of mankind.

Forgiveness, we should add, is not something made possible by the death of Christ. It was not as if Christ had to die to appease God's anger so that as a result God could forgive.[44] Rather, in Christ's very death on the cross there is forgiveness—His blood "poured out … *for* the forgiveness of sins." Forgiveness includes bearing the weight of the divine judgment on a sinful world. Hence, the death of Christ does not make forgiveness only possible; it makes it actual. In his

death our sins are forgiven and taken away.[45]

This means one further thing, namely, that forgiveness is the way of total release. Since Christ in forgiveness has taken upon himself the full weight of human sin and evil, mankind no longer has to carry it. Let me speak personally. Our sin is no longer our own; at infinite cost He has taken it to Himself. Our guilt and condemnation are no longer on us; at infinite cost He has suffered their full consequences. Through forgiveness *it is totally Christ in our place, and we are wholly set free!*

But we could not stop here without adding that the knowledge of such costly freedom must surely bring about profound joy and thanksgiving. He did *all that* on our behalf; in forgiveness He reached out to assume our guilt, even to enduring our punishment to the depths of hell itself. Such boundless love, such amazing grace! Let us continually rejoice and express thanksgiving now; we will certainly do so throughout eternity.

Now a few closing statements about reconciliation. It is important first to emphasize that Christ has wrought atonement for the sins of *all* mankind. It is not limited to the few but includes everyone in the entire world. We recall again the words of Paul: "God was in Christ reconciling *the world* to himself'; also the words of 1 John: "He is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of *the whole world*" (2:2).[46] Hence any idea of a "limited atonement"[47] is contrary to the teaching of Scripture, for Christ "came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15)—not just a few, or many, but all. This, of course, does not mean universal salvation, for what Christ has done for the whole world must become a matter of faith: "God so loved *the world* … that *whoever believes* in him [Jesus Christ] should not perish but have eternal life."[48] Hence, while the Atonement is unlimited, salvation is limited to those who come to faith in Jesus Christ.

This leads to a second point, often called "the finished work" of Christ. In regard to this, we vigorously affirm that in the Atonement the separation, the breach between God and man, *has been overcome* through Jesus Christ. What God has done through the death of Christ in sharing our lostness, expiating our guilt and punishment, and carrying away our sin is a finished work. The last word of Jesus from the cross as recorded in John, "It is finished!"[49] (19:30 NASB), is the triumphant affirmation of a work completed, a victory won. We can add nothing to it: it is an objective atonement:[50] He *has ransomed* us, He *has redeemed* us, He *has defeated* Satan. It is a finished work.

Third, it is important to add that the reconciliation God has accomplished needs to be *received*. Paul writes (as earlier quoted) that "while we were enemies

we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (this is a finished work), and he adds that by Christ "we have now received our reconciliation" (Rom. 5:10–11). God has bridged the gap and reconciled us to Himself. Yet we must receive it, else despite God's completed work, we are still unreconciled to Him. Shortly after his statement "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself," Paul continues: "We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). Our part is to receive—and that again means faith (as earlier mentioned). By faith we receive what God in Christ has done for us, and *in* Him by His wondrous grace we enter into total reconciliation.

As we conclude this chapter on the Atonement, we may have many feelings of amazement, thanksgiving, and joy for what God has done. We may well stand awed and amazed at a love and grace in Jesus Christ so immeasurable as to compel Him to suffer and die for a sinful world—for people like you and me. We can never be thankful enough that our Lord was willing to go all the way, even to bearing our condemnation, that we might be saved. Let us together rejoice with joy unspeakable that through His great act of reconciliation we will live eternally in His presence.

EXCURSUS: THEORIES OF THE ATONEMENT

Whereas the orthodox view concerning Jesus Christ as one person in two natures was established in the early creeds of Christendom,[51] there was at no time the elaboration of an official view of the Atonement. The most that was said in this regard was that Christ "for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven."[52] *How* this salvation was accomplished is nowhere stated. The result is that no one view of the Atonement to the present time has commanded the full consent of Christendom.

Briefly I will now sketch the three main theories of the Atonement set forth at different times in the history of the church. While not inclusive, they demonstrate something of the variety of approaches to the Atonement. I will also make some evaluative comments.

A. Ransom to Satan

Many of the early church fathers viewed the atonement as a victory over Satan procured through the ransom of Christ.[53] Since Jesus had said that he came to "give his life as a ransom for many," there must have been someone to whom the ransom was paid. The answer, these churchmen held, was Satan, since he held humanity captive until Christ came.

From this perspective the death of Christ was a kind of deal worked out between God and the devil, namely, that He would turn over His Son to Satan in exchange for the release of all the souls held captive by him. It was an arrangement that Satan was delighted to accept because in his mind the value of the Son of God far outweighed all humanity in his possession. Hence when Christ died on the cross and descended into hell, Satan thought he had his prize at last. However (and here Satan the ancient deceiver was himself deceived), try as hard as he might, he could not hold Christ fast. Christ's humanity he sought to destroy, but His divinity Satan could not overcome.[54] When Christ rose victorious from the dead, Satan lost not only his ransom prize but also all the vast multitude of souls in his possession.

Looking back at this ransom-to-Satan view expressed in varying ways over many centuries,[55] we may immediately be put off by certain aspects. For one thing, there is no suggestion in the New Testament that Jesus Christ was a ransom paid to Satan. Surely Christ spoke of giving His life as a ransom, for through His death man would be released from total bondage to sin, death, the law—indeed from Satan's dominion. However, "ransom" is better understood to express the costliness of salvation than to view it as a vast price paid to the adversary. Furthermore, it is hard to imagine God tricking the devil into thinking he would gain possession of Christ. Trickery is Satan's own game, not the Lord's! Most importantly, however, relating the death of Christ exclusively to Satan hardly touches on the more basic theme of reconciliation. Men may be set free from Satan's power, but are they thereby reconciled to God?

Despite the faultiness, even crudeness, of this ransom to Satan view, we should not deny that it contains important strands of truth. Christ did come "to destroy the works of the devil"; He did win a victory over all the forces of darkness; mankind is no longer held fast by Satan's power: Christ is victor![56] Moreover in this view the Atonement is a continuous work of God through

Christ; it is God in action all the way. Christ, accordingly, is not engaged in a work of reconciling or appeasing God the Father,[57] but He is totally the avenue by whom God wins the victory. Further, in this view of the Atonement an objective change[58] in relationship between God and the world *has* occurred. This is a fact whether one believes it or not. Hence even if ransom to Satan is an inadequate way of putting it, the joyous fact remains that the price of all mankind's salvation has been paid. The world after Calvary can never really be the same.

B. Satisfaction to God

In the high Middle Ages, Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) wrote a book entitled *Cur De us Homo (Why God Became Man).* In this small volume Anselm presented a quite different view of the Atonement from that of ransom to Satan, claiming that God became man in Jesus Christ to render proper satisfaction to the impugned honor of God. Sin, according to Anselm, dishonors the majesty of an infinitely great God and brings disorder into the universe. This dishonor of God cannot simply be overlooked or forgiven; it calls for either punishment or satisfaction on the part of the sinner.[59] However, if punishment is not to occur and satisfaction instead is to be made and sin put away, that satisfaction cannot be accomplished by man because his sin against the infinite God is infinite in character. Accordingly, only one who is God can provide this vast satisfaction. But since man owes it, it must also come from within humanity. This is why God became man in Jesus Christ: to make an offering sufficient to satisfy God's honor.

How then was this satisfaction rendered by the God-man? The answer of Anselm was that because Christ was both the great God and a sinless human being who accordingly did not have to die, His very death brought infinite glory to God, vindicated His honor, and restored order in creation. The infinite value of Christ's death equalized the infinite dishonor man's sin had wrought. God accepted the sacrifice of Christ as satisfaction to His affronted honor. Since Christ's work went far beyond what God required of Him—a work therefore of supererogation—Christ was granted as a reward the salvation of all those for whom He died.[60]

Anselm's theory of the Atonement in many ways is an improvement on the previous ransom theory. For one thing, it connects the Atonement with a requirement of God and not Satan: satisfaction to God rather than payment to the devil. Also there is much more stress on the seriousness of sin: God will not pass over it and leave it unpunished. When God is not honored, people merit punishment and death. Sin has infinite consequences. Further, Anselm's theory emphasized that this is a moral universe wherein the Atonement is the central piece in setting things right between God and man.

However, we must offer some criticism of Anselm's theory. The most obvious is that his basic focus is on God's honor. God seems much like a magnified feudal lord,[61] offended by the failure of His vassals to give Him proper respect.

Further, there is an undoubted commercial flavor[62] in the whole scheme: the *worth* of Christ's death is compared with the worth of God's honor and the negative worth of man's sins. This leads to an additional criticism. Because Anselm views this quantitatively, the superabundance of Christ's achievement may simply be passed on to people for their salvation. Accordingly—and here we offer another serious criticism—man is little more than a passive spectator of the whole drama that goes on outside him. Since there is an external transfer of merits, faith has little vital significance.

Finally, although Anselm did focus properly on the necessity of sin's punishment (an advance beyond the prior ransom theories) and demonstrated a way of its remission, there is still no removal of sin itself. Indeed, the Atonement is so much a transaction between God and Christ that man seems scarcely touched at all.

Anselm's stress on satisfaction to God, shorn of many of its negative features, has continued variously in both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), whose theology is normative for Roman Catholicism, spoke like Anselm of Christ's death as a work of sacrifice and declared that sacrifice "properly so called is something done for that honor which is properly due God in order to appease him."[63] Aquinas also spoke of the abundance of Christ's satisfaction as "not only a sufficient but a superabundant satisfaction for the sins of the human race."[64] Thomas Aquinas, however, was much broader than Anselm in his view of satisfaction: it relates not only to God's honor but also to his justice and mercy.[65]

This brings us now to the Reformation. Martin Luther (1483–1546) may be categorized as representing a certain kinship to the early church concerns about Satan. Although Luther did not espouse a ransom-to-Satan view of the Atonement, there is much in his writings that points to Christ's involvement with Satan in procuring man's salvation.[66] However, Luther's view was more centrally that of satisfaction, not to God's honor (as with Anselm) but to God's righteousness.[67] The righteous God needs to be reconciled to sinful man, and by the Atonement this occurs. By Christ's death forgiveness has been obtained[68] for man. Luther had a strong sense of the love and grace of God, but there was also in the background the dark and "hidden God" (the *deus absconditus)* who without Christ would be a terrifying figure: "Without Him [Christ] we should see nothing but an angry and terrible judge."[69] Hence, Christ's work in atonement was primarily a satisfying of the wrath of God and the demands of His law.[70] We may speak, then, of Luther's view of the atonement as basically that of *Penal*

Satisfaction.

John Calvin (1509–1564), like Luther, spoke often of satisfaction. For example, “By the sacrifice of his [Christ’s] death, he wiped away our guilt and made satisfaction for sin”;[71] Christ “by this expiation satisfied and duly propitiated God the Father.”[72] In regard to the necessity of Christ’s work of atonement, “there must be some mediator between God and man, to satisfy God by the shedding of blood, and the immolation of a victim which might suffice for the remission of sins.”[73] The necessity of appropriate satisfaction—a satisfaction that propitiates God the Father—is apparent. Calvin frequently also spoke of this propitiation as an appeasement of God’s wrath. Two examples may suffice: “He [Christ] declared the cause of his advent to be, that by appeasing God he might bring us from death to life”;[74] “had not Christ satisfied for our sins, he could not be said to have appeased God by taking upon himself the penalty which we had incurred.”[75] Calvin in such statements viewed God as “a just judge who cannot permit his law to be violated with impunity, but is armed with vengeance.”[76] It seems that in Calvin’s view God in His holiness and righteousness can be placated only by the death of Christ: thus his language of propitiation and appeasement. Yet, we must quickly add, Calvin in one place asks, “How can it be said that God who prevents [that is, “precedes”] us with his mercy, was our enemy until he was reconciled to us by Christ?”[77] Later Calvin strikingly answers: “Our being reconciled by the death of Christ must not be understood as if the Son reconciled us, in order that the Father, then hating, might begin to love us, but that we were reconciled to him already, loving, though at enmity with us because of sin.”[78] Such a statement of Calvin’s indicates a break with the satisfaction view wherein Christ reconciles the sinner to God, His love fending off the wrath of God. Rather, God’s love is operational throughout, and in Christ He brings about salvation.

With the successors of Luther and Calvin, there was a growing tendency to view the Atonement as essentially satisfaction to God’s justice. God’s love was increasingly subordinated to His justice so that the all-important thing becomes that of “the vindicatory justice of God.”[79] In such thinking the critical matter is that the Atonement so satisfied God’s justice that He could as a result forgive mankind. Forgiveness can occur only when judgment has been meted out. While God *may* show love, He *must* execute justice. Hence, the Atonement from this viewpoint is the full satisfaction of God’s justice;[80] thereupon God may embrace man in love.

Twentieth-century theologians in the Reformed tradition have frequently

spoken of the Atonement in terms of satisfaction. Louis Berkhof writes that the penal substitutionary or satisfaction doctrine is "the doctrine clearly taught by the Word of God."[81] The primary importance of satisfaction lies in the fact "that the atonement was intended to propitiate God and to reconcile him to the sinner."[82] This means further that "the demands of the law are met and that God is satisfied."[83] Karl Barth writes, "In His own word made flesh, God hears that satisfaction has been done to His righteousness, that the consequences of human sin have been borne and expiated… ."[84] Millard Erickson also writes, "It is the satisfaction theory which seizes upon the essential aspect of Christ's atoning work. Christ died to satisfy the justice of God's nature."[85] Satisfaction to God's righteousness, God's laws, God's justice—however stated—lies at the heart of the Atonement.

Let me add a few reflective comments. First, this post-Anselmian view of the Atonement as satisfaction to God's righteousness (or justice) is surely much closer to the heart of the gospel than Anselm's view is. What is at stake in the Atonement is the righteousness of God. Paul writes that in the gospel "the righteousness of God is revealed" (Rom. 1:17). To be sure, as Anselm saw it, God has not been given his due honor by mankind ("they did not honor[86] him as God" [Rom. 1:21]), and as the result of God's work in Christ people again may truly honor and glorify God. However, the Atonement as such is concerned with God's righteousness. Again, the post-Anselmian (especially Reformation) picture of Christ's death on the cross as vicarious and penal—Christ our Substitute and bearing the penalty of our sin—is surely in accord with the deepest meaning of the Atonement. Once more, a particular strength of this view is its powerful objectivity. The Atonement is a work of God—a finished work; it *has been* accomplished in Jesus Christ.

Some critical weaknesses in the satisfaction viewpoint, however, must be noted. For one thing, in many expressions of this viewpoint there is the suggestion that the righteousness or justice of God is more basic than His love and mercy: God *must* execute justice, He *may* show forth mercy. Yet from the biblical perspective, God is both wholly righteous and wholly loving; there can be no "mays" and "musts." Again, in the satisfaction picture there is frequently a split between God and Christ in that God is seen as wrathful and Christ as loving (recall especially Luther's view of the "hidden God"). It follows that the work of Christ is seen primarily as that of appeasing the Father's fierce anger against sin so that His wrath can turn to mercy. However, we must reply: the whole work of redemption is grounded in the love of God—"God so loved the world that he gave His only Son." "Satisfaction thinking" is too much oriented to God's being

reconciled, whereas the essential thrust of the New Testament is that of *man's' being reconciled:* "God was in Christ reconciling [not being reconciled] the world to himself' (2 Cor. 5:19). The Atonement was a *continuous* work of God the Father *through* the Son—not discontinuous (as if Christ had to set things right before the Father could proceed)—wherein the sins of mankind were expiated.

Perhaps the most serious criticism of "satisfaction" thinking is its failure to recognize the nature of free grace. Donald Bloesch, for example, writes that "atonement … is an act of God to satisfy his holiness before it is a declaration of forgiveness."[87] The word "before" sets satisfaction *prior* to forgiveness, thus making forgiveness the consequence of God's holiness being satisfied. This is an unfortunate error, since the grace, the forgiving grace, of God is operational throughout the work of Atonement. To be sure, the central fact in the Atonement is Christ as our vicarious Substitute. But this very substitution, this vicarious sacrifice, is the way of forgiveness. Atonement did not occur to make possible the forgiveness of sins; rather the Atonement is itself the expression of the divine forgiveness.

C. Moral Influence on Man

A generation after Anselm wrote his book on the Atonement, Abelard (1079–1142) set forth a view generally called the moral influence theory. Abelard's view was, in fact, a reaction against both the ransom-to-Satan and satisfaction-to-God's-honor theories of the Atonement. Abelard's view of the atonement had little influence at the time and for some centuries thereafter; however, it has been adopted in many liberal circles since the Reformation.

For Abelard the suffering and death of Christ is the ultimate demonstration of God's love and mercy which intends to evoke from us the response of love. Abelard wrote, "God in Christ has united our human nature to himself and, by suffering in that same nature, has demonstrated to us that perfection of love…. So we, through his grace, are joined to him as closely as to our neighbor by an indissoluble bond of affection."[88] We are "impartially justified by this manifestation of God's grace."[89] Again, "our redemption through Christ's suffering is that deeper affection in us which not only frees us from slavery to sin, but also wins for us the true liberty of sons of God, so that we do all things out of love rather than fear… ."[90] So by the divine influence—the influence of God's love and compassion—we enter into salvation.

From all the passages quoted above (many more could be added), it is apparent that in Abelard's view the exhibition of Christ's love has the power to elicit a corresponding love in man. It is not that God has somehow altered the human situation by the death of Christ; the change rather must take place in a the human heart. Through Christ's passion it is God's intention to woo man back to Himself: it is Love seeking to enkindle love. The obstacle between God and man is not that man is in bondage to Satan or that some satisfaction needs to be made to God through the death of Christ; the obstacle rests entirely in man. All that is needed is for man truly to behold the love and benevolence of God and allow his hardened heart to be transformed thereby.

Hence Christ's death on the cross is neither propitiatory nor expiative: it is altogether demonstrative. No objective change is needed in God's relation to man: only a subjective one in man himself. The force of Christ's vast love can bring about such a change. We may be moved by it in gratitude to repent and to love Him in return. Thus Christ does nothing in His death to alter the human situation; the alteration is totally within the heart of the one who in responsive love turns both to God and to his neighbor.

Surely there is much of value in Abelard's thinking about the Atonement. Over against exaggerated pictures of Satan's dominant place and God's impugned honor, Abelard seems refreshing. The love of God that had played almost no part in these previous views now occupies center stage.[91] Accordingly, with Abelard there is much more of a sense of the personal, ethical, and spiritual character of the work of God in Christ. Such a Scripture as "we love, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19) accords well with Abelard's perspective. There is a definite sense in Abelard's writing of the human impact of what God has done in Christ: the atonement affects man at his vital center. Perhaps the most important affirmative thing to say about Abelard's view is that the Atonement is seen as a continuous action of God in Christ to man. It is neither a matter of Christ's life as ransom to Satan nor as satisfaction to God that is the dynamic of the Atonement. In both such cases it was only *after* the way has been cleared by Christ—Satan-ward or God-ward—that God was free to move in, bringing man to salvation. Abelard by his stress on the love of God in Christ was able to make important modification of previous reflections on the Atonement.

On the other hand, Abelard's view suffers a number of inadequacies. First of all, this is a wholly subjective understanding of the Atonement. Until man responds in gratitude and love, there is no reconciliation. To be sure, in the suffering and death of Christ there is a marvelous demonstration of God's love, but, according to Abelard, it is nothing more. Nothing objective has happened, no atonement has been wrought: all this awaits the human response. Such a view is overly spectacular, as if God needed to prove His love by the death of Christ. Again, the Abelardian stress on God's love leaves almost totally untouched the matter of His holiness and righteousness, and thus also His radical opposition to evil. The suffering and death of Christ may awaken a response of love, but how does this action and response deal with such critical matters as sin, guilt, and punishment? The love of God so replaces holiness as actually to make no atonement necessary. Once more—and this follows—Abelard's kind of thinking minimizes, even disregards the whole area of expiation. God's love may have been shown forth in the suffering and death of Christ, but was it demonstration and nothing more? The answer must surely be that much, much more than that took place. For the cross was a costly expiation wherein the sins of the world were carried by God in Jesus Christ, and through that very action our redemption was accomplished. All that a person can do and must do is to receive what God has wondrously wrought.

Various forms of the moral influence theory have continued since Abelard's time. Just following Luther and Calvin, Faustus Socinus (1539–1604) depicted the Atonement altogether in terms of the example of Christ, namely, that in His

life and death Christ shows us the way of true living. Christ's death has no special atoning value; rather, God pardons whom He wills and calls us simply to follow in the way of Christ. Christ, accordingly, is supremely the moral teacher and example for all mankind,[92] and the Atonement is the change in us that Christ brings about. In the early nineteenth century Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) likewise viewed the Atonement as an event within our human experience. Christ, according to Schleiermacher, was a man in whom "God-consciousness" was complete, and through faith in Him we may enter into this blessed condition.[93] Hence, again, it is the influence[94] of Christ that brings about a change in man; in no sense is there need for an objective atonement. Later in the same century Horace Bushnell (1801–1876) spoke of the death of Christ as the supreme manifestation of the vicarious love of God whereby He softens human hearts and brings men to repentance. The Atonement, accordingly, is the change within man resulting from the powerful impact of God's sacrificial love.[95] Hastings Rashdall is a twentieth-century representative of the moral influence idea, stressing the example and effect of Jesus' obedience at Calvary to change human lives.[96]

The critique made earlier of Abelard's moral influence theory of the Atonement applies on the whole to the developments since that time. Of course, as was noted, Abelard wrote directly in response to Anselm's view of the Atonement as satisfaction to God's honor. Writers since Abelard who generally follow his thinking have more directly opposed the later developed views of satisfaction to God's justice. Basically the Abelardian perspective has not essentially changed over the centuries.

A word may be added by way of comparing the satisfaction and moral influence theories of the Atonement. On the one hand, satisfaction views properly understand the Atonement as an objective act of God: the Atonement is an accomplished fact. In the occurrence of Christ's passion and death the redemption of mankind has been wrought. Moral influence thinking—that Christ by His demonstration of loving sacrifice can change our lives—is far too anemic to probe the depths of the Atonement. On the other hand, influence views properly stress that the love of God is the controlling factor in the occurrence of the Atonement. The idea that God's righteousness must be appeased is totally missing. Accordingly, influence theories downplay, even overlook, God's wrath and holiness, but they do have the value of seeing the unity and continuity of the action of God in Christ.

In all of this there is obviously a tension in theory between God's righteousness and His love. Satisfaction thinking will not allow any minimizing

of God's righteousness and justice; moral influence thinking invariably counters with the stress on God's love and compassion. *Both are right:* The problem arises when one is emphasized above the other. God is a God of holiness *and* love; righteousness *and* grace; justice *and* mercy.

Since the act of atonement is initiated by God's love ("God so loved the world …"), then the primary matter in the Atonement is *not* the satisfaction of God's justice but the action of His mercy wherein He receives the full weight of His justice and judgment upon Himself. In this event love and righteousness have both been totally in operation. This is the way of the divine forgiveness, this is the Atonement, this is the reconciliation of the world to God.

[1]The word "atonement" is an Anglo-Saxon term deriving from the sixteenth century. According to the New Oxford Dictionary it first appeared as two separate words, "at onement," and referred only to harmonious personal relationships. By the seventeenth century the one word "atonement" had come increasingly to be used as a quasi-theological term (e.g., as frequently in the kjv of the Bible [1611]).

[2]Modern translations generally have "reconciliation" rather than "atonement." This would seem proper in light of the fact that the Greek word is katallage which, in verbal form, is translated "reconciled" in the prior verse above and elsewhere in the New Testament. I have retained the kjv translation to show how interchangeable the two terms are.

[3]In what follows, the sequence of God as love and mercy, holiness and righteousness, truth and faithfulness is different from what I wrote in chapter 3, "God," in that I dealt with God's holiness before God's love. The shift in my present chapter does not mean less emphasis on holiness (this will be apparent from what follows); rather it highlights love as the central thrust of the Atonement. As was said in the former chapter, "God is centrally the God of love," p. 63.

[4]The Greek words orge and thymos, translated as "wrath" ("the wrath of God," "the wrath of the Lamb," etc.), occur sixteen times in Revelation.

[5]For a much fuller elaboration of this section see chapter 11, "The Effects of Sin."

[6]In Matthew 25:46 Jesus referred to "eternal punishment" (see also 2 Thess. 1:9; Jude 7).

[7]This is prefigured in the unblemished paschal lamb of Exodus 12:5 (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7).

[8]The Hebrew word is holâyénû, “sicknesses” (rsv mg.), cf. nasb; the niv reads “infirmities.”

[9]The Hebrew word is mak obenû, “pains” (rsv and nasb mg.). Both translations in this verse are lexically possible, because as BDB notes, the word may be understood either physically or mentally.

[10]Cf. Luke 22:37.

[11]The Hebrew word is meholäl, “pierced through” (nasb).

[12]The Hebrew word is medukkä, “tortured” (neb).

[13]The Hebrew word is yesûpkâ, “he will crush your head” (niv).

[14]In the Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 44, the reply to the question “Why is there added: ‘He descended into hell’ [in the Apostles’ Creed]?” is given: “That in my severest tribulations I may be assured that Christ my Lord redeemed me from hellish anxieties and torment by the unspeakable anguish, pains, and terrors which he suffered in his soul both on the cross and before.” Not all would agree that this is the meaning of the statement, “He descended into hell”; however, I believe that the Heidelberg Catechism’s interpretation shows deep insight into the significance of Christ’s anguish on the cross for us.

[15]Institutes, II.xvi.5 (Beveridge trans.).

[16]Recall Tournier’s words about “the sense of guilt which is so intolerable that men feel an overpowering need to preserve themselves from it,” chap. 11, n.62.

[17]The Hebrew word is *nidmêtî*, “ruined” (niv, nasb), “undone” (kjv). Isaiah had just beheld the Lord, “high and lifted up,” heard the angelic cry of “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts,” and felt the foundations of the temple shake.

[18]The Greek word is hilasterion. It may also be translated “propitiation” (as in kjv, nasb). “Propitiation” connotes making things right with God, perhaps of appeasing His anger; “expiation,” that of extinguishing the guilt and paying the penalty for sin. Since God is the initiator (“God put forward”), “expiation” seems a better translation-although, to be sure, there is the aspect of the outpouring of God’s wrath against sin. The word “propitiation” may suggest that God becomes gracious by the blood of Christ, turning from wrath to mercy. “Expiation” better depicts the fact that God Himself is already gracious, and that the sacrifice is His action in Christ to change the human situation. According to Friedrich Büchselin, TDNT, “For Paul ἱλαστήριον is not something which makes

God gracious. This expiation for human sin presupposes the grace of God" (3.322). The word hilasterion may also be translated "mercy seat" (as in Heb. 9:5), referring to the Old Testament ark of the covenant. The ark was sprinkled with blood on the Day of Atonement for the expiation of sin (see Lev. 16). Thus the word speaks of both the means and the place of atonement.

[19]God declared, "The life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life" (Lev. 17:11). The Old Testament context is that of animal sacrifice: its life blood being poured out. How much more is Christ's life blood the way of complete atonement!

[20]The Greek word here is hilasmos (also in 4:10); "ἱλασμός does not imply the propitiation of God. … It rests on the fact that God is gracious, i.e., on His love, cf. 4:10. The meaning, then, is the setting aside of sin as guilt against God" (TDNT, 3:317). The kjv and nasb translate this word as "propitiation." Although "propitiation" conveys an important element of truth, it is less satisfactory. (For a defense of "propitiation" as the better translation of both hilasterion and hilasmos, see Leon Morris, New Testament Theology, 34, 73; also Colin Brown and H. G. Link, NIDNTT, 3:148-66.)

[21]"An animal is brought and slain, and its blood is shed. But the animal is not the old man which has to be made to disappear." Barth, Church Dogmatics, 4:279.

[22]The Greek word is lytron.

[23]The Greek word is antilytron.

[24]The biblical picture of ransom is at some distance from certain views of the Atonement in the early church that depicted the ransom as wholly related to Satan. For example, in one view Christ offers His life to Satan as a ransom for man, Satan accepts but falls into a trap, not knowing that Christ's divinity makes it impossible to hold Him. (See Excursus.)

[25]"Redemption" is frequently the English translation for apolytrosis, even as "ransom" is the usual translation of lytron. Whereas lytron concerns the price of release, apolytrosis concerns the effect of the ransom payment. The idea of ransom may be superseded by the more general note of redemption or release conveyed in apolytrosis.

[26]The Greek word is exodon. Jesus, like Moses but far greater, would lead forth people from captivity.

[27]27The Greek word is *katargese*, “break the power of’ (NEB). “Destroy” (KJV, RSV, NIV) is text in Isaiah is interpreted by Matthew 8:16–17 to refer to Christ’s activity in His ministry: “He cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, ‘He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.’” Hence it is primarily *through the life of Christ* that healing occurred. But does not 1 Peter 2:24 say, “By his wounds [“stripes” KJV] you have been healed”? This statement might suggest that healing of disease occurred through Christ’s death on the cross. However, the context of also a possible translation, but perhaps says too much. Satan is not destroyed by Christ’s death, but his power is broken.

[28]The Greek word is apallaxe , “liberate” (neb), ‘free” (niv).

[29]The Greek word is lyse, “undoing” (neb). The “undoing” of the devil’s work, which causes the fear of death, was brought about by Christ’s death.

[30]It is important to recognize that the victory over Satan was won in Christ’s death on the cross. The teaching, held in some circles, that the victory occurred only after a three-day- and-night struggle with Satan in hell is wholly contrary to Scripture. E. W. Kenyon, for example, speaks of Colossians 2:15 as “a description of a battle that took place in Hades before Jesus arose from the dead” (What Happened from the Cross to the Throne, 65). Such teaching flatly contradicts Colossians 2:14, which specifies that the victory occurred through Christ’s death on the cross. Kenyon also teaches that Christ “suffered Hell’s agonies for three days and three nights” (ibid., p. 89). This even more blatantly goes counter to the biblical testimony that Christ’s agony ended at the cross. With His words “It is finished” (John 19:30), the suffering of Christ was over. He had endured hell’s fury, Satan was rendered powerless, and Christ had wrought redemption for all mankind.

What happened “from the cross to the throne” may better be understood in two ways. First, in the words of Peter at Pentecost, Christ “was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh suffer decay” (Acts 2:31 nasb). Against the background of Jesus’ declaration that “as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40), Peter’s words indicate that during the three days and nights there was neither abandonment of Christ to Hades nor any decaying of His flesh. Accordingly, Christ was preserved intact from His death on the

cross until the day of His resurrection. Second, Peter in his first epistle further affirms that Christ was "put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient… in the days of Noah" (3:18-20 nasb). Hence though Christ was dead in His flesh, He was made alive ("quickened" kjv) in His spirit, and in His spirit He made proclamation to other spirits in prison. Whatever the significance of Christ's proclamation to the spirits in prison, He did not suffer in hell during these three days and nights; rather in His spirit He "went and made proclamation."

[31]The Greek word is ex e gor as en, literally, "acquired out of the agora [the marketplace]"; hence "brought us freedom" (neb).

[32]The Greek phrase is cheirographon tois dogmasin ho en hypenantion hemin, literally, "handwriting in ordinances which was contrary to us." The term cheirographon is "a handwritten document, specifically a certificate of indebtedness, bond" (BAGD) and one that, accordingly, contained "the decrees of the law."

[33]See rsv translation.

[34]Paul speaks of the Old Testament "written code" as "the dispensation [or "ministry" nasb, niv] of death" (2 Cor. 3:6-7).

[35]More will be said later about the Christian's relationship to the law. For the Christian the law is now under him, not over him, and by the Holy Spirit the law may be fulfilled (see Rom. 8:3-4). It is the curse of the law, the bondage (the "bond") of the law that is abolished, not the law itself. What was a demand before becomes for the Christian an occasion for joyful obedience!

[36]A side issue concerns the relation of the Atonement to sickness and disease. Christ took away our sins in His death; did He also take away our diseases? We earlier noted the words of Isaiah 53:4, "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" and observed in the related footnote that "griefs" and "sorrows" are literally "sicknesses" and "pains." This text in Isaiah is interpreted by Matthew 8:16-17 to refer to Christ's activity in His ministry: "He cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, 4He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.'" Hence it is primarily through the life ofChrist that healing occurred. But does not 1 Peter 2:24 say, "By his wounds ["stripes" KJV] you have been healed"? This statement might suggest that healing of disease occurred through Christ's death on the cross. However, the context of 1 Peter 2:24

relates only to sin, for the immediately preceding words are “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.” The context is the same for the words in Isaiah 53:5: “by his stripes we are healed” (words Peter was quoting), for verse 5 begins, “He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities.” Hence, to conclude, it is unscriptural to say that Christ took away our diseases in His death or that physical healing as such is to be found in the Atonement. To be sure, the death of Christ that delivers from sin and transgressions will often make for better health to the body; but the focal point of the Atonement is not deliverance from disease. This is by no means to discount the fact that God does heal (e.g., “I am the LORD your healer” Exod. 15:26), that Christ often ministers healing, and that the Holy Spirit makes “gifts of healing” available (1 Cor. 12:9). Indeed, it may well be said that we have scarcely begun to realize God’s available healing power. However, this is a different matter from assuming that Christ’s redeeming death delivers us from sickness and disease. Jesus Himself came both proclaiming the gospel of salvation and healing those who were sick (see, e.g., Matthew 4:23- “he went about ... preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people”), We ought not therefore confuse the salvation made possible through Christ’s atonement with the healing also available through divine resources.

[37]According to the superscription, David spoke this after his sins of adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah.

[38]See chapter 11, “The Effects of Sin,” section II, “Guilt and Punishment.”

[39]The word “new” (as in kjv) is found in some ancient manuscripts. It seems appropriate to include “new” in light of 1 Corinthians 11:25: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (cf. Luke 22:20), and the fact that the covenant in Christ’s blood is “the new covenant” prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31 and confirmed in Hebrews 8:8. For “new covenant” see also Hebrews 9:15; 12:24.

[40]As in the kjv. The Greek word here, ekchynnomenon, suggests violent death.

[41]One may recall the words of John Dryden: “Forgiveness to the injured does belong” (The Conquest of Granada, Pt. I, Act I, Sc. I).

[42]H. R. Mackintosh writes, “Let the man be found who has undergone the shattering experience of pardoning, nobly and tenderly, some awful wrong to himself, still more to one beloved by him, and he will

understand the meaning of Calvary better than all the theologians in the world" (The Christian Experience of Forgiveness, 193).

[43]On the cost of forgiveness see especially Donald M. Baillie, God Was in Christ, "But Why Atonement?", 171-79.

[44]We must always bear in mind that it was not Christ reconciling God, but it was God in Christ reconciling man ("the world"). Any view suggesting that Christ's role was that of changing God's attitude is foreign to the truth.

[45]'Forgiveness … is the one way in which the power of sin in the world can be absorbed, neutralized and brought to nothing." So writes Leonard Hodgson in The Doctrine of the Atonement, 64.

[46]Recall likewise the words in John's Gospel: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the worldV' (1:29).

[47]As, e.g., in L. Berkhofs Systematic Theology, "Proof for the Doctrine of a Limited Atonement," 394-99. It is sometimes assumed that "for many" (Mark 10:45-"to give his life as a ransom for many"; Mark 14:24-"my blood … poured out for many") points to a limited atonement. However, "for many" should not be viewed in a limited or particular sense. Calvin, in regard to Mark 14:24, puts it well: "By the word many he means not a part of the world only, but the whole human race" (Calvin's Commentaries, Harmony of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, 3.214).

[48]The role of faith in salvation will be discussed in a later chapter.

[49]The Greek word is tetelestai. This word spoken just before Jesus' death doubtless means, first of all, that He has done everything necessary for mankind's salvation (note also John 19:28-"knowing that all was now finished"-the same Greek word as in v. 30). However, it also suggests strongly that in Jesus' death, which immediately follows, there is the finalizing of redemption.

[50]By "objective atonement" is meant what God has accomplished outside man. Our (subjective) participation has nothing to do with its accomplishment. To be sure, we must receive what God has done (as will be noted), but the reception itself is not a part of God's atoning action. "Subjective" views such as those of the "moral influence" theory of Abelard (12th c.) and Bushnell (19th c.) hold that the Atonement has no effect outside the believer. The Atonement is what happens in us through the influence of Christ's love. Such a view, unfortunately, evacuates the Atonement of its power and significance. (See Excursus beginning on this page.)

[51]Particularly those of Nicaea (a.D. 325), Constantinople (a.D. 381), and Chalcedon (a.D. 451). Recall references to these creeds in the previous chapter, “The Incarnation.” These creeds established orthodoxy not only for the undivided early church but also for the later Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant churches. The Christological formulas of the early church have not been basically altered.

[52]Wording in the creeds of Nicaea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon.

[53]Among those who, in varying ways, set forward this view were Origen (c. 185-254), Gregory of Nyssa (331-96), Augustine (in part) (345-430), and Pope Gregory the Great (640-604). For a helpful summary, see H. D. McDonald, The Atonement of the Death of Christ, chap. 12, “The Payment of Ransom.” On Augustine, see Sydney Cave The Doctrine of the Work of Christ, 140-41.

[54]A bizarre analogy depicts Christ’s humanity as fishing bait that Satan devoured only to be hopelessly caught by the fishhook of Christ’s divinity inside. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, wrote, “The Deity was hidden under the veil of our nature, that so, as is done by greedy fish, the hook of deity might be gulped down along with the bait of flesh” (Great Catechism, 24). Augustine made occasional use of the mousetrap metaphor. In one of his sermons he asked, “What did our Redeemer do to our captor?” Then he replied, “As our price, He held out His cross as a mousetrap and set as bait upon it His own blood” (Sermon cxxx. 2, “The Miracle of the Five Loaves and the Two Fishes”).

[55]Not only among several early church fathers but as late as the twelfth century in the writings of Peter Lombard (c. 1100-1164). See McDonald, Atonement, 143-44. Many churchmen during the early centuries opposed the ransom-to-Satan view; nonetheless, it frequently recurred for almost a thousand years.

[56]Christus Victor by Gustav Aulèn is a twentieth-century attempt to underscore the relevance of this early-church thinking. Aulèn speaks of Christ Victorious as the “classic” or “dramatic” view of the Atonement (see, e.g., pp. 20-23) and deplores its neglect in the recent history of the church. Aulèn admits that the ransom-to-Satan idea is grotesque in imagery, but even so, it contains the critical truth that God “overcomes evil not by an almighty fiat, but by putting in something of His own, through a Divine self-oblation” (p. 70).

[57]As in some forms of the later satisfaction-to-God theory (see below).

[58]Moral-influence theories of the Atonement (see pp. 376-79) view the

change as occurring wholly within man. Hence such theories are not objective but subjective in character.

[59]Regarding satisfaction Anselm writes: “Every one who sins ought to pay back the honor of which he has robbed God; and this is the satisfaction which every sinner owes to God” (Cur Deus Homo, 1.11).

[60]“Upon whom would he [Christ] more properly bestow the reward accruing from his death, than upon those for whose salvation … he became man …?” (ibid. 2.19).

[61]Anselm lived at the time when feudalism was common throughout Europe.

[62]Accordingly, Anselm’s theory is often called the “commercial” theory of the Atonement.

[63]Summa Theologica, III, Q. 48, A. 3.

[64]Ibid., II. Q. 48, A. 2. The supererogation of Christ’s work brings about this “superabundant satisfaction.” It should be added that Aquinas also viewed man as contributing something to that satisfaction by his own contrition and confession. This opens the door to the Roman Catholic doctrine of penance and man’s own contribution through works to salvation.

[65]Ibid., II, Q. 46. A. 1. “That man should be delivered by Christ’s passion was in keeping with both His mercy and His justice.”

[66]Aulen in his Christus Victor shows that Luther even occasionally used “ransom to Satan” language (pp. 119-20). However, Aulèn’s main point is that Luther’s view of the Atonement was essentially the “classic” or “dramatic” view. While Aulèn may have overstated Luther’s position, he has undoubtedly brought to light an important motif in the Reformer’s thinking.

[67]Paul Althaus, a Lutheran scholar, declares Luther’s dominant view to be thus: “The satisfaction which God’s righteousness demands constitutes [for Luther] the primary and decisive significance of Christ’s work and particularly of his death. Everything else depends on this satisfaction, including the destruction of the might and authenticity of the demonic powers” (The Theology of Martin Luther, 220).

[68]Luther speaks of “the forgiveness obtained for us” in his Epistle Sermon, Twenty- fourth Sunday After Trinity.

[69]Luther’s Larger Catechism, ii.3.

[70]Cave, in regard to Luther, puts it well: “Before God’s love can do its work

the claims of Law and Wrath must be satisfied" (Work of Christ, 181).

[71]Institutes, II. 15.6 (Beveridge trans.).

[72]Ibid., IV.16.2.

[73]Ibid., IV.14.21.

[74]Ibid., II.12.4.

[75]Ibid., II. 17.4.

[76]Ibid., II.16.1.

[77]Ibid., II. 16.2.

[78]Ibid., II. 16.4.

[79]This is the language of Francis Turretin (17th-century Calvinist theologian) in The Atonement of Christ, 27. I take this with appreciation from McDonald's Atonement of the Death of Christ, 192. McDonald shows how the dominant idea in both Lutheran and Reformed (i.e., Calvinist) orthodoxy becomes that of God as judge (see pp. 186, 192-95). One striking example, as McDonald shows, is that of W. G. T. Shedd (19th-century Calvinist [Presbyterian] theologian) saying that "the eternal Judge may or may not exercise mercy, but he must exercise justice" (ibid., 194).

[80]The Westminster Confession (17th-century representation of Calvinist orthodoxy) declares that "the Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself … hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father … " (chap. IX, sec. V). Such a statement underscores the satisfaction motif in post-Reformation theology.

[81]Systematic Theology, 373.

[82]Ibid.

[83]Ibid., 375.

[84]Church Dogmatics, 2.1.413. Barth later in Church Dogmatics 4.1, however, expresses some discomfort with the idea of satisfaction, calling it a "doubtful concept." Nonetheless, he proceeds to make use of it, saying, "Here is the place of the doubtful concept that in the passion of Jesus Christ, in the giving up of His Son to death, God has done that which is 'satisfactory' or sufficient in the victorious fighting of sin to make the victory radical and total" (p. 254).

[85]Christian Theology, 2:815.

[86]The Greek word is edoxasan, "glorified" kjv, niv.

[87]Essentials of Evangelical Theology, 159.

[88]Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans, II (LCC, vol. 4, A Scholastic Miscellany), 278.

[89]Ibid.

[90]Ibid., 284.

[91]I refer here to views of ransom to Satan and satisfaction to God's honor. Later views of satisfaction to God's justice frequently suffer from much the same lack: justice must be satisfied before love can function. Calvin, as has been noted, seeks a better balance between the two.

[92]Socinus denied the essential deity of Christ and thereby laid the foundation for later unitarian movements. The Racovian Catechism (1605), prepared by the followers of Socinus, is openly antitrinitarian.

[93]See especially Schleiermacher's Christian Faith, published in 1821.

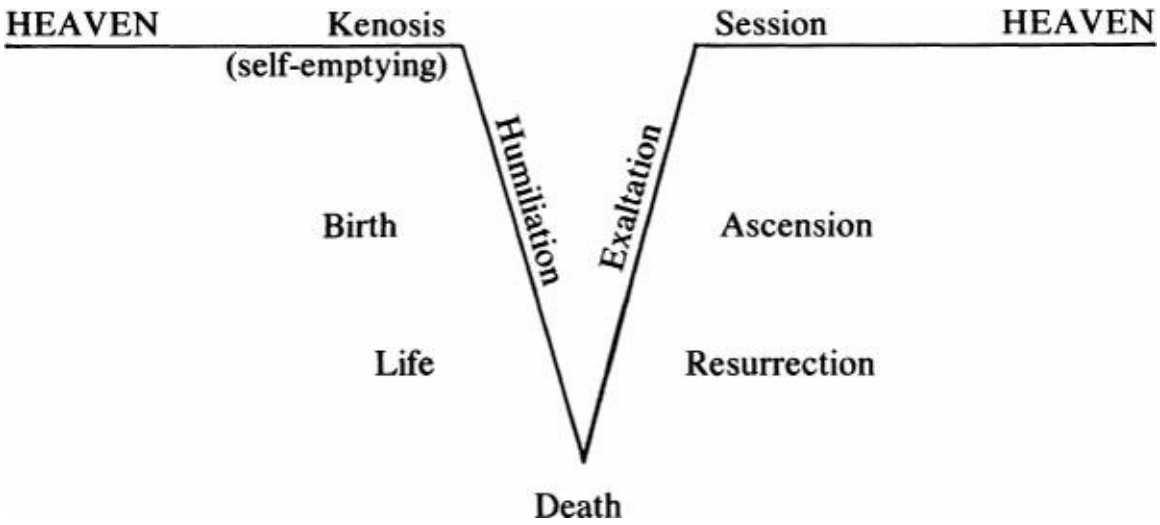
[94]Berkhof speaks of Schleiermacher's view of the Atonement as "the mystical theory" (Systematic Theology, 389). Still, in a broad sense, we may view it under the moral influence umbrella, since, to use Berkhofs words, "it conceives of the atonement exclusively as exercising influence on man and bringing about a change in him" (ibid.).

[95]See especially Bushnell's Vicarious Sacrifice (1866).

[96]See Rashdall's The Idea of the Atonement in Christian Theology (1920). Also R. S. Franks in his book, The Atonement (1934), definitely espouses a moral influence theory.

15
The Exaltation of Christ

We come now to a consideration of the exaltation of Jesus Christ. By this, reference is made to what happened following His self-humbling (or "humiliation"). In the words of Paul, "He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him" (Phil. 2:8–9). Because of Christ's willingness to humble Himself, even from the heights and glory of heaven to the lowliness of death on a cross, He has been highly exalted.



The exaltation of Christ may be spoken of as occurring in three stages: resurrection, ascension, and session. This may be compared with stages of His humiliation in the diagram below.

In discussing the exaltation of Christ we will view in turn each of the latter three stages.

I. RESURRECTION

It needs to be affirmed vigorously at the outset that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is an essential fact in Christian faith. As Paul puts it unequivocally, “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Cor. 15:14). The Christian faith is null and void, empty of all significance, if Jesus Christ was not raised from the dead.[1]

A. Actuality

The actuality of the resurrection of Christ must be our first concern. Since the validity of Christian faith is based on the resurrection, we must turn immediately to the matter of its actual occurrence. No one seriously disputes the question of Jesus' death on a cross, but the same cannot be said for his resurrection. What then is the evidence that Christ arose?

1. The Unmistakable Witness in Scripture

We note, first, that all four Gospels vigorously affirm the resurrection of Christ. The stone had been rolled away from the tomb where Christ was buried, the grave was empty, and the angelic message was proclaimed: "He has risen!" (Matt. 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20). The four Gospels give various details related to the event, but they are at one in declaring Christ's resurrection from the dead.

Moreover, in all four Gospels not only is there the angelic announcement but also the record of appearances of the resurrected Jesus to a number of the disciples. He appeared to certain women, to disciples on the road, and on different occasions to the eleven apostles. All these appearances are set forth as personal and direct confirmations by Jesus Himself of the angelic proclamation.

When we move from the Gospels to the account of the early church in Acts, the resurrection of Christ is likewise unambiguously declared. The narrative early relates Jesus' presence with the eleven apostles thus: "To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs,[2] appearing to them during forty days" (1:3). It was important that the apostles should be totally convinced of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Shortly after Jesus was taken up into heaven, a new apostle was chosen to replace Judas, one whose role, says Peter, is to "become with us a witness to his resurrection" (1:22). Thereafter in Acts the resurrection is continually proclaimed: "Christ … was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses" (2:31–32); "You … killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses" (3:14, 15); "with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (4:33). Paul, later to become an apostle, likewise in Acts proclaimed the resurrection: "God raised

him from the dead" (13:30) and "he preached Jesus and the resurrection" (17:18). The Book of Acts rings with the proclamation of Christ's resurrection.

When we turn to Paul's letters, it is of utmost significance to observe that in 1 Corinthians he gives a list of witnesses to the resurrection, including himself. Paul writes: "he was raised on the third day … he appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time…. Then he appeared to James [the brother of Jesus], then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me" (15:4–8). This personal appearance to Paul refers to the encounter on the road to Damascus when he was temporarily blinded by the brilliance of the revelation of the risen Lord (Acts 9:1—9).[3] So Paul was one among many who had beheld the risen Jesus. In all his letters there are numerous references to the resurrection.

All those to whom Jesus appeared after His resurrection were called to be witnesses. In Peter's message to the Gentiles in Caesarea a number of years later, Peter says: "God raised him on the third day and made him manifest; not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead" (Acts 10:40–41). Thus there were no resurrection appearances to people at large—as, for example, to the Jewish leaders or Roman authorities who put him to death—but only to those who were called to be His witnesses. The one purpose of these appearances was that they might know they were proclaiming the Gospel of a living God!

But back to the main point: there can be no doubt that the Scriptures bear unmistakable witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Indeed, as one New Testament scholar has put it, "The entire New Testament is written in the light of the resurrection fact."[4] Utterly no doubt exists among any of the New Testament writers that Christ rose from the dead.

2. Best Possible Explanation of All the Data

Still there are those who question the New Testament witness. Perhaps it is all a legend or a misunderstanding that Christ rose from the dead. I may mention, in passing, a few alternative explanations: (1) Jesus did not really die on the cross, He only fainted or swooned; hence, there was no resurrection from death, only a revival of consciousness. (2) Jesus died, but He really did not rise; the disciples stole the body from the tomb and then declared a resurrection—it was all a hoax, a deception. (3) The resurrection story is a myth, similar to many pagan stories of gods dying and rising again, derived from the imagination that often indulges

in flights of fancy. (4) The disciples thought they saw the risen Jesus, but it was a subjective vision at best, possibly a hallucination, produced by wishful thinking and their yearning for His continuing presence. (5) The resurrection of Jesus "from the dead" is a manner of speaking of a life so significant that despite death[5] He continues to live in influence and power in the world today. I will not speak seriatim to these alternative explanations, but they will be addressed variously in what follows.

A number of things point to a resurrection from the dead as the best possible explanation of the data.

a. Eyewitness accounts. The eyewitness accounts that have already been mentioned are strong evidence. It is not simply that the New Testament proclaims the resurrection, but that it asserts this proclamation to be based on the account of eyewitnesses. An eyewitness account always occupies a high level of evidence for the veridicality of an occurrence. According to the New Testament, there were many eyewitnesses. As noted, Paul speaks of an appearance of the risen Christ to over five hundred people at one time, adding, "most of whom are still alive" (1 Cor. 15:6). Thus many years later a large number of eyewitnesses were still living who could testify to any inquirer. It is quite unlikely that so many people could have been misled about a matter of such critical importance.

b. Transformed disciples. It would seem almost impossible to explain the transformation of the disciples from disillusionment, fear, even unbelief, to a bold and courageous faith without Jesus' resurrection from the dead. The prevailing picture of the disciples immediately following Jesus' crucifixion and death was one of disillusionment,[6] fear,[7] and disbelief.[8] What possibly could have changed this defeatism to courageous faith except Christ's unmistakable resurrected appearance? The mood after Jesus' death precluded any wishful thinking; thus the resurrection was no product of their imagination. Everything pointed to the end—it was all over. *Finis.*

c. Ease of disproof. Assuming, however, that the disciples for some reason fabricated the whole matter of Jesus' resurrection, disbelievers or enemies could easily have disproved their testimony with a corpse from the grave. It is significant that there is utterly no suggestion in the New Testament record that even the foes of Jesus assumed the body to be still in the grave. Indeed, quite the contrary, as is evident from the fact that the Jewish chief priests and elders paid the soldiers who had guarded the tomb to tell people, "His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep" (Matt. 28:13). No record exists

of anyone so much as suggesting a search for Jesus' body.[9]

d. Survival of Christianity. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, the basis of Christian faith is either an illusion or a lie. If the early disciples really believed in Jesus' resurrection but were in error and only fantasizing, then Christianity is based on wishful thinking and self-delusion. If they did not believe He rose but claimed it to be so, then the basis of Christian faith is falsehood and deception. It is hard to believe that Christianity could have survived so long if either an illusion or a lie constituted its foundation.

e. Continuation of Christ's presence. That the witness of the early disciples to the resurrection of Jesus belongs to the realm of mythology, or that it is only a statement about a highly significant life whose influence is perpetual, seems utterly contrary to the biblical records. Mythological resurrection motifs having little or no concern for concrete evidence of their factuality are totally lacking.[10] That the resurrection of Jesus is only a way of speaking about the continuing influence of a highly significant life again has absolutely no New Testament basis. Jesus Christ is experienced, not as a Socrates of blessed memory whose influence lives on, but as a real and continuing presence three days after His death.

3. The Certification of Faith and Experience

While the affirmation that Jesus rose from the dead is based on the biblical witness and surely makes the best sense of available data, it is also confirmed in faith and experience. There is an existential confirmation and verification.

It is of profound significance that just after Jesus offered doubting Thomas visible proof of His resurrection, He added, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (John 20:29). Jesus pronounced blessing on faith—believing without seeing—in His resurrection, and this blessing has continued through the generations. This does not mean that faith is blind, a kind of "leap in the dark" or wishful thinking, but has about it an inner certitude that makes for a richer blessing than any visible and tangible evidence.

Faith, according to the Book of Hebrews, is "the conviction[11] of things not seen" (11:1). Thus faith is not a lower level of certitude than visible proof, for it is the proving of things not seen. Faith has its own "eyes" to behold the

invisible[12] and therefore knows for a certainty that Jesus rose from the dead.

This does not mean that faith is sight. It is not to share the experience of the early disciples to whom Jesus appeared nor is it to have a special revelation from heaven such as came to Paul: those events belong to sight. Yet faith is knowledge—a knowledge that occurs when and where genuine faith exists. It is God's doing in us, opening our eyes to His truth.

Countless Christian believers through the centuries have come to know that Christ is alive. They have not only accepted the testimony of Scripture regarding His resurrection but in faith have also received Him into their hearts. The invitation of Christ, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him" (Rev. 3:20), has been accepted, so that they know for a certainty that Christ is not dead but alive. "Christ in you," says Paul, is "the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). It is also the certitude of His resurrection from the dead and His continuing reality.[13]

B. Form

We next consider the form of Christ's resurrected person. What was Jesus like in His resurrection appearance?

1. Corporeal

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was corporeal or bodily. He did not appear as a spectral or disembodied form. In Jesus' first appearance to the disciples "he showed them his hands and his side" (John 20:20). Later He told Thomas to touch His body: "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side" (v. 27). Unmistakably, Jesus' appearance was in bodily form.

According to Luke's account, not only did Jesus make the same offer but He also strongly disclaimed being a spirit, and He ate a fish in their presence. At first when Jesus appeared, they were "startled and frightened, and supposed that they saw a spirit." Then after seeking to calm them, He said, "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have. And while they still disbelieved for joy, and wondered, he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them" (24:37, 39–43).

Thus Jesus emphasized that He was not a different Jesus from whom they had known before but that in His whole person—which included the body—He was totally alive again. Resurrection could not have occurred if the body had been missing, since the body is inseparable from the total person. He just as firmly denied being a spirit—"a spirit has not flesh and bones"—by demonstrating his bodily presence through a willingness to be handled and by eating a fish before their startled eyes. It was the same Jesus who had walked among them, shared with them the Last Supper, and was crucified on Calvary that was again in their midst.

We may, then, properly speak of the essential identity of Jesus' resurrected life with His life before. He had not been changed from body into spirit, but was the same Jesus they had known in the flesh.

2. Spiritual

The resurrection of Christ was also spiritual. Although He was not a spirit in His resurrection and while his body was quite substantial, there was also a new spiritual quality or dimension to Him.

In His first resurrection appearance to the disciples Christ suddenly stood in their midst. He was absent, then "Jesus himself stood among them" (Luke 24:36). Little wonder they were "startled and frightened" (v. 37)[14] and thought they saw a spirit. John records that the doors were shut (20:19) and that suddenly without opening the doors He was standing in the room. There was obviously a new spiritual dimension in His bodily resurrection.

On another occasion Jesus suddenly vanished. After He spent time with the two Emmaus-road disciples in their home and breaking bread with them, the Scripture reads, "He vanished out of their sight."[15] Something was quite different about Jesus' resurrection existence.

Indeed, a transformation had unmistakably occurred. There was something unique here. Other resurrections are reported in the Gospels but none such—for all their wonder—signify a new mode of spiritual existence. They were only resuscitations of corporeal existence. They represent transitory returns to physical life, and in due time the resuscitated person died once more. Jesus, on the contrary, was raised not to die again but to continue living. Thus the resurrection, though it is bodily, is not a continuing physical life but a spiritual one.[16]

What we therefore behold in the resurrection of Jesus, to use the language of Paul, is no longer a physical or natural body but a spiritual body. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul describes the nature of the future resurrection body against the background of Christ's resurrection as "the first fruits" (v. 20); hence what he says here would also seem applicable to Christ's resurrection body. Several verses are pertinent: "What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body"[17] (vv. 42–44). It is proper therefore to speak of the body of Jesus in His resurrection not as a physical or natural body but as a spiritual body.

Thus while there is an essential identity and a continuity between Jesus' existence prior to and after His resurrection (there is no transition into a disembodied state), there is also an otherness and a certain discontinuity from what has preceded.

3. Mysterious

There is mystery in the resurrection. We simply do not know what spiritual corporeality means: it is strange to us.

Two examples of strangeness in Jesus' resurrection appearances may be noted. First, there was the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene near the tomb: "she turned round and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus" (John 20:14). Even after Jesus spoke to her, she supposed Him to be "the gardener" (v. 15). This is quite strange in that she had followed Jesus for a long time. She knew His face well, and His voice was very familiar to her. There was something mysterious about the form and manner of His resurrection body.

Second, Jesus joined two disciples on the road to Emmaus and walked with them, but "their eyes were kept from recognizing him" (Luke 24:16). These disciples belonged to the company of those around Jesus (see vv. 22–24), and so doubtless they knew Him well. But they did not recognize Him even though He talked with them at some length both on the road and in the village. According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus "appeared in another form" (16:12) to these two, which signifies that there was a different form—namely, spiritual—to His resurrection body.[18]

What is also interesting in these accounts about Mary Magdalene and the Emmaus disciples is that after their lack of perception they did come to recognize Him. Jesus simply called her name: "Mary" (John 20:16). Something in His voice brought about sudden recognition. On the other occasion, as Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to the Emmaus disciples, "their eyes were opened and they recognized him" (Luke 24:31). Whether they saw his wounded hands or detected some familiar mannerism when He served the bread —something caused them to know it was Jesus.

Thus all the resurrection narratives are on the mysterious borderline between the commonplace and the unusual, the natural and the supernatural. Another dimension of human reality is for the first time becoming manifest. There is both identity and otherness, continuity and discontinuity, familiarity and unfamiliarity. It all suggests that something new and inexplicable has for the first time come about. This is the transformation of physical human existence into a higher order of spiritual existence: the spiritual body of the resurrection!

C. Significance

We turn next to reflection on the significance of Christ's resurrection. Earlier I quoted these words of Paul: "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain." Why this is true is now the matter for our consideration.

1. Declaration of Jesus' Sonship, Deity, and Lordship

Throughout the ministry of Jesus His divine sonship was largely hidden. As we have noted,[19] Jesus' being the Son of God was not His own self-designation nor did it come readily from the lips of His disciples. But with His resurrection there was the removal of the veil; it can no longer be seriously questioned that He is the Son of God. Paul writes that Jesus was "declared with power to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4 NASB).[20] He was, of course, already the Son of God, but the resurrection was its powerful declaration.

Hence the Resurrection is an affirmation of His deity. Thomas, no longer the doubter, cries out, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). If there had been any question before about His divine nature, it is now dispelled. It has been said that the best apologetic for the deity of Christ is His resurrection, the reason being that there is no other sufficient explanation for its occurrence. It is a different order of resurrection from anything that had ever before happened. Moreover it is not simply a passive matter of His being raised up. Jesus says on one occasion: "Destroy this temple [the temple of His body], and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). The resurrection from the dead accordingly is a declaration of the divine power, the divine reality of Jesus Christ.

Also Christ's resurrection from the dead affirms His lordship: death could not hold Him fast. As Peter says in his first sermon: "God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it" (Acts 2:24). Moreover, not only was it impossible for death to contain Him, but by being raised up He will never know death again. Two beautiful passages illustrate this: "Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him" (Rom. 6:9), and "I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore" (Rev. 1:17–18). Christ is the Lord of life ("the living one") and death ("alive for evermore"). By

His resurrection from the dead the lordship of Christ is gloriously declared.[21]

2. Climax of Our Salvation

Now we come to a central and critical point: if Christ had not been raised from the dead, our salvation would not have been consummated. As Paul says, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17). For despite God's act of reconciliation in Christ, if Christ had remained locked in the grave, there would have been no life and no salvation.[22] Paul says elsewhere that Christ was "put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). Justification, the free gift of righteousness, is the very heart of salvation[23] and is made possible through the death of Christ. But unless Christ had been raised, justification would literally have been a dead matter. Hence through the resurrection of Christ our salvation has been completed.

Let us observe more closely that the problem of mankind is not only sin but also death[24] —so salvation means victory over both sin and death.

Thus did Christ in His great saving act deal decisively not only with sin at the cross but also with death through His resurrection. For truly He has also broken the power of death. In the words of Paul, our "Savior Jesus Christ … has broken the power of death and brought life and immortality to light"[25] (2 Tim. 1:10 NEB). However, we need to add immediately, death does not inherently have power but derives its power from Satan who brought it into human existence. And the marvel of what Christ has done is that He partook of our nature that "through death he might break the power of[26] him who has death at his command, that is, the devil; and might liberate those who, through fear of death, had all their lifetime been in servitude" (Heb. 2:14–15 NEB). Thus Satan's power over death has been broken. Not only did Christ rise victorious over Satan and death, but He also has wrought this victory for all who belong to Him.

We may now state it more specifically: By rising from the dead Christ has won the victory over both sin and death. Thereby our justification is complete, and life has been raised up.

Beyond forgiveness and reconciliation is a new life in Jesus Christ—to be with Him alive for evermore! For in Christ's resurrection we are raised to eternal life with Him.

3. Assurance of Our Future Resurrection

Christ's resurrection from the dead assures our resurrection in the age to

come. For not only are we raised from the dead spiritually now, as I have noted, but we will also be raised bodily in the coming age. Paul writes that “if for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied.” Then he adds, “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor. 15:19–21). Since the raising of Christ is the “first fruits,” other fruit is sure to follow, namely, our resurrection from the dead. Thus, as was earlier quoted, Christ has brought life and immortality to light!

This means that some day—“at the last trumpet”—“the dead will be raised imperishable …. For this perishable must put on the imperishable and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:52–53 NASB).[27] This is not some natural immortality but an immortality to be “put on”—and it all comes through Jesus Christ. Paul climactically cries forth, “‘Death is swallowed up in victory’ … thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:54, 56).

Because of Christ’s resurrection from the dead we have assurance of our resurrection to come. With Paul and the saints of all ages, we may rejoice in what God has done through Jesus Christ. Another declaration of Paul provides a fitting summary word of the Christian testimony:

If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living (Rom. 14:8–9).

II. ASCENSION

We now come to the second stage in Christ's exaltation: His ascension. For not only did Christ rise from the dead but He also ascended into heaven.

Before proceeding to discuss the ascension of Jesus, we should recognize that the church at large has paid little attention to this aspect of Christ's exaltation. Easter—the celebration of Christ's resurrection—is universally observed, but Ascension Day in most church traditions is little recognized. In a few countries Ascension Thursday[28] is a holiday, but this is increasingly a rarity. Such little attention would suggest that the ascension of Christ has only minimal importance.

The witness of the early New Testament church seems to reinforce that view. The apostles in the Book of Acts constantly proclaim the resurrection of Jesus, but nowhere do they give testimony to the Ascension. Further, it is claimed by some that the Ascension has no place in the apostles' writings and therefore ought to be viewed as identical with the resurrection or the session of Jesus.[29] This last statement is clearly in error—as we will note—and also though the apostles in Acts do not proclaim the Ascension, it is unquestionably and importantly in the background of their total witness.

A. Actuality

Let us then speak of the actuality of the Ascension and begin with the Book of Acts. Its author Luke states that the ascension of Jesus (1:9–11) occurred forty days after the Resurrection[30] and that the apostles witnessed it. Indeed when an apostle was chosen to replace Judas, a prerequisite, according to Peter, was that he have been with the other apostles "beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he [Jesus] was taken up from us" (1:22). Such a one, Peter continues, "must become with us a witness to the resurrection" (1:22). Hence, though the witness is to the Resurrection and not the Ascension, the Ascension provides essential and necessary background.

An overview of the rest of the New Testament shows many references to the Ascension. Let us note several, first in the Gospels. Mark 16:19—"So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven." In the Fourth Gospel Jesus asked those who were offended at His discourse about eating His flesh and drinking His blood: "Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before?" (John 6:62). After His resurrection Jesus said to Mary Magdalene, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending[31] to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (John 20:17). Second, we turn to the Epistles and note a number of similar references: Ephesians 4:10—"He who descended is he who ascended far above all the heavens"; 1 Timothy 3:16—"Great indeed, we confess is the mystery of our religion:[32] He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory"; Hebrews 4:14—"We have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens"; 1 Peter 3:22;—"[He] has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God."

Although the language varies somewhat in the above statements, it is surely significant that six or seven New Testament writers speak of the Ascension. The idea of an ascension was surely just as offensive in Jesus' day as to many in our day.[33] Further, the Ascension was the climactic statement in one of the earliest doctrinal formulas (1 Tim. 3:16). It is obvious that the ascension of Jesus occupies a place of critical importance in the New Testament record.

Aside from the Scriptures, logic dictates that if Jesus rose from the dead, there

had to be an ascension. Since He rose not to die again and is nowhere today bodily on the face of the earth, he must have gone somewhere else. Being the Son of God, He surely would have returned whence He came—to heaven.

B. Form

As we consider the form or manner of Christ's departure at the Ascension, we are unquestionably in the realm of mystery (cf. 1 Tim. 3:16 above) and faith. Only believers beheld the Ascension, and only believers can adequately comprehend it. The essential description is found in Acts 1:9–11. We will note this in conjunction with other references.

1. A Parting

"While he blessed them, he parted from them" (Luke 24:51). This happened, according to the record in Acts, "as they were looking on" (1:9). Thus it was an experienced departure. Christ did not just disappear; they saw Him go. Thus He did not rise to die again (like Lazarus and others). He is not still wandering around the earth; they beheld Him return to heaven.

Hence, it was also a corporeal departure. And this means that the Word who became flesh did not discard that flesh in leaving the earth behind. In His resurrection there was, to be sure, the transition from a physical body to a spiritual body, but in the Ascension there was not a further transition into a wholly spiritual entity.[34] He did not become an angel[35] to prepare for this departure. Thus it was a parting, not from the flesh, but from the disciples.

This parting, finally, was a leave-taking. Christ was not going to be gone forever. It was an "*auf Wiedersehen,*" an "*au revoir*," an "until I see you again." For at the close of the incident of His ascension, two angels declared that He "will come [again]" (1:11). He left them—to return.

2. An Elevation

Jesus was "taken up" (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51 NIV) or "lifted up" (Acts 1:9). This is comparable to "raised up" in His resurrection; note the passive voice in each instance. In regard to this recall the words of Paul in Philippians 2:9: "God has highly exalted him." This is in accord with the words Jesus Himself had spoken: "He that humbles himself will be exalted" (Matt. 23:12). Jesus' being exalted to the heavens is consequent to His willingness to abase Himself to the

uttermost.

As He was lifted up, “a cloud took him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). This would seem to be parallel to the Transfiguration where “a cloud came and overshadowed them [Jesus, Peter, John, and James]” (Luke 9:34) except that this time none of the disciples shared the cloud: it was for Jesus alone. This was truly a cloud of heaven not earth, a cloud of glory that seems most closely to parallel the cloud on Mount Sinai in which God came to Israel—“the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai” (Exod. 24:21–22).

But the important matter here is that of Jesus’ elevation. It was the next stage in the exaltation of Christ: the glorious action in which He who had never sought to elevate Himself was lifted up by God the Father.

3. Into Heaven

He was taken up “into heaven” (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51 NIV; Acts 1:11) or “in glory” (1 Tim. 3:16). Jesus was now lifted up to the exalted place whence He came. He was received back into the Father’s presence. What a glorious picture this is!

Paul writes that “he ascended far above all the heavens” (Eph. 4:10)—that is, far above all the spheres of heaven we know. It would surely be a mistake to view this as a trip like that of an astronaut or cosmonaut journeying into outer space, past moon, other planets, sun, and stars. This was a trip into glory, which can be reached through no mere spatial journey. He went to an absolutely inaccessible sphere that no telescope however powerful can see and that no space vehicle regardless of its speed can ever reach. He went up in a cloud of glory into heaven.

C. Significance

We come now to a consideration of the significance of the ascension of Jesus Christ. Of what importance is it that Christ not only rose from the dead but that He also ascended into heaven?

1. The Height of Christ's victory

It is one thing to say that Christ is alive; another that He is also victorious. The height of that victory is shown forth in His ascension. The key statement in this connection is found in Ephesians: "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives" (4:8). The picture here is of the captured enemy following in Christ's train,[36] and seems to be related to the words in Colossians 2:15—"He disarmed the principalities and powers, and made a public example of them triumphing over them." The heavens through which Christ ascended are also depicted as the realm of Satan—"the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2)—and of various other evil forces—"the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). But Christ has ascended above them, leading them captive in his triumphal train. Thus Christ's movement toward heaven with the captives beneath Him dramatizes the height of His victory.[37]

Christ has won a total victory over sin and death and over all evil forces—Satan and his minions. Jesus Christ has ascended on high!

2. Our Elevation in Christ

The ascension of Christ refers not only to the height of Christ's victory but also to the fact that we are lifted up in Him.

a. Human Nature Elevated. Since Christ did not surrender His human nature in returning to heaven but ascended in our flesh, this signifies, first, the extraordinary fact that human nature has already been elevated into the glory of heaven. All persons in Christ who have lived and died are now present with Him in heaven,[38] but not in their flesh or body: such must await the resurrection at the

end of history. It also signifies, secondly, that human nature—in a way totally inexplicable—has also in Christ become participant in the godhead.[39] Never was human nature more glorious; for, in a sense far beyond anything before, God is now united to our manhood, not on earth, but in heaven!

This is surely the ultimate glorification of man. It is not that some day, as Paul says, "[Christ] will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body" (Phil. 3:21)—as glorious as that will be. It is rather that His body is already glorious, and that in Him human nature has attained its zenith. The ultimate glorification of man is the glorification of the body of Jesus Christ.

b. Believers Elevated. This leads to another extraordinary truth, namely, that those who are in Christ have already spiritually been elevated to heaven. For, says Paul, "you have died and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). This refers only to our life in Christ. Without Him we remain very much a part of earth; with Him we are elevated to heaven.[40]

However, our true life is no longer a thing of earth: our home is above. Verily "our commonwealth is [not "will be"] in heaven" (Phil. 3:20).[41]

From such a vantage point all of life should take on a different cast. It does not mean that this earthly life is unimportant or to be despised—indeed it has much value—but we should never allow it to dominate us. Indeed, from the perspective of our heavenly commonwealth we can look down upon the things of earth, see them in their limited worth, and surely not be overcome by them.

Such a life might even be called "The Ascended Life." It is a victorious life by virtue of claiming our heavenly status and constantly living out of its reality.

c. Thoughts and Affections Elevated. Climactically, since we are also creatures of earth, the challenge of our heavenly status is that we should be constantly elevating thoughts and affections to things above.

I have earlier quoted the words, "You have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God," and stressed the importance of realizing our heavenly status. But Paul in immediately preceding words says, "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. [For you have died …]" (Col. 3:2). It is actually unreal to set one's mind on the low things if one has died. Still the earthly reality remains as an ongoing temptation to slip away from this heavenly focus.

The solution clearly for the person in Christ who knows his heavenly status is to turn deliberately from the things of earth and to set his mind, his heart, his affections on things above. By so elevating the life heavenward and fixing it supremely on Christ in whom our lives are hid, things of earth that otherwise

seem so alluring and tempting can but fade away.[42] To Him be the glory!

3. The Beginning of a New Period in History

With the ascension of Jesus Christ there is the beginning of a new period in history. It is the period between His ascending into heaven and His future return from there.

It is a period of hiddenness: His disciples beheld Him in the days of His presence on earth, and all will behold Him in His return (Rev. 1:7). But in between, He is not corporeally present; hence the walk with Him must be by faith and not by sight. But in this very hiddenness there is blessedness: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (John 20:29). Indeed, there can be love and joy. In the words of Peter, “Without having seen him you love him; though you do not see him now you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy” (1 Peter 1:8). Until He returns this is to be the Christian walk—and in hiddenness there is great blessing!

It is a time of His spiritual presence. For the hiddenness does not mean absence, but presence in a more total manner. Indeed, according to Paul, Christ “ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things” (Eph. 4:10). From heaven His presence radiates through heaven and earth. Then in a special way His presence is with His disciples: for the last words He spoke, according to the Gospel of Matthew, were “Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (28:20). Such is the spiritual presence of the ascended Lord.

It is a time of expectation. Although the believer knows Christ’s hidden presence in the walk of faith, he also looks forward to the day when Christ will return in His glorious body. Even while the ascending Jesus was disappearing from the apostles’ sight, angelic voices spoke to them: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). Thus from the very moment of the Ascension and thereafter through however many days, years, even centuries there may be to come, the true posture of the believer is that of looking forward to the glorious event of Christ’s return.

Even so, Come, Lord Jesus!

III. SESSION

The climactic stage in the exaltation of Christ is His session.[43] He who humbled Himself to the depths has now been exalted to the heights. Christ who has ascended into heaven is now seated in glory.[44]

The Session is the present tense of the exalted Lord. To use the language of the Apostles' Creed: "He sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty." The preceding statement in the creed, "he ascended into heaven," is past tense: it has happened; the following statement, "from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead" is future: it has yet to occur. *Now*, during the interim, between His ascension and His final coming, Christ is seated in heaven.

Hence the session of Christ is highly important in our consideration, for it concerns the present locus and sphere of the exalted Lord. Although this is hidden from our eyes,[45] we may through the guidance of Scripture and the apprehension of faith find much that is significant for the understanding of our world and age.

A. Actuality

When Christ ascended into heaven, He immediately entered upon His session. According to Peter (who saw Him go), Christ "has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God" (1 Peter 3:22). One follows immediately upon the other without some period in between. The climax of the Ascension is the Session of the exalted Lord.

The session of Christ is frequently spoken of in immediate conjunction with His death and resurrection. On the day of Pentecost Peter, after speaking of the death and burial of Jesus, proclaimed, "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God …" (Acts 2:32–33).[46] Paul himself declares, "Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God" (Rom. 8:34 NIV). Elsewhere Paul says that God has "raised him from the dead and made him sit at his [God's] right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:20). The Book of Hebrews, with its pronounced focus on the high priestly sacrifice of Christ, moves directly from this act to the Session: "When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3); again, "when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God" (10:12). While no direct mention of the Ascension is made in these Scriptures[47] —even the Resurrection being omitted in the Hebrews passages—this does not imply the unimportance of various stages. It only signifies that everything from Christ's self-humbling death on the cross points forward to the height of His exaltation: the session of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The actuality of the session of Christ is primarily a datum of biblical revelation. We accept it first of all on the basis of the testimony of Scripture. Furthermore, unlike the Resurrection and Ascension, there were no eyewitnesses to whom we may turn, for even those who beheld Jesus in His resurrection and ascension saw Him no further. For, as we have noted, "a cloud took him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9). Thus the climax of Jesus' exaltation was hidden from their eyes. It could not have been otherwise, because Jesus had left earth for heaven—the realm presently inaccessible to human reach. Hence, the arrival of Jesus and the entrance upon His session basically is a fact to be recognized from the above quoted Scriptures.

Quite significantly two further scriptural accounts portray a beholding through the Holy Spirit, not of the commencement of Jesus' session, but of its

continuation. The first is found in the extraordinary climax to the testimony of Stephen just before his martyrdom: “But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God’” (Acts 7:55–56). Second, there is the account of John who entered heaven “in the Spirit” (Rev. 4:1–2) and beheld the throne of God surrounded by four living creatures and the thrones of elders (Rev. 4:4–11). Thereafter, John “saw between the throne [with the four living creatures] and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain” (Rev. 5:6 NASB). While neither is a physical (or natural) eyewitness account—Stephen was “full of the Holy Spirit” and John was “in the Spirit”—they do bear vivid testimony to the continuing session of Christ at the right hand of God.

Now that we have noted the biblical witness to Christ’s session, is there anything further that can be said in terms of Christian experience? The answer to this question is yes. For Paul writes these extraordinary words: “[God] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him and made us sit[48] with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6). Hence, through the grace of salvation not only have we been made alive and raised up but we have also been made to sit together with Christ. God, says Paul earlier, “has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places”[49] (Eph. 1:3). Surely this is a glorious blessing that we are now spiritually seated in heaven with Christ. This, of course, is a further advancement of the truth, earlier discussed,[50] that our lives are “hid with Christ in God”—for not only are we ascended in Him to this high place but we also sit with Him!

Whether or not we have such a vision through the Spirit of the exalted Christ as Stephen or John did (a possibility that is by no means to be ruled out), the true believer is even now spiritually seated with Christ in the “heavenly places.” Although we do not perceive Christ in His exaltation, we know in faith that He is there, for in some profound sense[51] we share this high place with Him.

B. Form

We come next to a brief statement concerning the form or manner of the session of Christ.

1. It Is by Definition a "Sitting"[52]

This sitting is both Christ's own action and also that accomplished by God the Father. I have quoted biblical statements that refer to the former: "He sat down"; and to the latter: "[God] made him to sit" (or "seated him"). In either event, it is a divine action and clearly represents an installation or, more particularly, an enthronement.

In the Book of Revelation John heard the Lord Christ say, "He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne" (3:21). Thus this "sitting down" was an enthronement, hence a royal investiture. He who humbled Himself to become a lowly bondservant has now been exalted to the place of royalty. Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, before speaking of Christ's resurrection and exaltation (Acts 2:31–33), gave as the background God's oath that He "would set one of his [David's] descendants upon his throne" (v. 30). Hence when Jesus was exalted on high and was seated, this was the fulfillment of the oath to David: it is the enthronement of the Messiah. When Peter and the other apostles were later brought before the council, they declared about Jesus that "God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince[53] and Savior" (Acts 5:31 NIV), thus as One invested with royal prerogatives.

In two instances—as previous quotations have shown—Jesus is depicted not as "sitting" but as "standing."[54] Reference is not being made, however, to His original enthronement, but to an action or stance since this occurred. In the case of Stephen who was about to be martyred, Christ may have arisen from His throne to show His love and concern, perhaps even to receive Stephen's spirit when he died.[55] One scene in the Book of Revelation depicts Christ the Lamb as standing to go and receive a scroll: "He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne" (5:7).

The "sitting" of Christ accordingly is a continuing reality. It refers not only to

His original enthronement but also to his present activity.[56] A number of the Scriptures speak of Christ as being "at the right hand of God" with no direct reference to sitting.[57] So whether He stands, or no reference is made to His activity, Christ continues to "sit" in the heavens.

2. The Session Is "at the Right Hand"

This is the prevailing picture throughout the New Testament. For whether Christ is described as "sitting," "standing," or no reference is made to either, His location or sphere is ordinarily depicted as "the right hand of God"[58] or "the right hand of the throne of God."[59]

Thus in returning to heaven Christ in some sense was positioned alongside God. His glorified humanity was not merged into the Godhead, but Jesus as the exalted One in both His divinity and humanity was placed at God's right hand. This is an amazing fact to contemplate and demonstrates that the Incarnation was not simply an earthly matter. It continues on a yet higher level in the session of Jesus Christ. He was raised in our humanity, ascended in our humanity, and His enthronement is likewise in our humanity! When Jesus returned to the Father, as God and man He was at the Father's right hand.

Hence, once more Christ is "with God" (John 1:1). This was the case before His incarnation, and now in His session He has resumed His former position. He as the Son is somehow alongside the Father: He did not lose His identity or distinct personal reality when He returned to heaven. But the new feature—in all its extraordinariness—is that His humanity is also there. Jesus Christ, Son of God *and* Son of man is at the right hand of God the Father Almighty!

3. The Session of Christ Is at the Right Hand "of God"

Here we must examine more closely this mystery: since the Son of God is also God, the right hand of God cannot ultimately mean separation from God.

To seek some understanding of this matter, let us observe the relationship between the session of Christ and the throne of God. Scripture has already been quoted that Christ is not only "at the right hand of God" but also "at the right hand of the throne of God." Hence "the throne of God" is seemingly distinct from where Christ "sits." Yet—and here is the mystery—the throne of God can also be applied to Christ Himself! Hebrews 1:8 reads: "But of the Son he says,

‘Thy throne, O

God, is for ever and ever.’” Unmistakably, the throne of God is here depicted as the throne of “the Son”—or is this perhaps a separate throne? Are there two thrones: one for the Father and another for the Son? No, the Scripture never so represents it. In the Book of Revelation where both the throne of Christ and the throne of the Father are mentioned, it is significant that they are actually identified as the same throne. For example, Christ Himself said, “He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne” (3:21).[60] There is a throne of Christ —“my throne”—but Christ does not sit on it, but on “his throne”—the throne of the Father! Revelation 4:2–11 contains the magnificent portrayal of the throne of “the Lord God Almighty” (v. 8) without any direct reference to Christ. However, in Revelation 5:6, which refers to the Lamb (Christ), the text may be read as “in the midst of the throne[61] … stood a Lamb” (KJV). Again, in Revelation 7 where “the throne of God” is mentioned (v. 15), the Lamb is said to be “in the midst of the throne” (v. 17). Still farther on, in the glorious portrayal of “the new heaven and the new earth” (Rev. 21–22) the throne of God is unmistakably also the throne of Christ: it is “the throne of God and of the Lamb” (22:1, 3). From all such descriptions it is apparent that Christ not only stands “at the right hand of God”—hence has separate identity from the Father—but also occupies the same throne as the Father or the same throne as God.

This further signifies, to use the language of the Fourth Gospel, that the Word (Christ) is not only with God but also is God (John 1:1). Accordingly, when Christ is exalted to the right hand of God (hence with God), He is also exalted to the very throne of God (hence is God). These are not two thrones, two Gods, but only one throne, one God. For though the Son and the Father are distinct (the Son at the Father’s right hand), they are both the one God (occupying the same throne).

Here, of course, is mystery incomprehensible![62] Yet we must always keep before us both perspectives of this mystery as we reflect on the wonder of Christ’s exaltation. Hence, though we may properly see Him at the Father’s right hand and so offer Him worship and praise, it is not as if He is a separate focus for our devotion (so that we worship two deities). Rather, we praise the one God —who surely also is Father and Son (and Holy Spirit)—and glorify His Name both now and forever!

C. Significance

Next we will consider the significance of the session of Christ. What is the import of Christ's sitting at the right hand of God?

1. The Blessedness of Christ

The place of Christ at God's right hand, first of all, signifies His blessedness. It is a place of supreme happiness or beatitude. In a very meaningful sense the exaltation of Christ to the Father's right hand was His "beatification."[63]

a. A Place of Favor. The right hand is a place of favor.[64] As a boy growing to manhood, Jesus "increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). At Jesus' baptism the Father spoke from heaven: "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). In humility Jesus "became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" with the result that "God has highly exalted him" (Phil. 2:8–9). All of this suggests that Jesus in His humanity ever grew in favor with God (whatever the increasing disfavor of His enemies) and that the climactic evidence of this was His exaltation following His death on the cross.

To be favored of God does not mean that God, so to speak, "plays favorites" (people may do this, not God). But surely He does delight in those who are receptive and obedient to His will and purpose. Recall the words of the angel to Mary: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God" (Luke 1:30). It is apparent, as the Scripture unfolds, that Mary's favor resulted from her humility and faith:[65] her receptivity to God's intention. If this was true of Mary, how much more of her Son Jesus who from His earliest days sought nothing but the Father's will. The first statement of Jesus recorded in the New Testament was "[Did you not know] that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49 KJV).[66] These words spoken to His parents when He was twelve years old are the background for the statement about Jesus' increasing "in favor with God."

We may rightly say that the climax of the expression of God's favor was that supreme moment when, at long last, He placed His beloved Son at His right hand.

b. A Place of Honor. To be placed at the right hand also means honor. In the case of Christ this is His coronation after passing through unimaginable suffering and death. According to Hebrews, "we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death" (2:9). In His suffering and death on the cross Christ knew nothing but dishonor, for the cross itself was the very emblem of shame; only the vilest criminals were put there. Moreover, the soldiers and spectators mocked at and spit on Him. "He was despised" (Isa. 53:3)—no other statement in Scripture puts it more poignantly. Surely none so innocent, so undeserving had ever been so abused, so little esteemed. Now after Jesus' humiliation, God the Father had done totally the opposite. He had given Jesus the highest honor heaven could afford: the Father had placed Him at His right hand! He was "crowned with glory and honor."[67] It is important to emphasize that this glory and honor did not simply belong to Jesus by virtue of who He was. As the Son of God He had undoubtedly already known glory and honor,[68] and also as the Son of man.[69] But there is yet a higher glory and honor given to Christ after His kenosis: "though he was in the form of God, [He] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,[70] but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,[71] being born in the likeness of men … he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:6–9). Christ gave up all honor and glory. Although He was equal with God, He became a bondservant; it was a total act of self-humbling. He sought nothing for Himself, but only for His fellow man. Increasingly He was dishonored, all the way to the ignominy of the cross. *This* was the One—the slave who had died as a criminal—whom God exalted to His right hand. The One of utter self-abasement and total dishonor was raised to the place of ultimate honor!

The relevance of this for Christian living should not be overlooked. Even as Jesus humbled Himself, so must His disciples also. Indeed, on several occasions our Lord spoke forth: "every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:14).[72] Those who belong to Jesus are called to suffer dishonor, humiliation, and even shame as He did. Such ones God truly will lift up on high.

c. A Place of Joy and Pleasure. At the right hand of God there is also joy and pleasure. In the words of the psalmist: "In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (16:11 KJV). To be in the presence of God, indeed at His right hand, is to know fullness of joy and pleasures that never

end. For God Himself is One whose being is a veritable fountain of life and light and happiness. Truly He, in the words of the psalmist, is our "exceeding joy" (43:4). The ultimate felicity is to be where God is.

This joy and pleasure is all the more intensified against the background of God's faithfulness at death. Immediately preceding the words about joy and pleasure the psalmist declares, "Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Sheol; Neither wilt Thou allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay" (16:10 NASB). These words are quoted by Peter and applied particularly to Jesus Himself: "Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades,[73] nor let thy Holy One see corruption"[74] (Acts 2:27). Then come the words: "Thou wilt make me full of gladness with thy presence" (2:28). Beyond the joylessness of Sheol (or Hades) and the grave is the fullness of joy and gladness at God's right hand.

One further observation: it was because of this joy ahead that our Lord was able to endure the cross and undergo the shame. In the vivid words of Hebrews, Christ "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame,[75] and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (12:2). Because Jesus looked forward to the fullness of joy at the Father's right hand, He could endure the intensity of suffering at the cross; indeed, He could even make light of its disgrace. For Jesus knew in the midst of terrifying suffering and abysmal shame what lay ahead: heaven's highest joy.

What a testimony this is! For the challenge to every believer is to follow in Jesus' steps. The words just quoted about Jesus—"for the joy that was set before him"—are preceded by the exhortation "Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter[76] of our faith, who for the joy …" (Heb. 12:1–2). Our faith is perfected, that is, brought to a finish, in the fires of suffering and abuse for the sake of Christ.[77] But, praise God! Looking to Jesus, we may even make light of it—despise it—because of the joy that lies ahead! For "in thy presence is fulness of joy, at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore."

As we conclude this discussion of the blessedness of Christ—His favor with God, His honor and glory, His joy and pleasure at the Father's right hand—we need to emphasize that all this applies (though, to be sure, in lesser measure) to those who belong to Christ, those who are "in Him." Let us call to mind the beautiful words of Paul: "[God] raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6). If even now we sit with Christ in heavenly places, then already in Him we have begun to share His blessedness. For Christ is seated at the right hand of God. There is—to God be the glory—much more yet to come. For Paul's words continue: "That in the coming ages he

might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (v. 7). Such a future would be utterly unimaginable except for the fact that even now in anticipatory fashion, we are sitting with Christ in the heavenlies. But let us rejoice that already we have been given to participate in His rich blessings: of favor, of honor, of joy. For truly they are ours in Christ Jesus.[78]

2. Investment With Total Power and Dominion

The session of Christ at the right hand of God means, second, the investment of power and authority, dominion and rule. Truly the place is one of blessedness, but Christ does not sit only to enjoy beatitude. It is also for the sake of exercising power and dominion. The "seating" is a symbol of installation, even as the "sitting" is for rule (not for rest). To be at the right hand of God is to be at the right hand of power[79] and to enter upon an administration that will climax in His final coming.

We may ask, But did not Christ as the eternal Son of God already have total power and dominion? The answer of course is yes: there can be no increase in His essential authority. However, this investment of power is of a different order. First, this is the power of Christ, the Son of God and the Son of man—the God-man. His human nature accordingly is now participating in His power and rule.[80] Christ now reigns as both God and man. Second, this is the power and authority of One who has won a vast victory. The eternal Son of God is described in Hebrews as "upholding the universe by his word of power" (1:3), but the God-man is He who has conquered every foe and now rules supreme. The fullness of power has now come to One who gave up all power, the lordship of One who sought nothing but to be a slave, the victory of One who allowed Himself to be overcome in death by all the forces of darkness. He who claimed nothing for Himself has now been awarded everything: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt. 28:18).[81]

Christ seated at the right hand of God is, therefore, given by the Father this vast power and authority. He is now the Father's co-regent, and on His behalf exercises total dominion.

a. Over All Things. The power and dominion of the exalted Christ is over all things. In the words of Paul: "He [God] raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age

but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under[82] his feet" (Eph. 1:20–22). Because of Christ's position ("right hand") and high place ("far above all"), truly He is now over all things. Again Paul writes, "For God has put all things in subjection under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:27).[83] Peter similarly declares, "Jesus Christ … has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him" (1 Peter 3:22). Christ so rules both now "in this age" and "in that which is to come."

"All things," by definition, has no limitation. This means everything in heaven and earth: authorities in heaven and rulers on earth, angels and men. The nations of the world, civilizations that rise and fall, the peoples of the earth, are all under Him. Because Christ knows this world from within—having shared its flesh and blood—and has overcome, indeed conquered, this world, He also rules over its destiny. One of the most vivid scenes in the Book of Revelation shows God on the throne with a scroll in His "right hand" containing the pattern of the consummation of history, but no one is able to open it. Then a voice is heard saying that "the Lion of the tribe of Judah … has conquered, so that he can open the scroll" (5:5). But then instead of a Lion we behold "a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain" (v. 6), that goes to the throne, takes the scroll, and thereafter opens the seals one by one. Christ, the "Lion-Lamb," rules over the destinies of men and nations. All things thus lie under His disposition and direction.

We may now fully speak of the lordship of Jesus Christ. At the close of Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost he declared, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). He who is the Son of God has been "made" Lord by virtue of His exaltation to the right hand of God and so rules supremely as God and man over all things. In the words of Paul, He is "Lord of all" (Rom. 10:12).

We observe further that the lordship of Christ is over the forces of evil. It is the rule of One who has been victorious over them. As Jesus approached death, He could already say, "I have overcome the world"[84] (John 16:33). He had not surrendered to the ways of the world, He had not fallen into its sins and transgressions, He had foiled Satan at every turn. Indeed, Christ's going all the way to suffering and death was judgment upon the world and victory over Satan. For Christ previously had said about the coming hour of His death: "Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out" (John 12:31). Then at His death, as Paul puts it, Christ "disarmed the principalities and powers … triumphing over them" (Col. 2:15).[85] Thus "the rulers of this age …

are doomed … to pass away" (1 Cor. 2:6), for they are already "dethroned powers."[86] Hence the world was overcome, Satan cast out, and the evil principalities and powers disarmed. So did Christ come into His lordship over evil, indeed over all things.

This brings us to the high point of recognizing the kingship of Jesus Christ. For in so winning the victory over sin and evil, the kingdom of darkness, Christ thereby established His own kingdom. It is a kingship and kingdom supreme over all the forces of evil. As Jesus declared to Pontius Pilate: "My kingship [or kingdom][87] is not of this world" (John 18:36). To Christ now belongs the kingship, the royal rule, the kingdom. As such, according to the Book of Revelation, Christ is now "the ruler of the kings of the earth" (1:5 NASB). They may not know it, indeed usually do not. Nonetheless He rules over them, and His kingdom is supreme above every earthly kingdom.

This, of course, does not mean that the kingdoms of earth are willingly subject to Christ.[88] During the present era of His reign they are constantly in rebellion and waywardness, and it will only be at the Parousia that all their power will be abolished and their authority totally subjugated. Paul speaks of "the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying[89] every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:24–25). Christ's reign now continues until the final destruction and subjugation of every contrary power at the end. In the words of Hebrews, "When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, then to wait[90] until his enemies should be made[91] a stool for his feet" (10:12–13).[92]

I must emphasize, however, that ever since Christ's exaltation to the Father's right hand, He has been reigning over the kingdoms of earth. Whatever the rebelliousness of evil forces, even their vicious attacks against Him and His kingdom, they cannot get out from under Him. Whatever they do, it is by His leave—even to the final fury.[93] But Christ has everything under control. Satan has been cast down from his former authority and dominion over the world, and though he continues to storm against Christ and His kingdom, his doom is sure. He may still be "the god of this world" (as Paul speaks of him in 2 Cor. 4:4), but "this world" has been overcome by Christ and its "god" stripped of his power. Jesus Christ "*is* Lord of lords and King of kings"[94] (Rev. 17:14) now!

b. Over the Church. The power and dominion of Christ is also over the church. According to Paul, God "put all things in subjection under His [Christ's] feet, and gave Him as head over all things to[95] the church" (Eph. 1:22 NASB).

Christ who is head of all things (as we have discussed) has a particular relationship to the church. For, as Paul adds, the church "is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23).

Thus the exalted Christ in a special sense is head of the church, for the church is His body. In this regard, two other statements may be noted: "Christ is head of the church, his body" (Eph. 5:23), and "He is the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1:18). As the head of the body, Christ exercises full power and authority over the church.

Hence a difference is apparent between Christ's lordship over the world and His lordship over the church. In the former case it is the lordship of unwilling subjection—all things have been "put under" Christ; in the latter it is the lordship of glad acknowledgment. The church acknowledges Jesus as Lord —"Jesus is Lord" being its foundational credo[96] —and is gladly obedient to Him in all things. The church is a body whose only function is to subserve its Head, Jesus Christ.

Yet in an extraordinary way, the church is the fullness of Christ; as noted, "the fulness of him who fills all in all." Christ, who has gone to the right hand of the Father and who fills all things, has His fullness in the church![97] Here in His body is the fullness of His expression on earth, the disclosure of His majesty and grace, the representation of His humility and love before the world. If the church in history often falls short of these things, Christ will ever seek to purify and cleanse it until His fullness shines forth in beauty and splendor.

Now let us go on to observe that Christ who fills all things and is the Head of the church directs His people through various gifts. Paul writes, "When he [Christ] ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts[98] to men … [he] ascended far above the heavens, that he might fill all things. And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers for the equipment[99] of the saints" (Eph. 4:8, 10–12). Hence, these are gifts of office to "equip" the saints. Christ, the great Head of the church, rules over His people through His equipping gifts.

It is important to recognize that the exalted Christ continues to rule and guide His church through these given offices.[100] All are essential; by and through the proper function of each the body of Christ is built up. A church without such offices is no church at all; however, these offices cannot be achieved by people. They are each and all gifts of the exalted Christ for the sake of His church.

The climactic intention of these gifts is that we mature into Christ who is our Head. We are not to be like children "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine…. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up

in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ" (Eph. 4:14–15). Christ our Head desires maturity in His body!

Next we observe that Christ as Lord over the church sends His people forth to carry forward His ministry. While it is important for the church to mature in faith and love, the intention of Christ is that the church carry the gospel to all the world. The same Lord who said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me," immediately added, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them … teaching them …" (Matt. 28:18–20). These words spoken to the apostles are a commission to the whole church. They place on the church a vast responsibility to go—witnessing, baptizing, teaching—to all peoples. However, the commission comes from the Lord who, by virtue of His victory over all the powers of sin, death, and evil, has been given all authority both in heaven and on earth. Hence, the church cannot fail if it remains obedient to this command. Moreover, the Lord who commissions the church will not be a distant, uninvolved person, for He adds climactically, "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matt. 28:20). So with His assured presence and His unlimited power, the church is to move out to execute His Great Commission.

Accordingly, a church that exists only for itself—its own edification and concerns (even though these be deeply spiritual)—is a church that is disobedient to the exalted Lord. Indeed, although such a church may even seem strong and healthy, it is inwardly weak and impotent because it is not operating out of the resources made available only to those who are carrying out Christ's missionary command.

One further word in this connection: the Gospel of Matthew closes with the Great Commission, "Go therefore … ." Nothing is said in Matthew about the disciples executing this command. The Gospel of Mark, however, after stating that "the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them[101] was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God," adds: "And they went forth and preached everywhere while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it" (16:20).[102]

To be the church of the Lord Jesus, who sits at the right hand of God, is to be a church that goes forth and preaches everywhere! Moreover, not only are we never alone ("Lo, I am with you always") but also the Lord is working with us ("the Lord worked with them"). And He, if we are faithful, continues to confirm the message by "signs" (i.e., miracles)! For it is the *Lord's* church: a church of His power, His presence and activity, and His wondrous deeds.

Finally, since Christ is the Lord of the church, He is therefore the church's defense against all evil. We may here recall that the first words in the New

Testament about the church are those of Jesus in Matthew 16:18—"I will build my church, and the powers of death[103] shall not prevail against[104] it." The church is the Lord's ("my") church and, accordingly, the powers of death—Hades, hell,[105] all the forces of darkness—shall not be able to overcome or defeat it.

Let us note carefully. This does not mean that there will be no attacks against the church. Indeed, quite the contrary, the church will go through much suffering, persecution, and even seeming destruction, for this was the way the Lord of the church Himself went. His church, His people, cannot expect less—or more. The New Testament itself—in Acts, in the Epistles, in the Book of Revelation—is a continuing record of bitter assaults of enemy forces against the church. So it has continued to the present day and will until the Lord returns. But in all this attack, persecution, even death, the church cannot be overcome. In the victorious words of Paul: "No, in all these things [persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword] we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37)!

c. Over the Believer. The power and dominion of Christ is over the individual believer. Exalted to the right hand of the Father, Christ is not only Lord over the world and over the church but He is also Lord over the person who turns to Him in true acknowledgment and faith.

Paul writes, "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved…. For, 'every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved'" (Rom. 10:9, 13).[106] Prior to this Paul declared that it is not a matter of trying to ascend to heaven to bring Christ down or descending into the abyss to bring Him up from the dead; Christ *is* Lord above. Rather, one must acknowledge that lordship and believe in His resurrection; so does salvation come. To put it another way: to believe in Christ as risen from the dead and to acknowledge Him as Lord *now* is the entry door to a new life.

Having recognized and accepted Jesus as Lord, the believer lives under that lordship. Jesus is both Savior from sin and Lord of one's life. We have been redeemed from sin and bondage—bondage to the world, the flesh, and the devil—and have a new Master. No longer are we enslaved to the tyranny of self, but set free to belong to Christ. In such devotion there is perfect freedom, for "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17 NASB). The only concern of the true believer is to perform his Master's will. Daily he asks the question, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" For Christ has become the Lord of

everything the believer is, or has, or hopes to be.

3. Source of Manifold Blessings

Christ, seated at the right hand of the Father, is the source of manifold blessings. We have earlier observed the blessedness of Christ Himself and how we share much of that blessedness with Him.[107] Now we proceed to consider a number of blessings He imparts.

a. Repentance and Forgiveness of Sins.

The first blessing of Christ the exalted Lord is that He gives repentance and forgiveness of sins. In an address to the Jews in Jerusalem Peter proclaimed, "The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:30–31). This indeed is a blessed gift from the Lord above.

For truly the heart of the Christian message is repentance and forgiveness of sins. Jesus the risen Christ had declared, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and[108] forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46–47). On the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem Peter, faithful to Christ's words, proclaimed: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38). Some three thousand people responded to the message of repentance and forgiveness and were baptized, and thus they received salvation (Acts 2:41–42). And the marvel is that behind it all, indeed above it, stands the Lord Jesus Christ, who has made this possible, the One whom "God exalted at his right hand … to give repentance … and forgiveness of sins."

So we emphasize at this point that repentance and forgiveness (or repentance for forgiveness), by which salvation comes, is a gift from the exalted Lord. Indeed, it is His primary gift, for He is exalted *to* give repentance and forgiveness. This does not mean that there is no human responsibility[109] — people do the repenting, not God—but repentance/forgiveness is not a work: it is Christ's gift from above.

It is not possible, of course, to separate a gift of Christ from a gift of God. Thus on a later occasion when the Gentiles first heard the gospel and believed, the apostles declared, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance

unto life" (Acts 11:18). Paul himself likewise spoke of God granting repentance: "God may perhaps grant that they will repent… ." (2 Tim. *2:25).*[110]

Therefore, when a person truly repents and enters into salvation and life, this occurs by virtue of the grace of God in and through the exalted Lord Jesus Christ. It is *the* primary gift—eternal salvation.

b. The Fruits of Christ's Continuing Intercession. The second blessing of the exalted Lord is that of the benefits of His continuing intercession. The Christ of John 17, who on earth supplicated the Father in heaven, continues His prayers of intercession. We may be sure they are heard, for He who offers the prayers is the Son of His love, exalted at His right hand. And so we receive the fruits of Christ's intercession.

The first fruit of Christ's intercession relates to the matter of salvation. The Book of Hebrews in its depiction of Christ as "a great high priest who has passed through the heavens" (4:14) and "who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven" (8:1). also declares that Christ "holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever" (7:24). "Hence," Hebrews adds, "He is able to save forever[111] those who draw near[112] to God through him since he always lives to make intercession for them" (7:25 NASB). Truly this is a beautiful and moving picture of Christ at the Father's right hand ever living to intercede for those who through Him come to God.

Hence, the first role of Christ as heavenly intercessor is that of praying constantly for the continuation of salvation. The same Lord who gives repentance and forgiveness of sins, that is, salvation, never ceases to pray for the enduring of that salvation. Because Christ "continues for ever," He can so intercede for all who come to God through Him. Indeed, Christ "always lives" for that purpose; the picture is not only that of temporal continuation but also of constant concern. The marvel, the wonder of such unceasing love and compassion, is utterly beyond description.

The comfort is that amid all the temptations and trials that can lure us from the path of salvation there is One in heaven who is able to save forever and is constantly in prayer that we may maintain our course. How good it is to know that when the way seems difficult and evil sorely besets us, Christ is praying that the Father will keep us[113] and that our faith will not fail.[114]

This does not necessarily mean that no believer will ever depart from the way of salvation;[115] but it does mean that Christ never ceases to pray for all who come to Him. This is comfort indeed!

The Lord Jesus, who has wrought our salvation, does not forsake us. As the

great high priest He died for us; now He ever lives to intercede on our behalf. How vastly important this is, for if we had to make it on our own, who would arrive at the final goal?

The other role of Christ's heavenly intercession relates to our ongoing Christian walk. Let us hear what Paul says: "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is he who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us" (Rom. 8:33–34 NASB).

Truly this is another vivid picture of Christ's intercessory work. For here it relates to the Christian life and the fact that at times the believer, despite what Christ has done, may allow guilt and condemnation to return. Satan himself, though having had his power broken, nonetheless often seeks to gain a hold again by false accusation[116] ("You are still a guilty sinner" et al.). But, praise God, Christ Himself is ever at the right hand of the Father to "plead our cause,"[117] to re-present His atoning sacrifice that continues to remove all guilt and condemnation.

Two related Scriptures may be noted. According to Hebrews, "Christ has entered … into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf' (9:24). And in his first letter John says, "My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate[118] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (2:1). These Scriptures further enrich the picture of Christ's making intercession at the right hand of the Father as One who never ceases to appear in God's presence as our Advocate.[119]

Verily, *who* can bring any charge, *who* is there to condemn? *No one*. For Christ Himself, our great sin-bearer, also bears every accusation against us. He whose love was so great that He lay down His life for us and suffered in our place does not cease loving us. He continues to intercede for us at the right hand of the Father.

Let us ever be aware of His continuing intercession on our behalf, thank Him daily for His never failing love, and give to Him the fresh devotion of our hearts. What a glorious Savior and Lord!

c. The Gift of the Holy Spirit. The climactic blessing of the exalted Lord is the gift of the Holy Spirit. On the Day of Pentecost Peter declared about Christ: "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear" (Acts 2:33). The Father had promised the Holy Spirit, and through the exalted Christ the Spirit had been "poured" forth; so it was that the Holy Spirit

was given. This was later referred to as “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 10:45).[120]

Before proceeding further, let us pause to reflect on the extraordinary nature of this gift. This is the gift of the Holy Spirit *Himself:* this means God, the third Person in the Holy Trinity. It is the Holy Spirit who is given, not something that the Holy Spirit gives.[121] The Holy Spirit, to be sure, does give, or make available, many things such as power for witness, mighty works, and various *charismata.* But as important as these gifts are and however closely related they are to the Holy Spirit, none of them is the gift of the Holy Spirit. For it is the Holy Spirit Himself who is “poured out” or given.

The promise of this gift goes back to the Old Testament[122] and had its initial fulfillment in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost when “a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind … there appeared to them tongues as of fire…. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:2–4). Later Peter, in identifying what had happened, declared: “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh’” (Acts 2:16–17). It is significant to note that God does this through the exalted Christ: “*he* has poured out this… .”[123] This is unmistakably the gift of the Holy Spirit.[124]

Hence the same exalted Jesus who gives repentance and forgiveness of sins[125] also gives the Holy Spirit. In this connection we may look at the earlier New Testament witness of John the Baptist. He came “preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins’ (Mark 1:4), and multitudes came to be baptized in the river Jordan, making confession of their sins. But then John added, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mark l:7–8).[126] Next we observe the words of the risen Jesus that “repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations” (Luke 24:47), thus affirming the primary message of John the Baptist.[127] Thereafter Jesus said to the disciples who are to preach the gospel: “You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). Hence against the background of the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness, the Holy Spirit—“the promise of my Father”—was sent. Jesus, speaking shortly before the event, again referred to “the promise of the Father,” adding, “John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:4, 5). Later Jesus stated, “you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall

be my witnesses …" (Acts 1:8). Then came the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit was poured out. The Spirit thus came upon them: they were "filled" or "baptized" with the Holy Spirit.[128] It was on this day that the Holy Spirit was first given.

From the words of Jesus in the preceding accounts it is apparent that the *proclamation* of repentance and the forgiveness of sin is closely related to the gift of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the disciples were not to proclaim that basic gospel message until they had received the gift of the Spirit. Once they had received this, they were enabled to proclaim the message: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38). And this they did with great power and effectiveness. For upon hearing this proclamation, some three thousand souls believed, acted on the message, and came into salvation. What an amazing result was made possible through the gift of the Holy Spirit!

The story is not over, for the same gift was also promised to those who repent and believe. Peter concluded his message: "For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him" (Acts 2:38–39). The gift follows repentance and forgiveness and is promised to all generations.

Hence we may rejoice greatly that the gift of the Holy Spirit from the exalted Lord is still promised and therefore available to us today. And what a promise that is! To repeat—for it cannot be emphasized too much—the Holy Spirit Himself is given. This had never happened before the exaltation of Christ, indeed, according to the Fourth Gospel, it could not; "for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39). But with the climax of glorification, the exaltation of Jesus to the Father's right hand, the Spirit could at last be given. So even today, as in all past years since Christ's exaltation and until He returns, the promise of the Holy Spirit remains.

And the promise is "to *every one* whom the Lord our God *calls* to him." If we know the call of God, the call that brings about repentance and forgiveness of sins,[129] then the promise is to us. Truly this is a glorious promise to all who believe in Jesus Christ.

The gift of the Holy Spirit climaxes the manifold blessings of God that come from the Lord Jesus at the right hand of the Father. Let us not fail to be open to this blessed gift and receive it through the exalted Christ.

[1]"Christianity stands or falls with the reality of the raising of Jesus from the dead. In the New Testament there is no faith that does not start a priori

with the resurrection of Jesus" (Jürgen Moltmann, The Theology of Hope, 165).

[2]The kjv reads "infallible proofs"; niv and nasb have "convincing proofs." The Greek word is tekmeriois, meaning "convincing, decisive proof' (BAGD). For some of these "proofs" see Luke 24:30-43. Cf. John 20-21.

[3]See also Acts 22:6-11; 26:13-18. Cf. Galatians 1:16-"[God] was pleased to reveal his Son to me."

[4]Floyd Filson, Jesus Christ the Risen Lord, 31.

[5]Paul Tillich: "Death was not able to push him into the past" (Systematic Theology, 2:157).

[6]E.g., the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21).

[7]E.g., the disciples hiding behind closed doors "for fear of the Jews" (John 20:19). James Dunn writes in his book The Evidence for Jesus: "If men were transformed from frightened men cowering indoors 'for fear of the Jews' (John 20:19) to men who could not be intimidated even by the leading Jewish authorities, something must have happened to them. There must be an adequate explanation for such an outcome. The 'resurrection of Jesus' is part of that explanation in Christian sources" (p. 60).

[8]It is apparent in the Gospel record that the disciples neither understood Jesus' statements that He would rise from the dead, nor believed it would happen. According to Mark 16, after the resurrection the disciples believed neither Mary nor the Emmaus disciples when they said they had seen Jesus alive. When Jesus later appeared to the Eleven "he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart" (v. 14).

[9]The swoon theory, mentioned earlier, holds that Jesus did not really die on the cross, but only lost consciousness. This similarly would have led to a search for His whereabouts after His reported resurrection. Again, no one searched for Jesus, for the simple reason that both friend and foe knew He had died. Hugh Schonfield popularized the swoon theory in his book The Passover Plot.

[10]See, e.g., the myth of Er in Plato's Republic (Bk. 10).

[11]The Greek word is elenchos, a "proof, proving," hence "a proving of unseen things" (BAGD); kjv has "evidence."

[12]Later words in Hebrews 11 regarding Moses are apropos: "He endured as seeing him who is invisible" (v. 27).

[13]Some lines from a familiar gospel hymn “He Lives” by Alfred H. Ackley express this assurance:

He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!
You ask me how I know He lives?
He lives within my heart.

[14]The Greek phrase ptoethentes de kai emphoboi maybe translated even stronger as in the kjv: “terrified and affrighted.”

[15]The Greek phrase is autos aphantos egeneto ap’ auton, literally, “he became invisible from them.”

[16]“Jesus is not awakened again to physical life … but to a spiritual corporeality” (Emil Brunner, Eternal Hope, 149). It is “the new life of a new body, not a return of life into the physical body that died but has not yet decayed” (Wolfhart Pannenberg, Dialog 4 [Spring 1965], “Did Jesus Really Rise From the Dead?”).

[17]The Greek for “physical body” is soma psychikon, for “spiritual body” is soma pneumatikon. Psychikon is translated “natural” in kjv, nasb, niv. I believe the rsv translation of “physical” sets forth better the antithesis with “spiritual.”

[18]Although Mark 16:12 is a part of Mark’s so-called Long Ending (vv. 9-20), which is not found in many early manuscripts, the verses belong to the canon of accepted Scripture. C. E. Graham Swift writes that “although the question of literary authenticity must remain uncertain, all scholars agree that these verses are canonically authentic. They are part of the ‘Canon of Holy Scripture’ “ (NBC, revised, 886).

[19]In chapter 13, “The Incarnation.”

[20]The Greek phrase is ek anastaseos nekron. The nasb margin suggests “as a result of’ as an alternate translation of ek.

[21]Thus Peter at the climax of his sermon says, “God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). To be sure Jesus was already Lord and Christ, but by His resurrection from the dead He has been “made” in the sense of constituted or declared Lord and Christ. See jb footnote on this verse.

[22]Calvin writes, “How could he have obtained the victory for us, if he had fallen in the contest?” (Institutes, 11.16.12, Beveridge trans.).

[23]This will be discussed in volume 2.

[24]Or death which is the result of sin-“sin when it is full-grown brings forth death” (James 1:15).

[25]"Broken the power of' is preferable to "abolished" (kjv, rsv, nasb) or "destroyed" (niv). The Greek verb katargeo means "to make completely inoperative" or "to put out of use," according to TDNT (1.453). Since death is still a fact in human life and thus has not actually been abolished, the neb rendering is more accurate.

[26]The Greek word is katargese. See preceding footnote. See also chapter 14, note 27.

[27]The rsv has "nature" after both "perishable" and "mortal." However, that is not in the Greek text and is misleading because Paul is talking about the resurrection of the body (see 1 Cor. 15:35ff.).

[28]Ascension Day is, of course, reckoned as ten days before Pentecost Sunday (Whitsunday), hence on Thursday.

[29]For example, Emil Brunner writes, "For Paul the Exaltation of Jesus is identical with His Resurrection, and the same is true of John: only in John, still more plainly than in Paul, resurrection and crucifixion, and therefore resurrection and exaltation are regarded as a unity. While the exaltation of Christ and his session at the Right Hand of God belong to the fundamental kerygma of the witnesses in the New Testament, the exaltation as 'Ascension' plays no part in the teaching of the Apostles" (The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, 373).

[30]Jesus appeared to the apostles "during forty days" (Acts 1:3). Thereafter the Ascension occurred.

[31]Some have thought that Jesus' words imply an immediate ascension. However, such an ascension on the day of Christ's resurrection would be contrary to the overall New Testament witness. Concerning the words here, Leon Morris writes that they "must be understood in the light of a future ascension. It is as though Jesus were saying, 'Stop clinging to Me. There is no need for this, as I am not yet at the point of permanent ascension. You will have opportunity of seeing me' " (The Gospel According to John, NICNT, 841).

[32]The Greek word is eusebeias, also "godliness" (kjv, niv, nasb).

[33]See, e.g., "Ascension Day Charade" (article in *The Christian Century* [May 24, 1967], 675–76), which describes an Ascension Day parody on the campus of an unnamed "highly respected seminary." A number of seminarians with a shout of "blast off" released gas- inflated balloons tied to an effigy of Christ. As the effigy floated upward, one student read derisively from the account of the Ascension in Acts 1.

[34]"The hypostatic union is no passing phenomenon but an abiding reality" (J. G. Davis, He Ascended into Heaven, p. 180).

[35]Which is a wholly spiritual reality. Angels are "spirits," pneumata (see Heb. 1:14).

[36]Psalm 68:18, from which the words of Paul are basically taken, says: "Thou didst ascend the holy mount, leading captives in thy train." It is important to identify these captives as enemies in both Psalms and Ephesians. "… the captives are the enemies of Christ; just as in the Psalms they are the enemies of Israel and Israel's God" (EGT on Eph. 4:8).

[37]One may here recall a stanza from the hymn by Arthur T. Russell, "The Lord Ascendeth Up on High":

The Lord ascendeth up on high,
The Lord hath triumphed gloriously,
In power and might excelling;
The grave and hell are captive led,
Lo! He returns, our glorious Head,
To His eternal dwelling.

[38]The manner of this existence is suggested in Hebrews 12:23 that speaks of "the spirits of just men made perfect" in heaven.

[39]This is "the bringing of humanity to God. .. the conclusion of the days of humiliation and the consummation of the process of glorification whereby man, in whose nature God had become participant through the Incarnation, was made participant in the glory of the Godhead" (Davis, He Ascended into Heaven, 171).

[40]"We too are directly elevated and exalted in the elevation and exaltation of the humiliated Servant of God to be Lord and King. Apart from Him we are still below, but in Him we are already above" (Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, 4.2.271).

[41]"Our home is in heaven, and here on earth we are a colony of heavenly citizens," Martin Dibelius, quoted in BAGD, "*politeuma,*" ("commonwealth" or "citizenship").

[42]Words of the chorus "Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus," by Helen H. Lemmel, come to mind:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim

In the light of His glory and grace.

[43]The word “session” is used here in the sense of “sitting” or “being seated.” See section B. 1, footnote 52, for further comment.

[44]From the human point of view, Karl Barth writes, “It is as if we had made the ascent of a mountain and had now reached the summit” (Dogmatics in Outline, 124).

[45]The summit (preceding footnote) is, so to speak, hidden by a cloud. We cannot behold it-or break through to it.

[46]Cf. Peter’s words in Acts 5:30-31.

[47]Hebrews 4:14 speaks indirectly of the Ascension: “We have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens.”

[48]The Greek word is synekathisen, “seated us” nasb, niv.

[49]The Greek word is epouraniois, “the heavenlies,” translated by niv and neb “the heavenly realms.”

[50]In section II, page 394.

[51]The meaning of this will become more apparent in section C below.

[52]The word “session” in the sense of “sitting” is used frequently to refer to the sitting together of persons composing a judicial, a deliberative, or an administrative body for the transaction of business. In the Presbyterian church the Session is the Board of Elders who “sit” regularly to discuss and direct the affairs of the church.

[53]“Similarly, kjv, nasb. The rsv and neb have “Leader” (or “leader”). The Greek word in this context means “leader, ruler, prince” (BAGD). In light of Peter’s words about the throne of David, the translation of archegon as “prince” would seem best.

[54]Acts 7:55-56; Revelation 5:6.

[55]Some recent popular teaching suggests that Christ was giving Stephen a standing ovation for his daring witness. While the suggestion may have some appeal today, the thought is certainly alien to the cultural milieu of Stephen’s time!

[56]“Whatever prosperity or defeat may occur in our space, whatever may become and pass away, there is one constant, one thing that remains and continues, this sitting of His at the right hand of the Father” (Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, 126).

[57]Recall Romans 8:34; 1 Peter 3:22.

[58]To recall Hebrews 1:3, the language is “the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Obviously “the Majesty on high” is God.

[59]As in Hebrews 12:2. Hebrews 8:1 speaks of Christ the high priest as "seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven."

[60]These words have earlier been quoted in another context.

[61]Previously, following the rsv, I quoted this phrase to read "between the throne." Such is also possible, and when it is so translated, a differentiation is made between the throne of God and that of the Lamb (in line with Christ being at the right hand of God). However, the Greek word me sos can also be-and indeed in most cases in the New Testament is-translated "midst." The neb here reads "in the very middle of'; niv "in the center of'; nasb margin "in the middle of."

[62]In the spirit of Paul we say again: "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion"! (1 Tim. 3:16).

[63]This term is used in the Roman Catholic Church to refer to a deceased person having attained the blessedness of heaven and the church's authorization of the title "Blessed" to be used in his or her connection. (This is the first step to "canonization.") Surely Christ, beyond all others, was "beatified."

[64]This is true in many cultures. For example, a guest may be seated at one's right hand to show special favor and appreciation.

[65]Recall Mary's words after the announcement of her impending conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Also note the words of Elizabeth to Mary: "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Luke 1:45).

[66]The rsv reads, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (similarly niv, neb, nasb). The Greek text of the last phrase is en tois tou patros mou, literally, "in the [things] of my Father" (as with nasb marginal reading); hence, "about the things [affairs, matters] of my Father." The kjv seems to come closest to catching the meaning of the original text.

[67]In the words of Isaiah 52:13: "Behold, my servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high." This is the background for all that is said in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 about the servant (the Messiah) who was despised and rejected by men.

[68]About the eternal Son of God Hebrews says, "He reflects the glory of God" (1:3); and about the Incarnate Son is added, "Let all God's angels worship Him" (1:6). Thus glory and honor were Christ's already.

[69]Note that the expression “crowned with glory and honor” (Heb. 2:9 above) refers originally in Psalm 8 to man in general. Referring to man (or the son of man), the psalmist adds, “Thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honor” (8:5). Jesus as the Son of man was especially “crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death” (Heb. 2:9).

[70]The Greek word is harpagmon, doubtless here meaning to “hold fast.”

[71]Instead of rsv “servant.” The Greek word is doulos, basically meaning a slave (so neb translates.)

[72]See also Matthew 23:12; Luke 14:11.

[73]“Hades” here, like “Sheol,” refers simply to the realm of the dead.

[74]The Greek phrase is idein diaphthoran, “undergo decay” (nasb).

[75]The Greek phrase is aischynes kataphronesas, “making light of its disgrace” (neb).

[76]The Greek phrase is archegon kai teleioten, “author and finisher” (kjv).

[77]“Jesus … suffered outside the gate…. Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured” (Heb. 13:12-13).

[78]How true are these words of Paul: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:3).

[79]Jesus Himself speaks of “the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power” (Matt. 26:64).

[80]In the words of L. Berkhof, “His human nature was made to share in the glory of this royal dominion” (Systematic Theology, 411).

[81]These words at the end of the Gospel of Matthew reflect the exaltation of Christ.

[82]The Greek phrase is panta hypetaxen hypo, literally “all things subjected under.”

[83]Paul’s free quotation from Psalm 8:6 begins panta hypetaxen hypo.

[84]The word “world” (Gr. kos mos) in the New Testament often refers simply to the created order, the world as man’s place of existence. However, here it refers to the world as the arena of opposition to God.

[85]Recall our brief discussion of this in the section on the significance of the Ascension (C. 1., p. 393).

[86][86]This is an expression used by Moffatt in his vivid translation of this verse: “the dethroned powers who rule this world.” In the language of

Visser t'Hooft, "The inimical powers are no longer on the throne and that throne is occupied"! (The Kingship of Christ 81).

[87]The Greek word is basileia. It may be translated "kingship" (rsv) or "kingdom" (kjv, nasb, neb, niv) depending on the context. Pilate has just asked Jesus the question "Are you the King [basileus] of the Jews?" (v. 33). Hence the note of kingship is doubtless contained in Jesus' answer. However, there can be little doubt that the idea of kingdom is also included.

[88]The kingdoms of earth are surely included in the "all things" of 1 Corinthians 15:27-"For God has put all things in subjection under his feet." Subjection is one thing, willing subjection another.

[89]The Greek word is katargese. Here "destroy" (or "abolish" nasb) seems preferable to "break the power of' (as in 2 Tim. 1:10 neb; see footnotes 25 and 26 above).

[90]The Greek phrase is to loipon ekdechomenos, literally "henceforth awaiting." The kjv translation "henceforth expecting" conveys, though the terminology seems awkward, the notes of eschatological waiting or expectation. TDNT refers to ekdedechomai as here expressing "eschatological expectation" (2.56).

[91]Or "put" as in 1 Corinthians 15:25. A form of the verb tithemi is used in both 1 Corinthians 15 and Hebrews 10.

[92]In addition to these New Testament references (in 1 Corinthians and Hebrews) we may also call to mind the messianic words of Psalm 110:1-"The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet' " (niv). Jesus unmistakably applies these words to Himself (see Matt. 22:41-45; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44; also cf. Acts 2:34-35).

[93]In the Book of Revelation such a consummate force of evil as the beast "out of the sea" (often called "the Antichrist") who conquers Christians and has authority over every tribe and nation can exercise this force only by the leave of Christ: "It was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them; and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him" (13:7 nasb).

[94]These words are spoken against the backdrop of the kings of earth giving over their authority to the beast and are preceded by "they will make war on the Lamb." However, the Lamb will conquer them because His lordship has been established. Climactically, when Christ returns with "a sharp sword … to smite the nations," He is depicted as having "on his

robe and on his thigh … a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev. 19:15-16). Hence He is King now, not in the future, and will fully manifest his kingship at His return.

[95]Or "for" as in rsv, niv. The dative case in Greek can be translated either way. The neb translates the latter part of the verse above as "and appointed him as supreme head to the church."

[96]As, e.g., in Romans 10:9 and 1 Corinthians 12:3.

[97]Commenting on pleroma, translated "fullness" EGT adds: "… this plenitude of the Divine powers and qualities which are in Christ is imparted by Him to His Church, so that the latter is pervaded by His presence, animated by His life, filled with all His gifts and energies and graces" (3.282). In the words of F. F. Bruce, "the fullness of deity resides in him [Christ], and out of that fullness his church is being constantly supplied" (The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians, NICNT, 277).

[98]The Greek word for gifts here is domata (not the same as charismata as in Rom. 12:6 and 1 Cor. 12:4).

[99]Or the "equipping" (nasb).

[100]For further comment on these offices see volume 3.

[101]The commission in Mark while beginning with "Go" (16:15), differs somewhat in terminology from Matthew's version; however, it is essentially the same commission.

[102]The word translated "signs," sèmeion, doubtless means "miracles." So neb translates the word; also nasb has this reading in the margin.

[103]The Greek phrase is pulai hadou, literally, "the gates of Hades" (so in nasb, niv). The neb, like rsv, has "the powers of death." The kjv has "the gates of hell."

[104]The verb here is katischusousin, also translated "overpower" (nasb), "overcome" (niv), "conquer" (neb). The marginal reading in the niv of "not prove stronger than" (which suggests that "the powers of death" rather than being unable to conquer the church are not able to hold out against it) seems inadequate. The other two uses of katischuo in the New Testament, Luke 21:36 and 23:23, unquestionably convey the idea of positive activity. This is especially clear in Luke 23:23-"their voices prevailed" (katischuon).

[105]The word "Hades," while often simply meaning the realm of the dead (like Sheol, the "shades"), may also contain the more fearful note of the

abode of the ungodly, hence a place of torment (cf. Luke 16:23): the realm of the power of Satan. Accordingly, kjv, translating "Hades" as "hell" in Matthew 16:18, does so with real justification.

[106]Paul's quotation "Every one who calls …" is taken from Joel 2:32. It is significant that in the first proclamation of the gospel on the Day of Pentecost, Peter likewise quotes these words from Joel (see Acts 2:21).

[107]C.I., pages 400-403.

[108]Or "for" (nasb). Greek manuscripts vary between kai ("and") and eis ("for").

[109]The relation between the divine gift and the human activity will be discussed in more detail in volume 2.

[110]The context is Paul's instruction to Timothy about being "an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness"; and then Paul adds the words quoted above.

[111]The Greek phrase is eis to panteles, literally, "to the entire." This can have either a temporal meaning: "forever" (as in nasb above), "for all time' (rsv); or a quantitative meaning: "to the uttermost" (kjv), "completely" (niv), "absolutely" (neb) (see BAGD). In light of the temporal context (a permanent priesthood, continuing forever), I am inclined to the nasb and rsv readings. (This, however, does not rule out the other meaning of completeness, since this idea may also be contained in the translation "forever" or "for all time.")

[112]The Greek word is proserchomenous, literally, "coming to." "Come unto" (kjv), "approach" (neb), "draw near" (rsv, nasb) are also possible.

[113]Jesus' prayer in John 17 for His disciples that the Father would "keep them from the evil one" (v. 15) is doubtless His continuing prayer in heaven for all believers.

[114]The words of Jesus to Peter "Satan demanded to have you … but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22:32) are surely a beautiful preview of the heavenly prayers of Jesus for all believers whom Satan would seek to lead away.

[115]See volume 2, chapter 5, "Perseverance," for a discussion of this.

[116]In Revelation 12:10 Satan is called "The accuser of our brethren … who accuses them night and day before our God" (cf. Zech. 3:1).

[117]NEB, instead of "intercedes" in Romans 8:34, has "pleads our cause." The Greek word entynchanei also contains this note.

[118]The Greek word is parakleton. The literal meaning (as nasb mg. states) is

"one called alongside to help." The niv translates parakleton as "one who speaks … in our defense"; the neb reads: "one to plead our cause." Parakletos is also used several times in the Fourth Gospel to refer to the Holy Spirit.

[119]Calvin puts it thus: "Having entered the temple not made with hands, he constantly appears as our advocate and intercessor in the presence of the Father; directs attention to his own righteousness, so as to turn it away from our sins; so reconciles him to us, as by his intercession to pave for us a way of access to his throne …" Institutes, II.16.16.

[120]Although the language of Acts 10:45 is used in regard to the Gentiles, it also refers to what was given to the original disciples on the Day of Pentecost. It was "the same gift" (Acts 11:17), according to Peter.

[121]"The gift of the Holy Spirit" contains an objective genitive, i.e., the Holy Spirit as gift, not subjective, i.e., the Holy Spirit as giver.

[122]See particularly Joel 2:28-29; Isaiah 44:2-3; Ezekiel 39:29.

[123]Acts 2:33 (as quoted above).

[124]See footnote 120 re Acts 10:45 (and 11:17).

[125]See above, pages 409-10.

[126]See parallels in Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16; John 1:33.

[127]Two very important additions, however, should be noted: it is to be "in his name" (thus bringing salvation) and "to all nations" (John spoke only to the Jewish nation).

[128]As before quoted, the language of Acts 2:4 is that of being "filled"; however, this unmistakably is a fulfillment of the promise of being "baptized with the Holy Spirit" as declared in Acts 1:4-5. See also Acts 11:16-17.

[129]See volume 2, chapter 1, "Calling."

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Volume Two

Renewal Theology

Salvation, the Holy Spirit, and Christian Living

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS
PREFACE
1. Calling
2. Regeneration
3. Justification
4. Sanctification
5. Perseverance
6. The Holy Spirit
7. The Enabling Spirit
8. The Coming of the Holy Spirit
9. The Phenomenon of Tongues
10. The Mission of the Holy Spirit
11. The Reception of the Holy Spirit
12. The Effects of the Coming of the Spirit
13. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit
14. The Ninefold Manifestation
15. Christian Living
BIBLIOGRAPHY

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	*Anchor Bible*
ASV	American Standard Version
BAGD	Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon of* the New Testament
BDB	*Brown, Driver, and Briggs, Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament*
BDF	*Blass, Debrunner, and Funk, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*
EBC	*Expositor's Bible Commentary*
EDT	*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*
EGT	*Expositor's Greek Testament*
HNTC	*Harper's New Testament Commentary*
IB	*Interpreter's Bible*
ICC	*International Critical Commentary*
IDB	*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
ISBE	*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised Edition*
JB	Jerusalem Bible
KJV	King James Version
LCC	*Library of Christian Classics*
LXX	Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCBC	*New Century Bible Commentary*
NEB	New English Bible
NICNT	*New International Commentary of the New Testament*
NICOT	*New International Commentary of the Old Testament*
NIDNTT	*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*
NIGTC	*New International Greek Testament Commentary*
NIV	New International Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version

TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TNTC	*Tyndale New Testament Commentary*
TOTC	*Tyndale Old Testament Commentary*
TWOT	*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UBS	United Bible Societies Greek New Testament
WBC	*Word Bible Commentary*
WBE	*Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*
ZPEB	*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*

PREFACE

Renewal Theology: Salvation, the Holy Spirit, and Christian Living is a treatise on the Christian faith. It begins with a consideration of the way of salvation from the calling of God to final perseverance. Next, the person and work of the Holy Spirit, His coming, and the gifts of the Spirit are given attention. The book concludes with a discussion of Christian living.

The opening chapters on salvation deal with the heart of the Christian faith. This section concerns how God's work of redemption in Jesus Christ becomes effective for mankind. How do we enter on the way of salvation and continue in it? In this connection particular attention is given to the doctrines of regeneration, justification, and sanctification. I have written this section on salvation with the strong conviction of the need for fuller biblical, theological, and practical understanding in these areas.

The next chapters discuss many aspects of the activity of the Holy Spirit that call for special attention in our time. After some reflection on the identity and nature of the Holy Spirit, I turn to a study of His unique work of enabling and empowering. The coming of the Holy Spirit, next considered, is the critical center of this section of the book. I deal with the phenomenon of tongues after that. Next I write in some detail about the gifts of the Holy Spirit and focus on the ninefold manifestation of these gifts. My concern in this matter is to give a thorough biblical presentation of these spiritual gifts in their nature and function and to demonstrate their relevance for today.

The study in the aforementioned area of the Holy Spirit has particular bearing on the charismatic renewal in our time. As a participant in that renewal since 1965, I have long been concerned with its biblical and theological orientation. I trust that what is said in the section on the Holy Spirit will provide both an elaboration and a critique of many of the emphases in this renewal. Also it is my hope that both participants and nonparticipants will find this portion of the book helpful.

The final chapter on Christian living, which deals with doing God's will, walking in the light, and following the way of love, provides an ethical climax to this volume of *Renewal Theology.*

Renewal Theology: Salvation, the Holy Spirit, and Christian Living is the

second of two volumes. The first is entitled Renewal Theology: God, the World, and Redemption. Although volume 2 does not necessarily presuppose the use of volume 1, there is undoubtedly value in reading and studying what has preceded. Incidentally, there are footnotes in this volume that refer to volume 1, and it may prove helpful to follow them up. I also call attention to the preface in the first volume for further orientation to the writing of both volumes.

Finally, I extend appreciation to Regent University for the sabbatical leave that provided time for the research and writing of this volume. In this regard I express special thanks to Pat Robertson, Chancellor; Bob Slosser, President; Carle Hunt, Vice President for Academic Affairs; and Jerry Horner, Dean of the College of Theology and Ministry. As with volume 1, I am grateful for the careful reading of the manuscript by my colleagues in the School of Biblical Studies, John Rea and Charles Holman, and for the helpful suggestions they made. Mark Wilson has again been of great help in the initial editing of my material and in providing the several indexes. Also I offer thanks to Gerard Terpstra of Zondervan Publishing House for his invaluable work in the final editing of the material in this volume. My wife, Jo, has again been extremely helpful in putting all this material on computer and, even more, has been a constant source of challenge and encouragement.

This second volume of *Renewal Theology* is dedicated to “the Spirit of truth” (John 16:13). I sincerely hope that all who read these pages will be led more deeply into the truth that He alone can reveal.

1
Calling

In the last several chapters of volume 1 we have discussed the person and work of Jesus Christ: His incarnation, vicarious sacrifice, and exaltation. Their main thrust has been His entrance into the world as Savior: “To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). The question now before us is this: How does the work of Christ as Savior become effectual for us? How is His great redemption applied to us?

Surely it would be a serious mistake to say that what Jesus Christ did depends basically on us. This is not the case, for “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself’ (2 Cor. 5:19). Thus He accomplished something at the cross objectively for all mankind. However, it would also be a serious mistake to view the work of reconciliation and redemption as becoming effective without our participation. This is far from the truth. God has done everything on His part, but you and I must receive it, else we are still in our sins.

Hence, we come now to the critical matter of how the redemption through Christ becomes effective on our behalf. We begin our consideration of salvation with the doctrine of *calling:* God calls us to salvation.

I. PRELIMINARY—THE WORD “CALLING”

A. A Variety of Usages Unrelated to Salvation

The word “calling” or “call” may be used in a number of ways not directly related to salvation. It may mean to *name* as in the Scripture, “You shall call his name Jesus” (Matt. 1:21). Or it can signify to *summon:* “They called together the whole battalion” (Mark 15:16). Also there is the meaning of *designate* or *appoint:* “Paul … called to be an apostle” (Rom. 1:1). Further it may signify a *vocation:* “Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called” (1 Cor. 7:20 KJV). The last of these—calling as “vocation”—is common in secular usage, i.e., one’s calling or vocation in life, but at the same time it suggests some dimension beyond human decision.

B. General Calling to Salvation

In this connection the particularly relevant Scripture is Matthew 22:1–14, the parable of the marriage feast. Jesus told of a king who prepared a marriage feast for his son and then sent out his servants "to call those who were invited" (v. 3). All those invited spurned the invitation—some made light of it going off to farm and business, others abused and killed the servants. The king destroyed the murderers, and then sent other servants into the thoroughfares to invite as many as they found (v. 9). So they came, although one man entered without a wedding garment and as a result was cast into "outer darkness." The final word of Jesus in this parable is that "many are called, but few are chosen" (v. 14).

This parallels God's word through Isaiah: "When I called, you did not answer, when I spoke, you did not listen," and the result: "I will destine you to the sword, and all of you shall bow down to the slaughter" (Isa. 65:12). God called, but the response was negative. Thus they were not God's "chosen."[1]

In a similar way, though not directly related to salvation, Jesus called many to follow Him in His ministry. But not all responded positively. Whereas some immediately followed Him,[2] others turned away. The account in Luke 9:57–62 depicts one person after another who found the cost too great or who would not give the call priority in their lives ("Lord, let me first go and bury my father … let me first say farewell to those at my home") and thus did not become Jesus' disciples. They were called but decided not to follow.

The call of God therefore does not always bring about an affirmative response. Many are called to the marriage feast, to heed God's word, to accept Christ's invitation, but some do not respond; indeed only a few do. Thus the summary word: many are called but few are chosen—or, according to the Greek text, many[3] are *kletoi* (called) but few are *eklektoi* (called out, elect, chosen).

The general call of God is sometimes described as the universal call of God. In the words of Calvin, "There is a universal call, by which God through the external preaching of the word, invites all men alike… ."[4] All men are called to salvation, whatever their responses.

C. Effectual Calling to Salvation

This call of God is our basic concern, for it relates vitally to the area of salvation. It is sometimes described as “effectual calling,” that is to say, the calling of God that is effectual unto salvation.[5] This is the most frequent use of the word “call” in the New Testament.

Here we may note a number of biblical references. Two particularly stand out. Peter writes, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). In the words of Paul, “Share in suffering for the gospel in the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling” (2 Tim. 1:8–9). We have been “called out of darkness”; God has “saved us and called us.” Both are expressions of that calling of God wherein salvation comes about. A few other Scriptures may be added: “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son” (1 Cor. 1:9); “Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (Eph. 4:1; “… holy brethren, who share in a heavenly call” (Heb. 3:1); “He called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 2:14); “The God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ …” (1 Peter 5:10).

In all these cases, the “called” ones are the “saved” ones. They have entered into a totally new sphere of fellowship with Christ and a sharing in His eternal glory.

II. BACKGROUND

Our consideration now will relate to God’s calling of those who are in Christ —who have received salvation through Him—hence effectual calling. What is its background?

A. God’s Gracious Purpose

Let us continue with the words of Paul in 2 Timothy 1:9—“God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago… .”God’s calling to salvation has nothing to do with our works, for our works can never achieve salvation. If the calling were based on works, no one would ever be saved, since all the works of everyone are laden with sin. Thus the calling is fully based on grace—God’s unmerited love given to us in Christ Jesus—and that grace is in conjunction with God’s purpose. In another statement Paul writes that we are “called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

The gracious purpose of God reaches far back: it existed “ages ago,” or literally, “before times eternal.”[6] Thus it is an aspect of God’s eternal purpose. Paul writes elsewhere of “the eternal purpose which he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:11). Hence both God’s action in Jesus Christ and the grace we have received through Him go back into God’s purpose in eternity.

I should add that God’s gracious purpose for salvation is an aspect of His total purpose for all things. Paul speaks of “the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will” (Eph. 1:11). At the very heart of that overall purpose is God’s ultimate intention to head up everything in Christ. For Paul had just spoken of the “mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ” as “a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:9–10). God’s gracious purpose for salvation is grounded in this universal purpose of God.

B. God's Choosing

The background of God's calling to salvation is also His choosing. Let us return to 2 Thessalonians and notice Paul's previous words: "God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel …" (2:13–14). Thus behind God's calling is His choosing.

Further, this choosing is "from the beginning." What takes place in the present, namely, the calling to salvation, had its origins long ago.

Nowhere is this more vividly expressed than in Ephesians 1:4—"He [God] chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world." Thus we are again "before times eternal"—the eternity that precedes the creation of the world. Even as God's grace and purpose were given to us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, likewise God has chosen us before there ever was a world.

Incidentally, we should pause for a moment to consider the extraordinariness of this statement. This is the only biblical reference to what God did before the foundation of the world. Here the one amazing thing, we are told, is that He "chose us in Christ"! *Prior* to Genesis 1:1 ("In the beginning God created … ") was our eternal choosing or election[7] in Jesus Christ!

This marvelous fact highlights two things. First, the call of God is wholly a matter of His prevenient grace: His grace eternally preceded our call to salvation. God's free mercy is thereby vividly declared.[8] It is not that we have chosen Him, but He has chosen us. The words of Jesus to His disciples are quite relevant: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you" (John 15:16). The response necessary on our part is not to an indifferent God. Far from it, He has already—long prior to our response—reached out and chosen us.[9]

Second, it provides an unshakable basis for our call and salvation. Since God's call reaches us out of eternity and stems from His purpose and action (choice) before the world began, a foundation is provided that nothing else can give. Works, once again—even the best of them—can have absolutely nothing to do with it, since works belong to time. How splendid it is to know that the calling to salvation is based on nothing in us but wholly on the prior purpose and action of Almighty God.

The precursor of this calling to salvation is found in the Old Testament, where Israel is called to be a holy nation and is chosen by God for that purpose. "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you

to be a people for his own possession" (Deut. 7:6). This choice has nothing to do with Israel's own qualifications, but lies wholly in God's grace: "It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because the Lord loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers" (Deut. 7:7–8). The calling of Israel was based on God's election of grace.

Another word used in the New Testament in connection with God's choosing or electing is *predestining*. After Paul writes about God's choosing us in Christ before the foundation of the world, he adds, "In love He predestinated[10] us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself" (Eph. 1:4–5 NASB). Hence, predestining points to the same prior action of God, with the emphasis more particularly on God's *sovereign action* in the choosing or electing. Predestining also points more directly to the *end* to which we are called. Later in Ephesians 1 Paul speaks of our "having been predestined according to his purpose … to the end that we … should be to the praise of His glory" (vv. 11–12 NASB). Having noted these things—the broader meaning of God's sovereign action and the larger meaning of direction—we now observe that the word "predestine" may serve for "choose" or "elect."

This is illustrated in Romans 8:28–30. Paul first speaks of calling: "those … who are called according to his [God's] purpose." He then proceeds to say, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son…. And those whom he predestined he also called… ." The end of this sequence is glorification: "Those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified." Again both God's sovereign action is stressed—quite strongly through the whole sequence of events—and the ultimate intention: glorification.

In passing, it is important (in the light of many misinterpretations) to observe that the word "predestine" or "predestinate" is never used in the New Testament to refer to anything other than the arena of salvation—(as we have noted), adoption of sons, living to the praise of God, glorification—or matters connected with these realities.[11] Accordingly, a view of "double predestination"—a predestination referring to death and damnation as well as to eternal life[12] —has utterly no basis in Scripture. This does not mean that there is no death or damnation,[13] but such does not belong to God's predestining action, which (as we have noted) refers only to the general arena of salvation.

C. God's Foreknowledge

We proceed next to another factor in the background of calling, namely, foreknowledge. Here we recall Paul's words in Romans 8: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined …" (v. 29). Significantly God's predestining (choosing, electing) is of persons "whom he foreknew." Peter in the salutation of his first letter similarly addresses the scattered believers as those "who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1 Peter 1:1–2 NASB). These two Scriptures, from Paul and Peter, underscore the fact that God's elect are personally foreknown by Him; He does not choose or predestine them as abstract entities but as real persons.

We may observe specific illustrations of this. First, Israel is spoken of by Paul as a people whom God foreknew: "God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew" (Rom. 11:2). As God's chosen people in the Old Testament, they were foreknown by Him; God in His infinite knowledge and love[14] knew Israel before He chose them. Second, and quite remarkably, Jesus Himself is described by Peter as "foreknown before the foundation of the world" (1 Peter 1:20 NASB). Jesus was also God's Chosen,[15] but like Israel and Christian believers, He was foreknown before the world was made.

A pertinent Scripture relevant in this connection is Psalm 139, which begins: "O LORD, thou hast searched me and known me" (v. 1). It continues later: "Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance; in thy book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them" (v. 16). The psalmist says that God foresees, as in a book, everything about us as well as everything we do. His love, His grace, is indeed particular and detailed. Likewise, we may add, does God foreknow those whom He chooses. It is this foreknowledge that fills His election with profound and personal meaning. So can the psalmist cry: "How precious to me are thy thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!" (v. 17).

Before leaving the relationship of God's foreknowledge to election (or predestination), it is important to observe that Scripture nowhere suggests that God's election is based on foreknowledge in the sense of God's knowing ahead what someone will do and then basing His election on that knowledge.[16] This was not true of Israel in the Old Testament or of Jesus as God's Chosen in the New Testament, and correspondingly it is not true of the Christian believer. The idea of election as based on what God foresees in human action is actually alien

to the whole biblical witness.

EXCURSUS I: ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT ELECTION

1. Election is not to be understood in the New Testament as a limitation by which only so many *can* believe—as if God's grace were discriminate—but that all who *do* believe have their faith grounded in eternity.[17] To say that "God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world" is not to say that he reprobated others (thus preordained their death—Calvin; or passed them by—a later, more moderate Calvinism) but to say with glad conviction that our faith is based on the infinitely solid rock of God's prior action and foreknowledge. Thus it is a matter of great joy. Paul says, "[We] have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:12)!

2. Election does not rule out human responsibility. There is nothing automatic about it. As we noted earlier, "Many are called, but few are chosen." There must be the response of faith. However, when this response does occur, the calling is an "effectual calling,"[18] both because of man's faith and because of his grounding in the prior purpose and action of God. The very fact that there is a call of God (the "general" or "universal" call) that does not always result in salvation is by no means due to any withholding on the part of God, for Scripture makes it clear that "God our Savior … desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:3–4). The failure is due to people's turning away from God's purpose for them. It is indeed possible to reject God's purpose,[19] to turn from the light: "Light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light" (John 3:19). Election coerces no one nor rules anyone out but is the firm background for all who in faith respond to God's glorious grace.

3. Election consequently is to be held in close correlation with faith. It is not because we are elected that we are able to believe (Calvinism)[20] nor are we elected on the basis of foreseen faith (Arminianism)[21] but that *we are elected as believers.* God "chose us in him"—in Jesus Christ—"before the foundation of the world." This Ephesians passage from the outset is addressed to "believers incorporate in Christ Jesus" (1:1 NEB). Hence when Paul proceeds to say that "God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world," he speaks of

believers and no one else. Thus there is no choice outside our being "in Christ." Consequently, all that the New Testament has to say about election is addressed to believers and is relevant only in connection with them.[22] If one, even for a moment, steps outside the correlation of election and faith, the situation becomes meaningless. Election is related only to those "in Christ"; outside Him there is no election. Again, it is "those who love him [God], who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Thus it is the people of faith who are the elect people of God.[23]

What about persons outside this correlation of election and faith? Their situation seems to be thus: God yearns for their salvation as well, and Jesus Christ died for them all. It is reprehensible to speak of a limited atonement, that is to say, that Christ died only for those whom God elected to salvation. Christ did not come into the world to save some and condemn others, but to save all. The only barrier is man's own disbelief: "This is the condemnation, that … men loved darkness" (John 3:19 KJV). Thus general calling is the calling of God's outreaching love that would take every person to Himself. He has no hidden agenda, by which He has already decided to save some and reprobate or bypass the others. There is *no* predestination to death. God's purpose is never destruction. Those who do not believe will go into darkness, but this is not God's desire. They go, not because God did *not* choose them before the foundation of the world, but because in spite of His great love and act of reconciliation they do not choose to receive it in faith.

Let us note further that God's saving action in Jesus Christ is shown in the New Testament to bring about both positive and negative results. According to Luke 2:34, Simeon prophesied, "Behold, this child [Jesus] is set for[24] the fall[25] and rising of many in Israel" (KJV). This does not mean that Christ came in order that people might both fall and rise, for earlier Simeon had said, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation … a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel" (2:30, 32). Christ came that people might rise rather than fall; He came as Savior and not also as Destroyer. However, His very coming precipitates a crisis in which some fall and others rise. Similarly God says in Romans 9:33: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make men stumble, a rock that will make them fall; and he who believes in him will not be put to shame"[26] (compare 1 Peter 2:6).[27] Again there is a twofold result. While the text may suggest that Christ came to bring about people's stumbling and falling, this is not the case. Peter gives the real reason: "they stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do" (v. 8).[28] The stumbling is due to disobedience, *not* to God's predetermination; the destining is not due to God's

prior decision, but to their disobedience of the word.

The gospel proclamation itself brings about a twofold result. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 2:15–16 that "we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life." The same gospel (always good news with the same "aroma")[29] is the fragrance of death to one, of life to another. Is this due to the gospel? Not at all, for the gospel is for life, not for death. Is this because God withholds saving grace from the dying? Not at all: it is the same grace, the same beautiful fragrance. But some die *because they are not able to receive it.*[30] The gospel is for them, tragically, a fragrance unto death.

On this latter point, there are persons whom Paul describes elsewhere as "vessels of wrath fitted[31] to destruction" (Rom. 9:22 KJV). This might seem to suggest that "the vessels of wrath" were fitted beforehand by God to be such vessels. However, the larger context about "the vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory" (v. 23) excludes this interpretation. The vessels of wrath were not "prepared beforehand" for destruction, but "fitted" thereto because of their condition.

To summarize, there *are two destinations, but not two predestinations.* Christ came to save, not to condemn, to bring life, not to bring death. Yet His very coming brings about both falling and rising, destruction and salvation. He is the light that draws, the light that repels (John 3:19–21); a precious cornerstone and a stone of stumbling;[32] a fragrance that brings life and a fragrance that brings death. But none of this—the falling, the repulsion, the stumbling, the death—is due to God's decree but to *what is in man himself.*

Let us emphasize this latter point: what is in man himself. We earlier quoted the words of Simeon about "this child" being "set for the fall and rising of many." Shortly thereafter Simeon added, "that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:35). In other words, the fall and rising are a revelation of people's innermost disposition—the thoughts of their hearts—and they respond accordingly. Hence, the falling and rising are not the revelation of an eternal decree of God regardless of man's situation; rather the very falling and rising are due to the condition of the heart.

God ordains life, and He ordains death. In the one case, it occurs through faith, and in the other, through unbelief. Moreover, God unquestionably remains sovereign over both those who believe and those who disbelieve. Nothing occurs outside His ultimate control and disposition. He is the sovereign Lord of life and death, of heaven and hell, of this age and all that may occur in the ages to come. *But,* let us never say that the destiny of man, any man, has been fixed by God in

eternity and for eternity. The ordination of life is for those who believe in His only Son Jesus Christ, the ordination of death for those who spurn His unspeakable gift of love.

In Jesus Christ—to close with the magnificent words of Paul—"*it is always Yes*" (2 Cor. 1:19). There is a No, but it is outside Him. Let us therefore proclaim the Yes of Christ with great joy to all mankind.

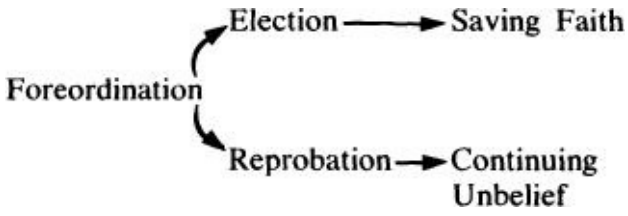
EXCURSUS II: ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT FOREKNOWLEDGE

A *neglect* or *misapprehension* of foreknowledge leads to a serious misunderstanding regarding the doctrine of salvation. *Each* must be carefully guarded against.

1. If one moves from God's eternal purpose to election neglecting to consider foreknowledge, the result will be that of arbitrary election: a "decree" of election. In Calvinistic theology the stress falls on this decree. It is set not against the background of foreknowledge but of absolute foreordination, the foreordination of all things. The decree of election is then viewed as a special application of this general decree. This may be diagramed as follows:

Foreordination → Election → Saving Faith

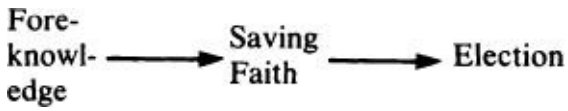
Hence against the background of absolute foreordination, the decree of election goes forth and necessarily brings about faith and salvation. Furthermore, since absolute foreordination rather than foreknowledge is the background—and not all people believe—and since there can be faith only if there has been election, then there must be another decree of reprobation,[33] whether the decrees were before or after the Fall.[34] Thus:



In both cases above saving faith is viewed as the result of election: it is an election *to* faith and salvation.

2. If, on the other hand, one misapprehends foreknowledge by viewing it as the foreseeing of faith, the result will be that of exaggerating human freedom. Divine election would therefore be based on the human decision of faith. Arminian theology, which represents this viewpoint,[35] stresses foreknowledge in general (counter to foreordination in general of Calvinism). Election is based on

the particular foreseeing of those who will believe. This may be diagramed as follows:



Here against the background of God's total knowledge, which of course includes those who believe, God's election takes place.

3. To respond to both the neglect of foreknowledge (as in Calvinism) and its misapprehension (as in Arminianism), one needs to emphasize that foreknowledge (not foreordination) is the background of election and that election (not foreknowledge) is the background of saving faith. This, accordingly, may be diagramed in this way:



This brings us back to the pattern of Paul in Romans 8:29–30: foreknowledge, predestination (= election), and then calling ("effectual"), justification, and glorification—a pattern that occurs with those who truly believe.

III. METHOD

The calling of God to salvation occurs by the ministry of the word and the Spirit. It is the conjoining of these two that God's calling is effectual.

A. Proclamation of the Word

Paul writes that “we preach Christ crucified … to those who are called … Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:23–24). It is through the word about Christ, focused on the cross, that people come to salvation. In a similar vein Peter declares, “You have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and abiding word of God … this is the word which was preached to you” (1 Peter 1:23, 25 NASB).

It is God’s intention that through the word of proclamation people be called out of darkness into light, called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ, and called into eternal glory.[36]

The first step, accordingly, is that the gospel proclamation be *heard*. Paul asks, “How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?” (Rom. 10:14). If Christ—who He is and what He has done—is simply not known, there obviously can be no calling unto salvation. Proclaiming the good news, speaking the word of the gospel, is unmistakably primary.

Jesus began His own ministry with proclamation: “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God” (Mark 1:14). He emphasized this matter of hearing in the parable of the sower and the seed, where He began with “Listen!” and ended with “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Mark 4:3–9). The problem, as Jesus declared, is that people often hear superficially or only partially. Thus the word brings forth little result. People must be able to hear or salvation cannot occur.

Peter likewise began his message on the Day of Pentecost with these words: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words” (Acts 2:14). A little later he again said, “Men of Israel, hear these words” (Acts 2:22). People must hear, and hear clearly, if there is to be that faith in which salvation occurs.

So it has been down through the ages, even to our present day: the gospel must be heard. In this lies the great challenge, namely, to get people to listen that they may hear and believe. In many cases, as at the beginning, it is a first hearing —as when the gospel is proclaimed in places previously unreached. In others, it is a matter of gaining a true hearing where people have heard in part many times but still have not come to a vital faith. The problem of a surfeit of hearing the gospel without genuine response is also compounded in our day by the multiplicity of voices (both religious and secular) calling out to be heard. If Paul

could say about many in his audience, “their ears are heavy of hearing” (Acts 28:27), how much more has this become a fact in our time!

Hence the whole area of communication—*how* to get the gospel message across—has become an increasingly critical matter. In the local church the “sermon monologue” doubtless will continue to hold a high priority and thus needs very careful homiletical consideration: effective content, style of delivery, and the like. However, in an age of multimedia communication the proclaimer of the good news should be sensitive to many other forms such as story, dialogue, and dramatic presentation.[37] In missions the subject of contextualization has assumed major importance.

Of much greater significance is the proclamation of the gospel accompanied by “signs and wonders,” so that the word is visibly confirmed by miracles of healing, deliverance, and the like.[38] One cannot see a soul being saved, whereas the healing of a lame or blind person cannot be easily overlooked. In the early church “they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it” (Mark 16:20). Communication with confirmation—how better can the gospel be proclaimed!

Second, if there is to be a hearing there must of course be one who *proclaims* the message: “How can they hear without someone preaching[39] to them?” (Rom. 10:14 NIV). Thus basic to hearing is the proclamation of the gospel. There is no more important—or more “beautiful”—function than that, according to Paul (quoting Isaiah): “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!” (Rom. 10:15).

The proclaimer of the message is basically a witness: “You shall be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8).[40] He stands firmly on the original witness of the biblical apostles and prophets, and with that witness confirmed in his own experience, he seeks to proclaim the truth. He speaks as one who has also seen and heard, and thus has the weight of inner authority and conviction.

This is the role not only of an official proclaimer (evangelist, pastor, teacher), but also of everyone who belongs to Christ. All are urged to proclaim the word, to bear witness, to share the good news. It may not, and will not, always be sermons from a pulpit or even on a street corner, but often the simple, unostentatious conversation about Jesus and the new life in Him.

The focus must always be on Jesus Christ, for He is the Word made flesh and our word made real. We are to proclaim the whole Christ—all that He is and has done—but with the emphasis always where the apostle put it: “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). Peter’s first gospel proclamation to the Jewish nation[41] is the original example, since everything he said focused on Christ: it

began, continued, and ended there. So it must be with us today.

Finally, those who proclaim the message must be *sent*. Immediately following the words "How are they to hear without someone preaching to them?" Paul adds, "And how can men preach unless they are sent?" (Rom. 10:15). This brings to mind also the words of the risen Christ, "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (John 20:21).

On the one hand, this applies in a special way to those who are called by God to a particular "ministry of the word."[42] Paul, for example, was "called … to be an apostle" (1 Cor. 1:1 and elsewhere). An apostle is, by definition, one "sent out."[43] Hence, he stood under a special commission. So today we speak properly of a "call to the ministry" or "the ministry of the word," and affirm that there is such a unique calling. The office of "apostle," incidentally, even in New Testament times was not coterminous with the twelve apostles,[44] nor has it actually ever been so down through the centuries.

But again, any believer regardless of office may be sent by God to proclaim the gospel. Surely this was true also in New Testament times in that such "nonapostles" as Philip (who came to be known as "the evangelist" [Acts 21:8]) and Stephen—both "deacons"[45] —were unmistakably also "sent" by God. Many others "who were scattered [by persecution] went about preaching[46] the word" (Acts 8:4). Surely, as the first to move beyond Jerusalem, they were "sent" by God. So it has been for almost two thousand years: "ordinary" believers also being used to proclaim the gospel.

Whereas there is no official limitation regarding those sent, it should be added, however, that one dare not proclaim the message in a given situation unless God sends him. Peter was sent primarily to the Jews, Paul to the Gentiles;[47] within their commissions there were particular persons and places to whom they were sent. This remains the case since God prepares the way. The messenger bears witness to those whom God has made ready.

The importance of this needs much emphasis. The Christian—every Christian —is commissioned by God to bear witness to the truth in Christ; *everyone is sent.* However, this *does not necessarily mean that a person is sent to everyone.* There can be much harm done, much confusion, much sense of failure if the witness is not under God's command and direction. The attitude should always be that of "Here am I! Send me,"[48] and then going to those to whom the Lord sends.

"How can they preach unless they are sent?" When they are sent, the next words ring forth with glad affirmation: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!" (Rom. 10:15).

B. Application by the Holy Spirit

There must be the application by the Holy Spirit of the word proclaimed if people are to be effectively called to salvation.

We have earlier noticed Peter's statement about being "born again" by the proclamation of the good news. Prior to this statement, however, Peter speaks of "the things which have now been announced to you by those who preached the good news to you" as having been done "through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven" (1 Peter 1:12). The proclamation of the word was through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Paul writes in similar fashion to the Thessalonians: "Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction"[49] (1 Thess. 1:5). The Spirit applying the word is the power that effectuates salvation. Without such activity of the Holy Spirit even the most plausible and compelling message will have absolutely no value in bringing about salvation.[50] Where the Holy Spirit is active in proclamation, He is verily the divine agent in salvation.

Jesus Himself began His ministry only after being anointed by the Holy Spirit. There is no record in the Gospels of any proclamation by Him until the Holy Spirit "descended upon him" (Luke 3:22). Then Jesus "full of the Holy Spirit … was led by the Spirit … in the wilderness" (4:2), and after that "returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee" (4:14) to begin His ministry. When He came to Nazareth, He declared the fulfillment of a word in Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news …" (4:18; cf. Isa. 61:1). Jesus' proclamation throughout His ministry was accordingly in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, after His death and resurrection Jesus announced to His disciples that "repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations" (Luke 24:47). However, He also commanded them, "Stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Hence, to be effective unto repentance and forgiveness the proclamation must go forth in the "power from on high"—the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is precisely what happened, beginning on the Day of Pentecost. The anointing came as it had come upon Jesus three years before: "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4). Shortly after that, through Peter as spokesman, the proclamation of salvation was sounding forth. Paul later was likewise "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:17) and "immediately he

proclaimed Jesus" (9:20). Thus it was that "through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven" the good news was declared by one person after another.

Now all of this has been reviewed in some detail because of the urgency to stress that if the calling of God to salvation is to be effective, it must go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit. Proclamation, witness, sharing the good news no matter how capably, earnestly, even fervently[51] done, cannot be effective without this anointing "from on high."[52]

The reason for this is apparent. The calling to salvation is far more than a human call: It is God himself through Jesus Christ moving in a life and effecting the supernatural miracle of a new creation. The word is essential—as in the beginning of the first creation ("And God said, 'Let there be …'"). But even as it took the Spirit of God "moving over the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2) for the earth to be formed and enlivened, so it is with the new creation. Since man has fallen from his primal estate and become "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1 KJV), the renewed moving of the Holy Spirit's power is the only hope to bring him to life again.

The continuing significance of this is that all who proclaim the word of God unto salvation must rely utterly on the power and efficacy of the Holy Spirit. The word remains important (there can be no minimizing of this), but even the most persuasive speech is totally ineffective without the dynamism of the Holy Spirit. As Paul said to the Corinthians, "My message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom[53] but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power"[54] (1 Cor. 2:4 NASB). So it continues today; every proclamation of the word that is truly effectual must be under the Spirit's anointing and power.

IV. RESPONSE: FAITH

The response to God's calling in which salvation occurs is *faith.* Accordingly, this (as I have previously described it) may be termed saving faith. Without such faith, regardless of what God has done, there can be no salvation.[55]

A. Inception

Faith[56] comes about through the unity of word and Spirit. Paul, after declaring that his message and preaching were done in the demonstration of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:4), added, "… that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (v. 5 NASB). Hence, faith is the result of the word, the message, going forth in the power of the Spirit.

Faith, therefore, goes back to God's action. It is not grounded in a human decision to believe. If that were so, salvation would be based on man's activity rather than God's. However, God reaches out to man—the initiative is totally on His side—and offers him an accomplished redemption in Jesus Christ. Man needs only to receive what God has done. This reception is the response of faith.

God's grace (His "gracious purpose"),[57] therefore, is the source, and faith the human instrument. In the striking words of Ephesians 2:8, 9—"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast." Similarly Paul wrote to the Philippians, "It has been granted to you on behalf of Christ … to believe on him" (1:29 NIV). Salvation originates in grace: it is God's gift, God's grant. It is channeled through faith. Grace, however, is clearly the primary reality.

No one, therefore, can make himself believe. It is not a matter of working up faith—as some have said, "to believe the unbelievable." It is not a human leap in the dark in the hope that what the Bible speaks about is true and perchance one may secure it for himself. Nor is faith a decision based on human reasoning and attempted proof; it has a far more solid basis than rational and empirical evidence. Moreover, faith, rather than reaching out and hoping to secure God's promise by passionate human effort, *is itself* according to Hebrews 11:1, "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction (or the "proof"[58]) of things not seen." Faith is not a human effort to believe but the inward assurance and conviction that results from God's presence and action.

Faith, accordingly, is man's response. Faith is made possible by God, but the faith, the believing, is not God's but man's. A human being is fully engaged in the activity of faith.

Let us now turn to the nature of this faith.

B. Nature

Faith may be spoken of as containing three elements: knowledge, assent, and trust. We will consider these in turn.

1. Knowledge

Faith begins in the apprehension of God's redeeming work in Jesus Christ. It is a matter of hearing, hence understanding, the gospel and thereupon believing. In the words of Paul, "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17 NIV). The "word of Christ" must be proclaimed, heard, and understood if faith is to eventuate.

This principle is well-illustrated in Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:22–36). His message is basically informational; he tells his audience about Jesus Christ, His life, death, and resurrection. Peter begins by saying, "Men of Israel, hear these words." They must hear, that is, know about Jesus Christ, if they are to come to faith and salvation. Thus again, "faith comes from hearing"; it occurs through a true hearing about Christ.

Faith, accordingly, is not blind; indeed, a blind faith is not faith at all. Faith begins at the point of apprehending what God has done in Jesus Christ. This does not mean wide-ranging knowledge (this may occur later), but a simple understanding that through Jesus Christ there is salvation. The blinders are removed, and in resulting faith a person moves into the way of salvation.

It is important to stress the knowledge component of faith. In some mystical forms of religion, ignorance is touted as the way of salvation. Knowledge, presumably, is the barrier to spiritual unity with the great Unknown (or Unknowable). Hence, the human mind is to be set aside in the search for oneness with the Ultimate. Such forms of religion usually have no historical rootage in a divine act of redemption. Thus no knowledge is necessary: it is a matter of achieving mystical unity. From a biblical perspective, however, some knowledge is essential to faith and salvation.

We need to add quickly that knowledge is not in itself sufficient for salvation. One may be well informed about the things of God, including His work of redemption in Christ, and still be far from God. James writes, "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder" (James 2:19).

To “believe that God is one” is good: “you do well.” But such knowledge obviously is by no means enough: the demons also so believe.[59] Likewise, there may be knowledge about Jesus Christ and even His work of redemption but without such knowledge leading to salvation. Knowledge in and of itself has no saving significance.

Nonetheless, knowledge is the beginning point of faith. For there must be a basic understanding of the gospel message for salvation to occur.

2. Assent

Faith continues with assent to the word of the gospel. It is not only an apprehension of the message, but also an acknowledgment of it. It is saying yes to what is proclaimed.

Assent means the recognition of the truth of the gospel and of the personal need for Christ’s saving work. Assent represents a growing realization that the gospel is for the one who hears it; it is knowledge passing into acknowledgment. What begins as a mental perception now becomes a matter of genuine personal concern. It is assent to God’s offer of salvation in Jesus Christ.

We must be careful to distinguish such assent from assent to doctrinal belief. There is sometimes a tendency in orthodoxy to identify faith with assent to a body of doctrine. Faith in that case is viewed as right belief, and salvation as assent to the doctrines of the church. For example, the Athanasian Creed begins: “Whoever will be saved: before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith.”[60] Therein salvation is said to depend on holding “the Catholic Faith”—namely, the body of doctrine set forth in the creed that follows. However important and correct the doctrines may be, it is surely an error to hold that salvation comes by orthodox affirmation and assent. Faith that saves is not directed to a body of doctrine but to Christ Himself in the gospel.

In relation to this latter point, let us recognize, nonetheless, that in the New Testament faith occasionally refers in a general sense to the gospel. Examples include Galatians 1:23—” ‘He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy’”; 1 Timothy 4:1—“In later times some will depart from the faith … “; Jude 3—“Contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” Such statements about “the faith” are quite important, for they do stress that there is a corpus of Christian truth.[61] However, it is *not* assent to this doctrinal content of the faith that is salvific. Rather, it is assent of mind and heart to the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Faith that passes into acknowledgment and assent is a critical second element in the occurrence of salvation.

3. Trust

Faith, lastly, is trust. Faith begins in knowledge, deepens in assent, and is completed in trust. It is the critical and final element in saving faith.

Faith as trust is complete reliance on God's promise in the gospel; it is total confidence in the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. Faith means to *believe in.*

Faith hears the word of the gospel and believes in it. Faith, accordingly, is reception of God's truth. After Peter's sermon at Pentecost, the Scripture reads that "those who received his word were baptized" (Acts 2:41). To believe the word means to trust in it and to depend on it as the way of salvation. Paul writes the Corinthians, "I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved" (1 Cor. 15:1–2). It is firm reliance on the truth of the gospel.

But faith is more than believing in the good news; it is believing in the one whom God has sent, even Jesus Christ. It is not only receiving the word; it is also receiving *the Word.* According to John 1, the Word came into the world, and "to all who *received him*, who *believed in* his name, he gave power to become children of God" (v. 12). To believe in His name is to receive Him—and this means trust. The most vivid statement of this is in John 3:16—"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Hence, even beyond believing in His name, the heart of faith is belief in Jesus Christ personally—"in him." This in the profoundest sense is trust.

To trust in Jesus signifies the reposing of all confidence in Him. It is the kind of personal commitment that gives up any and all reliance on the self and looks wholly to Jesus Christ. It is the conviction that He is totally trustworthy, that in Him and Him alone is to be found full salvation, and that one must surrender all[62] to Him as Savior and Lord.

C. Climax

The climax of faith is union with Christ.[63] It is we in Christ and Christ in us. Faith is that kind of intimate relationship.

1. In Christ

One of the striking emphases of the New Testament is that all the blessings the believer knows are due to his being "in Christ" or "in Christ Jesus." Paul writes, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:3); and after that he depicts the magnificent panorama of our being originally chosen "in him" (v. 4), redeemed "in him" (v. 7), and finally sealed "in him" (v. 13). This emphasis on being "in him," i.e., in Christ, is predicated on Paul's opening salutation to the Ephesians as "believers incorporate in Christ Jesus" (V. 1 NEB).[64] To be in Christ is to be incorporated by faith into Him.

This truly is the climax of faith. For faith is not only a matter of trust in Christ, thus of Christ as the object of faith; it is also—and most profoundly—the reality of being united with Him.[65] The climax of believing in Christ is being in Him.

Many biblical texts speak of being in Christ. Paul writes in Romans about being "alive to God in Christ Jesus" (6:11), and says later that there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1). In 2 Corinthians Paul declares, "If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation" (5:17), and in Ephesians are these words: "In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ" (2:13). All such texts emphasize that being in Christ is the very heart of faith.

Moreover, being in Christ is a unity of relationship. It is to be one with Him so that life finds its center in Him. Accordingly, this is not a unity of essence so that the believer loses his identity in Another.[66] Rather, it is a vital union in which the believer is constantly being invigorated and renewed by the life of Christ. The result, therefore, is not loss of personhood but its true fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Some analogy of this is found on the human level where in marriage a man and woman become "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Rather than suffering a loss of identity, they find themselves fulfilled in each other.

Moreover, being in Christ is a spiritual union. As Paul puts it, “He who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him” (1 Cor. 6:17). The human spirit is joined with the Spirit of Christ so that Christ’s Spirit operates in and through the believer’s spirit. Consequently, on the deepest level of human nature there is oneness with Jesus Christ.

2. Christ in Us

The other side of the relationship brought about through faith is Christ in us. One of the most dramatic statements regarding this is the affirmation of Paul in Galatians 2:20—“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Christ lives in the believer—by faith.

Here, indeed, there is paradox. For in one sense the believer is dead —“crucified with Christ”—and no longer lives. Christ is the One who lives in him. Yet, in another sense, the believer lives—“I now live”—through faith in Christ. One truly lives when Christ lives in him.

Christ in us is also a mystery. Paul writes to the Colossians concerning “the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in[67] you, the hope of glory” (1:27). There is no way of adequately comprehending the truth of Christ in the believer; hence, it is a. mystery and indeed a glorious one.

But now we must also realize that Christ is in the believer through the Holy Spirit. Or, to put it another way, the dwelling of Christ in the believer is identical with the indwelling of the Spirit. In Romans Paul interchangeably uses these expressions: “the Spirit,” “the Spirit of God,” and “the Spirit of Christ”—all in reference to Christ’s dwelling within (8:9–11).[68] Hence, Christ in us is not a bodily reality but a spiritual presence.

Faith, we now add, is the medium through which this occurs. Paul prays for the Ephesians “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (3:17). By faith the believer is united to Christ so that He comes to dwell within the heart, which is the center of human existence.

3. We in Christ and Christ in Us

Finally, faith is a union both of our being in Christ and of Christ’s being in us.

There is an inseparability of each from the other. One of the most expressive New Testament images is that of the vine as Christ and believers as branches: "I am the vine, you are the branches" (John 15:5). The branches are inseparably united to the vine and the vine to the branches. Another New Testament picture is that of the head and the body (e.g., Eph. 4:12, 15). Christ is the head and believers are His body.[69] The two, head and body, are totally joined and function as one. Another metaphor also found in Ephesians is that of husband and wife wherein the two "become one" (5:31). Husband and wife ideally function in a mutuality of life together.

Truly the climax of faith is union with Christ. It is such a response to God's calling that the believer is in Christ and Christ in the believer. This is the meaning of faith in its fullest dimension.

[1]As Isaiah 65:15 shows: "You shall leave your name to my chosen for a curse."

[2]Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11; John 1:40-42.

[3]"Many" (Gr. polloi) in this context (Matt. 22:14) should be understood in an inclusive sense. It is not as if some are not called ("many" thus taken as exclusive); rather the call is to all people. According to J. Jeremias, "Mt. 22:14 contrasts the totality of those invited with the small number of the chosen. God's invitation … embraces all without restriction" (article on πολλοί in TDNT, 6:542-also see article by John Rea on "the many" in WBE, 2:1075). "Many" in this comprehensive sense may be especially noted by comparing Matthew 20:28-"The Son of man came … to give his life a ransom for many"-with 1 Timothy 2:6-" … who [Christ] gave himself a ransom for all." Hence the many who are called are the many, i.e., the all for whom Christ gave His life as a ransom. In sum: the call of God is a general call to all mankind (as the next paragraph above assumes).

[4]Institutes, III.24.8, Beveridge trans. Calvin adds, "… even for those whom he designs the call to be a savour of death." We will discuss Calvin's view in this connection later.

[5]Effectual calling is "that calling of the living, sovereign, and almighty God which makes us partakers of the life eternal which Jesus Christ earned for us" (Carl F. H. Henry, Basic Christian Doctrines, "Effectual Calling," 179).

[6]The Greek phrase in 2 Timothy 1:9 is pro chronon aionion, "before the

beginning of time" (NIV); "from all eternity" (NEB, NASB); "before the world began" (KJV).

[7]The terms are essentially interchangeable.

[8]"When the call is coupled with election, in this way scripture sufficiently suggests that in it nothing but God's free mercy is to be sought" (Calvin, Institutes, III.24.1, Beveridge trans.).

[9]"The eternal election means that God's Word of Love which now reaches [= calls] me in Jesus Christ, reaches me out of Eternity, that it goes 'before' my existence, and my decision, as that which makes it possible" (Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of God, 318).

[10]The Greek word is proorisas.

[11]Predestine (Gr. proorizo) occurs six times in the New Testament. Four instances deal directly with salvation, all of which we have noted: Romans 8:29, 30; Ephesians 1:5, 11. The other two are Acts 4:28: "to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur" (referring to the action of Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, and the Jews), and 1 Corinthians 2:7: "We speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory" (quotations from the NASB). The last two deal with matters related to salvation.

[12]As held particularly by Calvin: "All [men] are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death" (Institutes, III.21.5, Beveridge trans.).

[13]Although there is no "double predestination" in Scripture, there is a "double destination": eternal life and eternal death. See Excursus I, pp. 18-22.

[14]Recall Deuteronomy 4:37 where the only reason given for God's choice of Israel was His love for them.

[15]E.g., Luke 9:35-"This is my Son, my Chosen."

[16]The view of post-Reformation Dutch theologian James Arminius (1560-1609). Arminius held that God's election was based on His foreknowledge of our decision to accept His offer in Christ, hence our faith. See The Writings of James Arminius, 1:247-48. Henry Thiessen, following Arminius, writes, "By election we mean that sovereign act of God in grace whereby He chose in Christ Jesus for salvation all those whom he foresaw would accept Him" ("Election and Vocation," 54, in

The New Life, Millard J. Erickson, ed.). Calvin (prior to Arminius) had already asked, “How can it be consistently said, that things derived from election are the cause of election?” CInstitutes, III.22.3, Beveridge trans.). Calvin, I believe, at this point is entirely correct.

[17]Election is not selection in the New Testament. In the Old Testament God did select a particular people; now election relates to all who believe in Christ.

[18]The language, e.g., of the Westminster Confession of Faith (chap. X, “Of Effectual Calling”). There is no mention, however, in the WCF of effectual calling as including the response of faith.

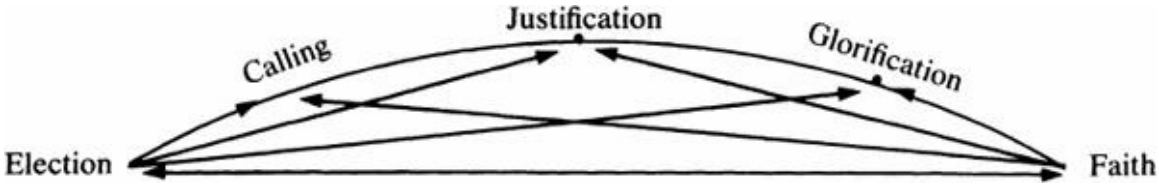
[19]As did the Pharisees and the lawyers: “The Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves” (Luke 7:30).

[20]Calvin speaks of election as “the parent of faith” (*Institutes*, III.22.10, Beveridge trans.), hence election produces or brings about faith.

[21]See note 16.

[22]A verse that particularly bespeaks the close connection between believing and election is Titus 1:1, which begins: “Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect” (KJV).

[23]Election and faith may be depicted as the two poles of the arch of salvation.



The arrows point out both the integral connection between election and faith and their relations to the other moments in salvation.

[24]The Greek word is keitai: “appointed for” (NASB); “destined to cause” (NIV); “destined to be” (NEB). The idea of destiny is clearly contained.

[25]The Greek word is ptosin; “fall, falling … lit. of the collapse of a house” (BAGD), “downfall-that many may fall and bring upon themselves ruin” (Thayer).

[26]Paul here conflates two texts, Isaiah 8:14 and Isaiah 28:16 (after the LXX). He seeks to emphasize Israel’s faithlessness in spite of her election.

[27]Peter speaks of the stone as “a cornerstone chosen and precious.”

[28]Peter also quotes the two verses from Isaiah in verses 6 and 8. In verse 7 he quotes a related passage from Psalm 118:22. His emphasis, however, is that the twofold result is evidenced in Gentiles as well as Jews.

[29]The Greek word is euodia, “sweet savour” (KJV).

[30]This is not too different from the old adage: “What is one man’s food is another man’s poison.”

[31]The Greek word is katertismena; the RSV has “made,” NIV and NASB, “prepared.” The RSV, NIV, and NASB translations too much imply that God directly made or prepared beforehand vessels of wrath for destruction. “Fitted”-or other possibilities such as “ready” or “ripe for”-better convey the meaning that the destruction is also due to the nature of the vessel itself. EGT has “perfected, made quite fit or ripe.” Moffatt translates as “ripe and ready to be destroyed.” Everett F. Harrison, while using the word “prepared,” writes, “ ‘Prepared for destruction’ designates a ripeness of sinfulness that points to judgment unless there is a turning to God, yet God is not made responsible for the sinful condition. The preparation for destruction is the work of man who allows himself to deteriorate in spite of knowledge and conscience” (EBC, 10:107).

[32]“Every one who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but when it falls on any one it will crush him [or “crush him to pieces” (Thayer)]” (Luke 20:18).

[33]Calvin declares, “There could be no election without its opposite reprobation” (Institutes, III.23.1, Beveridge trans.). “Reprobation” refers to God’s condemning the nonelect to eternal punishment.

[34]“Supralapsarianism” is the theological term used to express the Calvinistic view that God foreordained before the Fall (the “lapse”)-indeed before creation-both those elected to salvation and those reprobated to damnation (see n. 12 for Calvin’s statement). “Infralapsarianism,” a somewhat milder form of Calvinism, holds that God foreordained after the Fall-hence from among the sinful mass of humanity-those whom He elected and those whom He reprobated. The term “pretention” was used by later Calvinists to express the idea that God simply passed over (Latin: praeteritus = “pass over”) those whom He did not elect to salvation: they were allowed to go on their way to just damnation for their sins. Most Calvinist, or Reformed, confessions of faith tend toward infralapsarianism and preterition.

[35]See earlier note 16.

[36]See Scriptures earlier quoted in section I.C., page 15.

[37]Lest these seem like innovative and somewhat flighty ways of proclamation, let us call to mind that Jesus almost constantly preached in story form ("Indeed he said nothing to them without a parable"-Matt. 13:34); that Paul, in addition to a sermonic method, spent hour upon hour, arguing and dialoguing with his audiences (see, e.g., Acts 17:2: "Three weeks he argued with them"; Acts 17:17: "He argued in the synagogue … and in the market place every day"; Acts 19:8: "for three months … arguing and pleading about the kingdom of God"). Dramatic presentation was not lacking in an Old Testament Hosea (see Hosea 1) or Ezekiel (see, e.g., Ezek. 4-5), and in a New Testament Agabus (Acts 11:27-30; 21:10-11). Indeed, the whole life of Jesus (and to a degree of Paul) was a dramatic presentation of the gospel. Such liturgical activities as baptism and the Lord's Supper continue as visible demonstrations of the gospel.

[38]Such an emphasis is represented by John Wimber in his books Power Evangelism and Power Healing.

[39]The Greek word is kèrussontos. Hence, "preaching" is a better translation than "preacher" (as in KJV, RSV, NASB). "Preacher" conveys overmuch the note of an office rather than an action or activity. But even "preaching" may not be the best translation since the verb kerussô means basically to "announce," "make known by a herald," "proclaim aloud," "speak of," "spread the story widely" (BAGD). Since "preaching" has tended to signify for many "to exhort in an officious or tiresome manner" (Webster), other ways of translating kerussô would seem to be valuable in our time. The NEB translates Romans 10:14: "And how hear without someone to spread the news?"

[40]Although these words were spoken to those who beheld Jesus as resurrected and then became witnesses of His resurrection (see Acts 1:22; 3:15; 4:33; 5:32), the words in a larger sense may be used to refer to the total witness to the gospel (see also Acts 14:3; 22:20).

[41]Acts 2:22-36. Peter's words preceding this (vv. 14-21) are not proclamation of the gospel but explanation of what had just happened to himself and the other disciples in the "outpouring" of the Holy Spirit (vv. 1-4).

[42]As in Acts 6:4. The apostles appointed a number of men to "serve tables" (v. 2) so that they might "devote" themselves "to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

[43]The Greek word is apostolos, from apostello, to “send out” or “away.”

[44]For example, others mentioned as “apostles” include Barnabas (Acts 14:14); James, “the Lord’s brother” (Gal. 1:19); and Andronicus and Junias, Paul’s “kinsmen and … fellow prisoners” (Rom. 16:7).

[45]Stephen and Philip were among those appointed by the twelve apostles to “serve tables” (literally, to “deacon [diakonein] tables”) so that the apostles would be free for the “ministry” (literally, the “deaconing”! [diakonia]) of the word (Acts 6:2). However, their table service could not confine them, for soon Stephen and Philip turned to proclaiming the word (Stephen: Acts 6:8-7:53; Philip: Acts 8:5-40). Surely they were “sent” by God and therefore, in a broad sense, performed an “apostolic” ministry.

[46]The Greek word is euangelizomenoi, “bringing the good tidings of” (NASB mg).

[47]Jesus declared to Paul, “I will send you far away to the Gentiles” (Acts 22:21). Paul compared his ministry with Peter’s thus: “I [Paul] had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised” (Gal. 2:7).

[48]This was the response of young Isaiah to the voice of the Lord: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” (Isa. 6:8).

[49]Incidentally, the words immediately before are: “We know, brethren beloved by God, that he has chosen you; for… .” Note the close correlation between election and saving faith (which was discussed earlier).

[50]“Without this activity of the Holy Spirit, who writes the word in man’s heart, God’s Word itself is but an empty letter” (Heinrich Heppe, Reformed Dogmatics, 517).

[51]Apollos, “an eloquent man, well versed [or “mighty,” Gr. dynatos] in the scriptures … [and] instructed in the way of the Lord” (Acts 18:24-25), is a possible case in point. He was also “fervent in spirit” and “spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus” (v. 25). However, something was lacking, for “he knew only the baptism of John.” When Priscilla and Aquila heard him speaking “boldly in the synagogue,” they sensed something was missing and “took him and expounded to him the way of God more accurately” (v. 26). This “way” surely went beyond “the baptism of John” and its lack of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 19 for others who likewise had experienced only “John’s baptism” and knew

nothing about the availability of the Holy Spirit). Accordingly, Apollos' fervency in spirit needed the additional fervency of the Holy Spirit.

[52]Without a similar anointing, even well-intended and highly organized evangelistic outreaches become little more than human efforts.

[53]Paul thus distanced himself from the dependency on rhetoric and subtlety that was the manner of Greek oratory.

[54]This may mean more than the Spirit's empowering the word; it could also include the word's being accompanied by "signs and wonders" of the Holy Spirit. For in a summary of his years of proclaiming the gospel Paul elsewhere wrote, "Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:18-19).

[55]"Saving faith," consequently, does not mean that faith effectuates salvation. It is rather the human corollary to God's calling and election (as previously described). Still, without faith God's calling does not issue in salvation. It may be called "saving" to signify its necessity for salvation. Also this differentiates it from faith that is a special gift of God to the believer for doing mighty works (e.g., see 1 Cor. 12:9).

[56]By "faith," from here on, I mean "saving faith."

[57]Recall II.A., page 15.

[58]The Greek word is elenchos. BAGD gives "proof," "proving" as the first translation (prior to "conviction"). Thayer, likewise, states that elenchos means "a proof, that by which a thing is proved or tested."

[59]Demons mentioned in the Gospels also knew who Jesus Christ was. E.g., recall the demonic outcry to Jesus in Mark 1:24-"I know who you are, the Holy One of God."

[60]See Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom, vol. 2, The Greek and Latin Creeds, 66-71.

[61]Hence, there is value in church creeds, confessions, and various doctrinal statements. There is such a reality as the faith that calls for understanding, propagation, and defense. But the faith is not saving faith.

[62]The old acronym for F-A-I-T-H is still a good one: Forsaking All / Trust Him.

[63]The importance of this union with Christ is emphasized by Calvin: "Though we may be redeemed by Christ, still, until we are ingrafted into union with him by the calling of the Father, we are darkness, the heirs of death, and the enemies of God" (Institutes, III. 14.6, Beveridge trans.).

[64]The Greek phrase is pistois en Christo lesou. This could be translated as "faithful in Christ Jesus" (so KJV, RSV, NASB, NIV). However, the idea here is not so much that of faithfulness in Christ or even of Christ being the object of faith as it is of being in Him, namely, of being united with Him. As F. F. Bruce says, "The phrase 'in Christ' is incorporative-that is to say, it does not point to Christ Jesus as the object of belief but implies that the saints and the believers are united with him, partakers together of his new life" (The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians, NICNT, 251).

[65]The preposition "in" as found in the expression "believing in Christ" (e.g., John 3:16) is eis, signifying "into," that is, into Christ as object of faith. The Greek preposition used for "in Christ" is en, which conveys much more the unitive sense.

[66]As in a mysticism where the goal is absorption into the divine. (Recall my earlier statement about some forms of mysticism.)

[67]The Greek preposition en could also be translated "anjong" (as in NEB mg) since Paul's words "how great among [en] the Gentiles" immediately precede "the glory of this mystery." However, "among" hardly seems appropriate for the second en, since the reference is to "Christ en you" as "the hope of glory." It is not Christ among people but in them, that is the hope of the glory to come.

[68]For a fuller discussion of this, see the next chapter, "Regeneration," III.?., "The Agency of the Spirit," pages 37-39.

[69]Paul speaks of "building up the body of Christ" and thereafter states that "we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head."

2
Regeneration

At the heart of the reality of salvation is the doctrine of regeneration. As in the doctrine of effectual calling, the whole of salvation is included. Regeneration points particularly to the inward change that occurs in those who come to salvation.

I. DEFINITION

Regeneration means essentially rebirth: it is regeneration. Hence regeneration is a being born again or anew. The classic New Testament passage is these words of Jesus: "You must be born again"[1] (John 3:7 NASB). We may also note Peter's words to Christians "you have been born again" (1 Peter 1:23 NASB).[2] Paul declares to Titus that God "saved us … by the washing of regeneration[3] and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5 NASB). These three passages stand out in their testimony to regeneration; and the last (in Titus) specifically relates this to salvation.

It is apparent that this is a *spiritual* rebirth. It is not a second physical birth,[4] but a rebirth that is spiritual. Jesus emphasized this in His words just prior to those about rebirth: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). Thus, through the Holy Spirit there is spiritual rebirth. The Old Testament looked forward to this. God spoke through Ezekiel concerning Israel: "I will give them one heart,[5] and put a new spirit within them" (Ezek. 11:19; see also 36:26). Jeremiah says: "I will give them a heart[6] -to know that I am the Lord" (Jer. 24:7). And the psalmist prays, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10). Although the language of the Old Testament is not precisely that of rebirth, it points in the direction of a spiritual renovation for which the word "regeneration" is the fulfillment.

Regeneration, however, cannot be limited to one area of human nature. It is not only that the spirit, or heart, is made new, but the person himself is thereby *a new being*. As noted, Paul writes that God "saved *us*"—not just our spirits—as persons: *we* have been born again. Paul writes similarly elsewhere, "If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). The person is a new creature. This is the wonder of regeneration.

II. IMPORTANCE

Regeneration is an *imperative.* Again, in the words of Jesus: "You *must* be born again," that is, if you desire to see or enter the kingdom of God. Jesus had said to Nicodemus, "Truly, truly … unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"; also "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:3 and 5 NASB).[7] Rebirth is the only way.

The human situation outside of regeneration is indeed a bleak one. Paul speaks in Romans of how people's minds have become darkened, their hearts impure, and their actions perverse (1:21–32). Hence, despite the fact that there are accomplishments of the mind, affections of the heart, and innumerable human activities, many of which are surely noteworthy, the pallor of death is on all. For Paul says elsewhere to believers: "You he made alive, when *you were dead* through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked" (Eph. 2:1–2). This, tragically, goes all the way back to the first man who by disobeying the word of God became spiritually dead (Gen. 2:17). In this way "sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned" (Rom. 5:12). The only hope for a human race spiritually dead is spiritual rebirth. And the marvel is that such a regeneration has become possible through Jesus Christ!

The message of the possibility of spiritual rebirth has never been more timely than today. In countless numbers of people there is the desire for something radically new to happen in their lives. They have tried many things, but whether successful or not, they often have a feeling of emptiness and confusion[8] at the center of all their efforts and activities. "If there were some way of starting over again,[9] not just repeating the same old mistakes, but to live truly meaningfully … if there really were a rebirth… ." It is quite extraordinary how the language of "born again" is so current in our time: "born-again Christian"[10] is mentioned even in the public media, and a large number of Americans now speak of themselves as "born again."[11] Born again—rebirth—regeneration—such language doubtless is touching a vital nerve and bespeaks the contemporary interest in a reality of critical importance.

III. MEANS

But how is regeneration possible? How can such a miracle occur? To answer we need to consider basically two things: the Spirit and the word.[12] By the Holy Spirit and the word rebirth may occur.

A. The Agency of the Spirit

Regeneration is primarily the work of the Holy Spirit. We have already noted that Jesus said, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Hence, the second birth is by the Holy Spirit. Since this is a *spiritual* birth, there is no other possibility: it must come from the Holy Spirit.

This means a rebirth from God Himself. Accordingly, it is to be born “of God.” According to the Gospel of John, it is to be “born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (1:13). In John’s first letter he spoke several times of the Christian as one “born of God” (3:9; 4:7; 5:4, 18).

It is clearly a supernatural birth—from God Himself.

It is significant to recall that even Jesus Himself was born of the Holy Spirit. According to the angelic messenger to Joseph, “that which is conceived[13] in her [Mary] is of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:20). However, this of course was not his regeneration, but His generation. Nonetheless, Christ as the one to be first born of the Spirit, hence supernaturally, becomes the precursor of all who after Him, and because of Him, will be reborn of the Spirit, thus also supernaturally.

Only the Holy Spirit can bring about the marvel of regeneration. Even as in the original generation of the heavens and the earth it was the Spirit of God who moved across the dark waters and brought forth life, so in regeneration that same Spirit brings forth new life. Now the Spirit, who goes forth in the proclamation of the Word,[14] moves upon human beings who are in darkness and death and brings them to life again. This is the greatest miracle that any person can ever experience, for while one remains the same person, he is born anew in the whole of his being. It happens by the agency of the Spirit of the living God.

Before leaving the matter of the role of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, we need also to consider the significance of “water” and “washing.” It will be recalled that Jesus, according to John 3:5, not only spoke of being born of the Spirit but also of being born of water: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” “Water” here seems clearly to point to water baptism.[15] Indeed, just following this discourse with Nicodemus, the text reads: “After this Jesus and his disciples went into the land of Judea; there he remained with them and baptized” (v. 22). Water (in vv. 5 and 22) suggests cleansing, which indeed is one aspect of his new birth.[16] Similarly, as noted, Paul writes in Titus 3:5 of “the washing of regeneration and

renewal in the Holy Spirit." Since "washing"[17] refers to the "bath" of baptism, the water of baptism is closely related to regeneration. This could have Old Testament connections with the Book of Ezekiel in which the Lord declares, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean…. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you" (36:25–27 NIV). Even as stated by Paul and Jesus, water precedes Spirit and is preparatory to the action of the Spirit.

It is significant to observe, however, that in relation to regeneration, water and the Spirit are not of equal importance. First, in the words just quoted from Ezekiel, regeneration clearly follows the sprinkling of water. Second, although the words of Jesus taken in themselves seem to suggest regeneration through both water and Spirit, nonetheless in his next statement, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit," Jesus did not mention water at all.[18] Hence while water is related to regeneration, the regeneration of the heart is actually by the Holy Spirit. Third, whereas the words of Paul speak of the "washing" or "bath," the actual regeneration and renewal[19] come from the Holy Spirit. Both regeneration and renewal are *by* the Holy Spirit. Baptism in all these cases points symbolically to the inward cleansing and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

A highly important conclusion may now be stated: there is *no* teaching of "baptismal regeneration" in the Bible. The water itself in baptism does not bring about rebirth.[20] Nor is there any suggestion that the Holy Spirit invests baptismal waters with regenerative power. Furthermore, regeneration may also occur without water baptism at all—as is apparent from a number of scriptural evidences.[21] Baptism is important, but it must not be viewed as in any way effecting regeneration. It is essential that we be fully aware that the Holy Spirit throughout remains the agent.

B. The Word Implanted

Regeneration, although immediately the work of the Holy Spirit, occurs through the implanting of the word. Remember these words of Peter: "You have been born again," to which he adds, "not of seed which is perishable, but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and abiding word of God…. And this is the word which was preached to you" (1 Peter 1:23, 25 NASB). We have previously discussed the role of the word in preaching.[22] Here we observe that it is "the living and abiding word of God," hence the living word that abides within, through which rebirth occurs. It is the word of the gospel that has penetrated to the inner being and as seed therein is activated by the Holy Spirit to bring forth new life.[23]

The importance of the implanted word was emphasized by Jesus Himself. In one of His parables Jesus spoke of a man sowing seed (Mark 4:3–9) and how some of the seed fell along the path, some on rocky ground, some among thorns, but also some "into good soil … [which] brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold" (v. 8). The "good soil" signifies the heart open to receive the word that goes "into" it, and finding lodgment therein brings forth new life in increasing abundance. James, the brother of Jesus, writes, "Of his [God's] own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures" (1:18). It is by the implanted word, the word of the gospel, "the word of truth," that the Holy Spirit works the miracle of regeneration.

In the matter of the proclamation of the word,[24] we must now stress the importance of continued witness to it until the word finds entrance into the hearts of those who hear. To be sure, there are many whose hearts seem as hard as the stony ground and appear little likely to receive the word (as in Jesus' parable). However, we may also recall the powerful declaration of the Lord to Jeremiah: "Is not my word like fire … and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?" (Jer. 23:29). This may well be considered a challenge for continuing to bear witness especially in light of God's promise, "I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (NIV).[25] The word that finally gets into the stoniest of hearts can be the word that makes the heart new!

This leads us also to emphasize again the "sowing" of the word in every way possible. For example, this is quite pertinent in the preparation of a child for the

time when the Holy Spirit will bring him into salvation. Here is the importance of parents, Sunday school teachers, and pastors—indeed all who contribute to the planting of the word in the child's heart. The child is increasingly exposed to the word of the gospel and penetrated by it.[26] The word sown in the heart and activated by the Holy Spirit will surely bring forth salvation.

IV. OCCURRENCE

Regeneration relates to the total person in his heart, mind, and will. We have lately been focusing on the heart, for this is the center of needed change. However, the change includes also the mind and the will. According to the Great Commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30).[27] In order to fulfill this commandment a total life-changing occurrence is necessary. Let us consider this in more detail.

A. Illumination

As was previously mentioned, the mind has been darkened by sin and evil. Accordingly, there is first need for *illumination* in order to apprehend the gospel of salvation. Paul writes that "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4). This darkness, this blindness, can be overcome only by interior illumination. For the believer this has happened, for "the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' … has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). The glory of God in the face of Christ: this is what the "born again" person knows through the light shining in his heart!

Because sin has darkened the mind, the illumination must, secondly, show man his desperate plight and his need for salvation. As the primary illustration of this, Peter's first sermon, on the Day of Pentecost, not only declared God's gracious action in Christ but also confronted the audience with their evil deed: "This Jesus … you crucified and killed" (Acts 2:23). The message climaxes with the words: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). Through such straightforward address in the power of the Spirit, Peter's hearers were brought to a more vivid awareness of their sin and evil. The blinders were removed under the stark and awful realization that they had put to death the Lord of glory. Peter's exposure of their sinful situation was essential if they were to come through to salvation. Paul's commission by the exalted Christ is another illustration of this: "I send you to open their[28] eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:17–18). Eyes must be opened to know one's serious need if there is to be a turning from darkness to light.

Let this point be emphasized: for regeneration to occur, a person must know that he is lost. This is more than merely a sense that one has made some mistakes. It is rather a sharp awareness that before a holy and loving God one is a sinner in desperate plight and needing salvation.[29] It is to know that one's whole life, whatever the outer appearance, is turned away from true devotion to God and turned in upon itself. It is to realize that in one's natural condition a person is without hope and "without God" (Eph. 2:12). The "god of this world," Satan, is the master of lies and deception so that people are blinded and even

lulled into false security, not knowing that the way of the world is the way of death and destruction. Eyes must be opened by the word of God through the power of the Spirit so that people may move from darkness into light.[30]

This word of God includes the message of God's righteous and just requirements. These He has declared in His commandments, especially in the Decalogue; in the words of Jesus, especially in the Sermon on the Mount; and elsewhere in the Scriptures. It is unmistakably set forth that God not only requires external righteousness—such as not murdering, not committing adultery, not stealing, but also internal, such as not hating, not lusting, not falsely vowing.[31] Even more, the requirement goes far beyond the external by commanding love for one's enemies.[32] Such is the righteousness that God expects in His human creatures.[33] When this word truly opens one's eyes, there can be no pretense of innocence: a person knows, however much he may try to avoid it, that his condition before God and His righteousness is hopeless.

The realization of lostness is all the more intensified under the impact of the word, which declares that every sin is against God personally. If the psalmist could cry out, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight" (51:4), how much more must one who hears the message of Christ come to realize that he is guilty too. It is not only that some people two thousand years ago were responsible for putting to death the Lord of glory, but also you and I are—and every person is. "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?"[34] The only possible answer, however terrible, must be yes. For in the actions of those who nailed Him to the tree it was not just Jews or Romans but all mankind collectively represented. Your sin, my sin, your guilt, my guilt—this is staggering beyond all imagination.

There can be no escaping the fact that "none is righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10).[35] But to *know* this personally is necessary if one is to come into salvation. Hence, there must be an illumination of the human condition by the word of God. For it is only when a person knows he is a lost sinner that a radical change can occur.

Actually, the world, for all its knowledge, is a vast realm of spiritual darkness. Paul speaks of it as a "dominion[36] of darkness" (Col. 1:13). The wonder, however, for believers is that "He [God] has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son." Surely such deliverance begins with the opening of blind eyes to the truth about God, about sin and evil, and the marvelous way God has wrought our salvation.[37]

We may close this section with the words of the blind man whose eyes Jesus opened: "Though I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25). This is the glad testimony

of all whose eyes have been opened to the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

B. Conviction

For regeneration to take place there must also be a conviction of sin. This is more than illumination (which is basically a matter of the mind); it is an action of the Spirit that brings about a profound inner sense of guilt before God. It is a deep conviction of one's sinfulness and evil.

Doubtless the most striking illustration of conviction is that of the consequence of Peter's sermon at Pentecost: "Now when they heard this they were cut[38] to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'" (Acts 2:37). Rather than fighting back, or seeking to justify themselves, as well they might have under the accusation that they had put to death the long-hoped-for Messiah, they came under such conviction of sin and guilt that they could only cry out for help: "Men and brethren, *what shall we do?"* (KJV).

Let us ponder this phrase, "cut to the heart." The physical heart is the central vital organ of the body, circulating blood throughout. The heart spiritually is the innermost spring of human personality, hence such biblical expressions as "out of it [the heart] are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23 KJV)[39] and "the words that the mouth utters come from the overflowing of the heart" (Luke 6:45 NEB). But alas, the tragedy of the human condition is that the heart has become hardened to the things of God. So does the Lord cry forth in the Old Testament: "The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart" (Jer. 17:1). Jesus Himself, in the presence of the Pharisees, was "grieved[40] at their hardness of heart" (Mark 3:5). Paul speaks of mankind as having a "hard and impenitent heart" (Rom. 2:5). Man's only hope in this lamentable situation is that somehow his heart can be so cut, pierced, and smitten as to come under conviction of sin and evil until (like the Jews at Pentecost) there is a desperate outcry for help and salvation.

Let us be careful to understand this correctly. Conviction of sin is far more than a feeling of misery or remorse. There are countless numbers of people who may—and often do—feel sorrow and pain, their lives being on the edge of despair. There may be occasional, even continuing, remorse for actions they have done. Paul speaks of a "worldly grief"[41] that only "produces death" (2 Cor. 7:10). It is "a sorrow of the world," which many know, but it contains no real conviction of sin. Judas doubtless felt remorse for what he had done to Jesus;

indeed, he cried out, “I have sinned in betraying innocent blood” (Matt. 27:4), but there was no “godly grief [that] produces a repentance that leads to salvation” (2 Cor. 7:10). Rather Judas went out and hanged himself. Many in the world also experience “worldly grief” that sometimes leads even to suicide. But they have no genuine conviction of sin, no “godly grief,” the grief and sorrow toward God that leads to salvation.

Only the Holy Spirit can bring this about. In the words of Jesus: “He … will convict[42] the world concerning sin” (John 16:8 NASB). No human persuasion, regardless of how pointed and direct, can produce the deep inward realization of one’s sinful condition before God. The *Holy* Spirit, verily the Spirit of holiness, probing the inner recesses of the human heart, is like a light exposing all that is evil, impure, and ungodly. What previously may never have been sensed as sin is now experienced in all its heinousness. Indeed, to put it more succinctly, the Holy Spirit utilizes the implanted word (the word of God’s holiness and righteousness) and brings the sinner under the judgment that prepares the way for salvation.

We have now arrived at a critical turning point. For here we observe that this very conviction of sin not only signifies a deep realization but also brings about a profound internal change. For the “cutting” of the heart is not only a cutting *into* but also a cutting *away I* Let us, in this connection, first recall the word of God as spoken through Moses to Israel: “The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deut. 30:6). Physical circumcision—the cutting away of the flesh as required in the Abrahamic covenant—is the precursor of the circumcision of the heart—the cutting away of sin that will result in spiritual life. Thus Paul is able to say, “Circumcision is a matter of the heart” (Rom. 2:29), and it occurs “by the Spirit.”[43] Thus we behold the office of the Holy Spirit in the “circumcision” that brings eternal life. And this includes Jew and Gentile alike, for to quote Paul again: “Neither [fleshly] circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” (Gal. 6:15).

The point now is—and it is an extraordinary one indeed—that the “circumcision” of the heart is possible through Jesus Christ! And it occurs through faith in Him[44] whereby His Spirit in transforming power performs the miracle of cutting away the old to make the heart ready for a total change.

To conclude: all this happens when the Holy Spirit so applies the word that there is a profound conviction of sin. For when the heart is pierced through with the realization of the heinousness of one’s sin and guilt, the miracle of

regeneration soon follows.

Finally, we need to raise two questions in relation to our Christian witness to others:

First, do we so witness as to let the Holy Spirit through the word bring about conviction? Are people "cut to the heart"? Is there profound sorrow over sin? We read in Scripture that Peter, after his threefold denial of Christ, "went out and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62). Does this happen today? Is there a growing sense of the intolerable burden of sin that is being carried around? Do people so hear our testimony to the righteousness of God that they become convinced that all their righteousness is like "filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6 KJV) and nothing but judgment awaits? But along with this, do they apprehend the mercy of God, the everlasting mercy, that in Jesus Christ is poured out to bring forth salvation?

Second, are we willing to let conviction deepen? If the Spirit is to probe the inmost recesses of the heart, this may take time as He pierces through one layer after another, breaks through one barrier after another. This, incidentally, is the advantage of revival meetings over several days, even weeks, in which there can be growing conviction of sin, for sometimes people need time to "come under conviction." Do we make the "mourner's bench" available to them? Or are we so eager to get people to "accept" Christ that we fail to ascertain whether it is a matter of the heart? For, in the words of Paul, a "man believes with his heart" (Rom. 10:10). But has the heart been probed under a profound conviction of sin, so much that, like the tax collector, one who hears may "beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'" (Luke 18:13)?

C. Repentance

The climactic moment that makes for regeneration is the moment of repentance. For it is in repentance that a person turns from the old to the new, from darkness to light, from the dominion of Satan to the power of God, from the way of destruction to the way of eternal salvation.

Here it is important to stress the grace and mercy of God to the convicted sinner; namely, that if he now turns to God, he will be fully received. God has no desire to condemn anyone for his sinfulness but to save him from it: "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17 KJV). While there must be both an awareness of sin and a deep conviction of guilt, this is not to bring a person under condemnation. It is rather to prepare the way for a life-transforming return to God through Jesus Christ. Truly the righteous and holy God finds all sin intolerable, but—and this is the wonder of the Gospel—He gladly receives back to Himself the repentant sinner.

In the Old Testament there is frequently the call to Israel to repent, to return to God. One of the most powerful statements is that of Solomon concerning Israel: "If they sin against thee … so that they are carried away captive to a land far or near; yet if they lay it to heart … and repent … saying, 'We have sinned, and have acted perversely and wickedly'; if they repent with all their mind and with all their heart … then hear thou from heaven … and forgive thy people" (2 Chron. 6:36–39). There must be a full recognition of sinfulness—"We have sinned … perversely and wickedly." There must also be a profound conviction of heart—"if they lay it to their heart." And there must be withal a total repentance: "if they repent with *all their mind* and *all their heart*." It is of vital significance and importance that after Solomon's prayer God said to him, "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:14). This is the climax: not only must there be an awareness and conviction of sin (as Solomon called for); there must also be *a turning* from it—"from their wicked ways." For it is in the turning from sin that repentance reaches its culmination. A turning to God that does not stem from awareness and conviction will surely be superficial;[45] an awareness and conviction that does not result in turning will inevitably be incomplete. Repentance therefore climaxes in the *will*: it is a movement of the whole self

away from sin to God. Further, it occurs in the assurance that God will forgive: "I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin."

Despite the call of God in the Old Testament for repentance (for example, "Turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?" [Ezek. 33:11]), there never was a full turning. Doubtless, this failure was deeply grounded in both spiritual blindness and hardness, a condition that goes back to the beginning of human history. Man as such is a fallen creature, one who (as Paul puts it) has become "futile in … thinking" with "senseless minds … darkened" (Rom. 1:21).[46] Hence, although God discloses the way that leads to life, Israel neither fully comprehended nor ever truly walked in it. Whether God lovingly sought to bring Israel back to himself[47] or harshly declared His righteous judgments of destruction and death (as quoted in Ezekiel), there was no adequate response from His people. So the Old Testament ends.[48]

With the dawning of the New Testament era of the gospel, life-transforming repentance at last becomes a possibility. The call to repentance was present from the outset as John the Baptist proclaimed, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). Multitudes came to the Jordan River to be baptized, "confessing their sins" (3:6), and thereupon received stern admonition from John to "bear fruit that befits repentance"[49] (3:8). The Baptist's proclamation, however, was only preparatory for the coming of Jesus. After John's arrest, Jesus likewise called for repentance,[50] but with the decisive sense of fulfillment: "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel'" (Mark 1:14–15). The "gospel of God," for which John prepared the way, makes possible a repentance that is life-transforming.[51] Although Jesus continued to call for repentance throughout His ministry,[52] it is only after His death and resurrection that the gospel proclamation can elicit a genuine and total repentance.

We come once more to Pentecost and the message of Simon Peter. We have noted how Peter declared Jesus' life, death, and resurrection with the result that the assembly was brought under profound conviction of sin, crying out, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Next we observe Peter's reply: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38). While the word "repent" is not different from that spoken by Old Testament prophets, by John the Baptist, or even by Jesus Himself, the vast difference is that radical repentance[53] is finally possible. It at last is a "repentance unto life";[54] it is the doorway into the kingdom, it is entrance into

eternal life.

What brings about this profound repentance? Surely it is the message that in Jesus Christ there is forgiveness of sins. For the Jerusalem multitude this meant that in spite of their heinous sin in crucifying the Lord of glory,[55] they could receive forgiveness. Indeed, by faith in the very One they had sinned against so terribly, they might now be granted full forgiveness. Such an extraordinary message of God's grace in Christ—a message, not of condemnation (which they knew they deserved), but of mercy and compassion—had the power to lead them from conviction of their sin into total repentance. Amazing grace: God forgives in spite of all that we have done! With the overwhelming realization of that fact, they could repent with all their mind and all their heart, turn from their wicked ways, and enter into salvation.[56]

Repentance and forgiveness are closely related in the gospel message. Jesus Himself had instructed His disciples that "repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). "In his name" means that through Christ and because of what He has accomplished, repentance and forgiveness may be received. And "beginning from Jerusalem"[57] implied that this message is to be proclaimed everywhere else. Hence, it means that the message is just as relevant today to all the peoples of the world as it was in Jerusalem twenty centuries ago.

Let me be specific. The heart of the gospel is this: no matter how great our sins, God pours forth forgiveness through Christ to those who truly repent. If God could forgive those who were actually involved in the crucifixion of His Son two thousand years ago—the greatest sin ever—then His forgiveness is available to you and me. As we hear that message in faith, become convicted of our sinfulness, acknowledge our desperate need of salvation, and turn from our sins to God, we enter into salvation. Verily it is "repentance that leads to salvation,"[58] it is "repentance unto life."[59] It is life-transforming repentance.

Repentance, we may now emphasize, is a *turning* from the old to the new. While it includes the mind[60] and heart, as we have seen, it is an action of the will. It is the climactic moment in regeneration in which the whole person turns to move in a totally new direction. Further, this turning stems from an abhorrence[61] of the sin and evil that has held one fast, and represents a 180–degree change from the old life to a new life.[62] This means a radical break with the past—old ways, old habits, old attitudes—and entrance into a glorious new world in which Christ is Savior and Lord.

This brings us to another term, namely, *conversion*. Conversion means a turning from sin and a turning to God. The word repent" in itself conveys the

note of conversion.[63] But "repent" in Scripture may also be used in conjunction with another word that specifically means turn, as, for example, in Peter's words: "Repent, then, and turn[64] to God, so that your sins may be wiped out" (Acts 3:19 NIV). Paul uses similar language to describe his mission to Jews and Gentiles: that "they should repent and turn to God" (Acts 26:20). Both repentance and turning express the idea of conversion. Conversion, however, may suggest even more vividly than repentance this idea of a total alteration,[65] the turning of an individual from the old life of sin and evil to the new life of God.

Hence, the term "conversion" may express in itself the occurrence of salvation as in Acts 15:3, "the conversion[66] of the Gentiles." In that case, conversion is not only the act of repentance in which the climactic moment leading to regeneration occurs (following upon illumination and conviction); it is also a way of speaking of the totality of salvation. Accordingly, conversion may stand for both salvation and regeneration.[67] Nothing else need be added.

The word conversion also may be used to express the whole idea of repentance and faith in which salvation occurs. Later in Acts Paul spoke of "testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance to God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (20:21). Repentance and faith[68] may accordingly be viewed as the constituents of the conversion referred to in Acts 15:3. Since to convert, to turn, is two-sided, repentance and faith may well express both aspects that make up the totality of salvation.

Now to return specifically to the word "repentance," it is important on the practical side to give opportunity for repentance to be expressed. We have spoken earlier about the need for allowing conviction to deepen so that a person's inmost being is probed by the Holy Spirit. In regard to repentance it is quite important that a person give outward evidence of his turning to Christ. For example, this can mean coming forward in response to an evangelist's invitation to give public expression to one's faith. Since repentance involves the will, action is needed. "O Lamb of God, I come, I come,"[69] not only sung but also enacted, can represent that climactic moment of repentance when by the very act of walking down an aisle, the old life is left behind and a new life with Christ is begun. Most importantly, there needs to be the outward confession of the lips. For when such confession is from a believing heart, it is not only a verbal demonstration of repentance; it is also an essential expression. As Paul puts it: "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9). Confession with the lips—the culmination of repentance—is the final moment that leads to salvation.

One further word about repentance: it is a gift from God. This needs to be stressed because so much has been said about various actions involved in repentance that the impression could be given that repentance is basically a human work. Repentance, to be sure, is very much an act of human beings; however, it can occur only through God's gracious enabling. I have before quoted the words "repentance unto life"; now let us note the fuller statement: "To the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). Regarding this granting (or giving) we may also recall these words of Peter about Jesus: "God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31). Repentance, along with forgiveness, is God's wondrous gift.

Repentance, accordingly, is not doing penance by which we may hope to achieve a relationship with God. We may be forever grateful that such is not the case, for we could never be sure that we had done enough. Repentance, rather, stems from God's gracious deed in Jesus Christ whereby our eyes are enlightened, our hearts convicted, *and* our wills enabled to turn away from sin and bondage to eternal life and liberty. Thanks be unto God!

Lastly in the act of repentance there is such a turning from sin to Christ that one is united with Him. Immediately following Peter's message at Pentecost to repent, he added, "And be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38). To be baptized points to an immersion in Christ so that the person who is baptized is thereby identified with Him.[70] Hence the climax of repentance is union with Christ: the believer in Christ, and Christ in the believer.[71] Truly this is repentance unto life.

Christ in the believer and the believer in Christ is a spiritual union. It is a union with the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, so that the believer is in the Spirit and the Spirit in him. The Holy Spirit, who has been the primary agent in regeneration, now becomes the resident factor in the believer's life. Such a one, to use Paul's language, is "a temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 6:19). The believer operates out of a new center, not his own spirit but the Spirit of the living God. Indeed, this is the very touchstone of being a Christian: "Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to [literally, "is not of"] him" (Rom. 8:9). Paul elsewhere urges the importance of self-examination in this connection: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?" (2 Cor. 13:5 NIV). *The one essential thing that marks the true Christian is that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, dwells within.* Nothing else can substitute. For it is only by the presence of the indwelling Spirit that all

things become new.

V. RESULT: A NEW CREATURE

In regeneration a person becomes a new creature. He is no longer born of the flesh, but of the Spirit: “If any one is in Christ, he is a new[72] creature[73] ; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17). One is still the same person, but the old in terms of the former sin-dominated existence is no longer there: all things have become new.

A. A New Being

Regeneration brings about a radical alteration in man's being—his heart, his mind, his will. This may be described in terms of a changed heart, a renewed mind, and a liberated will.

1. A Changed Heart

Regeneration occurs primarily in the central area of man's being, namely, his heart or spirit. In this deepest level of human existence there is a decisive change.[74] In the Old Testament period God had spoken through the prophet Ezekiel to His people: "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36:26). This signifies a radical alteration.

First, we may speak of a *cleansing* of the heart. The heart of sinful man is the source of many evils. In the words of Jesus: "Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander" (Matt. 15:19). The heart, accordingly, needs to be washed clean. This occurs through what Paul calls "the washing of regeneration" (Titus 3:5).[75] When regeneration occurs, the heart is cleansed basically of every kind of evil. The Gentiles who had experienced "repentance unto life" were later described by Peter as having had their hearts cleansed: "He [God] made no distinction between us and them, but cleansed their hearts by faith"[76] (Acts 15:9). Thus their hearts were made clean before God.

This cleansing of the heart is a wondrous aspect of regeneration. Recall that the psalmist cried out, "Behold, thou dost desire truth in the innermost being [i.e., the heart]…. Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (51:6–7 NASB). These words, probably spoken by David after his sins of adultery and murder,[77] call for the deepest kind of cleansing. We may, therefore, be all the more grateful that through repentance from sin and faith in Christ the heart of any person may receive a full cleansing. One may be "born again"—the slate made clean and a new life stretching ahead![78]

Second, there is the inscribing of God's *law* on the heart. One of the chief

problems in the Old Testament period was the inability of people to keep God's law. The Israelites, regardless of all their efforts, never lived up to God's command: it was inscribed on stones but not on their hearts. Hence, one of the great promises of a future covenant was, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts" (Jer. 31:33, cf. Heb. 8:10). Thus the partakers of the new covenant have God's law newly inscribed[79] on their hearts so that they can truly do what God commands.

This is one of the most beautiful aspects of regeneration. The old and impossible struggle to keep God's law, the continual turning from God's command to pursue one's own ends, the inward conflict brought about by the failure to live up to conscience—all such is essentially done away with by God's transforming the heart. I have earlier referred to the "circumcision of the heart," the cutting away of the old. Now we speak of the cutting in of the new, the inscribing of God's law so that we are able to fulfill God's law and purpose.

Third, there is a *unification* of the heart. Ezekiel prophesied this to Israel: "I will give them one heart" (11:19), hence an "undivided heart" (NIV). This implies a heart that will no longer be torn by many, often contrary, affections and emotions, but a heart that is united before God. In Jeremiah is this promise: "I will give them one heart and one way" (32:39), hence "singleness of heart and action" (NIV translation). We may also look back to the psalmist (possibly David) who prayed, "Teach me thy way, O LORD, that I may walk in thy truth; unite my heart to fear thy name" (86:11). This uniting, this singleness makes possible the fulfillment of the Great Commandment, which begins: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one"[80] (Deut. 6:4 NIV).

Then follows: "And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart" (v. 5).[81] Even as the Lord is one, so the heart must be one that we may love God unitedly and totally. Truly, through the miraculous act of regeneration we are given a new heart, a heart that is one and single, that we may love God with all our being.

Also in regard to the other part of the Great Commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," as cited in the New Testament,[82] it is apparent that this can be done only from singleness of heart. The earliest Christian believers were said to be "of one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32). Their fervent oneness was the result of the uniting of their hearts through faith in Christ. Prior to their becoming new creatures in Christ, the state of people is that of separation and estrangement from others. Through the wonder of new birth, there is at last the realization of a unity that binds people together in genuine love and concern.

2. A Renewed Mind

Regeneration is also, quite importantly, a matter of the mind: the mind is renewed. Paul writes, “In reference to your former manner of life, … lay aside the old self … and … be renewed in the spirit of your mind” (Eph. 4:22–23 NASB). This refers to such a basic effect on the mind that it is actually made new[83] in the sense that it takes on a totally different attitude[84] or orientation from what it had before. As we have observed, before regeneration persons are blind to the things of God.

Paul speaks of how in their sinful condition people “became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened” (Rom. 1:21). This does not mean that the mind of a sinful person is incapable of thinking; such an idea would be absurd in light of all the accomplishments in civilization made possible through human mental faculties. But Paul’s words do declare that in regard to the knowledge of God and His ways—which is the truly critical knowledge—unregenerate man is utterly incompetent.

Let us recall for a moment the strong biblical emphasis on the knowledge of God. Through the prophet Jeremiah the Lord said, “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me” (Jer. 9:23–24). To understand, to know God is the all-important matter; in comparison with such knowledge all human knowledge pales. Yet, tragically, no such true knowledge remains. In the words of another prophet, Hosea, “There is … no knowledge of God in the land” (Hosea 4:1).[85] Furthermore, there is no way by human wisdom to gain that knowledge. According to Paul, “the world by wisdom knew not God” (1 Cor. 1:21 KJV). What, therefore, is of supreme importance in knowledge, namely, that concerning God, is not known by mankind.

Here, then, is to be seen the critical importance of the Old Testament promise in which God declares, “No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest” (Jer. 31:34 NIV: cf. Heb. 8:11). *They will all know me.* And it turns out, according to the New Testament witness, that this happens to all those who through Jesus Christ become new creatures. Renewed in their minds, they truly know God.

Indeed, Paul declares (and surely this is an extraordinary statement) that “we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16). This means that because Christ dwells in believers, they have basically a new mental outlook. Rather than their thoughts

and knowledge being rooted in themselves, they now have a new source: Jesus Christ. By no means do regenerated persons invariably view things from the perspective of Christ, for there is much of the flesh that remains.[86] However, because of the indwelling Spirit of Christ, His mind, His attitude, is ever present and ready to be expressed through the committed believer.[87]

Finally, the renewal, or making new, of the mind means that all of life is viewed in a new perspective. Rather than seeing everything from the aspect of the self—its interests and ambitions—the primary devotion is to God, His will, His word, His purpose. Further, there is a fresh orientation to other people and a new desire to reach out to them in thoughtfulness and concern.

When the old self has been laid aside, and there is a renewal "in the spirit of the mind" and the mind of Christ becomes the controlling source, all things truly are new and different.

3. A Liberated Will

Regeneration also includes the liberation of the will from its bondage to sin and evil. Shortly before the words about regeneration in Titus 3:5 Paul spoke of his—and our—former condition: "We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by men and hating one another" (v. 3). This is a sad, but true picture of the human predicament: "slaves" we were,[88] in bondage to all these evils—and with no hope of ever escaping or changing. But then, Paul adds, "When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us … by the washing of regeneration" (vv. 4–5). We were saved from this terrible bondage, brought into a new life of freedom in Christ.

In another place Paul speaks about regeneration in relation to people whom he describes as "fornicators … idolaters … adulters … effeminate [by perversion] … homosexuals … thieves … covetous … drunkards … revilers … swindlers" (1 Cor. 6:9–10 NASB). Then Paul adds, "And such were some of you; but you were washed …" (v. 11).[89] The washing of regeneration! No longer is one in bondage to a terrible past, even if it was sexual immorality and perversion, coveting and stealing, drunkenness and abusiveness. Free at last!

One of the sadder things about the old life—even if the evils were not as gross as those just described—is the utter human inability to break from the past. Perhaps we were not aware of how much the chains of evil bound us; but if we did become aware, no amount of exertion could turn our lives around. Paul

speaks of being “sold under sin,” and he expressed what that meant for him: “I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Rom. 7:14–15). So he cries out, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?” (v. 24). And the answer—glowingly stated: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (v. 25). Verily, this is *the* deliverance that surely comes through Christ.[90]

This liberation is from all that binds man, including the forces of darkness. Paul speaks of his commission from the risen Lord to Jews and Gentiles thus: “to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God” (Acts 26:18 NASB). Unredeemed man is not only in slavery to sin, he is also in bondage to the source of sin, the devil. When therefore one is born again, it is a tremendous liberation from the power and dominion of Satan into light and freedom. In writing the Colossians Paul declares, “He [God] has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (1:13).

Many a person has become so engrossed in sin that sin is far more than a matter of bondage to his own passions and pleasures; it is more profoundly a bondage to the power of Satan. But, praise God, there is emancipation even here! For Christ in his work of redemption has broken the power of Satan.

Hence, when we are united to Him in faith and are regenerated, there is a full and joyful liberation. The born-again person has at last been freed from the dominion of Satan and now lives in the kingdom of Christ.

It is a blessing to be on a new path of obedience to the will of God. One may —and often will—stumble and fall; however, the believer is free to walk in the way of Christ.

A messianic Psalm contains these words: “I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart” (40:8). These words are totally fulfilled only in Jesus Christ. For, according to Hebrews, “when Christ came into the world, he said … ‘Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God’” (10:5, 7). At every point in Jesus’ life and ministry there was the continual, “Thy will be done.” Since the born-again person is now in Christ and Christ in him, his will is basically set in Christ’s pattern. It is a will of obedience, not disobedience; it is a will of delight to do the will of God.

Paul speaks of “doing the will of God from the heart” (Eph. 6:6). This is the glad way of the new man who belongs to Christ.

B. A New Nature

Regeneration also means the birthing of a new nature. Rather than the old self of sinful disposition, attitudes, and impulses, there emerges a self whose nature is basically new. In the words of Paul, “Behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17). These words surely apply to a new nature in man.[91]

The “old man”[92] —man’s unregenerate self—is foreign to God and His nature. When regeneration occurs, the nature or character of God becomes operative in the new man. According to 2 Peter 1:4, we have become “partakers of the divine nature,”[93] that is, sharers in God’s holiness, love, truth—indeed, all that represents the divine nature. Similarly in 1 John 3:9 it is said of the regenerate person, one “born of God,” that “God’s nature[94] abides in him.” Indeed, according to John, there is such a radical change in the reborn man that sin becomes foreign to his new nature: “No one born of God commits sin; for God’s nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God” (1 John 3:9).[95] Sin becomes unnatural to the born-again person,[96] for it is totally out of character with the divine nature abiding within and the new life that has begun.

Since God’s nature is that of holiness, love, and truth,[97] man’s new nature shows forth the same. Likewise since original man, Adam, before the Fall was not a sinner, he reflected God’s nature (or character) in all these ways.[98] Hence, the person born again will show forth the same; he will be a new creature in holiness, love, and truth. Let us examine this in more detail.

1. Holiness

The new nature is, first, that of holiness and righteousness. So Paul writes, “Put on the new nature,[99] created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24). The regenerate person is one whose inmost being is now inclined to righteousness and holiness. There is a reorientation in which the governing disposition is that of righteousness. Consequently, his desire is to walk blamelessly before the Lord.

Indeed, Paul elsewhere calls this new person a “slave of righteousness”: “You who were once slaves of sin … having been set free from sin, have become

slaves of righteousness" (Rom. 6:17–18). Such a strong statement is entirely appropriate, because the new man in Christ has a totally different orientation. Previously, everything he did, whether wittingly or unwittingly, was under the domination of sin; now it is under the domination of righteousness. Again, the new person will not always act in righteousness (for there is no one who does not sin), but he will be basically mastered by a new passion: to fulfill the charge of righteousness and holiness.

So John declares: "Every one who does right[100] is born of him" (1 John 2:29). The doing of righteousness is the nature of a person born of God.

2. Love

The new nature is also characterized by love. Shortly before Paul's words that any person in Christ is a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17), he declared that "the love of Christ controls us" (v. 14). Christ's love expressed in dying for us, Paul adds, is also for the purpose that "those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (v. 15). In 1 John are similar, and quite succinct, words: "We love, because he first loved us" (4:19).

This very love is a vital element in the life of the reborn person. Again in the language of 1 John: "He who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love" (4:7–8). The love is *agape*,[101] an outgoing love that has replaced self-love (the natural condition of sinful man) with love for and devotion to God and to Christ. It is also a love that reaches out to other persons whatever their status or situation.

The regenerate person, accordingly, is at last in the position to fulfill the great commandments: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30–31). One born of God—having a changed heart, a renewed mind, and new strength,[102] and one whose newborn nature is grounded in love—has the capacity to love God and his neighbor in a total kind of way.

Since love is the very nature of God—"God is love" (1 John 4:8)—and God's nature abides in one born of God, then to exhibit love is a natural expression. Or to put it a bit differently, since Christ through His Spirit dwells within, His love may be freely shed abroad. Love is the new way of life of the newborn child of God.[103]

It is exciting to realize that through the origination of the new person, the

person through whom God's love can be expressed, a new force has been released in the world that can alter every relationship. Natural man, to be sure, knows of passionate love, which seeks in another its fulfillment;[104] he may indeed experience affection or friendship in human relationships.[105] But none of this operates on the level of *agape* love that is wholly selfless in relation to God and one's fellowman.

3. Truth

The new nature, finally, is marked by truth. The Holy Spirit who dwells within all those born of God is "the Spirit of truth." Jesus spoke to His disciples about "the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him," and then added: "You know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you" (John 14:17). So it is that in John's second letter the apostle speaks of believers as those who "know the truth … the truth which abides in us and will be with us for ever" (vv. 1–2). Paul writes similarly about this truth to Timothy: "Guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us" (2 Tim. 1:14).

Hence the person born of God has a knowledge of truth of which the world knows nothing. He knows the truth about God, about Christ, about salvation, about life and death, and about the world to come—all the things that are of ultimate importance.[106]

Furthermore, since God has "brought us forth by the word of truth" (James 1:18), lying and deception belong to prior days. Those born of God have entered upon a new path of speaking and doing the truth in every relationship. So Paul writes: "Once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8). To be "light in the Lord" means to be so enlightened by truth that it is natural to walk steadfastly in it. They are those, as Paul elsewhere says, who "in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation … shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15).

The new thing about the regenerate person is that truth marks his nature. He may, and sometimes does, slip into untruth, deception, falsehood (the old life out of which he came), but there has been an internal basic alteration so that he now naturally walks in the truth.

On one occasion Jesus declared, "Believe in the light [namely, in Jesus Himself], that you may become sons of light" (John 12:36). To be a son of light is to be one who radiates truth in both being and action. This is a high mark of

those who are born from above.

C. A New Life

Finally, through regeneration there is entrance into a new life. In the language of Paul it is to "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). This truly is such life as one has never known before.

To be born again is actually to pass from death to life. Paul writes the Ephesians, "And you he made alive, when you were dead through … trespasses and sins" (2:1). Before being made alive, what passed for life was actually death —not physical of course, but spiritual. Ever since Adam's fall the human race has been walking in spiritual death. Now there is spiritual life.

First, there is *aliveness to God.* In the striking words of Paul, "You also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11). Alive to God! Before Christ came and brought new life, people in general were dead to God and the things of God. They were "without hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12 NIV).[107] Now through the miracle of rebirth there is aliveness to God and His ways.

The awareness of God's presence becomes a new fact in the believer's life. Before rebirth, people, like sinful Adam, are shut out from fellowship with their Maker, so that strive as they may, there is no way back into the presence of God. Now all has changed, for regeneration is to be born of God, to be a child of God, and thereby to live in His presence. As John writes, "Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). This is the meaning of being "alive to God in Christ Jesus": new life in the presence of God.

To be alive to God is a fulfillment of the deepest need of human nature. The "death of God,"[108] that is, the deadness of man to God, is the ultimate tragedy, for that death darkens all of life's activities. For without God there is no ultimate meaning to life's pursuits: it is all "sound and fury, signifying nothing." On the other hand, aliveness to God means that our human existence, which was made for God (and without which all is futile), is at last being fulfilled. Man is now truly human again because he is back in connection with his Creator!

The wonderful sense of God's hand in all that transpires becomes a reality. Although there may not always be understanding, there is now the realization of God's providence, His sustaining care, His presence even in times of suffering and seeming defeat. For to be alive to God is to be alive to the One who in Christ Jesus has said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20 KJV).

Second, and this follows from the preceding, the new life a believer knows is one of *true happiness.* The "pursuit of happiness" is not only an expressed goal in the United States Declaration of Independence; it is also what people everywhere seek after. The natural man pursues it in terms of such earthly satisfactions as wealth, success, pleasure, recognition, and security. But none of these really satisfies the deeper longings for the things of God; moreover, any such attainment can with a change of fortune quickly pass away. True happiness is to be found only through the new life in Christ.

For one thing, there is abundant life in Jesus Christ. On one occasion Jesus declared, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). In such abundance is the highest possible happiness. There may or may not be earthly abundance, but that does not really matter, for the new life in Christ is one of continuing spiritual blessings. There is the highest happiness of knowing God's salvation through Jesus Christ, and along with this the blessedness of His Holy Spirit's continuing presence to comfort and guide. There is also the blessing of fellowship with other believers. This fellowship is far deeper than any earthly association or even that within human families: it is the fellowship of those who have been brought to life by Christ, and who know a rich experience of fellowship with one another. This is true happiness.

Again, in Christ there is profound and abiding joy. Jesus, on the same occasion, also declared, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full"[109] (John 15:11). The natural man in his pursuit of happiness never knows the joy Christ brings. Primarily there is the joy of salvation: it is truly the "great joy" (Luke 2:10) that was promised at the birth of Christ. Hence, all who are born again have entered into this joy beyond all earthly measure. Through the ancient prophet the Lord had declared, "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation" (Isa. 12:3). But also it is a continuing joy that does not depend on outward circumstances. Paul wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice" (Phil. 4:4), and added shortly after, "I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content" (v. 11). These words written from a Roman prison (see Phil. 1:7, 12–17) declare the extraordinary joy, regardless of circumstance, of one who truly belongs to Jesus Christ. The believer in Christ knows the joy of the Lord. This is true happiness.

Once more, there is victory through Christ. In the words of John, "Everyone born of God overcomes the world" (1 John 5:4 NIV); in the language of Paul, "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37). One who has not experienced the new life in Christ is still in the bondage of sin, still under the control of Satan, still haunted by the fear of death and judgment. The pursuit of happiness, therefore, is constantly frustrated by these insuperable

negative forces. But for the born-again person all is changed: the bondage to sin gone, the control of Satan broken, the fear of death and judgment dissipated. In the continuing words of Paul, “Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (vv. 38–39). Christ has triumphed, and we share His victory! This is true happiness.

Third, and finally, the new life is *life eternal*. Not only is there new life now but also it never ends. Following the words of Jesus to Nicodemus, “You must be born again” (John 3:7 NASB), the Scripture reads: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal[110] life” (v. 16). To be born again is to enter by faith in Jesus Christ into eternal life. Truly such life begins now—and it is life indeed—but the final glory is that such life never ends. This is the ultimate happiness.

We close with the memorable words of Peter: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew [or “again”] to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3–4). Amen and amen!

[1]The Greek word is anothen. It is translated “again” also in the KJV and NIV; as “over again” in NEB. The RSV has “anew.” It is also possible to translate anothen “from above” (as in John 3:31 and 19:11). According to BAGD, the expression “gennethenai anothen is purposely ambiguous and means both born from above and born again.”

[2]Literally, “having been born again” or “regenerated.” The Greek word is ana- gegennëmenoi (the “again,” ana, being included in the participle).

[3]The word for “regeneration” here is palingenesias (from palin, “again,” and genesis, “birth”). The only other New Testament use of palingenesia is in Matthew 19:28, referring there to the regeneration of the world in the eschaton.

[4]As, for example, in various religions that affirm reincarnation, i.e., the rebirth of the soul in a new human body or other forms of life.

[5]Or “a new heart” (RSV mg).

[6]“Heart” and “spirit” thus are used interchangeably. Despite different nuances of meaning, they both basically refer to the inner life, the center of human personality.

[7]"The kingdom of God" is the sphere of salvation. Hence, it is essentially the same thing to say that one cannot see salvation and enter into it except through rebirth.

[8]Walter Lippmann some years ago wrote of the insight of higher religion that "unregenerate men can only muddle into muddle" (A Preface to Morals, 251).

[9]The following lines by an unknown author catch up the feeling of many:

I wish that there were some wonderful place
Called the land of beginning again
Where all our mistakes
And all our heartaches
Could be left like a shabby old coat at the door
And never put on again.

[10]Despite the tautology. A Christian is either "born again" or no Christian at all.

[11]According to one Gallup Poll, three in ten Americans (31 percent) describe themselves to be "born-again" Christians. However correct this figure, the significant fact is that the nomenclature of "born again" has become current.

[12]As was the case in our consideration of "Calling" (chapter 1). See the previous chapter, section III, "Method," pages 23-26.

[13]The Greek word is gennethen, literally, "begotten" or "born."

[14]As described in chapter 1, IV.C.l.

[15]It is sometimes suggested that the phrase "born of water" has no reference to baptism. Nicodemus had just asked Jesus, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be bora?" (v. 4). To this Jesus replied, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (v. 5). Jesus could have been referring to natural birth. For example, in rabbinic Hebrew "water" sometimes refers to semen (see C. K. Barrett, The Gospel According to John, 209; Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John, 217-18); thus "born of water" could refer to procreation. If this is what Jesus meant, he was saying that not only is a person born of water naturally, but he must also be born supernaturally. However, I hardly think that this is what Jesus intended, since "born of water" also refers to entrance into the kingdom of God: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

[16]See hereafter. Incidentally, some persons hesitate to say that Jesus is referring to water baptism in v. 5 because such might imply baptismal regeneration. F. F. Bruce speaks contrariwise: “It is a pity when reaction against the notion of baptismal regeneration … leads to complete overlooking of the baptismal allusion in the words of Jesus” (The Gospel of John, 84-85). Jesus is definitely not affirming baptismal regeneration, since regeneration occurs essentially by the Spirit (as succeeding words in v. 8 clarify: “born of the Spirit”).

[17]The Greek word is loutrou. The word loutron = “bath, washing of baptism” (BAGD). Loutron is “used in the N.T. and in eccles. writ, of baptism” (Thayer).

[18]Cf. the words of Jesus as reported in Mark 16:16: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” Baptism, which appears coordinate with belief for salvation in the first statement, is not mentioned in the second. The weight clearly is on belief, not baptism.

[19]The word translated “renewing” or “renewal” is anakainoseos and refers to “the spiritual rebirth of men” (BAGD).

[20]First Peter 3:21 might seem to suggest such: “Baptism … now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” The meaning is not that baptism in and of itself saves: it is rather “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” The NIV puts it clearly: “It [baptism] saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

[21]E.g., Peter preached to the Gentiles in Caesarea and the Holy Spirit fell upon them, an unmistakable evidence of their regeneration. Only after that were they baptized (Acts 10:44- 48; cf. 11:14-18). Also note Paul’s words: “I am thankful that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius…. For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel” (1 Cor. 1:14, 17). These words clearly imply preaching resulting in salvation but without baptism. For a fuller discussion of baptism see pages 283-87.

[22]In the preceding chapter, “Calling.”

[23]Witsius, early Reformed theologian, writes of regeneration as “the hyperphysical act of God, by which the elect man who is spiritually dead is imbued with new, divine life … from the incorruptible seed of God’s word, fecundated by the transcendent power of the Spirit.” Quoted in Heppe’s Reformed Dogmatics, 518.

[24]Again, see chapter 1, “Calling.”

[25]These words from Ezekiel 36:26, previously quoted, are similarly found in Ezekiel 11:19.

[26]The Old Testament particularly speaks of the role of the parent in this connection: “These words which I command you … shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deut. 6:6-9). If this was important for the words of the law, how much more for the word of the gospel!

[27]The words of Jesus in Mark 12:30 (parallels in Matt. 22:37 and Luke 10:27) are essentially a quotation from Deuteronomy 6:5 (words preceding the quotation in footnote 26).

[28]Referring to “the people” (the Jews) and “the Gentiles” who had just been mentioned.

[29]Witness these words of Augustine before his conversion: “For I felt that I was still the captive of my sins, and in my misery I kept crying ‘How long shall I go on saying “tomorrow, tomorrow”? Why not now? Why not make an end of my ugly sins at this moment?’ “ (Confessions, Pine-Coffin trans., 8.12).

[30]Barth writes that a person now “sees what he did not previously see as a blind man, hears what he previously could not hear as a deaf man… because it was present to him only outwardly and not inwardly” (Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics IV/3, 512).

[31]Matthew 5:21-37.

[32]Matthew 5:38-47.

[33]Matthew 5:48-“You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

[34]A line from the gospel song that goes by that title.

[35]These words, quoted freely by Paul from Psalm 14:3, refer to Jew and Gentile alike.

[36]The Greek word is exousias, “domain” (NASB, NEB).

[37]Hence this is a matter of knowledge. Recall what was said on page 29 about the fact that faith begins with knowledge. Indeed, illumination of the mind (the subject of the present section) and the beginning of faith as

knowledge are identical moments in the initial stage of salvation (or regeneration).

[38]The Greek word is kaîenygesan, “pierced” (NASB). The word is used only here in the New Testament and conveys the idea of feeling a sharp pain, thus being “pierced,” “stabbed,” “smitten” in heart, (KJV “pricked” does not sufficiently convey this deep note.)

[39]Or “from it flow the springs of life” (RSV, NASB); “it is the wellspring of life” (NIV).

[40]The Greek word is syllypoumenos, literally, “deeply grieved”; NIV reads “deeply distressed.”

[41]The Greek phrase is hë tou kosmou lupë, literally, “the grief [“sorrow” (KJV)] of the world.”

[42]Instead of “convince” (RSV) or “reprove” (KJV). The Greek word is elenxei. According to TDNT (2:74), it means “to show someone his sin and to summon him to repentance,” hence “convict.” The NIV translation, “convict the world of guilt in regard to sin,” conveys the idea excellently.

[43]Thus NASB, NIV, NEB. The RSV has “spiritually”; KJV, “in the spirit”; the Greek phrase is en pneumati. Although any of these translations is possible, the context suggests “by the Spirit.”

[44]This faith is more than knowledge that the Spirit of Christ can accomplish this radical change; it is also assent to His doing it. (See chapter 1, IV.B.2 with the concluding statement about “faith that passes into acknowledgment and assent.”)

[45]The words of 2 Chronicles 7:14 are frequently used today in calling people (sometimes a nation) to repentance. Surely this is good. However, if there is not a prior realization of what sin is (its contravening of God’s holiness and righteousness) and a deep conviction of human perverseness and unrighteousness, there can be no genuine turning to God. Incidentally, this is doubtless the reason why many of the well-intended appeals for repentance accomplish so little: those addressed are not existentially prepared for it.

[46]Paul speaks elsewhere of “the Gentiles” (people at large) as living in “the futility of their minds … darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God … [with] hardness of heart; they have become callous” (Eph. 4:17-19).

[47]E.g., in Hosea 2:14-23.

[48]This is not to discount, for example, the confession of sin made by the Israelites returned from exile. According to Nehemiah 9:2, “the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.” However, the changes refer largely to such matters as mixed marriages, Sabbath observance, and temple obligations (see especially Neh. 10:28-39). There was no radical repentance that led to life.

[49]See, e.g., the practical instructions to the multitudes, to the tax collectors, and to the soldiers in Luke 3:10-14.

[50]See Matthew 4:17 where Jesus is recorded as speaking the identical message of John: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

[51]Although people repented under John’s preaching, the repentance had no life-changing character. John in his ministry spoke of “the ax … laid to the root” (Luke 3:9), but he had no way of rooting out the sin. It was only when “the gospel of God” was proclaimed that people could come to genuine repentance.

[52]Early in His ministry Jesus said, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32). These words bespeak His continuing concern.

[53]The root of sin (see earlier note) is eradicated in radical repentance (“radical” is from the Latin word radix = “root”).

[54]Later, after the Gentiles at Caesarea heard the gospel and believed, it was said of them, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18). Thus it was “repentance unto life” for both Jews and Gentiles.

[55]Paul speaks of Jesus Christ as “the Lord of glory” in 1 Corinthians 2:8. Also cf. James 2:1.

[56]Recall Solomon’s words (earlier quoted) to Israel: “If they repent with all their mind and all their heart … and turn from their wicked ways, then I will … forgive their sin.” What Israel could never fully do is at last possible through Jesus Christ.

[57]We have already noted the initial proclamation in Jerusalem: “Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.” Peter again appealed to the Jews in Acts 3:19: “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out [i.e., forgiven]” (NIV). Later Peter and his fellow apostles declared: “God exalted him [Christ] at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and

forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31).

[58]Recalling 2 Corinthians 7:10.

[59]Recalling Acts 11:18.

[60]The word for "repentance" in all the accounts we have quoted is from the Greek word metanoia. Literally, this means "a change of mind" (mind = nous). Hence, the mind is involved (as in the Old Testament words "if they repent with all their mind") and so is the heart ("if they repent with all their heart"). However, metanoia points more in the direction of the will.

[61]According to Thayer, metanoia means "heartily to amend with abhorrence of one's past sins."

[62]Repentance with such a change is memorably set forth in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). When the son "came to himself" (v. 17), he turned back to his father in repentance and received complete forgiveness.

[63]The call to repentance is the call to conversion. According to TDNT, metanoia means "convert, conversion" (9:999).

[64]The Greek word is epistrepsate (from epi, "to," and strepho, "turn"). The KJV translates as "be converted" which, while properly speaking of conversion, wrongly uses the passive voice instead of the middle or reflexive voice. Conversion is not a being converted but a converting, a turning to God.

[65]This is true in secular usage also. To convert, e.g., may mean to alter the physical or chemical nature of one form into another.

[66]The Greek word is epistrophen.

[67]Conversion, accordingly, is neither the result of regeneration nor prior thereto. Louis Berkhof regards conversion as "that act of God whereby He causes the regenerated sinner … to turn to Him in repentance and faith" (Systematic Theology, 483), hence results from regeneration. Millard J. Erickson, on the other hand, declares that "the biblical evidence favors the position that conversion is prior to regeneration" (Christian Theology, 3:932). Both views fail to recognize the integral nature of regeneration and conversion.

[68]There is no priority of one over the other. Previously under "Calling" I discussed that we are called to faith in Jesus Christ. Nothing was said about repentance in regard to calling; however, it is apparent that the very act of faith is a turning to Christ from something else, namely, the old

life. Since a turning from is the basic idea in repentance, Paul refers to repentance and faith in that order (cf. Heb. 6:1, which speaks of "a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God").

[69]Words from the hymn "Just as I Am, Without One Plea."

[70]Paul writes that "as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27).

[71]Accordingly, the climax of faith and repentance is the same. In chapter 1, "Calling," I wrote of the climax of faith as union with Christ. Since faith and repentance are two sides of the same activity-faith being a "turning to" Christ and repentance a "turning from" sin-they both culminate in union with Christ.

[72]The Greek word for "new" in 2 Corinthians 5:17 is kainos. Kainos refers to what is new in quality or nature. In that sense the new as kainos is not the appearance of something that did not exist before but the making new or renovating of what was already there. (Kainos is quite different from another word for new, neos. According to Johannes Behm in TDNT, neos signifies "what was not there before," "what has only just arisen or appeared," what is "new in time or origin"; kainos, "what is new and distinctive," "new in nature," what is "essentially different from the old divine order" [3:447, 449]. Similarly, according to Thayer, neos "denotes the new primarily in reference to time, the young, the recent"; kainos "denotes the new primarily in reference to quality, the fresh, the unworn" [article on καινός]. The new, consequently, may also be spoken of as the "renewed" (as in the "renewed mind"), but so renewed as to be qualitatively different from what was before.

[73]Substituting "creature" (as in KJV, NASB) for "creation." The Greek word ktisis can be translated either way. Paul also speaks of "a new ktisis" in Galatians 6:15: "For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new ktisis."

[74]Emil Brunner writes, "Regeneration consists in this, that in this invisible core of personality the great, eternally decisive change takes place that 'Christ is formed in us' through the death of the old man and the creation of the new …" (Dogmatics, 3:273-74).

[75]Recall the earlier discussion in III.A about this verse.

[76]Repentance and faith are again seen to be closely related.

[77]Adultery in relation to Bathsheba; murder in connection with having Uriah, Bathshe- ba's husband, killed (see 2 Sam. 11).

[78]This does not mean that no taint of sin and evil remains. As I will discuss later (chapter 4, “Sanctification”), despite the new birth and the Spirit’s indwelling, there is still the “flesh” and an ongoing warfare between Spirit and “flesh.” Nonetheless, whatever the struggle that lies ahead, the radically new has begun in regeneration.

[79]There is the natural law written on the hearts of all men (see Rom. 2:15: “What the law requires is written on their hearts”). The conscience attests this; however, because of man’s fallen and sinful nature, he does not truly obey God (“no one does good, not even one” [Rom. 3:12]). Thus there is needed a new and lasting inscription.

[80]The RSV reads, “The LORD our God is one Lord” but has the NIV reading in the margin. The NASB is almost identical with the NIV.

[81]Jesus recalled the words of Deuteronomy 6:4-5 in Mark 12:29-30; cf. Matthew 22:37; Luke 10:27.

[82]Matthew 22:38; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27.

[83]The Greek word translated in Ephesians 4:23 as “renewed” (ananeousthai) means “to take on a new mind” (Thayer). The NIV and NEB translate it “be made new.”

[84]The NIV translation of Ephesians 4:23 continues: “to be made new in the attitude of your minds.”

[85]Although these words were spoken particularly in regard to Israel, they undoubtedly also have universal relevance.

[86]Paul, after saying, “We have the mind of Christ,” in the next verse calls the Corinthian believers “men of the flesh … babes in Christ” (1 Cor. 3:1) because of the strife and jealousy among them.

[87]Hence, this calls for an ongoing renewal. See Chapter 4, “Sanctification.”

[88]In Romans 6:6 Paul likewise describes our former condition in terms of slavery: we were “enslaved to sin” (also see v. 20: “You were slaves of sin”).

[89]The verse continues, “You were sanctified … you were justified.” Justification and sanctification will be considered in the next two chapters.

[90]Many New Testament commentators view Romans 7:14-25, not as referring to Paul’s regeneration, but to his continuing struggle as a Christian with sin (see, e.g., F. F. Bruce, Romans, TNTC, 256-73). I agree, however, with James Denney that “the experience described is essentially that of his [Paul’s] pre-Christian days” (EGT, 2:641). To be

"sold under sin" can hardly refer to the regenerate person who has been essentially delivered from sin!

[91]As 2 Corinthians 5:21 suggests: "… so that in him we may become the righteousness of God." (For further discussion of this righteousness, see the next chapter, "Justification.")

[92]This is the language of the KJV in Ephesians 4:22 and Colossians 3:9.

[93]This does not mean that we share in God's being. Regeneration does not signify any kind of merger of man with God; there is no absorption into deity. The word translated "nature," physis, does not refer to being but to "natural characteristics" (Thayer).

[94]The Greek word is sperma, literally "seed" (as in KJV, NIV, NASB, NEB). Some interpreters view the "seed" as the word, some others as the Spirit. According to I. H. Marshall, "most commentators take 'seed' to refer to a divine principle of life which abides in the believer" (The Epistles of John, NICNT, 186). Perhaps "nature" is the best translation, as the reference, I believe, is not only to a divine principle of life but also to the divine nature indicated by the word "seed."

[95]The NIV translates: "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God." This translation removes any idea of sinless perfection. For further discussion of this matter see chapter 4, "Sanctification," 88-89n.29.

[96]This does not mean that a person will not do the unnatural, i.e., sin; indeed, we often do just that (see John 1:8: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us"). Still, such an action is basically contrary to the new nature.

[97]See vol. 1, chapter 3, "God."

[98]For a fuller discussion of this see vol. 1, chapter 9, "Man."

[99]The Greek phrase is kainon anthropon, literally, "new man." The NASB and NIV translate the phrase "new self."

[100]The Greek word is dikaiosynen, literally, "righteousness."

[101]In the quotation from 1 John 4:7-8 the Greek noun for love is agape: God is agapë. The verbs for love are from agapao. Agapao, the verb, is occasionally used in the New Testament to refer merely to an act of human love or affection; however, the noun agape invariably refers to divine love (God's love of persons or their love of God) or the outgoing love for others that God's love makes possible.

[102]We have previously talked about a changed heart and renewed mind. “New strength” refers to the will liberated from bondage.

[103]This does not mean that the regenerate person invariably exercises love; far from it. As will be discussed later (in chapter 4, “Sanctification”), the continuing “flesh” of man wars against every godly expression and activity of the new man. This surely includes love. Moreover, love is to be an ever-growing reality in the life of the child of God; no new Christian fully loves. This is why Paul speaks of love as a “fruit” of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22)-and fruit may take long to ripen and mature. In another place Paul prays that believers may “know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge” (Eph. 3:19).

[104]Often expressed by the Greek word eros in nonbiblical literature. The word “eros” is not found in the New Testament.

[105]Often expressed by the Greek word philia in nonbiblical literature. It is found only once in the New Testament-in James 4:4 where reference is made to “friendship with the world.”

[106]Paul couples salvation and knowledge of truth in 1 Timothy 2:4: “[God] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

[107]Paul writes these words particularly in reference to Gentiles.

[108]This modern-day expression originating with Friedrich Nietzsche in the nineteenth century says nothing, of course, about God’s demise but much about the inward condition of man.

[109]See further chapter 12, II, “Fullness of Joy.”

[110]The Greek word is aionion, “everlasting” (KJV).

3
Justification

In the area of salvation one of the critically important doctrines is justification.[1] This doctrine has to do with salvation in terms of man's *standing* before God. One who has experienced salvation has a new relationship to God: he is justified.

I. BACKGROUND

The doctrine of justification concerns God's way in salvation of dealing with man as unrighteous. God, who is righteous in all His ways, demands of His human creature a reciprocal righteousness. But man does not respond affirmatively; indeed, because of his sinful nature he cannot and will not. Yet there is no way to avoid the demand of God that he walk in righteousness.

Hence, this is the original crisis, for no man can live a life that truly reflects the righteousness of God.

The burning question is simply this: How can any person stand before a righteous and holy God? When God is recognized for who He is, a human being can only cry out, "Woe is me!"[2] For there comes the vivid realization that "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags."[3] All that we do, even "our righteousnesses," is unclean in His holy and pure presence.

This situation is the case for all people. It may be more obviously true for those who are given to immorality : those who constantly defy God, live in lustful passion, and abuse their neighbors. If confronted by the Righteous One, who bids all persons to honor Him, to live in purity and holiness, and love their fellow human beings, there can only be great anxiety and fear. Indeed, the overall situation seems hopeless: they simply have no genuine righteousness to respond to the righteousness of God. Their manner of life merits only God's judgment.

The plight, however, is no better for those who may be called moral persons. These are the ones who seek generally to keep God's commandments, obey the laws of the land, or at least follow after the scruples of their consciences. They seem to belong to an entirely different category from the immoral (as described above) and would indeed be classified by most people as good and righteous. However, in the presence of the holy Lord of heaven and earth, all their deeds are immediately shown to be darkened by sin: there is no true worship of God, no clear inner conscience, no pure love of neighbor. Some such persons may even strive to achieve a righteousness that God will find acceptable, but it is to no avail. They still fall short of what God requires, and therefore likewise stand under judgment.[4]

It is with such matters that Paul deals in Romans 1:18–3:20. In those verses

the apostle sets forth the unrighteousness of all men, Jew and Gentile alike. Paul first speaks about the wickedness of men in general: how they turn from God's own revelation of Himself in nature, hence suppress the truth, and how, as a result, God gives them over to ways of immorality and unrighteousness (1:18–32). Paul then declares that Gentiles are inexcusably unrighteous, for in addition to natural revelation, they have the law written on their hearts (2:1–16). But so are Jews who, having the law of Moses, nonetheless constantly break it and thereby render their circumcision invalid (2:17–29). The result is, in Paul's words, that "all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one'" (3.9–10).[5] Hence, "no human being will be justified in his [God's] sight by works of the law" (3:20).

The situation, then, is extremely serious for all people: on the one hand, God demands righteousness; on the other, none can give it because of the power of sin.

From all appearances man's plight is indeed hopeless. The only hope from the human side would seem to be that of living a life of such a caliber of righteousness that God would be able to accept it. But such attempted justification by human deeds is not possible because of who God is, what He requires, and man's sinful condition. The other possible hope might be that God, knowing human frailty and disposition to evil, would simply overlook it and receive man in spite of his sinfulness to Himself. But such is even more impossible, for God as totally holy, righteous, and pure, cannot act in such an arbitrary fashion.

II. MEANING

Before proceeding further, we do well to consider the meaning of the word "justification." In the New Testament it is the usual translation of the Greek word *dikaiosis. Dikaiosis* may also be rendered "acquittal."[6] In one instance "justification" is the translation of *dikaioma*[7] The verb "justify" (also "justifies," "justified") is the translation of the Greek verb *dikaioo.* Some form of *dikaioo* is found most frequently in Romans and Galatians.[8] The usual meaning of the term, especially as found in the writings of the apostle Paul, is to "pronounce or declare righteous."[9]

The striking feature about the word "justification" (both in substantive and verbal forms) is its declaratory aspect: it does not mean to make righteous or just but, as noted, to declare or pronounce righteous.[10] Hence, one who is justified is one who is declared by God to be righteous. It is not the justification of the righteous but of the unrighteous! Paul speaks of God as He "who justifies the ungodly" (Rom. 4:5). There is nothing in sinful man that merits God's approbation. Accordingly, it is not the righteous (there are none), but the unrighteous whom God justifies.

Here we might pause to marvel and wonder. We have previously commented on the extremely serious nature of the human situation, namely, that God demands righteousness in man but that man is by no means able to comply. There is no way by which man can justify himself.[11] Moreover, God being holy and righteous cannot simply overlook sin, nor can man do enough that is good to make himself acceptable to God.[12] Now what we are saying—or better, the gospel proclaims—is that God in an extraordinary manner declares the sinner to be righteous!

How this can occur will be considered later. For the moment, we need simply to rejoice in the wonder of it all. Hear this: we do not have to prove ourselves before God, we do not have to be anxious about His final judgment against us,[13] we do not need to struggle to achieve something God will somehow find acceptable. Rather, He declares us to be righteous. In Him we are righteous—not we who are godly, but we who are ungodly; not we who have climbed the mountain heights of righteous living, but we who are struggling on the plains,

and sometimes in the muck and mire, of unrighteous living. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, in us—whether we be the most moral or the most immoral of people—that makes this possible. God pronounces us righteous, though we are not: this is the glory and wonder of the gospel message.

III. ASPECTS

Now we move on to observe that there is a double aspect (or two aspects) of God’s declaratory righteousness. On the one hand, there is the nonimputation of sin; on the other, there is the imputation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

A. The Nonimputation of Sin

We begin with the words of the rejoicing psalmist: "Blessed is the man to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity" (32:2). In Paul's discussion of justification in Romans, he quotes these words thus: "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (4:8 KJV). This nonimputation of sin may also be called the *nonreckoning* of sin or the *nonaccounting* of sin.[14] This means that although sins are still there, God does not hold them against us.

One of the great Pauline statements to this effect is that of 2 Corinthians 5:19—"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing[15] their trespasses against them" (KJV). This nonimputation of sin stands at the very center of God's act of salvation through Jesus Christ.

We pause again briefly to marvel and rejoice. God does not impute our sins against us. Although they be as a great mountain, though they be a vast number, though they be black as night, God does not impute, does not count, them against us. We cannot pretend sins are not there—and surely God makes no such pretense—but they are not charged to our account. We may shudder at some thought of a heavenly account book, with column upon column of entries against us, and sense the horror of God's coming condemnation. But, praise God, the record is clear; there are no such entries. Somehow, somewhere, they have all been removed.

How significant are the later words of Paul in Romans 8:33–34: "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn?" And the answer implied is: "*No one*." In the Book of Revelation the devil is depicted as the accuser of believers, one who "accuses them day and night before our God" (12:10). However, his accusations (e.g., "You are a sinner and have no hope." "You are condemned whether you admit it or not") cannot stand. God does not accuse; Christ does not condemn. Who, therefore, shall bring *any* charge against God's elect, God's people?[16] Again, and even stronger, the answer implied is: "*Absolutely no one*." For since it is God who justifies, who can there be to condemn?

The nonimputation of sins also means *the forgiveness* of sins. Paul's quotation from Psalm 32 (above) actually mentions forgiveness first: "Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered" (Rom. 4:7). This, then, is followed by the statement about not imputing sins.[17] Hence forgiveness

is the same as nonimputation, though the latter term does help to give the concept of forgiveness further clarification.[18] On the other hand, the beauty of the word forgiveness is its deeply personal quality.

Many Old Testament passages speak vividly of God's forgiveness. For example, Psalm 130:3–4—"If thou, O LORD, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou may est be feared [or 'revered' NEB]." Isaiah 43:25—"I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins." Micah 7:18–19—"Who is a God like thee, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression …? Thou wilt cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." However, even beyond all such expressions, there is to be a future forgiveness of sins. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God declares that in days to come He will make "a new covenant" (31:31). The climactic words are: "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (v. 34). In all such Old Testament passages forgiveness is truly the nonimputation of sins, and this truth is conveyed through the imagery of blotting out, not remembering, passing over, casting into the depths of the ocean. How blessed are those who are thus forgiven, whose sins are no more imputed to them!

In Jesus' ministry also forgiveness of sins has a vitally important place. He said to a paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5); to a sinful woman, "Your sins are forgiven" (Luke 7:48); to a woman taken in the act of adultery, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again" (John 8:11);[19] to His disciples at the Last Supper, "This is my blood of the [new][20] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28); and on the cross He spoke these memorable words: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Moreover, after His death and resurrection, Jesus declared to His disciples that "repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all the nations" (Luke 24:47). It is apparent that forgiveness of sins is at the heart of Jesus' ministry and that forgiveness along with repentance[21] is to be the focus of gospel proclamation thereafter.

It follows that in the preaching of the early church, forgiveness of sins is often declared. Peter on the Day of Pentecost proclaimed, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38). Shortly after that Peter, along with the other apostles, declared that God has "exalted him [Jesus] at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31). A number of years later Peter preached the gospel for the first time to the Gentiles, saying, "Every one

who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43). After that, Paul declared, "Through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you" (Acts 13:38). Finally, Paul asserted that his mandate from Jesus regarding Jew and Gentile alike was to "open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins" (Acts 26:18).

A further word about repentance should be added here. God does not impute our sins to us; He freely forgives. But only those who are truly repentant can receive this forgiveness (recall the words about repentance *and* forgiveness in the words of Christ and Peter). I have previously discussed in some detail the nature of repentance,[22] so I will not repeat that here except to emphasize its necessity in the reception of forgiveness. The Scripture that best illustrates this and its relationship to justification is Luke 18:9–14, the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee represents, according to Jesus, those who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous," hence, justified themselves ("God, I thank thee that I am not like other men"). However, the tax collector in contrition cried out, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" "This man," said Jesus, "went down to his house justified rather than the other." It was the tax collector's repentance and humbleness of spirit that led to his justification, even God's forgiveness. His sins were not imputed to him; he, not the Pharisee, was righteous before God.[23]

Now back again to forgiveness of sins : here we are at the very heart of the gospel. For the good news is that however great the sin, however deep the sense of guilt, however heavy the condemnation that may be felt, there is total forgiveness.[24] If Peter could charge the multitude in Jerusalem with putting to death the Messiah—"this Jesus … you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23)—and thereafter proclaim to these same people forgiveness, then there is no limit to God's forgiveness. For surely if the most heinous crime ever committed, the crucifying of the Son of God, could be forgiven, then forgiveness is unlimited. Idolatry, sexual perversion, murder, theft, adultery, false witness, slander, betrayal of others, lust—and on and on—every single sin, both in its fullest dimension and minutest detail, may be totally forgiven by Almighty God.

When we are aware of this, we are able all the more to say with the psalmist and Paul, "*Blessed* are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; *blessed* is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." The forgiveness of sins, the nonimputation of sins: blessed beyond measure are all who have received this grace from God!

B. Imputation of the Righteousness of Jesus Christ

The other aspect of God's declaratory righteousness (and this is the positive side) is that our righteousness is found in Jesus Christ. God does not impute our sins to us; rather He imputes to us the righteousness of His Son, Jesus Christ. Christ is our righteousness! So Paul states in 1 Corinthians 1:30—"By His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption" (NASB). Clearly Christ has become many things for us: here we focus on the marvel that He "became to us … righteousness."

We might at this juncture call to mind a beautiful word in the Old Testament given through the prophet Jeremiah: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring forth for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness'[25] (Jer. 33:14–16). What an extraordinary and meaningful name! Not that the city is called "righteous," but "the LORD is our righteousness."

Returning to the New Testament again, let us hear other words from Paul that express some of his deepest feelings about Christ's righteousness. After reviewing how in regard to "righteousness under the law" he was "blameless" (Phil. 3:6),[26] Paul shortly after adds, "For his [Christ's] sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ" (3:8–9). This is not a righteousness that is my own, or our own, but that which comes from Jesus Christ.

In summary, this declaratory righteousness is not only a matter of nonimputation of our sins, as important as that is though still basically a negative, but also the imputing to us of the righteousness of Christ. That means a perfect righteousness, nothing lacking, all complete: His purity, His obedience, His integrity, His humility, His love—all this and more, making up His righteousness. It is all ours by virtue of Jesus Christ.

When God looks at us, He beholds us clothed in the righteousness of His Son, and each of us is complete in Him. "Yes, but," I may reply, "there is too much sin and evil in me." The answer from heaven by God the Father is that all is

covered by His Son; hence, I am righteous in Him. There is not even a tawdry little bit that remains. *It is as if I had never sinned.*[27] For even as I have been acquitted of all sin, so do I stand complete in His righteousness.[28]

We may summarize the doctrine of justification at this point by saying that it highlights the wonder of the good news that we do not have to achieve righteousness to be acceptable to God. It is not on the basis of any righteousness that we may have or gain that salvation occurs. Rather, by humbly accepting God's forgiveness and looking to Christ for all righteousness, we enter upon the way of salvation.

Before proceeding further, I should make clear that imputation of the righteousness of Christ is far different from an infusion of righteousness. It would be a serious mistake to assume that we are justified by virtue of God's putting righteousness within us. Although such may seem proper (why should God justify anyone except on the basis of some given righteousness?), it is not God's way of justification. Doubtless one reason for this is that even though the righteousness should be given by God—a righteousness we did not have before salvation—we would be inclined to focus more on what we are than on giving God all the glory. Further, such an instilled righteousness would never be complete in this life (sin continues to some degree in the most righteous of persons);[29] hence, we would never fully know the deep peace of being totally right with God. To sum it up, justification is not making righteous, but declaring righteous by virtue of Jesus Christ. The difference is of great importance in understanding and living the Christian life.[30]

IV. GROUND

The ground of our justification is God's act of redemption in Jesus Christ. So Paul writes, "Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood" (Rom. 3:23–25). Justification is grounded in the costly deed of redemption.

We now need to emphasize this point lest there be some misapprehension about justification as God's declaratory righteousness. It is by no means a casual matter to speak of God's declaring the sinner righteous and imputing to him the righteousness of Christ. God is not like some absolute earthly monarch who by a stroke of the pen decrees whatever He wills or changes the laws if He so likes. The holy and righteous God does not play fast and loose so as to pronounce righteous what is actually unrighteous without some alteration of the situation. In saying this, the question may naturally arise, Does this not then call for some change in man's condition? Is not some basic righteousness—at least a bit of it—required for God to declare man righteous (God perhaps supplementing His declaration with some infused righteousness)? In accordance with a moral universe, how can God possibly justify anyone without some evidence of moral character, good works, and the like? Is not some radical change necessary?

Now to respond: there has been a profound alteration of the human situation, but *not* by sinful man. God does not act casually, contrary to His own righteousness, in justifying man. Rather in extraordinary fashion His righteousness is vindicated through his redemptive act in Christ Jesus. Shortly prior to the words in Romans (quoted above) Paul declared, "Now the righteousness[31] of God has been manifested" (3:21). And this manifestation of God's righteousness was not in man himself but in the redemption wrought by Christ. It was at the cross that God so altered the human situation that man could truly be declared righteous.

Here we turn to the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:21—"For our sake he [God the Father] made him [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." What an extraordinary, mind-boggling statement! First, Christ, the truly righteous One—the *only* righteous One—*made* to be[32] *sin*. There at the cross of Calvary Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of

Man, took upon Himself the sin of the whole world—every sin of every person of every time and place, so that in a real and terrible way he became totally identified with sin. Christ the wholly righteous One became Christ the wholly sinful One! Second, all this was done that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. Observe that Paul does not say that we might become righteous but the righteousness of God in Him. Here truly is the wondrous deed of God that lies behind justification: Christ's dying in our place. He took all our sin to Himself and in return gave to us His righteousness.

For a full elaboration of justification let us look again at Romans 3:23–24. First, justification is an act of God's grace: we have been "justified by his grace as a gift." In fact, justification must be by grace—i.e., God's unmerited favor—or not at all, since all people are sinners without any possible way of achieving salvation. Second, justification is based on Christ's redemption, His death bringing about mankind's release from bondage to sin and evil. Hence, the person who experiences justification is one who has been redeemed by Christ. It is not that a person has become righteous, but as one who has been brought back by Christ from the realm of darkness into light, he is declared righteous or forgiven. This is why Paul so closely relates redemption to the forgiveness of sins. As Paul says elsewhere: "He [God] has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:13–14). This is not an infused righteousness so that man is now righteous in himself, but a positive one in which his abode is no longer in the kingdom of darkness but in the kingdom of Christ. Third, and climactically, this redemption has occurred through "an expiation [or "propitiation"][33] by his blood." The word translated "expiation" is from a Greek word that originally referred to the lid or cover on the ark of the covenant. This cover was also called the "mercy seat."[34] On this cover of the ark the blood of the sin offering was sprinkled annually on the Day of Atonement. However, since the blood of an animal could not really suffice for redemption ("It is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins" [Heb. 10:4]), Christ in His death "entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12). It was an amazing act of expiation, so that by Christ's atoning sacrifice both a way of extinguishing the guilt and paying the penalty for sin occurred. In this way eternal redemption was secured.

Similarly Paul says elsewhere that "in him [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7). Since forgiveness is one way of speaking about

justification, justification is through Christ's blood. This is precisely the language of Paul in Romans 5:9—"We are now justified by his blood." Justification is no light matter to God: it cost Him the death of His only Son.

But we dare not stop with the death of Christ, for if He had remained dead, there would be no justification. The powers of evil and darkness would have prevailed, and man would still be in his sins. This is why Paul says in Romans 4:25 that Christ "was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification." "Raised for our justification"! It is the righteousness of a triumphant Christ, a living Christ, that is now ours.

To return, finally, to the central point: the ground—and the only ground—of justification is our redemption through Jesus Christ. Based on the marvel of God's grace ("by grace as a gift"), we have been redeemed through the sacrifice of Christ. Since He bore our sins in that sacrifice, they are no longer imputed to us; since by His sacrifice our guilt and punishment have been taken away, we are now accounted righteous before God. It is through the grace of redemption that we stand justified in the presence of Almighty God.

Before proceeding further, we do well to observe that the righteousness imputed to us in justification is more than an alien righteousness. Surely God justifies the ungodly and the unrighteous by not imputing to us our sins but imputing to us the righteousness of Christ, so that we are declared righteous. Yet it is also a quite important fact that by the death of Christ we are *constituted* as righteous. In a real sense, righteousness does not simply cover us—thus remaining basically alien to us; it becomes our new constitution.[35]

Paul speaks of this in Romans 5, where he compares Adam and Christ. The apostle first states that "the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification" (v. 16). Adam's sin of disobedience, Paul adds, has "led to condemnation for all men" whereas Christ's "act of righteousness leads to acquittal[36] and life for all men" (v. 18). Then—and here is the pertinent verse—Paul declares, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous" (v. 19). The obedience referred to is doubtless Christ's "act of righteousness,"[37] namely, His willing death on the cross;[38] by this many are "made righteous." The translation "made righteous" might be better translated "constituted[39] righteous," that is to say, established as righteous. Hence, in justification there is a basic sense in which God not only declares the sinner righteous but also constitutes him as such. He becomes what God has pronounced him to be.

On this latter point recall the words earlier quoted: "… that we might become

the righteousness of God." The word "become"[40] also contains both ideas, the declarative and the actual:[41] we become in a vital sense what God declares us to be. The new standing in Christ is also a new being: the opening door into a new life!

V. INSTRUMENT—FAITH

Everything thus far said about God's declaratory righteousness and its ground in redemption becomes effective only through faith. We have dealt with the objective side of justification, namely, that it is basically a declarative act of God that in no way depends on our righteousness and is made possible through the redemption in Jesus Christ. To that we contribute absolutely nothing. But now we have reached the critical subjective point, namely, it is through faith that this justification becomes effective for us.

Indeed, Paul highlights this in Romans prior to his presentation of the unrighteousness of man in 1:18–3:20. In Romans 1:16–17 Paul declares, "I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through[42] faith for faith; as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.' "[43] The instrument of justification is faith.

Now let us again look at Romans 3:25 and note the words "through[44] faith" (NASB). Justification against the background of God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ is through faith in Christ. A few words later Paul declares, "He himself [God] is righteous and … justifies him who has faith in Jesus" (3:26). To be sure that both Jew and Gentile understand this, Paul adds, He "will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith" (3:30 NASB).[45] It is faith in Jesus all the way—for everyone.

How, we may inquire, do grace and faith relate? Let us recall Paul's previous words that "they are justified by his grace as a gift." Hence, grace is the basis, the source, the origin of our new life. But it is to be received by faith; thus faith is the means, the channel, the instrument. In Ephesians Paul puts it very simply: "By grace you have been saved through faith" (2:8). By grace[46] —through faith. If the language is "justified by[47] faith," this does not mean that faith is the source or condition. It is rather the agent or means by which justification comes to man. If it is said to be "through[48] faith," the emphasis lies on faith as the instrument or channel. In either case, the basic idea is that there is no justification without faith in Christ. And behind that faith stands the grace of God in Jesus Christ. For, says Paul, "it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace" (Rom. 4:16 NASB).

Thus harmonious and vital is the relationship between grace and faith![49]

Next there is need to emphasize the urgency of faith. I have spoken about the amazing fact of God's declaratory righteousness, how God justifies even the most ungodly, and that man can make utterly no contribution to what God has done and does. However, until a person responds in faith to God's prior activity, he is still in his sins and unrighteousness. It is not as if God justifies and then a person receives justification in faith; it is rather that God justifies him who has faith. The atonement, to be sure, is an objective work of God in Christ that has occurred regardless of any man's response. It is the ground of God's justifying the sinner. But justification itself occurs only where there is faith that receives it.

Now let us examine more closely this matter of faith. In doing so we next observe Paul speaking of Abraham as the original illustration. He writes, quoting from Genesis, "'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned[50] to him as righteousness'" (Rom. 4:3).[51] It was not Abraham's deeds, Paul adds, that counted, but his faith. Immediately following this Paul says, "To the one who does not work, but believes in[52] Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness" (Rom. 4:5 NASB). We noted previously that God justifies the ungodly (we also marveled at it) and stressed the aspect of God's declaratory righteousness. But now the point before us is that God does this to the one who "believes in Him." Such a person does not rely on his own works (however good they may seem to be), but realizing his total need—his "ungodliness"—believes in God and is thereby justified.

Faith, accordingly, is "believing in"; for our salvation it means believing in the One who has accomplished this. In a summary statement on righteousness Paul writes, "It will be reckoned to us who believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:24–25). It is not merely a believing in God (for example, that He exists), but in Him as the One who completed the work of redemption by raising Jesus from the dead.[53]

Faith—I must now add—is more than a matter of intellectual assent.

Such faith surely includes this: it is a "believing," hence involves the mind. But it is also a "believing in" and therefore involves the heart. Paul clearly makes this point later in an important statement about justification: "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved" (Rom. 10:9–10). It is not a matter merely of accepting as a fact that God raised Jesus (even Satan accepts that fact), but of believing in what God has done. "Believing in" is

therefore trust;[54] it is the grateful response of man's inmost being—his heart—to what God has wrought in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is this kind of faith, out of which the lips proclaim the lordship of Jesus, that is the vehicle of our justification.

Simply put, the faith by which we are justified is faith in Jesus Christ. Paul earlier in Romans, as we observed, spoke thus: "God justifies him who has faith in Jesus" (3:26). In Galatians Paul writes, "We have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ" (2:16). This means believing in Him as the expiation for our sins and as the risen Lord; but it is at the same time a matter of personal trust and commitment.

Indeed, faith can now be seen as actually the means of our being *united* with Christ. After speaking about being buried with Christ in baptism (baptism representing death to self and total identification with Christ), Paul declares, "If we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom. 6:5). Faith—believing in Jesus Christ—is to be in union with Him. This is why Paul, after several statements about justification by faith in Galatians (2:15–17), movingly declares, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (2:20). The climax of faith is this, that we are in Christ and Christ is in us.

All of this leads to some further reflection on the role of faith in justification. We have spoken earlier of the nonimputation of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Now we are ready to emphasize that it is the person who believes in Christ to whom this righteousness is imputed ("he justifies him who has faith in Jesus"). It is not a matter of an imputed righteousness that is thereafter received by faith, but of such righteousness being imputed to one who now has faith. Moreover, since faith is a believing in and union with Christ, this imputation of righteousness is by no means a pretense or a make-believe, as if God declares about us what really is not so. Rather, by virtue of our union with Christ through faith (Christ thereby living in us), God declares what really is true! Yes, God does justify the ungodly,[55] but only as they are believers in Christ and thereby united with Him. Hence, Christ's righteousness does clothe the sinner[56] and he is in some sense thereby constituted righteous,[57] but this occurs through the faith that unites one to Jesus Christ. This is not by virtue of any accomplished righteousness in ourselves, but totally what we have in Him. We are, then, righteous in Jesus Christ.[58] This does not mean that we are no longer sinners, for indeed *in ourselves* we are. But *in Christ* we are wholly righteous!

In the last several paragraphs I have spoken much about faith and its necessity for justification: we are justified only through faith. Where faith is not present, there is no justification. But now we must not so elevate faith as to make it the cause of justification. We are justified by faith, through faith, but *not on account of faith.* The grace of God is prior to all faith; the work of redemption is the ground of justification. Christ's righteousness precedes any righteousness we may have; hence, faith, for all its importance, is only the channel of God's saving deed. To say that faith justifies[59] is to place too great an emphasis on the place of faith. "He [God] justifies him who has faith in Jesus," Paul says, but faith is not the cause or source: this rests in God.

One statement in Romans might seem to place the larger emphasis on faith. Paul, referring to the promise to Abraham and his descendants about inheriting the world, declares that the promise is fulfilled "through the righteousness of faith" (4:13). Then Paul adds, "For this reason it is by[60] faith, that it might be in accordance with[61] grace" (4:16 NASB). "By faith," however, does not mean that the promise depends on faith,[62] but that it is by way of the faith that accords with the grace of God that the promise is to be fulfilled. Faith is essential, but is not to be placed above grace.

Further, by overemphasizing faith there is the danger of its becoming a kind of work to be accomplished. Later I will discuss the misplaced stress on works that may lead to anxiety about whether enough has been done to achieve or merit salvation. But a similar anxiety concerning faith may emerge, for example, have I believed enough to be justified? If faith justifies, do I have sufficient faith?[63] It is far better to understand faith not as some act of believing, but purely and simply as a channel. It is an empty one at that, receiving what God has done in Christ. Faith makes no positive contribution (as a work seeks to do), but simply and wholly relies on God's mercy for justification.

In summary, wherever there is realization of sin and repentance, faith in turn is total reliance on God. There is nothing to offer up, to contribute, except our own sinfulness. The only hope is to cleave to the mercy of God and trust Him for entire salvation. We accept what He has wrought in Jesus Christ, and thereby are justified. Faith is merely this thankful acceptance, and thus the way into eternal life.

From all that has been said it is apparent that faith *alone* is the instrument of justification. There is nothing that man can contribute by way of preparation or cooperation. It is "by faith from first to last."[64] The singularity of faith[65] is critical to a proper understanding of justification.[66] Without such an understanding, salvation becomes precariously based. There will, again and

again, arise the disturbing question: Have I done enough, in addition to believing, to merit justification?

VI. PLACE OF WORKS

Now we come to a consideration of the place of works in justification. Already much has been said to discount works as having any positive role to play. The main point is that all our works are so tainted by sin that they can make no contribution to salvation. Ideally, as Paul declares in Romans, "it is … the doers of the law who will be justified" (2:13).[67] However, as he proceeds to show after that, there is no one who really keeps the law; hence, "no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law" (3:20). Works of the law, thus any works, are ruled out as contributing anything at all to justification.

We may turn first to Ephesians 2:8–10 on this matter of works. Paul therein declares that salvation is not by works and that this deprives anyone of boasting. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast" (vv. 8–9). If we were saved[68] by our good works, we might become boastful of our accomplishment. But since salvation is totally of God and wholly a gift through faith, all boasting is eliminated. This is important because humility is what God desires of man; moreover, it is essential to a genuine Christian walk. Second, Paul affirms that good works are a result of our new creation in Christ: "For we are his workmanship, created[69] in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (v. 10). Good works, accordingly, are the issue of salvation. They are so closely related to the new creation in Christ that they are not merely a consequence. We are created "for"; hence, for the purpose of performing the good works that God has "prepared beforehand."[70] Without such good works our creation in Christ remains unfulfilled.

This leads us to observe how intimately faith and works are related. Although we are justified by faith alone (and that means without works), faith is never alone. For a true faith, a justifying faith, is a faith that works through love. To use the language of Paul in Galatians 5:6: "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love." Love is the immediate companion of faith, but this does not mean that it is coeffectual with faith in terms of justification.[71] If so, we are back again with something in man,

in this case love, that provides some basis for justification. Love, to be sure, Paul says elsewhere, is "poured into our hearts" (Rom. 5:5) as a result of our justification (v. 1—"since we are justified by faith"), but it is not a shared basis with faith for justification.[72] It is that which the Holy Spirit, given to the believer, pours into his heart. Love is the sure and certain outflow of a true and living faith.

This becomes apparent in the letter of James. In a discussion of the relation between faith and works James says a number of things. First, he declares that "faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (2:17). James prefaces this statement by speaking of someone who says he has faith but no works, and as a result shows utterly no concern to help a needy and hungry person. Such a faith obviously never was real: It cannot save him (v. 14) and by showing no love demonstrates its deadness. We may interpolate by saying that a living faith centered in Jesus Christ is bound to express itself in love; else it is no faith at all. But, again, it is not the loving deed that saves a person; it is rather his relationship to Christ. Second, James declares that "faith apart from works is barren" (2.20).[73] In context, this means again that a faith not expressing itself in works is as barren as the faith of demons, who believe God is one (v. 19). Their faith is obviously not a living faith (surely no salvation accrues to them), and their works are idle, useless, barren. Third, James attests that Abraham's faith "was *completed* by works" (2:22)[74] in that he offered up his son Isaac. This was the fulfillment, James adds, of the Scripture that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (v. 23), hence "a man is justified by works and not by faith alone" (v. 24). It is important to observe here that although there is a seeming contradiction with Paul, James is not dealing with works as a way of salvation but with a superficial faith that issues in little or no works at all.[75] Again, a living faith will overflow in good deeds, else it is only a dead faith. Hence, the appropriateness of the final words of James on the subject: "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead" (2:26).[76]

Returning to the main theme in Paul about faith working through love, we may say that works are not the ground but the consequence of justification. Works are clear-cut evidence that the faith is a vital faith. Hence, works have demonstrative but not saving value. When John writes in one of his letters, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14), it is not that love has made the passage but that it is the evidence that it has occurred. Indeed, John says later, "He who does not love does not know God" (4:8)—again not that love justifies or saves,[77] but that if one does not love,

it is sure proof that he has not really come to know God. Faith operates through love: it cannot be otherwise.

To use the language of Jesus Himself, “Every sound tree bears good fruit … you will know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:17, 20). A good tree, we might add, is one rooted deep in the soil of faith, and in that is its life and salvation. But the only assurance we have that the tree is good is by seeing the fruit. Surely, this is the proof—good fruits, good works—that salvation, yes, justification, has been received. Good works are the fruit of a true and living faith.

VII. RESULTS OF JUSTIFICATION

The primary result of justification is that we become *sons of God*. All human beings are God's creatures: they are made by Him. But those justified are now His sons and daughters, His children. This is our new status in Jesus Christ.

Let us look again at Galatians. Shortly after his statement "that we might be justified by faith" (3:24), Paul adds, "In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith" (v. 26). Still further on, Paul speaks of this sonship as adoption: "God sent forth his Son … to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (4:4–5). Hence, as sons of God by adoption we may call God "Father"—"Abba! Father!" (4:6). Paul likewise says in Romans, "You have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'" (8:15 NASB).[78] Thus, not only are we declared righteous in justification but we are also adopted into God's family.[79] Consequently, there is a new child-to-Father relationship, which is the joyous result of justification. We are in the family of God.

A. Freedom

One of the outstanding results of justification is *freedom.* As the children of God we have been delivered from the slavery of the past. Paul declares, "Through God you are no longer a slave but a son" (Gal. 4:7). We are free people because of Christ.

For one thing this is a freedom from any and all earthly systems. Just prior to Paul's speaking about our adoption as sons, he says, "We, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements[80] of the world" (Gal. 4:3 KJV). "Elements" probably refers to basic forces by which people live and are bound—pagan deities, ceremonial practices, societal demands, and the like. Formerly captives to the world—this elemental worldly system—we have been set free by Christ. Paul later calls the elementary forces "weak and beggarly elements" (v. 9 KJV), and in this connection refers to the observance of "days, and months, and seasons, and years" (v. 10). All such elemental stuff, whether one is yoked to it as Jew or Gentile, represents bondage to the world. From this, declares Paul, we have been set free!

This bondage to the world is common to all people outside of Christ. We have but to reflect for a moment on our contemporary situation in which people are dominated by the spirit of the age. This refers not so much to obvious sin and evil as to the constant pressures to conform to a worldly outlook that makes idols out of such things as success, pleasure, money, security, and fame. Also there is the ongoing substitution of forms for reality in the religious sphere—observances, rituals, practices—that actually enslave people. From all this, and much more, Christ freed us.

The greatest deliverance, in simple terms, is from bondage to sin. We may turn in this regard to the Book of Acts and hear Paul's words in a sermon: "Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man [Jesus] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone that believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses" (13:38–39). The two words here translated "freed" are derived from the word for "justified,"[81] hence the close approximation of the two. To be justified, accordingly, is to be freed from all sin through the forgiveness of sin. This freedom the Mosaic Law could never give. That law commanded righteousness, but because of man's bondage to sin, there was no deliverance.

There is, finally, a freedom from anxiety in justification. No longer is there

cause for concern about one's relationship to God. Such questions as, Have I done enough to be right with God, enough to please Him, enough to insure salvation? are all done away. God has completely forgiven our sins and declared us righteous in Jesus Christ. Our standing with God, because of Him and His grace, is perfect. There is utterly nothing lacking.

This freedom from anxiety also applies to one's daily Christian walk. Even though there is a right relationship to God, we do sin now and again. Hence, as believers, we may again feel anxious about our situation. Here is where a proper understanding of justification makes for a full freedom from anxiety, namely, that whatever sins we may commit are *already* forgiven. We may and ought to repent of these sins, even more to seek to remove them from our lives,[82] but we do not need to feel condemned. In Jesus Christ there is no condemnation; we are complete in Him, and His righteousness totally envelops us! The burden of sin and guilt is gone forever: we are totally and gloriously free!

B. Peace

Another result of justification is the *peace* that it brings. There is peace with God, peace with others, and peace within.

First, let us reflect on peace with God. At the conclusion of Paul's presentation of justification in Romans 3 and 4, he says, "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace[83] with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:1). Formerly, we stood under the wrath of God, but, Paul later adds, "now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him [Christ] from the wrath of God" (5:9). We were "enemies" of God (5:10), subject to His wrath and anger, without hope of anything except terrible judgment. Now we are no longer at odds with God, no longer standing under His wrath, no longer hopeless and helpless: we have peace with God. Justified by His blood through faith, we have this marvelous peace!

As sons of God through justification, our status is totally different from what it was before. Previously, as Paul puts it elsewhere, we were "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3). Now we are children of God, no longer under His wrath, but through Jesus Christ under His peace and salvation. What a blessed change of status!

There is also peace with other people. In the sinful human situation division, hostility, enmity, and the like everywhere predominate. There are insurmountable barriers between people, but, as Paul declares (particularly in reference to Jew and Gentile), through Christ there is peace: "For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph. 2:14). But this also refers to all categories of people. Shortly after Paul has said (in Galatians) that we are all sons of God through faith, he declares, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (3:28). This, of course, does not mean that there are no differences and distinctions among people. But where culture and race, sex and social status formerly made for hostility and enmity, these are now transcended by a oneness in Jesus Christ. To be sure, we still see hostility, rancor, and antagonism existing among many who call themselves Christians. However, such is contrary to our true life in Christ.

The gospel is the gospel of peace, indeed of "grace and peace." Since God has forgiven and accepted all of us in Jesus Christ, we are challenged thereby to forgive and accept one another. "He is our peace!"

Finally, there is peace within. Among the last words Jesus spoke to His

disciples were these: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you” (John 14:27). This is an inner peace that the world can neither give nor take away. It is more than freedom from anxiety (which I have previously discussed); it is a positive sense of deep peace that belongs to those who are justified by faith in Christ. Being united to Him in faith, we find *His* peace deep in our hearts.

It is a peace that stems from being right with God—no longer under His judgment and condemnation—and thus we are at peace within ourselves. We do not need to feel condemnation, for, as Paul asks, “Who is to condemn?” (Rom. 8:34). Since God does not condemn, no one—including Satan, other persons, or even we ourselves—is able to condemn!

At peace with God, our neighbors, and ourselves, we are at peace within.

C. Inheritance

The final result of justification is that we are *heirs* of God's promise. In Galatians, following words about being justified by faith and the statement that we are "all sons of God, through faith" (3:26), Paul declares, "If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (v. 29). The promise in the New Testament is clearly that of an *eternal inheritance.*[84]

Later in Galatians we read, "Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God" (4:7 NASB). The nature of the inheritance is not specified, but that it is "through God" is a matter of decisive importance. On earth we may inherit many things through the action of other people (for example, through their last will and testament), but such pales into insignificance when compared with the fact that we are heirs through God. As no longer slaves but sons, there is a rich inheritance from God our Father.

Next, we observe that not only are we heirs through God but also, as Paul says in Romans, "fellow heirs[85] with Christ" (8:17). Fellow heirs with Christ! In the messianic Psalm 2 God speaks to His Son, saying, "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Thy possession" (v. 8 NASB). In John 3:35 the text reads, "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand." So whatever God has given Christ, we are to share as "fellow heirs." In John 17:22 Jesus declared, "The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them"; hence His immeasurable and incomparable glory will also be shared with us!

But the inheritance begins even now! Perhaps nowhere in Scripture is this stated more effectively than in 1 Corinthians 3:21–22: "For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's." Belonging to Christ, we are heirs even now of all valuable things—the rich Christian heritage (Paul, Apollos, etc.), the world in all its extent and wonder, life in all its richness and variety, the present in all its challenge and opportunity. But also the inheritance extends far beyond: for death is ours (we triumph over it), as well as the future beyond the grave—life everlasting. All are ours, for we are Christ's and Christ is God's.

Finally, of course, the glorious inheritance is the life to come. One last word from Paul is surely in order: "He saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy … so that we might be justified by

his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:5, 7). *Justified by His grace*—our theme throughout this chapter—and as a climactic result: we are heirs looking forward to eternal life. Truly we shall sing God's praises forever and ever! Amen.

[1]Martin Luther, who brought this doctrine to the forefront in the Reformation, spoke of it as "the test of a standing or falling church." In his commentary on Galatians 3:13 Luther wrote: "As I often warn … the doctrine of justification must be learned diligently. For in it are included all other doctrines of our faith; and if it is sound, all the others are sound as well" (Luther's Works, 26:283). John Calvin, while discussing regeneration first, nonetheless spoke very highly of justification as "the principal ground upon which religion must be supported" (Institutes, III. 11.1, Beveridge trans.). There can be no doubt that justification was the doctrine that most deeply separated Protestantism from Roman Catholicism at the time of the Reformation.

[2]As Isaiah cried out in the presence of the thrice-holy God ("Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts"). See Isaiah 6:1-5.

[3]Isaiah 64:6 (KJV).

[4]This was Luther's problem. As a young monk, he had strenuously sought God's approval through fasting, penance, vigils, mortifications, prayers, strictness of life and morals. As Luther himself said, "If ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I." But it was all to no avail: more and more he came to realize that nothing he did could measure up to God's righteous demand. "My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him." Luther, "impeccable monk," was utterly destitute before God. (Quotations from Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther by Roland H. Bainton, 45, 65.)

[5]This is a free quotation from Psalm 14:1. Reference might also be made to Psalm 143:2: "No man living is righteous before thee."

[6]Dikaiosis appears only twice, both times in Romans: 4:25: "who [Christ] was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" ; and 5:18: "one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men." In the latter verse KJV, NIV, and NASB, instead of "acquittal," translate dikaiosis "justification."

[7]In Romans 5:16: “The free gift following many trespasses brings justification.” The KJV, NIV, and NASB likewise have “justification.”

[8]Fifteen times in Romans, eight times in Galatians.

[9]“To declare, pronounce, one to be just, righteous, or such as he ought to be” (Thayer); “to be acquitted, be pronounced and treated as righteous” (BAGD).

[10]There are instances in the New Testament where dikaioo has the related meanings of “vindicate” (e.g., Luke 7:35; 1 Tim. 3:16) and “free” (e.g., Acts 13:39; Rom. 6:7). However, dikaioo never means “to make righteous.” In Luke 7:29 the people “justified God”; they could not “make” God righteous, only declare that He is just.

[11]The Pharisees are the primary New Testament example of those who seek to justify themselves, but God sees beneath the surface. In the words of Jesus to the Pharisees: “You are those who justify yourselves before me, but God knows your hearts; for what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15).

[12]Paul could even say, “I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted [“justified” KJV]” (1 Cor. 4:4).

[13][13]Justification unmistakably includes the future as well as the present: the present declaration of righteousness will also be heard on the final day of judgment. George E. Ladd, speaking of justification as “an eschatological doctrine,” adds, “The issue of the final judgment will be either a declaration of righteousness that will mean acquittal from all guilt, or conviction of unrighteousness and subsequent condemnation” (*Theology of the New* Testament, 441). However, we would add, the primary emphasis of justification lies in the present.

[14]The RSV in Romans 4:8 reads, “Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not reckon his sin. “ The NASB reads, “BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT”; NIV: “will never count against him”; NEB: “does not count against him.” The Greek word variously translated “impute,” “reckon,” “account,” or “count” is logisetai.

[15]“Not counting” (RSV, NASB, NIV).

[16]This includes self-condemnation. According to 1 John 3:19-20, “By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts.”

[17],7This form-forgiveness, then nonimputation-is a Hebrew poetic

parallelism of ideas in that both refer in different ways to the same reality. Paul, accordingly, follows this parallelism.

[18]According to Gottlob Schrenk (art. on δικαιοσύνη) in TDNT, "It is important to Paul not merely to speak of forgiveness but by means of δικαιοσύνη to give to forgiveness a precision grounded, enlarged and deepened in divine right" (2:205). Significantly, Paul, outside the quotation from Psalm 32, nowhere in Romans speaks directly of forgiveness. His concern (as Schrenk suggests) is that forgiveness be understood in relationship to God's righteousness. This, incidentally, is why I have dealt with nonimputation before forgiveness.

[19]Although John 8:1-11 is not found in most of the ancient manuscripts, this passage so much expresses the attitude of Jesus that I do not hesitate to include it in a total picture of Him. Regarding the passage, it may be noted here that though the word "forgiveness" is not used, Jesus' statement of noncondemnation amounts to the same thing.

[20]Some ancient manuscripts have "new." However, whether "new" was in the original text or not, it is doubtless implied. Jesus' words unmistakably point to the fulfillment of the prophecy in Jeremiah.

[21]I will discuss repentance shortly.

[22]See chapter 2, "Regeneration," IV.C, pages 44-50.

[23]The words of Psalm 32:1, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven," quite possibly are words of David following God's forgiveness for his sins of adultery and murder. David repented: "I have sinned against the LORD," and received God's forgiveness: "The LORD also has put away your sin" (2 Sam. 12:13).

[24]There is one exception, namely, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Jesus declared, "All sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin-for they had said, 'He has an unclean spirit' " (Mark 3:28-30; cf. Matt. 12:31-32; Luke 12:10). As the larger context shows, this sin was that of the scribes and Pharisees who deliberately and maliciously attributed to Christ the work of the devil. Thus one may even blaspheme God, fight against Christ and His church, spurn all truth and righteousness, commit the most debased act of immorality possible to mankind—all such horrible sins are forgiveable. But to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit shows a conscience so perverse and hardened as never to be able to receive forgiveness. (See also vol. 1, chapter 11, "The Effects of Sin," page 256, including n. 54).

It is knowingly to call light darkness, to claim Christ to be the ally of Satan, and to identify a work or act of the Holy Spirit as demon-inspired.

[25]The Hebrew phrase is *Yahweh* *Ṣiḏqēnû*.

[26]Even as Martin Luther was an "impeccable monk," Paul, long before him, was "blameless." Luther's had to rediscover what Paul had attested, namely, that the only righteousness that counts is that which comes from Jesus Christ.

[27]A popular, but meaningful, way to put this is to say that the word "justified" in part spells this out: "just-as-if-I'd" never sinned.

[28]Quite appropriate are the words of the chorus: He is all my righteousness, I stand complete in Him and worship Him, Jesus Christ the Lord.

[29]This will be discussed further under "Sanctification."

[30]Calvin has a valuable discussion of infused righteousness, designated as "essential righteousness," in the Institutes, III. 11.5-12. He is arguing with Oslander, a Lutheran theologian, and calls his view of essential righteousness a "monstrosity" that "deprives pious minds of a serious sense of divine grace" (5). Calvin also argues that this "heresy" (10) confuses regeneration (in which there is truly a given righteousness) with justification (11). (Oslander was also criticized by his fellow Lutheran theologians [especially Melanch- thon], and his views were later repudiated in the Lutheran Formula of Concord, Article III.)

[31]The Greek word is dikaiosyne. It is significant that this comes from the same Greek root as dikaiosis (justification).

[32]There is actually no "to be" in the Greek text; hamartian epoiësen is literally "he made sin." This all the more staggers the mind.

[33]The Greek word is hilasterion. See my earlier comments on these two possible translations in volume 1, 360n.l8.

[34]Hilasterion is usually translated "mercy seat" in Hebrews 9:5.

[35]At this point the doctrines of justification and regeneration tend to merge.

[36]The Greek word is dikaiosin, literally, "justification."

[37]The Greek word is dikaiomatos, literally, "righteous act."

[38]Cf. Philippians 2:8: He "became obedient unto death, even death on a cross."

[39]As, e.g., in Weymouth's New Testament in Modern Speech. The relevant Greek word is katastathesontai (from kathistemi). Thayer, in loco, has "to set down as," "to constitute." There is both the declarative sense and the effective sense in the Greek word. This means that what declares a

person's righteousness in some sense also makes him that. The English word "constitutes" well conveys both meanings. John Murray puts it succinctly: "Justification is a constitutive act, not barely declarative" CRomans, NICNT, 205). Kathistemi contains both the idea of declaring and rendering, of showing to be and causing to be (again see Thayer).

[40]The Greek word is geno met ha.

[41]The KJV translation instead of "become" has "be made." "Be made" conveys (perhaps too strongly) the note of the actual. "Become" (like "constitute") better represents the Greek text and, most importantly, the fuller meaning of justification.

[42]The Greek word is ek, more often translated as "by."

[43]Or, "the just shall live by faith" (KJV). Luther's turning point was this statement by Paul. "Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that 'the just shall live by his faith.' Then I grasped that the justice [or "righteousness"] of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise" (Here I Stand, 65).

[44]The Greek word is dia, usually translated "through" (as also in KJV, NIV, NEB).

[45]The two prepositions translated "by" and "through" are ek and dia. They are used interchangeably in relation to faith here and elsewhere. Note especially Galatians 2:16, where dia is first used, then ek.

[46]Cf. also Titus 3:7 where the language is "justified by his grace."

[47]Usually ek, as in Romans 3:30 above. See also Romans 3:26; 5:1; Galatians 2:16; 3:24 among others.

[48]The Greek word is dia, as in Romans 3:22, 25, 30, 31; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8 above.

[49]This is a relationship, or correlation, that needs constantly to be borne in mind. Berkouwer puts it well: "The preaching of salvation is perpetually threatened from two directions: on the one hand from an over-estimation of the function of faith, by which the decisiveness of grace is made dependent upon human abilities and capacities, and, on the other hand, from a disruption of the correlation by making salvation so wholly objective that faith loses its decisive role in the correlation" (Faith and Justification, 167).

[50]The Greek word is elogisthe (see earlier discussion), "counted" (KJV,

NEB); “credited” (NIV).

[51]Genesis 15:6 reads, “And he believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness.”

[52]The Greek word is epi, usually translated as “on” or “upon.” Whether “in” or “on” or “upon,” the meaning is essentially the same.

[53]Peter similarly writes about the resurrection: “Through him [Christ] you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God” (1 Peter 1:21 NIV).

[54]Recall the discussion of faith as trust in chapter 1, “Calling,” IV.B.3., pages 30-31.

[55]The full statement of Paul reads, “To one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness” (Rom. 4:5).

[56]As earlier discussed.

[57]As earlier discussed.

[58]“God treats us as righteous, because we are righteous in so far as we are ‘in Christ.’ It is not that God treats us ‘as if’ we were righteous. In Christ we are righteous even now” (Alan Richardson, An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament, 237).

[59]Luther in his strong concern to repudiate any idea of works as contributing to justification sometimes puts it that way: “Since … works justify no man … it is very evident that it is faith alone which, because of the pure mercy of God through Christ and in his Word, worthily and sufficiently justifies and saves the person” (Selections from His Writings, John Dillenberger, ed., “The Freedom of a Christian,” 70). Luther, to be sure, emphasizes God’s “pure mercy” before mentioning justification; however, the statement that “faith … justifies” can be misleading. (For the expression “faith alone justifies” also see ibid., 56-57, three times repeated.)

[60]The Greek word is ek.

[61]The Greek word is kata.

[62]The RSV translation, “it depends on faith,” is misleading.

[63]Calvin writes, “For did faith justify of itself… as it is always weak and imperfect, its efficacy would be partial, and thus our righteousness being maimed, would give us only a portion of salvation. We indeed imagine nothing of the kind, but say, that, properly speaking, God alone justifies” (Institutes, III. 11.7, Beveridge trans.). Later, Calvin calls it “an absurd

dogma, that man is justified by faith" (111.11.23).

[64]The NIV translation of Romans 1:17: "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last… ."

[65]Luther felt so strongly about this singularity that in his German translation of the New Testament he added the word "alone" to the word "faith" in Romans 3:28.

[66]The Roman Catholic Council of Trent in its reaction against Luther (and other Reformers) set forth a number of "Decrees" and "Canons" including some on justification. Canon 9 reads, "If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will, let him be anathema." In other words, man must do something by way of cooperation (according to chapter V in the "Decree," "co-operating with that grace"): faith alone is not sufficient. Roman Catholicism thereby failed to recognize that man is in no way capable by an act of will to "be prepared and disposed," that man can do nothing except to rely totally on the grace and mercy of God. It is sad that the Roman view puts man back in the anxious condition of wondering if he has done enough to receive justification.

[67]Paul, at this juncture, is comparing hearing with doing: "It is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified." Paul has not yet come to his statements about the gospel meaning of justification.

[68]The terminology of justification is not used in Ephesians; however, the same theme is implicitly here.

[69]This is not the original creation but new creation. See Ephesians 2:15 for further clarification. The Amplified Bible translates as "recreated in Christ Jesus."

[70]The Greek word is proëtoimasen. This further eliminates any room for boasting: even our good works are those which God has already prepared!

[71]In Calvin's words: "The only faith which justifies is that which works by love … but love does not give it its justifying power" (institutes, III. 11.20, Beveridge trans.).

[72]Here, again, the Council of Trent erred. Under the "Canons" related to

justification, Canon 11 states in part: “If anyone says that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity [love] which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and remains [or “is inherent”-Lat. “inhereat”] in them … let him be anathema.” However, we must reply, love is excluded basically from justification. Rather, it is the immediate result in that one already justified has the love of God poured into his heart by the Holy Spirit. Trent errs on both sides of justification: it looks for something plus faith (see earlier n. 66-a cooperation to obtain justification) or faith plus something (love poured forth in the heart as also necessary). Either of these plusses vitiates the gospel of the marvelous free grace of God that is received by faith and faith alone.

[73]The Greek word is argë: “idle, useless” (BAGD), “idle,” “unprofitable” (Thayer). The NASB and NIV translate it “useless.” “Barren” (also NEB transfation) well conveys the meaning. (Cf. 2 Peter 1:8 where argous is used along with akarpous [“unfruitful”]. “Barren” and “unfruitful” are good parallel translations.)

[74]The NEB interestingly reads, “By these actions the integrity of his faith was fully proved.”

[75]“James was combating a superficial faith that had no wholesome effect in the life of the professed believer. Paul, on the other hand, was combating legalism-the belief that one may earn saving merit before God by his good deeds” (Donald Burdick, James, EBC, 12:185).

[76]Luther in his “Preface to the Epistles of St. James and St. Jude” begins by saying, “I think highly of the epistle of James.” However, later he declaims against it, stating that “in direct opposition to St. Paul and all the rest of the Bible, it ascribes justification to works.” Luther adds concerning James, “I therefore refuse him a place among the writers of the true canon of my Bible” (see, e.g., Selections from His Writings, 35-36). Luther’s deeply personal experience of justification by faith doubtless influenced his mixed attitude toward James. Still, there are many today who find in James a contradiction to Paul, or at least a misunderstanding; e.g., B. S. Easton: “James, of course, misunderstands Paul …” (IB, 12:41). Although there are some difficulties in the language James uses, I see no real contradiction or misunderstanding. Paul does stress justification by faith alone, whereas James is saying that if that faith is genuine, good works will follow. James is dealing with what

might be called operational justification!

[77]To use Paul's and James' terminology. John, neither in his Gospel nor his letters, speaks, as such, of justification.

[78]John, without using the exact language of justification, says much the same thing: "As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12 NASB). "Right" is the Greek word exousin and signifies a new status (as does justification); "to become" (not "to be") is similar to Pauline language, "that we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).

[79]The Westminster Confession of Faith, after a chapter on justification (chap. XI), has a chapter on adoption (chap. XII). This latter chapter begins, "All those that are justified God vouchsafeth, in and for his only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the grace of adoption… ." What follows in the Confession is generally what I will be saying in the following pages except that my presentation continues under the heading of "Results of Justification." I do not believe that there is need for a separate doctrinal formulation of adoption, since it is really another aspect of justification, namely, that in justification we are not only declared righteous but also adopted as sons. Both aspects refer to our new standing before God, with the latter, i.e., adoption, highlighting the new family status.

[80]The Greek word is stoicheia. According to Thayer, Paul here refers to "the rudiments with which mankind … were indoctrinated before the time of Christ, i.e., the elements of religious training, or the ceremonial precepts common alike to the worship of Jews and of Gentiles." These rudiments became forces to which people were enslaved. The RSV rendering of stoicheia as "elemental spirits" (which is a possible interpretation of stoicheia) points to the power nature of these forces.

[81]Two forms of dikaioo. The NIV (like the KJV) translates both words "justified."

[82]This will be discussed more fully in chapter 4, "Sanctification."

[83]There is some manuscript evidence for "let us have peace" (in accordance with this, NEB reads, "Let us continue at peace"). However, Paul's prior argument plus the further development in Romans 5 favors "we have peace." So (in addition to RSV) KJV, NIV, NASB translate.

[84]Hebrews 9:15 speaks of receiving "the promised eternal inheritance." Hebrews 11:8- 10 first speaks of the land as an inheritance, but thereafter adds that Abraham "looked forward to the city which has foundations,

whose builder and maker is God." These two passages, viewed together, emphasize that the promise to Abraham ultimately was that of an eternal inheritance.

[85]The Greek word is synkleronomoi; KJV: "joint heirs," NIV: "co-heirs."

4
Sanctification

We come next to a consideration of the doctrine of sanctification. Our concern will not only be with salvation in its initial occurrence but also with the wider area of Christian life. Accordingly, we will be viewing sanctification in all its dimensions.

I. MEANING

At the outset it is important to recognize that we are dealing with the matter of holiness.[1] To sanctify means to *make holy* or *be made holy*. Sanctification refers, accordingly, both to an action—sanctifying or making holy, and to a condition or state—being sanctified or made holy. In any event, sanctification has to do with holiness of life.

First, holiness refers to *separation* or *apartness*. In the Old Testament, Israel was called a holy people because of their separation to God from all other nations. So, for example, Deuteronomy 7:6 reads, "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth." Israel was a separated people, separated unto the Lord and therefore holy, not because of any intrinsic virtue but simply because of their set-apartness.[2] Israel, consequently, was not like any other people: they belonged exclusively to the Lord.

This matter of separation and apartness is grounded essentially in the reality of God Himself. The oft-repeated declaration that God is holy refers primarily to His otherness from everything else.[3] This includes any other gods: "Who is like thee, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like thee, majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?" (Exod. 15:11). This otherness is also in relation to man: "I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst" (Hosea 11:9). Since God is thus separate from all else, His people are a people separated to Him and set apart from the rest of mankind. Thereby they are a holy people belonging solely and uniquely to God.[4]

This basic idea of a distinctive holy people carries over into the New Testament in regard to Christian believers. For example, note these words: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Peter 2:9). "Chosen," "holy," "God's own people"—all fit together. God's people are a "holy people" by virtue of belonging uniquely to Him.[5] Second, holiness refers to *purity and cleanness.* For holiness means not only separation in the sense of removal from one sphere of existence to another (as Israel from all other nations), but also separation from all that is impure and evil. This again goes

back to the holiness of God, for the divine holiness signifies not only God's total otherness from His creation, but also His purity over against all that is common and profane. As the holy God, who is "of purer eyes than to behold evil" (Hab. 1:13), He calls for purity in His people. In the Old Testament this is early seen in the account of Israel at Mount Sinai. God said to Moses: "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments … for on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people" (Exod. 19:10–11). The consecration of the people and the washing of their garments points to the necessity of purity and cleanness in the presence of God.

There is much in the Old Testament that relates to ritual holiness. The washing of garments, just mentioned, is but the first of many requirements for Israel in regard to ceremonial cleansing. Such cleansing is required of everything—priests, utensils, the people themselves—all that participates in the worship activity. Furthermore, the call to holiness (as in Lev. 11:44) may be put in terms of not eating foods designated as unclean. Holiness, whether in terms of ritual cleansing or abstention from food, is in such instances a matter of external purity and cleanness.

There is, however, an increasingly strong emphasis on holiness as inward purity. A central feature of the Day of Atonement is that of inner cleansing: "You shall be clean from all your sins before the LORD" (Lev. 16:30 NASB). In addition, there are many expressions elsewhere in the Old Testament relating to the need for inner cleanness and purity. For example, in reply to the question, "Who shall stand in his holy place?" the answer is, "He who has clean hands and a pure heart" (Ps. 24:3–4). Once again, this goes back to God Himself who is "of purer eyes than to behold evil." Accordingly, only the pure of heart can stand in His holy presence.

In the New Testament the idea of ritual purity or cleanness is almost totally eclipsed. Jesus in His ministry spoke against those who "cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity" (Matt. 23:25; cf. Luke 11:39). On another occasion, after Jesus declared that "whatever goes into a man from outside cannot defile him," the Gospel writer added, "Thus he declared all foods clean" (Mark 7:18–19). In both instances the purity called for is not outward but inward: it is a matter of the heart. Nothing more vividly says this than these words of Jesus in the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). Purity in heart—not outward purity—is the way to the Highest.

The purpose of Christ's self-giving, according to Paul, included our purification: "[He] gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to

purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:14). Unmistakably this refers to inner purification or cleansing, not an outward "cup," but people themselves. Elsewhere Paul writes, "Let us cleanse[6] ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). It is apparent that purification refers to both body and spirit and relates to the perfection of holiness, or sanctification.

Third, holiness refers to *moral perfection.* In the Old Testament God is declared to be perfect: "This God—his way is perfect" (2 Sam. 22:31; also Ps. 18:30).[7] This is a positive affirmation about God's character, "His way." It is not only that the holy God is without evil in His nature but that He is perfect in all His ways and actions—in righteousness,[8] love,[9] and truth.[10] In the Old Testament perfection was demanded in the sacrificial animals. As an illustration: "When any one offers a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD … from the herd or from the flock, to be accepted it must be perfect" (Lev. 22:21). That was the external perfection of an animal without bodily blemish. However, in the New Testament the shift is to internal perfection, as especially declared in the words of Jesus: "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48 NASB).

The perfection of which Jesus spoke (preceding the "therefore") is spelled out in terms of a sixfold "But I say to you," five of which prohibit anger, lust, divorce,[11] swearing, and retaliation, and the sixth enjoining love of enemies. Prior to these injunctions by Jesus, He had already affirmed the indissolubility of the Old Testament commandments;[12] hence the perfection He declared includes these, *plus* His own statements beginning "But I say to you… ."

It is significant that, according to Jesus, this perfection finds its fulfillment in terms of self-sacrificing love. To the rich young ruler who claimed to have kept all the commandments, Jesus asserted, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor … and come, follow me" (Matt. 19:21). The final perfection is the perfection of love. To this we may well add the words in 1 John 4:12—"If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us." The holy God, who is perfect in all His ways, calls His people to perfection.

II. OCCURRENCE

Next we observe that sanctification relates to the beginning, the continuation, and the goal of the Christian life. Thus sanctification is past, present, and future.

A. The Beginning

Sanctification, or holiness, in a primary sense *already* belongs to those who are the people of God. Israel, as previously noted, is a holy people by virtue of their separation from other peoples unto God—"You are a people holy to the LORD your God." Likewise the New Testament people of God are "a holy nation." Holiness, or sanctification, is a bedrock fact of the existence of God's people.

However—and this must immediately be added—sanctification belongs to Christian believers not simply by virtue of their being separated from other people but because of separation and purification from sin. The "holy nation"—referring to Christians—consists of those who (as the verse continues) have been "called … out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). Paul writes about those who were previously "immoral … idolaters … adulterers … homosexuals … thieves … greedy … drunkards … revilers … robbers," adding, "such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:9–11). This separation from sin is therefore not only a distancing from it,[13] but also an inner purification or a cleansing ("you were washed"). There is both separation and cleansing in sanctification.

It is important to recognize that the source of this sanctification is Jesus Christ. Paul spoke earlier of how Christ is "our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). And this is *an accomplished reality* because of what He has done. According to Hebrews, "we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (10:10), hence by His sacrificial death on the cross. This has happened through the purification of sin by His blood.[14] Hebrews earlier spoke of how in the former covenant "the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh"[15] (9:13). Then the writer adds, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (9:14).

Now all of this refers quite specifically to the beginning of the Christian walk. Even as our justification was at the beginning, so was our sanctification; even as He forgave our transgressions, so did He cleanse us from sin. Not only did He

remove from us the guilt of sin, but He also purged us of its inner pollution.[16] This happened—and happens—in and through Jesus Christ's death on the cross and is received on our part by putting our faith in Him.

All believers, whatever their present situation, have accordingly been sanctified in Christ Jesus and therefore are *saints.* Paul addressed the church at Corinth as "those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling"[17] (1 Cor. 1:2 NASB). All Christians, i.e., those "in Christ Jesus," are persons who have been sanctified, and by their very calling[18] are saints.[19] A saint, therefore, is any and every Christian, not some person on a higher level of holiness.[20] We may say "Saint Paul" and "Saint Peter," but just as properly we may say "Saint William" and "Saint Louise" if they are believers. "Sainthood" is proper nomenclature for all God's people. In Christ Jesus we are all holy ones, sanctified and, as such, saints of God.

Moreover, there is a sense in which one may speak of believers as those whom God has *perfected.* In Hebrews 10 the writer speaks, first, of how the Old Testament system of repeated sacrifices "can never … make perfect those who draw near" (v. 1). Then later are these words: "By a single offering [of Christ] he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified"[21] (v. 14). This statement underscores the close connection between perfecting and sanctifying. It also doubtless, in looking back to Hebrews 9:14, refers primarily to the conscience, which was said to be purified by the sinless offering of Christ. The Old Testament sacrifices were inadequate in that they could serve only to purify the flesh,[22] whereas the sacrifice by Christ was wholly adequate, since it serves to perfect the conscience. The perfected conscience, accordingly, is a corollary to the perfect self-offering of Jesus Christ, which results in a perfectly restored relationship to God.[23]

In summary, sanctification, whether it is viewed as separating, purifying, or perfecting, is a given reality for all who belong to Christ. We were sanctified in the beginning of our Christian walk.

B. The Continuation

Sanctification also relates to the continuing life of the people of God. Under the old covenant it was not enough for Israel to be claimed as a holy people by virtue of their calling; Israel was also called *to* holiness. Thus the Lord said to Moses, "Say to all the congregation of the people of Israel, You shall be holy; for I the LORD your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2). Then follows a number of divine prescriptions—the Ten Commandments and various ordinances—by which this holiness is to be manifested.[24] To be a holy people, therefore, is to walk according to God's command. In the New Testament the people of God are called to an even more extensive holiness: "Like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior;[25] because it is written, You SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY"[26] (1 Peter 1:15–16 NASB). "All your behavior" represents a call to total holiness.

Not only is sanctification, therefore, for Christian believers the primary reality of their existence—they have been sanctified from the beginning—but also it is to be a *continuing process.* We have earlier recounted these words of Paul in regard to a number of specified sins: "You were sanctified." However, shortly after that, along with other admonitions, he urges them to "shun immorality" (1 Cor. 6:18). Hence there is an additional call for continuing sanctification or holiness. In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul speaks about the Old Testament call to holiness: "Come out from them, and be separate from them … and touch nothing unclean" (6:17, quoting freely from Isa. 52:11). Later he adds: "Beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect[27] in the fear of God" (7:1). The words are written to believers: "beloved' '—including Paul himself—"let us cleanse ourselves." Hence, though they, and Paul, have already been sanctified, there is the call to continuing sanctification.

The reason for such a call is apparent. Believers, although sanctified, are by no means without sin in their lives.[28] According to John, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).[29] To use Paul's language again, there is still "defilement of body and spirit"; there remain sinful elements from the former life. Although we have been cleansed (as earlier discussed), cleansing and purification continue to be needed. So John continues by saying to believers: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will

forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1:9). Later in the epistle John states that "every one who … hopes in him [Christ] purifies himself as he is pure" (3:3). Cleansing and purification will never cease to be needed. Although we have been "perfected" (as stressed in Hebrews), there is nonetheless a need, in Paul's words, for "perfecting holiness." It is quite significant that Hebrews, with its strong emphasis on the perfection already received (recall 10:14), also says, "Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (12:14). Holiness is a matter to "strive for" in every believer's life.

Sanctification in this sense refers to *progressive transformation.* Paul writes to the Romans, "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.… Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (12:1–2). These words are clearly addressed to believers—"brethren"; moreover, the sacrifice called for is "holy."[30] Nonetheless, the call is for nonconformity to the world and an ongoing transformation. Although believers are holy, they are admonished to a continuing self-sacrifice in which this transformation may come about. This is *not* a movement *toward* sanctification (for believers are already holy) but a growth *in* it, a gradual process of transformation. Paul expresses this vividly in writing the Corinthians, "We all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror[31] the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18 NASB). There is nothing automatic about this ongoing change: it occurs as we behold "the glory of the Lord." But in so beholding His glory, we move from glory to glory! This verily is progressive transformation—the continuance of sanctification.

One further scripture in Hebrews relating to the process of sanctification contains these challenging words: "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (12:1 NASB). Here, in the imagery of Christian life as a race, there is the laying aside of sin as we move to the finish line. It is not a once-for-all laying aside of sin but a continuing activity throughout the whole of life.

Sanctification, accordingly, is not only an accomplished fact—it has happened in our Christian beginning—but also a matter of day-by-day growth in holiness.

C. The Goal

Finally, sanctification is the goal of the Christian life. God would have His people constantly moving toward the goal of complete holiness. This is stated quite trenchantly by Paul thus: “May the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:23 NASB). The goal is clear—entire sanctification; the goal to be fulfilled at the coming (Parousia) of Jesus Christ.

The goal of entire sanctification is set forth markedly in Philippians: “And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge[32] and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for[33] the day of Christ, filled with the fruits of righteousness” (1:9–11). The goal is purity and blamelessness, and (as in 1 Thess.) for the day of Christ. Paul had earlier said, “… being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until[34] the day of Christ Jesus” (1:6 NIV). The process of sanctification is to go on until the Parousia.

There can be little question but that the goal is complete sanctification. James writes: “Let steadfastness have its full effect[35] that you may be perfect[36] and complete, lacking in nothing” (1:4). Peter speaks about “the coming of the day of God” with “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” and then adds, “Therefore, beloved, since you wait for these, be zealous to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace” (2 Peter 3:12–14). In Hebrews 12:2 Jesus is called “the author and perfecter of our faith” (NIV), thus signifying that perfection is the end in view. Thereafter in Hebrews 12:14 (as earlier quoted) the writer says, “Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” Purity, completeness, perfection, holiness—whatever the wording—is the goal of Christian faith and practice.

This question may now arise: Is this goal achievable in the present life? There can be no question but that the goal is ever present. The quotations in the preceding paragraphs declare this in many ways: “May” this happen, “my prayer” is for this to occur, “I am confident” that it will come to completion, “let steadfastness” continue, “be zealous” for spotlessness and purity—all such expressions point to the high importance of total sanctification. Indeed, one might even draw the conclusion that the New Testament teaches the possibility

of entire sanctification in this life.[37] However, the overall tenor of Scripture does not sanction such a conclusion.

First, it is apparent that there is much biblical testimony to the continuance of sin throughout life and the need for moving on to perfection. We have earlier noted the words of John that "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us"—a statement that clearly applies to every stage of the Christian walk. Also we have quoted certain words of Paul in Philippians 1 that might suggest the possibility of perfection now. However, Paul speaks further on of himself as not being perfect, but rather pressing on to the goal: "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me…. I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (3:12, 14 NIV). Paul unmistakably disclaims perfection, but at the same time declares that he is pressing on to the goal to which God has summoned him.[38] In Hebrews it is also apparent that although Jesus is "the author and perfecter of faith" and although we are called to strive for holiness "without which no one will see the Lord," there is no suggestion of perfect holiness becoming a reality in this life. Indeed, in the whole chapter (Heb. 12), contrariwise, there is a continuing encouragement not to grow weary and faint, to accept God's frequent and painful discipline, and to strengthen feeble arms and knees (vv. 3–13)—whereas perfection lies beyond. This comes out particularly where "the heavenly Jerusalem" (v. 22) is spoken of as now the place of "the spirits of righteous men made perfect" (v. 23 NIV). These last words imply that perfection lies only in the world to come. In 1 John the writer speaks of the appearing of Christ (3:2), and adds (as we have observed) that "every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure" (3:3). Hence, there should be a continuing personal purification, or cleansing, until the Parousia.

Here we need to interpose that there is a certain "relative perfection"[39] in this life. In the Old Testament Noah is called "a righteous man, blameless in his generation" (Gen. 6:9); Job is said to be "blameless and upright, one who feared God, and turned away from evil" (Job. 1:1); and Daniel is listed along with Noah and Job as a person of "righteousness" (Ezek. 14:14, 20).[40] Yet such righteousness was relative; no one was without sin. But in comparison with others of their time, they were blameless and righteous. In the New Testament Zechariah and Elizabeth are called "righteous" and "blameless" (Luke 1:6), and Paul declares that deacons (1 Tim. 3:10) and elders (Titus 1:5–6) are to be "blameless." Again, all of this is clearly relative in relation to others around them: they still remained sinners. Also there is a certain relative perfection that

may be defined as “maturity.” For example, Paul writes about attaining to “mature manhood … so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:13–14). The word translated “mature,”[41] here and elsewhere, is the same as “perfect” in the previous quotations. However, in this context “mature” or “full grown,” is much more adequate. The same is true in 1 Corinthians 14:20: “Be babes in evil, but in thinking be mature”; Philippians 3:15: “Let those of us who are mature[42] be thus minded” (in regard to *not* viewing oneself as “already perfect” but pressing on to the goal); Colossians 1:28: “… teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature[43] in Christ”; and Hebrews 5:14—“But solid food is for the mature.” Maturity is much to be desired and does represent a kind of perfection, in the sense of completeness or full growth, but it is by no means to be understood as moral and spiritual perfection.

Second, there is the biblical affirmation that at the end of this life, whether at death or the return of Christ, there will be complete sanctification. We have already observed the words of Hebrews that in the world to come the spirits of righteous men are made perfect, signifying that perfection belongs to believers after death. And, as certain other Scriptures attest or imply, this will also happen for those who are alive at the Parousia. According to 1 John, “When he appears we shall be like him” (3:2); and to this is added the statement that “every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” (3:3). Hence, in conclusion, whereas purification continues in this life, total likeness to Christ awaits His final coming. We may note also some of the words in the benediction of Jude: “Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing” (v. 24). God is able in the believer’s lifetime to guard against falling, but the “without blemish” condition will occur only at the occasion of final glorification. Similar to the words of Jude are Paul’s in 1 Thessalonians 3: “May the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all men … so that he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus” (vv. 12–13; cf. Col. 1:22). During this life believers should continue to grow in love for all people (the process of sanctification), whereas at the Parousia there will be the final establishment of perfect holiness.

Finally, it is quite important to distinguish between the goal and the fulfillment of perfection. The goal of growing in holiness should always be before the believer. Indeed, there is no justification for any view that suggests little concern for holy living.[44] We are called by God to be a holy people and that means, as we have seen, progressive sanctification. There is serious error if we do not

devote ourselves to growing continually in holiness. However, we err badly if we allow the goal to be claimed as an accomplished end. It is a misreading of God's word, and—this must be emphasized—*a critical danger to the Christian walk*. If we make such a claim, there is terrible deception at work and the forsaking of truth (recall once more: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us"). The person so self-deceived by claiming perfection is open to many dangers such as pride, hypocrisy, blindness, and even despair.[45] Moreover, being presumably beyond sin, such a one may be all the more at the mercy of its subtler and higher manifestations.

Verily we continue to need the acute testimony of the apostle Paul. Although he again and again exhorts believers to continue growing in holiness, he never claimed perfection for himself. Rather it was a matter of *pressing on*—to the goal. He once called himself the "foremost of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15);[46] and he also recognized the continuing internal struggle of the flesh against the Holy Spirit in the believer's life (Gal. 5:16—26).[47] Hence, even though we are being transformed into Christ's likeness, we can never claim to have arrived in this life. But—surely and definitely—we must ever move on.

To Paul's testimony might be added a final exhortation from Peter: "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). There can be no end in this present life to such growth in sanctification.

III. SCOPE

Sanctification refers to the renewal of the whole person according to the likeness of God.[48]

A. Renewal

The word “renewal” may well be used to reflect the full range of sanctification. Renewal may represent the beginning of sanctification in such a passage as Titus 3:5, which speaks of how God “saved us … by the washing of regeneration and renewal[49] in the Holy Spirit.” “Regeneration” here refers to the new birth and “renewal” to the sanctification given in the origination of Christian life. There is a renewal of holiness in the first moment of the new life in Christ. Paul refers to this also in Ephesians 4:22–24, where he says, “Put off your old nature[50] … and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” Renewal here again refers to the new life—the “new nature”—as one of righteousness and holiness.

Renewal also points to ongoing sanctification. It is a process of day-by-day renewing. To this Paul speaks particularly in these words to the Colossians: “Do not lie to one another, … seeing that you have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Col. 3:9–10). “Being renewed” clearly speaks of a continuing activity. This is equally apparent where Paul exhorts the Romans, “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (12:2 NASB). Renewal and transformation are closely linked together.

Renewal implies a continuing “making new.” The person who is born again has a new nature; indeed he is a “new creature” (2 Cor. 5:17 NASB). But along with the new, much of the old remains and needs to be dealt with. Hence, an ongoing renewal or rejuvenation is called for so that all areas of the new being will be increasingly conformed to the likeness of God.

B. The Whole Person

In this connection our key scriptural passage is 1 Thessalonians 5:23 (earlier quoted): “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (NASB). We will note particularly the words “entirely”[51] and “spirit … soul … body.”

1. The Spirit

The spirit of a person is the deepest dimension of human nature.[52] As given by God, it is particularly the center of man’s being. The spirit is that dimension of the self in which God immediately encounters man. However, as a result of sin man has become estranged in his spirit from God and shut away from His life-giving presence. Thus he has become dead to the things of God. But in and through Jesus Christ, the spirit is alive through righteousness: there is a renewed spirit within. Communication with God becomes reestablished, and the Holy Spirit witnesses to our spirits that we are God’s children (Rom. 8:16). Nonetheless—and here we come to the point of sanctification—the human spirit needs to be continually purified and refined. The goal is to be completely transparent to the divine Spirit and to radiate His glory from within.[53]

Hence, there is need for an ongoing purification of the spirit. The words of Paul again come to mind: “Beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1). In the area of spirit surely much in the believer needs a continuing cleansing. There may be pride or haughtiness of spirit that needs reduction to humility, bitterness of spirit that needs a sweetening by God’s Spirit, a judgmental spirit that needs to be refined by love, a fretful spirit that needs to be renewed in calmness and peace. To these may be added especially an unforgiving spirit that needs to be released from hardness and ingratitude.

The words of Paul to the Ephesians are a much needed exhortation: “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (4:31–32).

Here the word “heart” should be mentioned. “Spirit” and “heart” may be used interchangeably; for example, “My spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled” (Ps. 143:4). Again in relation to committed sin the psalmist prayed, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10 NASB). In terms of needed sanctification this would suggest that defilement of spirit and defilement of heart are essentially the same. It is quite significant that Paul earlier prays for the Thessalonians,[54] “May the Lord … establish your hearts unblamable in holiness” (1 Thess. 3:12–13). Purification of heart and spirit belong together.[55]

One further word should be mentioned in this context, namely, “conscience.” “Conscience” is placed alongside “heart” in Romans 2:15. Here Paul, speaking of the Gentiles, says that “what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness.” In 1 Timothy 1:5 he writes, “Our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith.” Conscience particularly highlights the moral aspect of the heart, hence expressions such as “a troubled heart” and “pangs of conscience”[56] may be used interchangeably. The close approximation of the two terms may further be seep in the frequent biblical concern for both a clean heart and a clear conscience.[57] In terms of sanctification, Hebrews 10:22 puts it directly: “Let us draw near … with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience.”

All three of these biblical terms, “spirit,” “heart,” and “conscience,” refer to man in his responsible nature before God. In salvation there has been a renewing of the spirit, an alteration of the heart, a purifying of the conscience.[58] However, although this has occurred essentially (man has a new spirit/heart/conscience), there is the need for further sanctification. It is this area that we will examine shortly. But let us first consider the aspects of man as soul and body.

2. The Soul

The soul can be spoken of as the inner life of man through which the spirit expresses itself.[59] Man is a living and conscious soul, or self, as demonstrated in the wide range of his intellectual, emotional, and volitional activity. Accordingly, mind, feeling, and will are all aspects of the soul in action. With the incursion of sin there has been a darkening of the soul, indeed a turning from God in all these vital areas. As salvation has been received, the mind is able again to ponder the things of God, the emotions to sense and enjoy the presence of God, the will to move in harmony with God’s purposes. Yet the soul needs further cleansing and

strengthening.

a. The Mind. Sanctification has to do with an ongoing renewal of the mind. We refer, first, again to the words in Romans 12:2—"Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind." This exhortation is spoken to those who already belong to Christ and thereby have a new mind;[60] however, this mind needs a continual renewing, indeed, a further transforming.[61] The mind may be beset by evil thoughts, corrupt schemes, and worldly plans; the mind may slip away from spiritual concerns into things of the flesh; the mind may not seek a walk in humility after the pattern of Christ. In this latter regard, the words of Paul to the Philippians are urgent: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (2:5 NIV). They are to have the mind and attitude of a servant, humbling themselves and being obedient even unto death.

The renewal of the mind is essential if we are to walk in God's will. Romans 12:2 continues, "… that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." To "prove" here means to "prove by testing,"[62] hence to know for a certainty what is God's will, a will that is good, acceptable (or well-pleasing),[63] even perfect. Since sanctification is concerned with the "perfect"—as we have discussed—the renewal of the mind plays a critically important role, for only thereby can the perfect be discerned.

Elsewhere Paul speaks about his intention to "take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). Although Paul's words refer specifically to the thoughts of those in the world,[64] there is also an implication for his believing readers, for Paul later expresses a fear lest their "thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). Hence, to take "every thought captive to obey Christ" also expresses a fundamental requirement in the believer's ongoing process of sanctification.

Let me elaborate this latter point further. The believer, while truly having the mind of Christ, may yet be far from subjecting all his thoughts to that mind. This is not only a matter of evil or stray thoughts, but also thoughts that, while seemingly without fault, are not really submitted to the mind of Christ. Since the believer lives in a world that is not guided by that mind, it is easy to fall into secular ways of thinking with little realization of doing so. The mind-set of contemporary culture—its philosophy, its morals, its values—is not of Christ. Since the believer necessarily lives in such a culture, it takes much rethinking and reshaping for the mind of Christ to pervade all. There is constant pressure to submit to, or at least conform with, the prevailing ethos. Thus, there is the urgency of bringing "every thought captive" to obey Christ. It is unquestionably

an ever-continuing struggle, but every success makes it eminently worthwhile.

"Do not be conformed … but be transformed by the renewal of your mind." The renewal of the mind is basic to the transformation of all of life.

b. The Feelings (Emotions, Desires, Passions). Sanctification deals also with inward feelings and desires. The Christian has already had a basic victory in this realm. As Paul declares in Galatians, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh[65] with its passions and desires" (5:24). The flesh—the carnal nature—has been essentially "crucified," or put to death. There is new life in the Spirit and by the Spirit. However, the flesh still remains (even if no longer as a central, dominating principle); hence there is an ongoing struggle with the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote shortly before: "The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would" (5:17). This area of "the desires of the flesh" calls for much sanctification.

Elsewhere Paul wrote to Timothy that "if any one purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work," immediately adding, "So shun[66] youthful passions" (2 Tim. 2:21–22). In his letter to Titus, Paul wrote, "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men," and then added, "instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age" (2:11–12 NASB). The denial of "worldly desire" is an aspect of the continuing life of sanctification.

We may also recount John's exhortation to believers: "Do not love the world or anything in the world…. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father" (1 John 2:15–16 NIV). All such craving and lusting and boasting is a constant temptation for believers, but it must not be indulged in. This calls for a life of daily growth in holiness.

There is much in the realm of the feelings and passions that needs to be sanctified. We have but to mention such things as anger, lust, envy, jealousy, and covetousness to recognize immediately how often these occur in the Christian walk. For example, anger and lust (and here let us go back to Jesus' own teaching) are passions that inwardly break God's law against murder and adultery.[67] The issue deeper than murder is giving vent to anger and hatred; the issue deeper than adultery is allowing oneself to look lustfully at another person. It is such feelings and passions that need continual purging. Indeed, such are included in Jesus' climactic words: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your

heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

The perfecting of holiness must deal in depth with desires and passions that are not of God.

c. The Will. Sanctification also has to do with the will. Before salvation, the will was in bondage to sin. There was an invariable turning from God to sin and evil—man was *not* able not to sin. But with a liberated will through Christ there is a fresh path of freedom ahead. However, there is also the ever-present pull of the world to step back into sinful practices.

In this connection Paul declares, "There must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting" (Eph. 5:4 NASB)—all temptations to believers. After that he urges: "Walk as children of light … trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them" (vv. 8, 10–11 NASB). Believers are challenged as "children of light" to walk in the way of the Lord. Elsewhere Paul writes, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25). The way of the world must not be the Christian way.

There is the constant temptation in the Christian life to fall back into worldly, or pagan, ways. Hence there is a never-ending need to say, "Not mine, O God, but your will be done."

3. The Body

Finally, there must be a sanctification of the body. Prior to the new life in Christ the body was actually a body devoted to sin, but with the crucifixion of our old nature that sinful condition has been essentially destroyed. As Paul puts it: "We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body[68] might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin" (Rom. 6:6). However, although the body of the believer no longer is controlled by sin, sin is still present and needs cleansing. So it is that Paul says elsewhere (as previously noted), "Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of *body* and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). Wherever bodily sin is found, there is need for cleansing and purification from it.

One of Paul's strongest statements about bodily sanctification is found in these words: "This is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:3). Immediately after saying that, Paul dealt with the bodily sins of sexual immorality, saying, "That is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each

of you know how to possess his own vessel[69] in sanctification[70] and honor" (1 Thess. 4:3–4 NASB). All of this bespeaks the importance of holiness of the body in sexual matters. Just prior to that Paul had spoken about God's establishing the Thessalonians' "hearts unblamable in holiness" (3:13) at the Parousia; now it is a matter of bodies that need also to be pure. Generally speaking, any form of sexual immorality[71] is included here. Moreover, the emphasis is very strong: "*This is the will of God*"—and to paraphrase, "it is your sanctification of the body."

In another passage Paul deals specifically with the sin of giving one's body to a prostitute. He first asks, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?" (1 Cor. 6:15). Then comes a crucial question: "Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute?" Paul is adamant in his answer: "Never!" Shortly thereafter Paul says, "You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (vv. 19–20). We were bought at the awesome price of Christ's death; our bodies are now united to Him. How terribly wrong, then, it is to indulge in this sexual immorality, for in so doing we prostitute the body that belongs to Christ. If such a sin does happen, how great the need to "cleanse ourselves" of the "defilement of body" so that we may again glorify God in our bodies.

But there is also another reason why this sanctification of the body is important. In the same passage Paul asks another question: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God?" (1 Cor. 6:19 NASB). Since the body of a believer is a temple of the indwelling Spirit, it is indeed a heinous sin against the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of holiness, to give over one's body to a prostitute. It is a profanation of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. All the more desperately cleansing is called for!

To return briefly to Paul's words about the will of God and sanctification in relation to sexual immorality in general (1 Thess. 4:3–4), we now note that Paul concludes his teaching thus: "He who rejects this [instruction] is not rejecting man but the God who gives his Holy Spirit to you" (v. 8 NASB). To reject this teaching, says Paul, is to reject God (whose will is for total bodily sanctification), who freely gives the Holy Spirit. All sexual immorality is a travesty against this gracious gift.[72]

The constant temptation to sexual immorality is surely no less today than in Paul's time. There is, first, the ever-increasing lure to lust[73] in a culture of declining sexual standards: primarily it is this inner temptation that must be dealt with. But, second, in a society becoming more and more hedonistic ("Do it if it feels good"), it is all the harder not to slip into outward forms of immorality. It is

urgent, on the path of sanctification, to continue to bear in mind to Whom we belong and that—marvelous to realize—our bodies are temples of God's Holy Spirit.[74]

But now a brief word needs to be spoken about two other related bodily sins—namely, drunkenness and gluttony. In the Book of Proverbs is this practical admonition, "Be not among winebibbers, or among gluttonous eaters of meat; for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty" (23:20—21). In the New Testament Paul, speaking against "the works of the flesh," concludes with "drunkenness" and "carousing" (Gal. 5:19, 21). He then warns that "those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (v. 21). There is utterly no place for such in the Christian life. On the matter of gluttony, Paul elsewhere speaks of those whose "end is destruction, their god is the belly" (Phil. 3:19).[75] This is a warning against allowing bodily appetites[76] to get out of hand and thus lead to destruction.

A personal word: it is commonplace to hear Christians speak quite strongly against such bodily vices as sexual immorality and drunkenness, but often they are soft on gluttony. However—it needs to be emphasized—overindulgence in food, frequently with results of obesity, bodily ailments, and the like, is no less sinful before God than immorality or drunkenness. Our bodies, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, are in all things—including sex, food, and drink—to show forth the glory of God.

C. The Likeness of God

The intention in the sanctification of the whole person is renewal in the likeness of God. Let us recall Paul's words about "the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" (Col. 3:10). Although the reference is only to knowledge, it is a knowledge in the sphere of the things of God, and hence one aspect of renewal in God's likeness. The more complete renewal is described in Paul's words to the Corinthians (earlier quoted): "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18 NASB). The "same image" is the image, or likeness, of the Lord—and this means particularly the Lord Jesus Christ.

The likeness of God is the likeness of Christ. Hence, the ultimate goal of sanctification is transformation into the likeness of God in Christ. Or, to put it another way, it means *conformity to Jesus Christ.* So Paul writes to the Romans: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (8:29). Whereas this conformity begins with the new life in Christ, it is also to be ever growing, with the goal that of likeness to Jesus Christ.[77] Not "conformity to this world" (to recall Paul's words further on in Romans 12), but "conformity to Christ"—this is God's intention!

There can be no higher goal.

IV. METHOD

We come now to a consideration of the method of sanctification. How does sanctification occur? In our reflection on this we will recognize both a divine and human side.

A. The Work of God

Sanctification is primarily the work of God: its source is in Him. Sanctification is basically God's doing; it is not a work man can perform in himself. It is not as if a person who has been called, regenerated, and justified[78] (all unmistakably works of God) is thereafter called on to sanctify himself, so that whereas God justifies, man sanctifies.[79] While man's role is an important one, sanctification is not basically his work. Jesus could say, "I sanctify Myself" (John 17:19 NASB), but no one else can.[80] For sinful man, it is God alone who sanctifies.[81]

Let us observe several scriptural references. A number of times in the Old Testament there is this declaration: "I, the LORD, sanctify you" (Exod. 31:13).[82] In the Gospel of John, Jesus prayed to the Father, "Sanctify them in the truth" (17:17). Thus it is the Father who sanctifies. Paul also says, "May the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely." Further, Paul adds, "Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass" (1 Thess. 5:23–24 NASB).[83] God (the Father) is the *source* of sanctification.

Jesus Christ is the *agent* of sanctification. As we have earlier noted, Paul writes to the Corinthians as those "who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:2 NASB) and speaks shortly after that about "Christ Jesus, whom God made our … sanctification" (1:30). Christ is the agent of sanctification in that, as Hebrews says, "We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (10:10).[84] This is also true of our continuing sanctification. So Paul writes Titus that "our great God and Savior Jesus Christ … gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:13–14). The consummation of this sanctification for God's people—collectively the church—will also come from Jesus Christ; for "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her … that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle … that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25, 27).

Finally, it is the Holy Spirit who is the *energizer* of sanctification. Peter writes to believers as those "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:2 NIV).[85] This suggests that through His work of sanctification the Holy Spirit prepares believers for obedience to Jesus Christ. Also, Paul speaks of the walk of

sanctification in which we seek not to gratify fleshly desires but rather to "walk by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16, 25). The Holy Spirit provides the strength for this walk. In the verse where Paul speaks of our "being transformed into the same image from glory to glory," he adds that this happens "from the Lord, the Spirit"[86] (2 Cor. 3:18 NASB). The Spirit is at work to make this transformation complete.

But now a further thing needs to be said about the activity of the Holy Spirit, namely, that His operation is from *within* believers. This is true, first, corporately of believers. Paul speaks to the Ephesians thus: "You [Jew and Gentile together] … are of God's household … Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone" and "[you are] growing into a holy temple in the Lord." He adds that they are being "built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:19–22 NASB). God in the Spirit indwells this "holy temple," the community of believers. Paul also refers to the community as a temple indwelt by the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 3:16–17—"Do you not know that you [plural] are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" Then Paul adds: "If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you [plural] are." The community of believers is not to be destroyed, for it is God's own habitation in the Spirit.

Second, each believer is also individually indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We have already observed the further words of Paul: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?" (1 Cor. 6:19).[87] This refers to the extraordinary fact that each believer's body is a temple, hence also a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Paul writes Timothy: "Guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells[88] in us" (2 Tim. 1:14). A further word from Paul: "But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you." That such indwelling is a fact for the believer, Paul adds, "Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (Rom. 8:9). Anyone who belongs to Christ—marvelous to say—is indwelt by God the Holy Spirit.

Since the Holy Spirit dwells within believers, it follows that His sanctifying work will be an internal operation. It is He who carries forward in depth the work of sanctification. As the Spirit of holiness, He is constantly illuminating the dark areas of the believer's life and ever seeking to bring every aspect of human nature—spirit, soul, body—into conformity with Christ. The Holy Spirit—the *Spiritus Sanctus*—is the sanctifying Spirit. It is His main office to bring the work of sanctification to increasing fulfillment.

B. The Human Task

Sanctification is also the task of man: God does not work without our involvement. It is not that God does so much, say 50 percent, whereas man is called upon to accomplish the rest, the other 50 percent. It is, rather, *God all the way through man all the way.*

We have previously noted the Old Testament word of God that says, "I the LORD, sanctify you." Now we may observe another word: "Consecrate yourselves … and be holy; for I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 20:7). God does the basic work of sanctifying,[89] but Israel's consecration is also called for in order to "be holy." In the New Testament it is likewise the case that although God is declared to be the author of sanctification, the believer is definitely challenged to personal consecration. Two scriptural exhortations, earlier mentioned, highlight this: "Beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1); and "Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). There must be a human perfecting, a human striving: such is the task of man.

In reflecting on the human task, let us observe both a negative and a positive aspect: on the one hand, there needs to be a constant dying to sin; on the other, a steadfast living toward righteousness. Some words from 1 Peter are particularly relevant: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins[90] and live for righteousness" (2:24 NIV). Let us consider the human task under the twofold heading of dying to sins and living for righteousness.

1. Dying to Sins

It is a paradoxical fact about Christian existence that though the believer is to understand himself as "dead to sin"[91] —in that sin no longer dominates him— nonetheless sins do remain, and to those sins he is called upon to die.

This may be understood first as *renunciation* of sins. We may here listen to the words of Paul: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny[92] ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:11–12 NASB).

“Ungodliness” refers to everything in the believer’s life that is contrary to God; “worldly desires” signify all those passions that are not directed to the things of God but to the world. All such ungodliness and desires are to be denied—or, put more strongly, to be renounced.

Jesus pointed to a similar renouncement when He said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself[93] and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23 NIV). Denial of the self refers here to the total self that is opposed to the way of Christ: this sinful self must be left behind. It follows that whatever there is of pride, anger, lust, or any other sin, it is to be denied, indeed, renounced. This is by no means a renunciation of the person and his selfhood, as if there were some virtue in self-persecution. Rather it is a renunciation of everything that continues in the self as sin, hence the sinful self. Dying to these sins, moreover, is not a matter of calm repose (as death may be viewed) but of vigorous action. It is as if to say, “I *renounce* each and every sin that operates in my life; I *disown* them as not belonging to me as a follower of Jesus Christ.” This is the complete opposite from denying Christ and disowning him (as Peter was later to do):[94] it is rather to deny and renounce everything that is contrary to Christ and His manner of life.

We must recognize that the Holy Spirit who dwells within is totally opposed to the sinful self—or, in the words of Paul—to the “flesh.” Indeed, there is strong internal opposition on each side. “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other” (Gal. 5:17). Since the Holy Spirit stands in opposition to the sinful self, this means that every act of renunciation on the part of the believer will be strongly undergirded by the Holy Spirit. Moreover, since this opposition exists, there cannot be any taming of the flesh or compromise with it (or spanking it like an unruly child!). The flesh is wholly evil and must be totally renounced.

Dying to sins may be understood next as *mortification.* Here we turn to the words of Paul in Romans 8:13—“For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death[95] the deeds[96] of the body[97] you will live.” Observe two things: first, believers are exhorted to the very serious business of mortifying the evil practices of the body; second, this is to be done by the power of the indwelling[98] Spirit. One should carefully note that it is not the Holy Spirit who performs the task of mortification, though He is clearly the energizer. It is rather the believer himself who *by* that power is to execute the mortification. Hence, the Holy Spirit is not only opposed to the flesh, but He is also the empowering force in the believer’s action of ongoing mortification.[99]

This means that not only is the believer to renounce sins (as we have

discussed) but also he is to put them to death in the power of the Holy Spirit. For example, when such a sin as jealousy, or anger, or lust is manifest, and the believer feels in the grip of it, then he may declare vehemently some such words as these: "*By the power of the Holy Spirit I put you* (jealousy, anger, lust) *to death*!" Sin should not be permitted to have its way or be allowed to lurk in some hidden corner. If necessary, it should be dragged out screaming, and then slain in the power of the Spirit. Nothing less can suffice when the Christian is dealing with the viciousness of sin.[100]

Paul also deals with the subject of mortification in Colossians 3:5. There he writes: "Put to death[101] therefore what is earthly in you:[102] immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." This is even stronger, and possibly broader, than the words in Romans 8:13 which contain the conditional statement *("if* by the Spirit you put to death … ") and speak of "the body." Here in Colossians, there is a blunt imperative that relates to the "earthly."[103] When Paul mentions immorality, impurity, etc., these are doubtless only illustrative of whatever in a person needs sanctification. But the important matter again is that the believer is not to tolerate sins: they are to be utterly destroyed.

Here a word is in order regarding confession and contrition. There is much need for the believer to confess his sins, both generally and particularly, and to receive God's forgiveness, for a humble and contrite spirit is pleasing to the Lord. But confession and contrition cannot replace mortification. Many Christians make confession of sin in some such words as "We have sinned and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep…. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders…. And grant that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life."[104] However, there is no suggestion in this prayer of the penitent doing anything about his sins. Truly we must be ever grateful that God does hear a genuine confession of sins and delights to grant pardon. *But* He also expects us to get down to the serious business of mortifying sins—not just confessing them —and moving on in sanctification.

Returning to the passage in Colossians, it is important to observe that the background for mortification is found in the statement "You have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (3:3). The believer's true life is no longer earthly but heavenly,[105] and therefore he is able from this heavenly vantage point both to perceive more clearly and to deal more effectively with his sins. In regard to perception there is better perspective: what is earthly is more clearly seen in its nature and shape. Sins can be viewed for what they are—*not* belonging to one's true nature, which is heavenly ("hid with Christ in God"), and in a real sense

unnatural and very distant. For that very reason they are all the more detestable and deplorable. As a result the believer should be even more determined to deal with these sins in such manner as to increasingly mortify them. However, the strength comes not from oneself but from Christ in whom the believer's life is hidden. The risen and ascended Lord, victorious over sin and evil, is the source of the believer's continuing victory.

This brings us back again to the Holy Spirit, for Christ now operates on earth through the Spirit's presence and power. Hence, in relation to sins of the self—whether of the spirit, soul, or body—it is in order to deal with them in terms of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Recall that Paul speaks of sanctification [106] "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11). Thus one may properly—and vigorously—declare about any sin: "*I put you to death in the name of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.*[107] The believer accomplishes this mortification in the power that the Lord provides through His indwelling Holy Spirit.

Mortification, we need to add, is not a way of coping with sins in general but in particular. As noted, Paul says, "Put to death therefore what is earthly *in you*," and thereupon certain sins are mentioned. Hence, what a believer sees and knows as specifically sinful *in himself*—the sins being named—is to be put to death. Thus when a sin becomes particularly visible[108] and perhaps threatening at a given time, it is then that the believer may in the name of Christ and by the Holy Spirit seek to put it to death.[109] One may know he has a problem, for example, with lust, but it is when the temptation presses in unmistakably and almost overwhelmingly that the believer may then call out for its mortification. Or he may have just succumbed to a particular sin, and now, realizing what has happened, he cries out in anguish of spirit for its total annihilation. In any event, when the believer speaks forth, "I put you to death …," it is by no means a verbal exercise; it is done with the total being.

This leads to the recognition that such mortification may involve much effort. Evil does not easily let go its grasp; hence, it must be dealt with severely. In Hebrews there is this striking statement: "In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (12:4). These vivid words may well declare the extent to which the believer will sometimes have to go in his battle against sin: it is a fierce struggle even to the shedding of blood.[110] Christ Himself, although He was without sin, was in much agony in Gethsemane as He struggled against the temptation to turn from the Father's will, so much so that "his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground" (Luke 22:44). Although this was not the shedding of blood later at Calvary, it

was the final struggle of our Lord against the temptation to forsake the way of the Cross. Sin, however viewed, is no light matter: the struggle against it can be bloody indeed.

One further way of dying to sins is through the *putting away* of sins. Shortly after Paul wrote the Colossians to "put to death" the earthly in them, he added, "But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk[111] from your mouth" (3:8). To put away is by no means a gentle action: it implies to get rid of them, to cast them off, to be done with them.[112] This suggests an act of the will in which the believer who is caught up in such sins as anger, malice, and the like, throws them off and away. So Paul writes elsewhere: "Let us then cast off[113] the works of darkness" (Rom. 13:12).[114] It is, therefore, not only a matter of attacking sins so that they become dead, that is, mortified, but also a vigorous expulsion of them so that they are no longer present.

Accordingly, in regard to putting away sins, the believer may not only declare about a particular sin, "I put you to death," but also "*I put you away*"—and in the latter case he may add, "*never to return*." The corpse of the dead sin is not to be allowed to remain but is to be cast far away. Henceforward the believer will have utterly nothing to do with that sin. It is both dead and gone. Indeed, I may add, it is renounced, mortified, and expelled![115]

Again, the putting away of sins cannot be done in the believer's own strength. As with mortification, the strength comes from his life being "hid with Christ in God." Hence, it is from the believer's true place in the heavenly realm and by the power of Him who is "seated at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:10) that the putting away is to be accomplished. Still the believer must do it: he himself is to cast the sin away.

The putting away of sins is continuous throughout one's lifetime. Hebrews 12:1–2 depicts the whole of life as a race of perseverance, and in the running of it we are urged: "Let us also lay aside[116] every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus … ." Ever and again sins will make their appearance, but we can and must put them away in the strength that Christ provides.

A further word about the role of the Holy Spirit in the believer's "dying to sins" needs to be stated. It is through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit that the believer is again and again made conscious of sins. No matter how far he may have gone in renouncing, mortifying, and expelling sins there is never any place at which he may claim arrival at perfection;[117] rather, the Holy Spirit will disclose to him further areas of need. There will surely be growth in holiness with many sins no longer present, but this does not mean that the struggle is all

over. Indeed, it is usually only when grosser sins have been dealt with that subtler sins become apparent in the light of the Holy Spirit. The believer who is far advanced in sanctification is often aware of sins in his life that would scarcely be recognized by another person, nor would he have recognized them himself until other sins were gotten out of the way. The closer one comes to the light, the more exposed are sins that were hardly recognized before. It is the noble saint who knows, as no one else, that he is still a sinner. For the Holy Spirit never ceases to illumine the dark places and to call for further sanctification.

This does not mean, however, that the believer's life is weighted down by sin. First of all, there is the basic and joyous fact that sin does not reign in the believer's life. Through faith in Jesus Christ he has been liberated from the bondage of *sin;* hence no matter where the believer is on the road of sanctification, he can never be burdened by the *sins* that remain. The believer is always victorious in Jesus Christ! Second, from the believer's vantage point in heavenly places, he knows that although sins remain, they do not truly represent his new life with Christ in God. Hence, there is the constant challenge to do everything possible to remove these earthly blemishes. Third, there is ever and again the joyful realization that through his dying to sins some sins no longer exist for him. He can look back on them and praise God for the victory.

Finally, there is the comforting assurance of the Lord's presence all the way. Since He knew far more than we what it was like to struggle against sin, we have His accompaniment, encouragement, and help in and through every battle. Truly He rejoices with us in every victory. At last, when all the struggle is over, He will complete our sanctification in glory.

2. Living for Righteousness

The other side of the human task in sanctification is living for righteousness. As was noted previously, we are to "die to sins and live for righteousness." To "live for" signifies a steadfast concern for righteous and holy living.

This means, basically, that the believer's life should be undergirded with an intense desire for righteousness. So Jesus declared, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matt. 5:6). Afterward, in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), Jesus spelled out the nature of this righteousness. At one point He urged, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (6:33). Accordingly, the believer who will grow in holiness must be a person who both hungers and thirsts after righteousness and gives it the highest priority in his life.

Paul describes this living for righteousness in the vivid metaphor of slavery. Writing to the Romans, he says of them that they who have "been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness" (6:18)[118] . Paul then adds, using the imagery of the human body: "Now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification" (6:19 NASB)[119] . Righteousness should be so much the concern and commitment of the believer that just as he was formerly given over to sin, now he will be given over to righteousness.

Thereby he will become truly a slave of righteousness.[120]

With this understanding of living for righteousness as an intense desire for and commitment to righteousness and that such leads to further sanctification, we are ready to consider how the believer is to move forward. How does one live for righteousness?

a. Obeying God's Word. We begin with the necessity of giving obedience to God's word. Since God's word expresses His holy and righteous will, living for righteousness means, for one thing, to live according to that word. The psalmist declares, "I have laid up thy word in my heart, that I might not sin against thee" (119:11). The word of God "laid up" in the heart—the center of one's being—is a powerful force in keeping a person from sin and thereby enabling him to walk in holiness.

Since God's word is found authoritatively in Scripture, the Bible contains the primary guidance for righteous living. In the words of 2 Timothy 3:16–17: "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." The words "for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" all declare the role of Scripture in helping toward holy and righteous living.

Hence, if a believer is to grow in holiness, he must live according to Scripture. First, this points to an immersion in the words of Scripture, so that they are a part of one's daily life. Even as Jesus Himself made use of the Old Testament when tempted by Satan[121] and thereby continued to walk in the Father's will, so the believer must make constant use of Scripture in his ongoing walk. This can happen only through an ever-growing apprehension of God's written word.

Second, this faithful reading of God's word must be constantly supplemented by action. Jesus emphasized this in relation to His own words: "Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock" (Matt. 7:24).[122] Since words spoken by Christ are now found only in Scripture, His disciples—those who believe in Him—must hear

them as if spoken directly today, and then seek to put them into practice. By doing so a believer's "house"—that is, his life and character—is built on a solid rock. He will become increasingly a person of holy and righteous living.

Accordingly, it is urgent both to know the Scripture and to obey what is written in it. The believer who would "live for righteousness" will again and again turn to God's inspired word. For there he will find the basic guide to "training in righteousness,"[123] and he will earnestly seek to live by its admonitions and teachings.

Obedience to God's word also refers to the word, based on Scripture, that may be spoken in a community of believers. When a pastor or teacher speaks an exhortation that comes from God, it is incumbent on those who hear to obey. In Hebrews is this statement: "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God" (13:7). Later this directive is added: "Obey your leaders and submit to them" (v. 17). Hence, the word of God may come from those called especially to minister that word. When that word is spoken, there is the call by God to obedience. Of course, if the exhortation is out of harmony with sacred Scripture, it is not to be accepted as God's word. However, the *truly* proclaimed word[124] is God's word, and by giving heed to it the believer may grow in holiness and righteousness.

God may also speak His word in other situations. In one's prayer time God's word may be spoken and heard. Indeed, the believer should expect to hear from God regularly. In relation to sanctification the Lord may point to some area in a person's life that needs to be dealt with and likewise give directions to be followed. If there is a genuine concern for holiness on the believer's part, he may expect God, the holy and righteous One, to offer such guidance. But it is not only during the prayer time that God may speak. There are other occasions and circumstances in life by which God speaks forth His word, and the alert believer will often hear in them some message from God. For example, one may endure suffering, and the very suffering itself could be a call for deeper obedience.[125]

In summary, to live for righteousness is to live in obedience to God's word. This means basically to live according to Scripture. But however that word may be spoken, the believer's concern should be that of constant attention with earnest determination to follow every leading of the holy God into fuller holiness.

b. Looking to Christ. The central focus of living for righteousness is Jesus Christ. In Hebrews where the "race" of life is described, the center of attention is Jesus: "Let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily

entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing[126] our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith" (12:1–2 NASB). By fixing their eyes on Jesus—that is, staying constantly focused on Him—believers may increasingly lay aside their sins.

Primarily this means to actively *follow Jesus*. One of the striking features of Jesus' ministry was His call to people to follow Him. The command "Follow me" was spoken at the beginning,[127] during,[128] and at the end of His ministry. The last words in John's Gospel spoken to Peter were "Follow me" (21:22). "Following" meant very clearly to give Jesus a total commitment, so that devotion to Him would be absolutely first in a person's life. The words of Jesus are quite pointed: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23 NIV). Not only must there be self-renunciation,[129] there must also be an active, daily cross-bearing[130] and following of Jesus. In the words of Peter: "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again" (1 Peter 2:21–23 KJV). As the true believing disciple follows the steps of Jesus, there will be suffering. But there will also be an increasing likeness to Him in whom there was no guile. When one follows Jesus faithfully, sin and evil become all the more despicable and are more readily set aside.

The psalmist declared, "I keep the LORD always before me" (16:8). "Always before" suggests in daily life a constant looking to the Lord for guidance. So the psalmist added, "Thou dost show me the path of life" (v. 11). By keeping Jesus always before him, the believer sees the true path so that he may walk in it and in this way be increasingly changed. Paul puts it vividly when he writes, "We all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18 NASB). Like Moses, believers in Christ who steadily look upon the glory of the Lord begin to reflect that same glory and are more and more changed into His likeness. What an amazing picture of transformation! It is indeed "from glory to glory." There is no limit on earth; the one beholding becomes increasingly like Christ.

This calls for looking constantly to Jesus as the Lord of one's life. Whether it be in the time of prayer and worship or in the midst of busy activity, the believer's controlling devotion should be to Jesus Christ.[131] So to follow One who is the perfection of holiness enables, as nothing else, the breaking away from sin and living to righteousness. This has well been called "the expulsive power of a higher affection."[132] The devotion of the heart to Another, even as in human relations, makes for a strong desire and urgent action to remove every

barrier in the way of that relationship. To look continuously to Jesus is the most powerful incentive to holy conduct and living.

Practically speaking, this means turning again and again to Scripture, where the picture of Christ is set forth. As the believer beholds His manner of life in a wide variety of circumstances and seeks truly to follow His example, the whole person will steadily change into His likeness.[133] This is the way of growing in holiness.

We may note again that looking to Christ means that the believer is constantly to *seek after the highest*. In the words of Paul to the Colossians, "Seek the things that are above, where Christ is…. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (3:1–2). The believer, knowing that his life is "hid with Christ in God" (v. 3), is doing only what is natural to his heavenly position in Christ Jesus when he sets his mind on heavenly things. Paul writes in similar fashion to the Philippians: "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on[134] these things" (4:8 NASB). Truly these are the excellences of Christ Himself. The mind of the believer is to dwell on all of them, and in so doing the mind of Christ will be increasingly formed in him.[135] In this way he will become more and more like the Lord.

Hence, for sanctification to continue, it is imperative for the believer to have his mind set on things above and to have his thoughts dwell on them. This means that he will in no wise allow the base and degrading to occupy his mind but will constantly turn from such to the highest, the noblest, the best. This does not mean that the believer will perfectly express the things that are above; however, there will be such a set of the mind in that direction that every slippage into things earthly will cause inward pain and anguish. For the believer knows that his life is "hid with Christ in God," and that any failure is an unnatural betrayal, even a distortion of his heavenly position.

But seeking after the highest is also to follow Christ in His descent from the highest to the lowest. We have earlier quoted the words of Paul: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5 KJV). Paul continues, "… who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation,[136] and took upon him the form of a servant … he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (vv. 6–8 KJV). The word "mind" may also be translated "attitude";[137] hence, the continuing attitude of a believer should be that of self-emptying (as with Christ) and being a servant of all mankind. Hence, to focus on Christ and the things of

Christ means to follow Him in His amazing act of giving up glory and humbling Himself for the sake of others. Shortly before Paul's words about having this mind, or attitude, he writes, "Do nothing from selfishness or conceit,[138] but in humility count others better than yourselves" (v. 3). This (humanly) impossible attitude can come about only through focusing on Christ in His compassionate action of total selflessness and utter humility.

I have reviewed all this to emphasize that sanctification includes the forsaking of selfish concern (the sin of pride and self-centeredness) in a total outgoing attitude of compassionate selflessness and humble concern for others. Sanctification is far more than a life of purity of heart (as basic as that is); it is also a life of humility, love, and self-sacrifice.

This means, finally, the activity of *putting on.* As the believer focuses on Christ in His vast act of condescension, his attitude should also gradually change. However, the vigorous activity of putting on, or clothing oneself with, the characteristics of Christ is also needed. Thus Paul writes the Colossians, "Put on[139] a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another and forgiving each other … beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity" (3:12–14 NASB). To put on is to set one's mind on Christ (3:2), for in doing so there is vision and motive power. Without this mind-set any attempt at putting on such virtues as compassion, humility, and patience would be entirely artificial and empty. But against the background of Christ Himself, the believer is called to the continuing and forceful action of putting on, or clothing himself with, the characteristics and virtues exemplified in Christ.

Let us understand this as vigorous effort. We have previously observed how Paul in Colossians 3:5 speaks strongly about putting to death, or mortifying, various sins: immorality, impurity, evil desire, etc. Now it is after this putting to death and putting away (v. 8)—both essentially negative actions—that Paul speaks of putting on. This suggests that the negative should be followed by the positive, for as sins are put off, there should be immediate concern, no less vital to be sure, for virtues to be put on.

Indeed, this signifies deliberate action. As if dressing in the morning, the believer is to put on one piece after another: the clothing of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, and love (which binds all the others together). This kind of action, incidentally, is not dissimilar to Paul's admonishing the Ephesians to "put on the whole armor of God" (6:11). After that he describes, one after another, various pieces of armor that are to be put on (vv. 14–18). The purpose, of course, is quite different: the

armor is for the battle against evil forces (v. 12), whereas the clothing is for representing Christ and His character to all persons. Still, deliberate activity is called for; this is implied in the verb "put on."

Practically speaking, this could suggest the zealous effort each day to put on afresh these various virtues. There are many believers who make a practice at the beginning of the day of putting on the whole armor of God, piece by piece, to stand against the world of evil forces. Why not also try the other, and far more significant, even more exciting, activity of putting on the clothing of Christ? One might say, "As I rise in the morning, focused on Christ (the necessary background and power), *I will put on compassion, next kindness, next humility, and so on*—piece by piece." To be sure, there are other virtues besides those Paul lists in Colossians 3:12–14 that may likewise be put on. However, this is surely a good place to begin, and God will indeed honor even the believer's fumbling attempts in such a continuing exercise.

The subject of looking to Christ may be summarized in the phrase *abiding in Him.* Jesus said to His disciples, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me" (John 15:4). The word "abide" brings out especially the note of constancy, a looking to Jesus, that is as continuous as is His life within the believer.[140] By abiding in Jesus, the believer does bear fruit—including the fruit of righteousness—that will continue to multiply.

According to 1 John, "No one who lives[141] in him keeps on sinning" (3:6 NIV)[142] . This signifies that one who abides in Christ has thereby a powerful deterrent to sin. Sin is no longer natural to him as it was before. Now the true life is the life of Christ, one of increasing righteousness and holiness.

Truly to abide in Christ is the capstone of looking to Christ. For looking is not to glance now and then, but to look constantly so that the believer day by day becomes more like his Master and Lord. This, indeed, is the very heart of living for righteousness.

c. Walking by the Spirit. Finally, to live for righteousness is to walk by the Spirit. Paul writes to the Galatians: "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk[143] by the Spirit" (5:25). Because believers have been made alive by the Spirit, they are challenged to walk by that same Spirit.

This means, first, to *walk in freedom.* Paul writes the Corinthians about the "new covenant" which is "not in a written code[144] but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6). Afterward Paul adds, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (v. 17). Hence, in terms of

sanctification, the believer is no longer operating under a killing written code but under a life-giving Spirit—and this means freedom. In Romans Paul declares, "We serve in the new way[145] of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code" (7:6 NIV). This "new way of the Spirit" is no longer the way of the written code, the law, but the way of freedom in the Spirit.

Thus the believer who walks in the Spirit is not (amazing to relate!) under the law. For we also hear Paul declare in Galatians: "If you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law" (5:18). The law, for all its righteous content, could not bring about true righteousness and holiness because it demands what the previously unregenerate person could not do—namely, walk truly in the way of God. At best there could only be an external righteousness;[146] at worst the law produced an anguishing sense of condemnation.[147] The believer is set free from the law by Christ ("for freedom Christ has set us free"—Gal. 5:1). He is no longer under the law; he walks in the freedom of the Spirit.

Moreover, in the new life of walking by the Holy Spirit, there is for the first time true holiness. As the believer strives after righteousness, it is not a matter merely of his own effort but of the Spirit enabling him to fulfill the righteousness he seeks. Hence, instead of a sense of bondage to a law he could not keep before, there is the freedom in the Spirit that transcends all law and brings about a higher holiness and righteousness.

Now we come to Paul's great statement about the fruit of the Spirit. Shortly after saying that those led by the Spirit are not under the law, Paul declares: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:22–23). What the law could never produce, the Holy Spirit brings about. This takes time and much walking by the Spirit, because good and mature fruit may be long in producing. But the results are far beyond what the law could ever bring about. Further, the law cannot be against this fruitage of the Spirit because in such is the true fulfillment of the law[148] and of more than the law ever demanded.[149]

I wrote earlier about putting on such virtues as compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, some of which are identical with, or similar to, the fruit of the Spirit. Hence, there is no essential difference between the virtues designated in the clothing and the fruit. However, what may be most significant is the inner direction by the Spirit as to how these virtues are to be exercised. "Putting on" is one thing, how to do this is another—and in this the Holy Spirit is the true guide.[150] Guided by the Spirit of freedom, believers may express these virtues in a great variety of ways so that they increasingly flourish in the believers' lives.

Walking by the Spirit, second, enables the believer *to fulfill the law.* Paul speaks in Romans of how "the just requirement[151] of the law" may be "fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (8:4). What the law requires (and what could not be accomplished before) can be fulfilled by those who walk according to the Spirit. Hence, although the believer is not under the law[152] (as we have seen), the law does not thereby cease to be. For the law is God's righteous ordinance and an expression of His own nature: it remains firm. The great difference between the old and new covenants is this: since the law is now written on the heart by the indwelling Spirit, the believer can actually do what the law requires. To put it another way, although the believer is now not under the law but under grace ("You are not under law but under grace" [Rom. 6:14]), grace does not dispense with law but fulfills it. In a still earlier statement in Romans about justification by faith Paul adds, "Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish[153] the Law" (3:31 NASB). The law is at last established, given a firm footing, in that it can now become truly operational in the life of a believer.

Furthermore, the law is needed in the life of a believer because of the remnants of sin that invariably remain in him. Although he is now moving in the Spirit, the flesh is still present to seek its own way. In our earlier discussion on "dying to sins" I quoted the words of Paul that "the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other" (Gal. 5:17). Paul then adds: "… to prevent you from doing what you would." Although the Spirit does operate within to enable the believer both to transcend the law and to fulfill its just requirements, there is still the opposition of the flesh that prevents a fully free action. Accordingly, the law remains as a needful curb against the desires and passions of the flesh. Even the Spirit-filled believer needs to hear such commandments as "You shall not be angry," "You shall not lust," "You shall not resist one who is evil," "Love your enemies."[154] For the flesh remains antagonistic to all such commands. To say that one does not need such injunctions because he is no longer under law but under grace is wholly unrealistic. Rather the law remains for the believer a necessary constraint on his continuing sinfulness.

But now to return to the affirmative side. The believer moves in the freedom of the Spirit and this enables him for the first time to begin to fulfill the law, thus finding a fresh delight in it. Since it is *God's* law—His way of righteousness and justice—there can now be even a pleasure in its contemplation. If the psalmist could say, "Oh, how I love thy law!" (119:97) in the time of the old covenant, how much more should the Christian be able to rejoice in it! To be sure, there is

much more than law in the Christian walk, but in the law basically is set forth God's will and purpose. Thus the grateful believer takes delight in all that God has revealed and gladly seeks to walk according to it.

This means continuing progress in sanctification. For as the believer walks by the Spirit in the fulfilling of the law, he more and more is conformed to the image and likeness of Christ.

The climax of walking by the Spirit is *walking in love*. We have been discussing how walking by the Spirit is both a walking in freedom from the law and, at the same time, a fulfilling of the law. *The reality that unites both freedom and law is love.*

It is quite significant that in Galatians 5 Paul writes first about freedom: "For freedom Christ has set us free" (v. 1); "For you were called to freedom, brethren" (v. 13). Then he adds, "Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (vv. 13–14). This means, accordingly, that law is not done away with by freedom, but is fulfilled in the commandment to love one's neighbor.[155] This signifies that all the commandments in regard to the neighbor are to be fulfilled freely in love. The Christian's freedom, therefore, can be neither a selfish freedom that disregards the other person nor a legalistic action that does only to him what the law requires. For where the love of God operates, there is a free and glad self-giving to all persons that includes but also goes far beyond any requirement of the law.

The supreme example of walking in love was Christ Himself. He freely gave Himself for the sake of all mankind. In correspondence to this, Paul enjoins, "Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2). This was a love that went far beyond any requirement of the law, and it was freely and totally given. Followers of Christ are to walk in that same love, and by the strength of His indwelling Spirit it can freely be done.

Those who so love are truly walking by the Spirit. Since there can be nothing higher or greater than the love of Christ, to walk day by day in such a way is to become more and more like Him.

In this our sanctification is made complete.

[1]In the English New Testament the Greek word hagiasmos is often translated either 44sanctification" or "holiness." E.g., 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7 contains hagiasmos three times: the NASB translates all three as

"sanctification"; the KJV as "sanctification" the first two times, "holiness" the other time; the RSV as "sanctification" the first time, "holiness" the other two times (NIV and NEB shift to a verbal form, namely, "to be holy" in the first instance, and various like renditions thereafter). A similar Greek word hagiosyne (used only in Rom. 1:4; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 3:13) is translated "holiness" in RSV, KJV, NASB.

[2]The Hebrew word for "holiness," qodes (or "holy," qâdôs) means initially "apartness" or "separation." TWOT lists "apartness" first. IDB speaks of the "elemental meaning" as "separation" (see article "Holiness"). Louis Berkhof suggests that qodes may "derive from the root qad, meaning 'to cut,' " thus making "the idea of separation the original idea" (Systematic Theology, 527).

[3]Everett F. Harrison writes, "Judging from the usage of the root qds, the basic idea conveyed by the holiness of God is His separateness, i.e., His uniqueness, His distinction as the Wholly Other … the One who stands apart from and above the creation" ("Holiness; Holy," ISBE rev. ed., 2:725).

[4]Indeed, everything associated with God is holy. E.g., the Sabbath instituted by God is "a holy sabbath" (Exod. 16:23); the heaven above is God's "holy heaven" (Ps. 20:6); God sits on His "holy throne" (47:8); and Zion is God's "holy hill" (2:6).

[5]In the New Testament the apostles and prophets are called "holy apostles and prophets" (Eph. 3:5), the Christian calling is a "holy calling" (2 Tim. 1:9), the Jerusalem from above is "the holy city" (Rev. 21:2). See vol. 1, chapter 3, IV.?., pages 59-63.

[6]The Greek word is katharisomen, "purify" (NIV).

[7]Also cf. Deuteronomy 32:4: "The Rock, his work is perfect."

[8]"E.g., "the law of the LORD is perfect" (Ps. 19:7), referring to God's righteousness.

[9]E.g., Paul writes about God's "perfect patience" (1 Tim. 1:16). God's patience, or longsuffering (makrothymia), represents His continuing love.

[10]Right after the statement, quoted above, "This God-his way is perfect," are the words "the promise of the LORD proves true."

[11]"Except on grounds of unchastity (Matt. 5:32).

[12]"Not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished" (Matt. 5:18).

[13]Sometimes called positional sanctification.

[14]Hebrews 10:29 speaks of “the blood of the covenant” by which one has been “sanctified.”

[15]“Flesh” here refers to the outward, external aspect of man “defiled” by ceremonial impurities (e.g., the “ashes of a heifer” refers to Numbers 19 where a person, made “unclean” through contact with a dead body, became clean through the ashes of a slaughtered red heifer mixed with water).

[16]We will later observe that the believer needs ongoing cleansing and removal of pollution; however, it is important, first of all, to emphasize the initial purification through Jesus Christ.

[17]Not “called to be saints” (KJV, RSV) or “called to be holy” (NIV). The Greek reads Kletois hagiois, literally, “called saints.” Hence, the NASB translation, “saints by calling,” is quite proper. “Called to be … “ may suggest sanctification as wholly future.

[18]The calling to salvation, i.e., “effectual calling.” See chapter 1, “Calling.”

[19]Paul also addresses the Romans (1:7), the Ephesians (1:1), the Philippians (1:1), and the Colossians (1:2) as “saints.” Cf. Hebrews 13:24 and Jude 3. In the Old Testament the whole people of God are likewise often called saints. One among several references is Psalm 85:8: “He will speak peace to his people, to his saints” (NASB reads “godly ones”).

[20]According to Roman Catholic theology, “saints” are departed persons who through the ecclesiastical process of canonization are elevated to sainthood and thereby are worthy of special veneration. This view of sainthood, as belonging to only a few, is far different from the biblical picture.

[21]In between are the words of verse 10 (earlier quoted): “We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

[22]Recall Hebrews 9:13 (quoted earlier).

[23]F. F. Bruce writes, “By that same sacrifice Christ has eternally ‘perfected’ His holy people … by it His people have had their consciences cleansed from guilt; by it they have been fitted to approach as accepted worshippers; by it they have experienced the fulfilment of what was promised in earlier days, being brought into that perfect relation to God which is involved in the new covenant” (Hebrews, NICNT, 241).

[24]Holiness in the Old Testament was also (as we have observed) a matter of ceremonial cleanness. E.g., see words similar to Leviticus 19:2 (above) in Leviticus 11:44: “I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves

therefore, and be holy, for I am holy." The context here relates to eating of unclean foods, namely, "to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean and between the living creature that may be eaten and the living creature that may not be eaten" (11:47).

[25]The Greek word is anastrophe, "way of life, conduct, behavior" (BAGD). The KJV reads "conversation," which at the time of translation (1611) meant conduct or behavior. Such is obviously an unsatisfactory rendition for our time, since it now seems to limit holiness to speech.

[26]The capital letters in NASB do not signify a special emphasis but an Old Testament quotation (this is the case elsewhere in NASB and is true also of italics).

[27]The Greek phrase is epitelountes hagiôsynën, "perfecting holiness" (KJV, NASB, NIV).

[28]Calvin puts it well in saying that "sin … though it ceases to reign, does not cease to dwell" (Institutes, III, 3.11 Beveridge trans.).

[29]John's concern, expressed shortly thereafter, is that believers not sin. But if they do, there is help: "My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin *[hamartete*—aorist tense = commit sin (see NEB)]; but if any one does sin [again aorist], we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ" (1 John 2:1). Further on, John emphasizes that "no one who is born of God will continue to sin *[hamartian ou poiei*—present tense = does not practice sin (see NASB)], because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning *[ou dynatai hamartanein*], because he has been born of God" (3:9 NIV). The believer may, and often does, fall into sin, but he will not walk in it. No born-again person-one in whom "God's seed" (or "God's nature" RSV) dwells-continues in sin (the present tense represents ongoing practice). He may commit sins (the aorist tense signifies complete action without reference to duration or repetition), but he cannot practice them [i.e., sin is no longer a habitual matter] because he has a new nature. See Dana and Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament, 195, for a discussion of the Greek tenses here. F. F. Bruce puts it well: "The new birth involves a radical change in human nature; for those who have not experienced it, sin is natural, whereas for those who have experienced it, sin is unnatural" (The Epistles of John, 92). It is clear that John is by no means teaching that the regenerate person never commits a sin, only that it is not natural to him. But when he does sin, he has an advocate, Jesus Christ.

[30]Recalling the holy status of believers.

[31]"Beholding as in a mirror" is the translation above for katoptrizomenoi. The NIV has "reflect"; NEB, "reflect as in a mirror." However, "beholding as in a mirror" seems preferable (see BAGD: "to look at something in a mirror").

[32]The Greek word epignosis equals "precise and correct knowledge" (Thayer), "decisive knowledge" (TDNT, 1:107), "real knowledge" (NASB).

[33]The Greek word is eis. "Until" (NASB, NIV; cf. KJV) is a less adequate translation for this preposition.

[34]The Greek word is achri. "Until" is the correct rendering in this instance.

[35]The Greek phrase is ergon teleion, literally, "perfect work"; "perfect result" (NASB).

[36]The Greek word is teleioi, "mature" (NIV). Although te le ios can be translated "mature," that word hardly seems satisfactory here. "Maturity" does not necessarily imply "lacking in nothing."

[37]John Wesley affirmed such in his teachings. He wrote that "from the time of our being born again the gradual work of sanctification takes place…. We go on from grace to grace … we take up our cross, and deny ourselves every pleasure that does not lead us to God. It is thus that we wait for entire sanctification [italics mine]" (quoted from The Scripture Way of Salvation [1765], as found in Creeds of the Churches, ed. John Leith, 363-64). In this "entire sanctification," Wesley adds, "Sin ceases to be" (372). Such total sanctification may be looked for now: "It will come, and will not tarry…. Expect it by faith, Expect it as you are, and Expect it nowl" (ibid.).

[38]"The apostle denies … any sense of final perfection as a present experience … he makes it clear that the work of sanctifying grace is progressive, and the summum bonum of Christian experience will be reached only at the consummation…. If the attainment of perfection is denied, there is equally no quietism or indifferent acquiesence in his present experience. He is concerned to strain every nerve to pursue the ideal before him…. " So writes Ralph P. Martin in The-Epistle of Paul to the Philippians, TNTC, 151-52.

[39]A. H. Strong uses this expression (Systematic Theology, 879).

[40]Also see Daniel 6:22, where Daniel says, "I was found blameless before him [God]."

[41]The Greek word is teleion. The KJV has "perfect" ("a perfect man")

rather than “mature.” Such a translation is misleading, since the comparison is not between the perfect and imperfect but between children and fully grown, or mature, people. (John Wesley makes much use of the KJV translation here-“a perfect man”-to emphasize his doctrine of Christian perfection. He writes, “We understand by that scriptural expression, ‘a perfect man’ … one whom God hath ‘sanctified throughout in body, soul, and spirit’; one who ‘walketh in the light as He is in the light; in whom is no darkness at all: the blood of Jesus Christ having cleansed him from all sin’ … He is ‘holy as God who called’ him is holy…. This it is to be a perfect man, to be ‘sanctified throughout.’ “ (A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, 42-43.)

[42]The KJV and NASB translation of “perfect” is quite unfortunate, because Paul’s whole idea is that one who is teleios does not lay claim to perfection!

[43]Again “perfect” in KJV, NIV.

[44]The popular saying “I’m not perfect, just forgiven” leaves much to be desired. We may-and should-thank God for His mercy and forgiveness in Jesus Christ; but we dare not stop there. The saying too easily suggests a lack of concern for holy living.

[45]Pride: “I have now arrived”; hypocrisy: “I am not like other Christians”; blindness: “I find no fault in myself”; despair: “I know I have just sinned, so I feel hopeless.”

[46]The context might suggest that Paul is here referring to his pre-Christian days; however, the present tense, “/am the foremost of sinners” points to Paul’s Christian walk. Cf. Paul’s words about himself as “the least of the apostles” (1 Cor. 15:9) and as “the very least of all the saints” (Eph. 3:8).

[47]I will discuss this struggle in some detail hereafter.

[48]Sanctification is defined in the Westminster Shorter Catechism as “the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness.” “Renewed in the whole man after the image of God” is what we are discussing in this section on “Scope.”

[49]The Greek words are palingenesias (regeneration) and anakainoseos (renewal).

[50]The Greek phrase is palaion anthropon, literally, “old man” as in KJV, “old self” (NASB, NIV), “old human nature” (NEB).

[51]The Greek word is holoteleis. The KJV and RSV translate it “wholly”;

NIV, “through and through”; NEB, “in every part.”

[52]See vol. 1, chapter 9, “Man,” II.B, pages 210-13. E.g., “The spirit … is the very essence of human nature.”

[53]This operation of the Holy Spirit in the human spirit is basic to the renewal of the mind (to be considered hereafter under “soul”). Paul exhorts (as we have seen) that believers “be renewed in the spirit of … [their] minds.” Spirit and mind are very closely related; however, since the spirit functions through the mind, the renewal must be primarily in “the spirit” of the mind.

[54]Earlier than the passage in which Paul speaks of entire sanctification of spirit, soul, and body.

[55]Hence, what was said in the previous paragraph about pride, bitterness, judgment, and anger in relation to the spirit also applies to the heart.

[56]As in the RSV and NASB translations of 1 Samuel 25:31. The RSV reads, “My lord [David] shall have no cause of grief, or pangs of conscience, for having shed blood.” The NASB, instead of “pangs of conscience,” reads “a troubled heart.”

[57]See especially Acts 24:16; 1 Timothy 3:9; 2 Timothy 1:3; Hebrews 13:18; 1 Peter 3:16, 21. The words “unblemished” and “good” are also used in other translations.

[58]Hebrews 9:14 speaks of the blood of Christ purifying (or cleansing) the conscience: “how much more shall the blood of Christ … purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”

[59]See vol. 1, chapter 9, “Man,” II.C, pages 213-14. Hence “spirit” and “soul” are sometimes in the Scriptures used interchangeably.

[60]Paul writes earlier in Romans 8 that those who are “in Christ Jesus” (v. 1) have their minds “set … on the things of the Spirit” (v. 5); cf. 1 Corinthians 2:16: “But we have the mind of Christ.”

[61]Since the mind is the organ of knowledge, there needs to be a renewing in knowledge. As we have seen, Paul speaks of our “being renewed in knowledge” (Col. 3:10).

[62]The Greek word is dokimazein, “put to the test,” hence, “prove by testing” (BAGD).

[63]The Greek word is euareston.

[64]Corinthians 10:5 reads in full: “We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

[65]The Greek word is sarx, “flesh” (“sinful nature” [NIV], “lower nature” [NEB]). “Flesh” can mean simply the body; however in this verse, and frequently elsewhere, “flesh” refers to the principle of sinfulness at work in every area of human personality.

[66]The Greek word is pheuge, “flee from” (NASB), “flee” (KJV, NIV). It is important to note that Paul uses the imperative mood here.

[67]Matthew 5:21-30.

[68]The Greek phrase is to soma tes hamartias, “body of sin” (KJV, NIV, NASB). AS John Murray writes, “The expression ‘the body of sin’ would mean the body as conditioned and controlled by sin, the sinful body” (Romans, NICNT, 220). Paul was not referring to the destruction of the physical body but to the body as sinful-i.e., “the sinful body” (as RSV translates).

[69]The Greek phrase is to heautou skeuos ktasthai. The word “skeuos” has been interpreted to mean either “body” or “wife.” In regard to the former, the NIV translates “control his own body”; in regard to the latter, the RSV reads, “take a wife to himself.” “Body” seems the more likely in light of the context. Also, as F. F. Bruce says, “There is no New Testament parallel for calling a man’s wife his skeuos” (1 & 2 Thessalonians, WBC, 83).

[70]The Greek word is hagiasmo, “holiness” (RSV), “holy” (NIV).

[71]The Greek word translated “sexual immorality” above is porneia. The KJV and NEB have “fornication.” Fornication, usually defined as sexual intercourse between an unmarried person and one of the opposite sex (whether married or unmarried), is doubtless one important meaning, but porneia represents, more broadly, any illicit sexual activity. BAGD, under πορνεία, reads: “prostitution, unchastity, fornication, of every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse.”

[72]For more on the gift of the Holy Spirit see chapter 8.

[73]As mentioned in the previous section.

[74]I have not touched on homosexual activity in this section. My concern-following Paul-has been with heterosexual deviations. It is significant that Paul never discusses homosexuality as an issue for Christians. For example, in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Paul speaks vigorously against homosexuality, but only as that which some had practiced (“such were some of you”) prior to their becoming Christians. Homosexuality obviously cannot be-as some would claim today-a “viable Christian

lifestyle."

[75]The people were at least nominal Christians (see background in vv. 18-19). EGT speaks of them as "professing Christians who allowed their liberty to degenerate into license" (in loco).

[76]Paul also speaks in Romans 16:18 about those who "do not serve the Lord Christ, but their own appetites [literally, "belly"]." Service of the Lord is given up for their own bellies-indeed, again, "their god is the belly."

[77]According to EGT, in loco, "This conformity is the last stage in salvation, as προγνω ("foreknew") is the first. The image [or "likeness"] is in import not merely spiritual but eschatological … to be conformed to His image is to share His glory as well as His holiness."

[78]See our discussion of these matters in previous chapters.

[79]G. C. Berkouwer puts it well in saying that sanctification is not "a series of devout acts and works performed by the previously justified man" (Faith and Sanctification, 21).

[80]Indeed, His sanctification was that others might be sanctified-"that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth" (continuation of John 17:19 NASB).

[81]"Sanctification is indeed God's work, for no one can sanctify but He who is Himself the Holy One" (Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith, and the Consummation, Dogmatics, 3:298).

[82]Cf. Leviticus 20:8; 21:8, 15, 23; 22:9, 16, 32; Ezekiel 20:12; 37:28. The wording varies somewhat, but it is "the LORD" each time who sanctifies.

[83]Also cf. Hebrews 13:20-21: "May the God of peace … equip you with everything good that you may do his will."

[84]Also cf. Hebrews 13:12: "Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood."

[85]Also cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:13: "God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth."

[86]Or "the Lord who is the Spirit" (Rsv; cf. NIV).

[87]Recall that these words are spoken against immoral sexual use of one's body-a heinous sin against the Holy Spirit who dwells within.

[88]The Greek word is enoikountos (see also Rom. 8:11).

[89]Significantly, in the following verse God adds: "Keep My statutes, and do them; I am the LORD who sanctifies you" (v. 8 NASB).

[90]The Greek word is hamartias, a plural. The RSV, NASB, and NEB reading of "sin" is unfortunate, since the problem for the believer is not

sin but sins (as will be discussed later).

[91]Paul writes in Romans 6:11: “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

[92]The Greek word is arnesamenoi (from arneomai-to “deny, repudiate, disown” BAGD), “renounce” (RSV, NEB).

[93]The Greek phrase is amesasthô heauton, an imperative: “Leave self behind” (NEB). The same Greek words are found in Matthew 16:24 and Mark 8:34 with the omission of “daily.” The Gospel of Luke carries Jesus’ emphasis of an ongoing activity.

[94]Simon Peter’s tragic denial of Christ with cursing and swearing, “I do not know the man” (Matt. 26:74), would never have happened if he had truly denied himself. In all Christian experience it is one or the other: deny self or deny Christ. There is no other alternative.

[95]The Greek word is thanatoute, “mortify” (KJV).

[96]The Greek word is praxeis. In the present context the connotation is clearly “evil or disgraceful deeds” (BAGD), hence “misdeeds” (NIV) or “base pursuits” (NEB).

[97]“The body” may refer to the physical body; however, more likely it refers to “the body of sin” (recall Rom. 6:6). So writes John Murray: “ The deeds [or “misdeeds”] of the body’ are those practices which the believer must put to death if he is to live” (The Epistle to the Romans, NICNT, 294). Paul, accordingly, is referring to any and all sins.

[98]Paul had just spoken of the Holy Spirit as indwelling (vv. 9-11).

[99]“That this mortification is ongoing is suggested by the present tense of thanatoute. The NASB translates, “If by the Spirit you are putting to death… .”

[100]Lest there be some misunderstanding, mortification is not infliction of pain upon oneself (though in the past mortification has often been viewed that way) or the obliteration of personality, but it is the putting to death of those evil forces that wage war against the person. Sin is like cancer in a person: it warrants destruction, even cell by cell, until the deadly disease is no more.

[101]“Mortify” (KJV); the Greek word this time is nekrosate.

[102]The NASB rendering is a poor one: “Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead.” The KJV, NIV, NEB, like RSV, translate as an imperative.

[103]The Greek phrase is ta meleta epi tes gës, literally, “the members on the

earth." This rather unusual construction relates to everything about the believer that is sinful (earthly over against heavenly-see Col. 3:1).

[104]Some of the words in a frequently recited liturgical prayer.

[105]Recall my earlier designation of this as "the ascended life"; see vol. 1, pages 393-95.

[106]As well as justification.

[107]Thus expanding the earlier suggested declaration against sin so as to include the name of Jesus Christ.

[108]This may happen not only in one's conscious life but also while dreaming in sleep. Since dreams emerge from subconscious depths, they often are the channels for sin and evil to express themselves. What appears in dreams may be suppressed in ordinary consciousness, but in dreams the dark elements become visible.

[109]A person waking from a dream and perhaps startled by the evil expressed in it may find this a God-given opportunity for mortification. The evil has gotten by the censor of consciousness; it has now exposed itself in its base nature; hence, it is ready for the slaughter!

[110]Many biblical commentators view the words in Hebrews 12:4 as having to do with martyrdom. However, in light of the preceding words in 12:1: "Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely," I believe the struggle is in relation to the power of sin. Sin that "clings closely" often may not be dislodged without a bloody struggle. According to F. F. Bruce "the agonistic language is continued, although it is warfare with sin rather than a race to be run that is now envisaged" (The Epistle to the Hebrews, NICNT, 355, n. 55).

[111]The Greek word is aischrologian, "abusive speech" (NASB).

[112]The Greek word translated in RSV as "put away" (KJV: "put off"; NASB: "put aside") is apothesthe. The NIV renders it "rid yourselves"; the NEB after translating it "lay aside" adds "have done with them!"

[113]The Greek word is apothometha (the same root as apothesthe); "lay aside" (NASB), "put aside" (NIV), "cast off" (KJV), "throw off" (NEB).

[114]Cf. also similar statements about casting off (putting away, getting rid of, etc.) in Ephesians 4:22: "Put it ["lay aside" NASB, NEB] your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life"; James 1:21: "Therefore put away ["get rid of" NIV; "away with" NEB] all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness"; 1 Peter 2:1: "So put away ["rid yourselves of" NIV] all malice and all guile and insincerity and envy and all slander."

[115]Renunciation (as previously discussed) may be the first step as the believer renounces everything in the self that evidences sin; mortification can then follow with attack on a particular sin; and finally expulsion, by which the sin is cast totally away, is the climax.

[116]The Greek word is apothemenoi, “throw off” (NIV, NEB).

[117]As we have earlier discussed.

[118]This essentially is true of every believer. We who were formerly in bondage to sin, hence slaves, “become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). In that sense, we are slaves (free ones!) of righteousness.

[119]The Greek phrase is eis hagiasmon, “for sanctification” (RSV). This properly suggests a continuing sanctification.

[120]Paul writes, a few verses later, that sanctification is a result of becoming “slaves of God” (v. 22): “Now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God [literally, “enslaved to God”], the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life.” This is actually no different from what Paul had said about being “a slave of righteousness,” since God Himself is the epitome of righteousness. To be enslaved to righteousness, in the true meaning of that word, is to be enslaved to God.

[121]See Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13.

[122]Recall also the words of James: “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22).

[123]Paul also speaks of training in 1 Timothy 4:7. He admonishes Timothy: “Train yourself in godliness.” This applies to all believers who would grow in holiness.

[124]This is not necessarily a word from the pulpit. It may be spoken by a fellow believer-e.g., as a word of wisdom or knowledge, a prophecy, or a tongue plus interpretation (see 1 Cor. 12:8-10)-and be likewise truly from God.

[125]Even Jesus “learned obedience through what he suffered” (Heb. 5:8).

[126]The Greek word is aphorontes. According to Thayer, the verb aphorao means “to turn the eyes away from other things and fix them on something.”

[127]E.g., see Matthew 4:19; Mark 1:17, 2:14; Luke 5:27; John 1:43.

[128]E.g., see Matthew 8:22; 9:9; Luke 9:59.

[129]As was discussed in the previous section on “dying to sins.”

[130]Cross-bearing does not mean the usual sicknesses and sorrows that all people suffer at some time; rather it means, as it did for Jesus, the

endurance of suffering that the world inflicts on those who truly follow Him.

[131]Paul, in another connection, speaks of the believer being “a slave of Christ” (1 Cor. 7:22). We may recall his similar words about being “slaves to God” (Rom. 6:22).

[132]I am not sure of the source of this expression.

[133]The words of Adolf Koberle in The Quest for Holiness are most apropos: “For the formation of the image of God within us, for the renewing of our minds … for the control of our emotions, for the determination of the manner and form of our conduct, the contemplation of the teaching, praying, healing, suffering Savior as he is portrayed in Scripture is indispensable” (158).

[134]The Greek word is logizesthe; “think (about), consider, ponder, let one’s mind dwell on” (BAGD).

[135]The believer already essentially has “the mind of Christ” (“We have the mind of Christ” [1 Cor. 2:16]). However, the believer’s mind needs continuing conformation to Christ, as do all other areas of his being. We may recall how deeply Paul yearns for this full formation in regard to the Galatians: “I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you” (4:19).

[136]The Greek word is ekenosen, “emptied himself” (RSV, NASB).

[137]As in the NASB and NIV. The Greek word phroneite does not so much mean have “this mind” (above) as “be thus minded” (BAGD). It is the same word used in Colossians 3:2, there translated “set your minds.” In Philippians 2:5 “attitude”-understood perhaps as a “set attitude”-may be the best translation.

[138]The Greek word is kenodoxian, “vainglory” (KJV).

[139]The Greek word is an imperative: endysasthe, “clothe yourselves with” (NIV).

[140]I much appreciate the words of James H. McConkey in his little book, *The Three-Fold Secret of the Holy Spirit*: “These three words, LOOKING TO Jesus, picture perfectly the posture of the soul that is abiding in Christ. The moon keeps looking to the sun, for every gleam of her reflected radiance; the branch keeps looking to the vine, for every whit of its life and fruitage; the drinking fountain keeps looking to the supplying reservoir, for every drop of water it is to pour out to its thirsting visitors; the arc light keeps looking to the great dynamo, for every ray of the stream of light with which it floods the midnight darkness. Even so the

child of God … must keep looking to Jesus, until such abiding in faith becomes the constant attitude of his soul" (p. 106).

[141]The Greek word is menon, "abides" (RSV, NASB, KJV).

[142]The Greek word is hamartanei. This present tense refers to a "continuance in sin" (EGT, in loco). See previous rio te 29. The KJV, "sinneth not," and RSV and NASB, "NO one who abides in him sins," are misleading translations.

[143]The Greek word is stoichomen. The NIV translates thus, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

[144]The Greek word is grammatos, literally, "a letter" (however, "letter" clearly means the written code, or law, or the Old Covenant).

[145]The Greek word is kainoteti, literally, "newness."

[146]Paul could speak of himself prior to his conversion "as to righteousness under the law blameless" (Phil. 3:6), but it was by no means a righteousness of the heart.

[147]According to Paul, the law that says, "You shall not covet," because of sin in himself, "proved to be death" to him (Rom. 7:7, 10). Paul later declares about his new status in Christ, "There is therefore now no condemnation …" (Rom. 8:1).

[148]Herman Ridderbos writes in reference to Galatians 5:22-25: "The law is not against those who walk by the Spirit because in principle they are fulfilling the law" (Commentary on Galatians, NICNT, 208).

[149]Indeed, the very fruit of the Spirit represents the character of Christ being formed in the life of the believer. F. F. Bruce writes, "Living by the Spirit is the root; walking by the Spirit is the fruit, and that fruit is nothing less than the practical reproduction of the character (and therefore the conduct) of Christ in the lives of his people" (Commentary on Galatians, NIGTC, 257).

[150]Relevant here may be the earlier-mentioned NIV translation of Galatians 5:25: "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." To this may be added the NEB rendition: "If the Spirit is the source of our life, let the Spirit also direct our course."

[151]The Greek word is dikaioma. The NIV has "righteous requirements."

[152]I speak here particularly of the moral law as expressed in the Ten Commandments and as further declared in Christ's teachings (especially the Sermon on the Mount).

[153],53The Greek word is histanomen. The NEB translates the last sentence

above thus: “By no means: we are placing law itself on a firmer footing.”

[154]I am freely paraphrasing Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:22, 28, 39, 44.

[155]Cf. Romans 13:10: “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”

5
Perseverance

In this chapter we will consider the matter of perseverance in the Christian life. Having reflected on matters relating to the occurrence of salvation,[1] our concern here will be with the subject of continuation in salvation throughout life.

I. PRELIMINARY

A. General Usage

The word “perseverance” may be generally defined as persistence in a state, a course of action, or undertaking often in spite of difficulties, contrary influences, or opposition. Perseverance accordingly particularly signifies steadfastness and endurance.

Regarding steadfastness in the Christian life, Paul speaks of the need to “keep alert with all perseverance”[2] (Eph. 6:18). He also encourages the Colossians to persevere in prayer: “Continue steadfastly in prayer” (Col. 4:2).[3] Of the early Christians it was said that “they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42 KJV). The apostles also said of themselves: “We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). These are, variously, instances of perseverance in Christian life and ministry.

There is similarly the New Testament note of endurance. In the Book of Hebrews this challenge is given: “Let us run with endurance[4] the race that is set before us” (12:1 NASB). Also, “by your endurance you will gain your lives” (Luke 21:19); “suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character” (Rom. 5:3–4); “here is a call for the endurance of the saints” (Rev. 14:12). The perseverance (or endurance) of “the saints” lies at the heart of victorious Christian living.

B. Special Usage

The word “perseverance” also has a more technical usage, namely, its relation to salvation. Here the concern is not the Christian life in general with the call for steadfastness and endurance, but the arena of salvation. Now that salvation has been received through faith in Jesus Christ, what is the *basis* for persisting therein throughout life, what are the *conditions* of this persistence, and what *conclusions* may be drawn? Is it possible for a person to forfeit his salvation?

Thus we will be focusing on the matter of *persistence in salvation.* The question, in traditional theological language, is that of “the perseverance of the saints.” Since all Christians are saints,[5] the concern is not for some special—presumably higher—category of Christians, but relates to all believers. We turn now to the consideration of their perseverance, or persistence, in salvation unto the end of life and the glory that lies beyond.

II. BASIS

The basis, or ground, of perseverance lies in the activity of the Triune God. He has set everything in motion, and He is the sustainer. It is God’s work and activity that is the basis of persistence in salvation.

A. God the Father

1. His Will and Purpose

First, it is God's intention that all who truly come to Christ shall remain to the end. Jesus Himself declared, "This is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day" (John 6:39). Paul also spoke of his conviction: "I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at[6] the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). It is God's intention that all who belong to Christ, as well as their work, remain and be fulfilled at the end.

2. His Power

What God wills and purposes He is able to fulfill. We turn immediately to the stirring climax in the letter of Jude: "Now to him who is able to keep you from falling[7] and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing" (v. 24). Our God is able; He has the power to do this.

Another relevant text is 1 Peter 1:5, where the apostle speaks of those "who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Again, it is a matter of God's power that undergirds the salvation to be concluded at the end. The almighty power of God stands guard against every obstacle or enemy that would seek to prevent the Christian from arriving at the ultimate goal.

Our God is able—totally.

3. His Faithfulness

The faithfulness of God also lies behind the perseverance of the believer. Paul writes, "[He] will strengthen[8] you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:8–9). We do not strengthen ourselves; it is

God who undergirds and strengthens us. Moreover, in 2 Timothy Paul writes: “If we are faithless, he remains faithful” (2:13). God’s faithfulness never wavers whatever may be our faithlessness. One other Scripture that is apropos is set against the background of sanctification. In the preceding chapter we noted that Paul wrote, “May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly.” And he immediately added, “And may your spirit and soul and body be kept[9] sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it” (1 Thess. 5:23–24). God in His faithfulness will strengthen and keep to the end.

B. God the Son

1. His Safeguarding

In one of His addresses to a critical audience of Jews, Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” Then He added, “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand”[10] (John 10:27–28). Similarly, Jesus later said in His prayer to the Father: “While I was with them, I kept them in thy name, which thou hast given me; I have guarded them, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition” (John 17:12). Jesus never fails to safeguard and to safekeep those who belong to him.

2. His Continued Intercession

I have earlier spoken of the high priestly role of the Lord Jesus for His people: “He always lives to make intercession for them.” Prior to these words the Scripture reads: “He holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:24–25). Jesus, exalted at the right hand of the Father and constantly interceding for those who come to Him, is able to save both now and forever. A clear-cut example of Jesus’ intercession to the Father while on earth is found in these words: “Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me” (John 17:11). This is surely the kind of intercessory prayer that the exalted Lord Jesus never ceases to offer at the throne of God.

3. His Unity With Us

Since through faith we have been united with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection (“If we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with[11] him in a resurrection like his” [Rom. 6:5]), this very

union is a strong basis for the continuing of salvation. In another text Paul writes, “You have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3); this means death to the old self and life in this unity with Him. We are so incorporated into Christ as to give a solid ground for persisting to the end.

C. God the Holy Spirit

1. His Abiding Presence

In one of His discourses about the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, “I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor,[12] to be with you for ever” (John 14:16). The fact of the presence of the Holy Spirit “forever” provides a dynamic and continuing basis for enduring salvation.

2. His Sealing

Paul writes to the Ephesians of being “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, [who] is the guarantee[13] of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it” (1:13–14). The sealing by the Spirit, occurring in those who believe in Christ, is the guarantee of their future inheritance. This guarantee, truly a “gilt-edged” basis for the inheritance to come, would insure continuance in salvation until the goal beyond death is reached.

3. His New Life

Finally, through the Holy Spirit we have been “born anew” (John 3:3, 7). By this new birth we have “eternal life” (John 3:16). Moreover, through the Holy Spirit dwelling in us—“he dwells with you, and will be in you” (John 14:17)—the life of God verily is within our life. Hence, born anew to eternal life and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the believer is on firm ground for a life that will not end at death.

From what has been said in the preceding paragraphs, it is apparent that the Triune God provides in multiple ways the solid basis for persistence in salvation. From the background of the divine action, perseverance takes on the note of preservation:[14] God’s preservation of those who belong to Him. Perseverance, accordingly, like other areas of salvation and Christian faith (calling, regeneration, justification, and sanctification) is primarily a work of God.

III. CONDITIONS

Although God Himself has done—and continues to do—everything by way of sustaining the believer to the end, this does not eliminate certain human conditions. Although God's grace is unconditional, there is no unconditional persistence in salvation.[15] A good preparatory warning is that of Paul: "Let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

We turn now to a number of scriptural conditions. Some of these overlap; however, I will treat them separately so as to note the variety of biblical statements regarding conditions.

A. Our Abiding

One of the first requirements is that of abiding or staying close. In his first epistle John writes: “If what you heard from the beginning abides[16] in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he has promised us, eternal life” (2:24–25). The promise of eternal life made by God is sure. But abiding in the truth of the gospel, and thereby in Christ and the Father, is necessary for that life to be fulfilled. In Hebrews there is another passage that emphasizes the need for abiding, staying close: “We must pay the closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it…. How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” (2:1, 3). In both of these cases abiding is a matter of remaining in what has been “heard,” and that means for us today especially abiding in the words of Scripture.

But also, and of even greater importance, there is the call to abide in Christ Himself. After Jesus gave this message, “You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you” (thus the word of salvation), He said, “Abide in me, and I in you” (John 15:3–4). This likewise includes abiding in His words: “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you” (v. 7). The focus unmistakably is on Christ personally and the call to abide in Him.[17]

The result of failure to abide in Christ is a tragic one indeed: “If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown in the fire and burned” (John 15:6). Such a one who does not abide is “cast forth,” literally, is “cast outside,”[18] and his future is without hope.

The first condition of persisting in salvation is that of abiding, of staying close to the source, whether this be understood as the word heard and read or the Word who is Christ Himself.

B. Our Continuing

Closely related to the matter of abiding is that of continuing, of remaining steadfast. God has begun the work of salvation in us; now we are to continue in it. This is necessary if we are to arrive at the final goal.

One of the great passages on salvation is Colossians 1:21–22, where Paul says: “And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him.” Reconciliation has occurred, and its goal is the final presentation before Christ. There is, however, a proviso in the words that immediately follow: “Provided that you continue[19] in the faith,[20] stable and steadfast, not shifting from[21] the hope of the gospel which you heard” (v. 23). A condition is clearly included: “provided that [literally, “if indeed”] you continue … .” If we shift, that is move away from the faith and hope that is in the gospel, then we will not be present before the Lord.

In another place Paul speaks of how God in His kindness has granted the Gentiles salvation. The Jews would not listen, but “through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles” (Rom. 11:11). This, says Paul, as he writes the Gentile Romans, is “God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness.” Then Paul immediately adds, “Otherwise you too will be cut off” (11:22). “Salvation has come,” “God’s kindness” is there, but by failure to continue, the end is tragic: such persons are “cut off.”

Paul also speaks of continuance in his words to Timothy: “Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to[22] that, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim.

4:16). Only by continuance is there persistence in salvation.

Hence, there is need for continuing, holding fast, if we are to attain the ultimate goal. God in His great love and kindness has wrought our salvation; He has reconciled us to Himself and intends to present us holy and blameless in heaven—*provided that … .*

C. Our Enduring

We take a further step in noting also the importance of enduring, or holding on. The moment of salvation to the end of life may cover many days and years—a shorter or longer time. Ordinarily there are many ups and downs. Through it all, whatever may happen, we are called on to endure.

In a memorable passage Paul writes of his concern for God's "elect": "I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which in Christ Jesus goes with eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:10). He then quotes from an early Christian hymn: "'If we have died with him, we shall also live with him; if we endure,[23] we shall also reign with him'" (vv. 11–12). The reigning "with him" points to the future kingdom, and this will occur "if we endure." Paul immediately adds, "If we deny him, he also will deny us." If we deny Him, Christ at the end will not recognize or claim us. Thus endurance—to the end—is the condition of the final salvation of God's elect.

The Book of Hebrews strikes a similar note in a passage that recounts many sufferings the readers have gone through—public abuse, plundering of their possessions, and the like. Then the writer adds, "Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.

For you have need of endurance, so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised" (10:35–36). The promise refers to what was earlier mentioned—"a better possession and an abiding one" (v. 34)—in other words, life in the world beyond. If we fail to endure, the end is quite different. The Lord adds these words: "For yet a little while and the coming one shall come and shall not tarry; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him" (vv. 37–38).[24] This is shrinking back "to destruction" (v. 39 NASB)—a tragic end after so great a beginning.

One further word may be mentioned—and this from the mouth of Jesus Himself: "He who endures to the end will be saved" (Matt. 24:13). While the text here does not necessarily refer to salvation in terms of eternal life (the context concerns tribulation and persecution), nonetheless, since the immediately preceding words are "most men's love will grow cold" (v. 12), there is a strong suggestion of reference to personal salvation.

To summarize, endurance is clearly called for in order to obtain the future salvation, to reign with Christ, to secure the better possession. Truly—in this larger sense—"he who endures to the end will be saved."

D. Our Firmness

It is also important to make firm, or confirm, what has been given us in Jesus Christ. In Hebrews we read, "For we share[25] in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end" (3:14). In other words, those who share in Christ both now and in the future are those whose "first confidence" is never lost but rather is held firm to the very end.

A somewhat similar statement is found in 2 Peter: "Brethren, be the more zealous to confirm[26] your call and election, for if you do this you will never fall; so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (1:10–11).

It is particularly significant to note the need for confirming, or making firm one's "call and election." This clearly implies that calling and election (the background of calling)[27] do not guarantee continuance; rather, this only occurs through our making this firm and thereby having an abundant entrance into God's eternal kingdom.

As to how this "making firm" is to be done, Peter gives a list of qualities of character to be developed. He speaks of supplementing faith in a number of ways: "Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue … knowledge … self-control … steadfastness … godliness … brotherly affection … love" (1:5–7). Faith is clearly basic. But as these qualities develop and abound, the knowledge of Christ is intensified (1:8), and they make for a confirming of one's call and election.

Further, in this second letter Peter speaks of the tragic situation of those who do just the opposite, some becoming false prophets and false teachers, "denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction" (2:1). There are some whose final condition turns out to be worse than their first: "For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overpowered, the last state has become worse for them than the first" (2:20). Peter adds sadly, "For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back" (2:21). For the true believer, who knows the Lord and Savior, to become entangled again in worldly defilements is far worse than never to have known Him at all. Could there possibly be a stronger warning for the Christian than this: to guard against that worldly defilement wherein one's last state is worse than his first?

How important it is—to return to Peter's earlier words—to confirm, make firm, to firm up, our call and election. For this we should be zealous. In so doing, we shall never fall.

E. Our Faithfulness

Finally, it is necessary that we remain faithful to the end. We have already observed God's faithfulness; now we must hear the call for our faithfulness, our remaining in faith and belief. The words of Christ in the Book of Revelation to the church in Smyrna (and accordingly to all believers) stand out: "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (2:10). Our faithfulness, all the way, is climaxed with the award of heaven's crown. The importance of this is shown by earlier words of Christ to the church in Ephesus: "I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place" (2:4–5). When faithfulness gives way to abandonment, the end is *removal*—with all that the word suggests—unless there is repentance and return.

Another strong warning about remaining in faith is found in Hebrews: "Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away[28] from the living God" (3:12). This evil, unbelieving heart is one that has become "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (3:13), of which the parallel is Israel in the Old Testament (3:7–11). Such a heart has not remained faithful, but has allowed unbelief gradually to come in.

How seriously the situation can deteriorate is further shown in Hebrews 6:4–8. For here the picture is of a full-orbed faith that gives way to apostasy. The Scripture reads, "It is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy,[29] since they crucify again[30] the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt.[31] For land which has drunk the rain that often falls upon it, and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed; its end is to be burned." This, indeed, is a tragic picture of persons who have had a comprehensive Christian experience—enlightenment,[32] tasting the heavenly gift,[33] becoming partakers[34] of the Holy Spirit, the powers of the age to come[35] —and then commit apostasy. It actually signifies the crucifying of Christ again "on their own account," the holding Him up to contempt. The result

can be none other than a curse near at hand upon all such—and the end: burning.

All of this demonstrates that even the fullest Christian experience can end in tragic loss. However, to guard against it, the writer of Hebrews, after expressing his persuasion that this will not apply to his readers (because of their "work and the love … in serving the saints" [v. 10]), gives a critical prescription: "We desire each one of you to show the same earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (vv. 11–12). Diligence and earnestness must mark our pilgrimage of faith.

In regard to these five conditions relating to persistence in salvation—our abiding, continuing, enduring, firmness, and faithfulness—we may summarize by saying that what is essential throughout is *faith.* Another relevant passage of Scripture (earlier noted in part) is found in 1 Peter where the apostle first speaks of how "by his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope … and to an inheritance … kept in heaven for you." Then he adds, "… who by God's power are guarded[36] through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1:3–5). We are "guarded through faith"; this is the channel through which God's work of preservation is carried forward.

Thus it is possible to say that the various conditions mentioned are all aspects of faith in operation. Faithfulness is obviously just that, but it is also true of the other qualities. Hence, an abiding, continuing, enduring, firm faith is called for. These are not conditions beyond faith, but are the very dynamics of a living and vital faith in Jesus Christ.

IV. RELATIONSHIP

From all that has been said about basis and conditions in perseverance, there is an unmistakable inner relationship. The basis in the Triune God is exceedingly strong, so much so as perhaps to suggest unconditional preservation. But also there can be no question that the Scriptures also point again and again to the existence of a human side. How are we to relate the two aspects?

Let us observe once more the divine basis and seek to relate it to the human condition. We shall do this in a number of summary statements.

A. God the Father and Believers

God's will, power, and faithfulness are ever present to undergird Christian life and salvation, but He operates through the faith[37] of those who have come to Him. God's intention is always affirmative, to "lose nothing," to "bring to completion"; His power to "keep from falling" is unlimited; His faithfulness to "strengthen to the end" never ceases. But it all operates *through* the one who believes.

For example, the passage in John's Gospel emphasizing the Father's will that the Son should "lose nothing" of all that the Father had given Him (6:39) is set in the context of "he who believes in me" (6:35). Believing, by which one enters upon salvation, is not a once-for-all accomplishment; rather it is a continuing reality. Believing is abiding, continuing, holding fast; it is of such a person that Scripture speaks. God intends that the Son should lose none who have come to salvation (and He will undergird them all the way), but if the believing *through which God acts* should discontinue, there can be no continuing salvation.

Again, God's faithfulness, by which He will "strengthen to the end," so that even "if we are faithless he remains faithful," does not mean that our faithlessness is of little importance. Indeed, quite the opposite, for the immediately preceding words are "if we deny him, he will also deny us." God's faithfulness operates through our faithfulness (recall the earlier discussion of faithfulness as a human condition), and our faithfulness is nothing other than our continuing in faith.[38]

B. Jesus Christ and Believers

Christ's safeguarding, interceding, and unity with us are very strong factors in the maintenance of our salvation, but again we must remain in faith.

One of the texts quoted that might seem particularly to affirm an unconditional preservation of the Christian has the words, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand." It is important again to observe the context, for the immediately preceding words are "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27–28). The word "follow," by definition, means to continue in action, to come after, and keep coming after. It is *such* persons who can never perish, and who cannot be "snatched" out of Christ's hand. Neither the world nor the devil nor all principalities and powers together can break a person loose from the Lord's firm grasp and safekeeping. However, if we fail to follow, if we drop out somewhere along the line, we do what no other power can possibly do to us: we remove ourselves from Christ's protection and care—and the results are tragic indeed.[39] Thus, following is simply another way to speak about abiding: to follow Christ is to abide in Christ, and (as earlier quoted) "if a man does not abide in [Him], he is cast forth as a branch … thrown into the fire and burned." To follow and to abide are essential—else we too shall perish.

All of this applies likewise in Scriptures that speak of our unity and incorporation with Christ. Upon first reflection it might seem impossible for such a unity with Christ in His death and resurrection ever to be broken. Surely this is a solid basis for enduring salvation. Nevertheless, once again we must recognize that however great His self-giving to us, it is only through continuing faith that the connection is maintained. Recall that Paul speaks of our being grafted into Christ, hence into a living unity with Him. But then he adds, "You stand fast only through faith" (Rom. 11:20). Following that, he makes the statement about continuation: "else you too will be cut off." Thus a unity with Christ, no matter how dynamic and close, is no guarantee of persevering forever.

Also, it is true that Christ ever makes intercession for His own, and thus by His prayers to the Father undergirds our continuing salvation; hence, "he is able for all time to save." But this does not prohibit our departure from Him. Nothing can overcome us if we continue to look to Him in trust, for His prayers are mighty indeed. But if we give access to Satan (as did Judas), then we can be carried away.

C. The Holy Spirit and Believers

The Holy Spirit's abiding presence, sealing, and new life are also powerful factors in the persistence of salvation. Once again, however, we must note the human situation.

Truly the Holy Spirit has been given to be with us forever. This very presence of God in the Spirit makes for a tremendous force in our bearing witness to Christ, in doing His work, and confronting every circumstance of life. Nonetheless, the New Testament speaks (as we have seen) of those who, though they have become "sharers of the Holy Spirit," do fall away. Thus the presence of the Spirit may dim. Paul warned the Thessalonians, "Do not quench[40] the Spirit" (1 Thess. 5:19). This implies that the Holy Spirit may be rendered ineffective in a person's life by that person's own actions; hence, the Spirit ceases to be an operative force. "Sharing" is no more.

On the matter of the sealing with the Spirit, our "pledge" or "earnest" of the coming inheritance, it is not impossible to forfeit that pledge. For example, in a business contractual relationship, even though "earnest money" has been given, failure to carry out the terms of the agreement will nullify the contract. Paul writes that "in him [Christ] you … were sealed." If we do not remain "in Christ" (by failing to abide, continue, etc.), the sealing is voided, and there is no longer any pledge of a future inheritance.

Finally, in regard to being "born anew" by the Holy Spirit to eternal life, it is important to recognize that this life is related to the operation of faith. Whoever "believes" has "eternal life" (John 3:16), and "believing" signifies continuation.[41] This is apparent from the words of Jesus in John 8:51—"If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." "Keeping" is not a matter of a moment, but an ongoing process. So unless there is "keeping," one will see death. This is the same as a failure to abide in Christ and His words, which, Jesus later says, results in being "cast forth" (John 15:6). There is no longer life, but death. How important it is, therefore, to realize that while eternal life is God's free gift through faith in Jesus Christ, we must continue to believe. Hebrews, as has been noted, warns against there being "in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God," thus into death. The forsaking of eternal life through unbelief *can* happen.[42] How much more are we called on to remain firm in faith as the final day draws near!

V. CONCLUSIONS

A. The Security of Salvation

Because of all that God is, has done, and continues to do, the salvation of believers is in secure hands. It is not that we have reached out to God and found Him, but that God has reached out and found us. It is not that we hold on to God, but that God holds on to us. Thus the security of believers rests in both God's prevenient and sustaining grace.

Let this be emphasized still more. We can rest assured in the knowledge that it is God's desire that none should ever again be lost. It is not a matter of indifference but of vast importance. He who loved us so much as to send His only Son for our salvation at infinite cost has no other concern than to preserve us to the end. Moreover, there is no limit on His ability and power to accomplish this or on His continuing faithfulness. Also, our Lord Jesus Christ constantly watches over us and intercedes for us. There is a oneness between Him and us that is very personal and real. Certainly, He who bore our transgressions, died for us, and brought us to life, never ceases to uphold us in great love and compassion. Further, the presence of the Holy Spirit, His inward sealing, and bringing of new life makes for a rich and deep salvation. Also, the Holy Spirit is the constant inward intercessor for all who belong to God.[43] The Triune God-Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—*is* the security of our salvation!

Hence, there is no way of falling out of God's love and care and concern. *Grace is unconditional*. This means that God perseveres, whatever man may do, in the undergirding and sustaining of all who truly believe. God never fails. The security of salvation rests—let it be repeated—not in ourselves, but in Him.

Further, believers may, and often do, sin against God, even grievously. But whenever they turn to God in genuine repentance, there is abundant forgiveness.[44] Truly, "if we [believers] confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Thus the fear sometimes expressed that one may have lost his salvation because of a particular sin is groundless. What is needed is not to be "saved again" (salvation can happen only once)[45] but to seek God's forgiveness. If one were to look to himself in his sinful plight, all salvation might seem to have been forfeited. But God, not we ourselves, is our security!

Most important in this matter is the constant reminder that our total security is in God. When we focus on ourselves—the ups and downs of our continuing Christian existence—we may be overwhelmed by a sense of our own inadequacy

and sinfulness. Indeed, the more we grow in holiness, the more we become aware of our sinfulness. There may even come times of crying out in despair with the haunting fear that perhaps we have never really known salvation or have now lost it: “Woe is me; for I am undone!” In such a dark situation as this, we need all the more to be reminded that our salvation is in God, not ourselves. For “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins… .”

We must then take a strong stand against any idea of the possible recurrence of salvation. There simply is no “sliding in and out” of salvation: no first, second, third conversion, and so on. Unfortunately, in some quarters there are those who will go forward at every altar call to “get saved again.” This may even stem from an exaggerated “saved one minute, lost the next” viewpoint. However, such behavior, if there has been prior salvation, is an offense against the Triune God. What God does He does well, and there can be no possibility or need of repetition. It may be the diabolical ploy of Satan who would delight to convince us that we are no longer God’s children; or it could instead be the impurity of the flesh that still resists the Spirit. But whatever the case, if we turn to God in true repentance and faith, there is abundant forgiveness. Surely we need forgiveness over and over again, but not repeated salvation.

Our security is not in ourselves, but in God. Moreover, there is no earthly security that can begin to compare with it. “Salvation belongs to our God” (Rev. 7:10), and we are totally secure in Him.

B. The Possibility of Apostasy

But because of the fact that the salvation of God operates through faith—a faith that is living—the forsaking of that faith can lead to apostasy. By failing to abide in Christ, to continue in Him and His word, to persevere in the midst of worldly trial or temptation, to make faith firm and strengthen it—thereby allowing unbelief to enter—believers may fall away from God. Thereby they may tragically forfeit their salvation.

Here we may recall the previously quoted warning; "Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away [apostatize][46] from the living God" (Heb. 3:12). "Brethren" are here addressed; therefore it is believers who are warned against the development of "an evil heart of unbelief"[47] that leads to falling away, to apostasy from the living God. This warning is surely meant for all Christians, "lest there be in any" of us such evil unbelief and resulting apostasy.[48]

We may also note another Scripture passage that refers directly to apostasy "in later times" and observe again how the reason for this is failure in faith. "In later times some will depart from [apostatize][49] the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). This is no light matter, no suggestion of a temporary or partial falling away: this is apostasy[50] —the departure from and the abandonment of faith. Further, it is an urgent warning to those "in later times"—doubtless including, perhaps even climactically, the times in which we live. Truly many "deceiving spirits and things taught by demons" (NIV) are abroad in the world so that even believers are being led astray. Hence, peculiarly in our time we need to hear and heed the grim warning of apostasy.

Such apostasy can occur simply by "drifting away." Here we may recall the statement, earlier quoted, "We must pay the closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it," followed by the question "How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" Thus, there is not only a falling away from the living God and from the faith, but also—and included in that—a falling away from salvation. Again we have a warning, in this case of gradual departure, concerning the terrible dangers of neglecting salvation and so leaving it behind.

In addition to a situation of gradual departure from faith and salvation, there is also the real possibility of a particular "sin unto death" that may be committed

by a believer. In the words of 1 John: “If any one sees his brother committing a sin not leading to [literally, “unto”][51] death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to [“unto”] death. There is a sin leading to [“unto”] death; I do not say that he should make request for this” (5:16 NASB).

The nature of this “sin unto death”—or “mortal sin” (RSV)—is not specified. It may be the sin (1 John 4:1–3) of succumbing to the “false prophets” who deny “that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh” (such denial being “the spirit of antichrist”), and thereby of abjuring one’s faith. To do so is to inflict a mortal wound on one’s spiritual nature: there can be no healing. Possibly it is the same as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Jesus warned, “Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin—for they [the scribes] had said, “He has an unclean spirit’” (Mark 3:28–30). Although this unforgivable sin is spoken of in connection with the scribes, “religious” people, it clearly has a wider reference (“whoever blasphemes”) and this could include Christian believers as well. Deliberately to call what is holy “unclean” or of the devil, to declare as evil what is of the Lord, is to so capitulate to Satan and the kingdom of darkness that there is no hope: it is an “eternal sin.” Such a person has passed the point of no return. Whether John is referring to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, the abjuring of Christ, or something else, it is unmistakable that “sin unto death”—“mortal sin”—is that committed by a believer—a “brother.”

Moreover, while it is a particular sin, there may well be a long build-up before it is committed. Nonetheless, when it occurs there is a climactic suddenness, and a clear recognition of it by the faithful believer. John urges further that one is not even to “make request for” such a person. God will not “give life” to one so hardened; there is no forgiveness. For this is apostasy—irrevocable and eternal.

It is imperative to stress that the biblical picture of what awaits the apostate is indeed a grim one. We have already observed such declarations as “The last state has become worse than the first,” “my [God’s] soul has no pleasure in him,” and that one who does not abide in Christ will like a branch be “cut off,” “thrown into the fire and burned.” Also the awesome statement “Vengeance is mine, I will repay” (Heb. 10:30) is spoken not to the unbelieving sinner, but to the apostate believer. The fires of eternal judgment, however much they may burn for the one who has refused Christ in the first place, are depicted as even more furious for one who has spurned the Christ in whom he has believed and the Holy Spirit through whom he has received grace.

We must therefore warn against a false sense of security. Truly the security of

our salvation is in God, not in ourselves (as we have discussed). But this is not to be interpreted to mean that through our own faithlessness we may not forfeit it. Even in the Old Testament the prophetic word warns, "The LORD is with you, while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you" (2 Chron. 15:2). These words spoken to people in the Old Covenant are much more poignantly true for us in the New: *because we have been given so much more*. Hence any claim to security by virtue of the great salvation we have in Christ without regard to the need for continuing faith is totally mistaken and possibly tragic in its results.[52] We need to hear the word again and again, "How shall *we* escape if *we* neglect such a great salvation?"

This means, accordingly, that although perseverance in salvation is surely grounded in who God is and what He has done (including the establishment of the new covenant), there is no assured continuance in salvation: apostasy is a real possibility. This is more than just a temporary "backsliding," a temporary falling away: it is total and final.[53] This is by no means God's wish, for, as earlier recounted, His power and faithfulness, Christ's safeguarding and intercession, and the Holy Spirit's presence and sealing are ever present to undergird the believer. However, there must also be continuing faith—with all that that means in terms of abiding, enduring, continuing—or there can be a gradual or sudden falling away: apostasy. A doctrine of "perseverance of the saints" that does not affirm its occurrence through faith[54] is foreign to Scripture, a serious theological misunderstanding, and a liability to Christian existence.

Another word needs to be added. It is sometimes said that apostasy refers only to those who are not true believers.[55] If persons fall away, this shows that they were not believers in the first place. The biblical text frequently quoted is 1 John 2:19—"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us." However, John is here referring to unbelievers—indeed "antichrists"[56] who have been in the Christian fellowship but who do not in faith truly belong, and who by their defection exhibit this. This, we may add, is by no means limited to John's time. There are many in the church today who are not genuinely believers; some have manifested their infidelity by leaving and even blatantly denying the Christian faith.[57] But as diabolical as this is, it is not apostasy, for they—no more than the *diabolos* (the devil)—were ever actually believers. Apostasy can only mean departure from the faith.

Also, the claim is similarly made by some persons that all the references in Scripture (especially in Hebrews) to those who turn aside describe persons who have not actually received salvation. For example, in Hebrews 6 it is sometimes

held that such persons have been intellectually "enlightened" but not "spiritually," that they have only "tasted" salvation but not received, and so on. But on the basis of our earlier discussion of this and other like passages, it is apparent that this is a serious misreading. Often such interpretation is due to the importing of a theological perspective that leads to a false interpretation.[58]

A few other comments are in order. One of the mistakes made by those who affirm the invariable continuance of salvation is the viewing of salvation too much as a "state." From this perspective, to be saved is to enter into "a state of grace."[59] However true it is that one moves into a new realm—whether it is called the kingdom of God, eternal life, or other like expression—the heart of the matter is the establishment of a new relationship with God. Prior to salvation, one was "without God" or "against God," cut off from His presence. Now through Jesus Christ reconciliation—" at-one-ment with God"—has occurred. Moreover, the Holy Spirit, who becomes present, is not merely some force or energy but God Himself in a new and intimate relationship. Hence, if a person begins to "drift away," it is not from some static condition or "state" but *from a Person.* It is a personal relationship that thereby is betrayed, broken, forfeited; this is the tragic meaning of apostasy. It is not so much giving up something, even so marvelous as salvation, but the forsaking of a Person. Surely through such an action salvation too is forfeited. But the critical matter is the severing of a relationship with the personal God.

Another comment: all that has been said about the possibility of apostasy is contrary to the expression, sometimes heard, of "once saved, always saved." Salvation, to be sure, is once and for all: there can no more be repetition of it than the once-and-for-all act of redemption through Christ. However, the "onceness" of salvation does not mean its necessary continuance. God surely undergirds it, but since salvation is *both received and continued in faith*, it is also a matter of our faithfulness to the end. To one who has "kept the faith" as Paul did, truly there is "laid up … the crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:7–8). So will we likewise be saved in the age to come.

Finally, what has been stated in the preceding paragraphs about the possibility of apostasy is not meant to give it the primary place. The first fact—and glorious indeed—is that our security is in God; that our salvation is based on the Triune God; that it is God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—who has made salvation possible for us, and who daily sustains us by His grace. It is a *great* salvation indeed! However, just because it is so great, the New Testament writers are also concerned to warn us of the tragedy of its possible loss.

One senses in all the biblical warnings a compassionate note of hope that none

of the dire results should befall believers. For example, at the conclusion of the passage containing warnings regarding those who “commit apostasy” and “crucify the Son of God on their own account” with the result that their “end is to be burned,” the writer adds, “But, beloved, we are convinced[60] of better things concerning you” (Heb. 6:9 NASB). Such a conviction, indeed such a hope, set against the background of unmistakable warning is the positive witness of the Christian faith.

C. The Christian Pilgrimage

It would be fitting to close this discussion of perseverance by observing the nature and spirit of what it means to persevere in salvation. We are here concerned, finally, with the Christian pilgrimage from the time of its beginning until its culmination in glory. I will summarize by saying three things.

First, Christian believers are ever to move forward, rejoicing in their great salvation. We need have no feeling of insecurity or anxiety about it, knowing that God Himself is the Author. There is nothing in all the world more firmly based than the salvation a believer has received. Moreover, we know that God's attitude is that of desiring only good for us and never ill. Since God also delights to forgive, when we commit sin we need not hesitate to turn to Him in sincere confession. He will surely cleanse us from all unrighteousness and establish our way. Thus we may every day "with joy … draw water from the wells of salvation" (Isa. 12:3).

Let it be said vigorously: God is not "spying" on us, at every moment watching to see if we have made some mistake for which He can justifiably annul our salvation. Nor is He a neutral figure with the attitude that it makes little or no difference to Him whether we "make it" or not. God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is *totally for us*, and therefore He is with us every step of our journey. He made us the crown of His creation; He redeemed us at infinite cost and therefore yearns over us with immeasurable love and compassion. Accordingly, He will do everything possible to guard us in our pilgrimage until we arrive in glory.

Second, Christian believers are called upon to pay serious heed to the New Testament warnings. These are declared not to create fear and anxiety about God's attitude toward us or to question the genuineness of our salvation, but they are God's own earnest counsel not to neglect what He has given to us. We are forcefully warned that apostasy is possible and that its very occurrence makes for a far worse condition than that prior to salvation. To turn from God who *created* us (which all persons have done from the beginning) brings sin and judgment, but through faith there may be salvation. To turn from the God who *redeemed* us—that is, to commit apostasy—can only bring destruction. God does not desire it: He will remain faithful to the end. But ultimately if we deny Him, He will also deny us; if we do not abide in Christ, we will be cut off.

Hence, we are called upon earnestly *not* to neglect this great salvation. In all

the world no other neglect with its possible tragic consequences can compare with it. Such neglect may begin by failures now and then to be faithful in prayer and God's word, by gradually forsaking the assembling of God's people together,[61] by more and more allowing "the defilements of the world" to crowd in, and on and on until the apostasy is complete. Thus Christians are called upon to heed the warnings and also to seriously warn brethren (as, for example, the Book of Hebrews does over and over again) not to take steps that can finally lead to that apostasy from which there is no return. "It is impossible to restore again to repentance… ."

Third and finally, we can throughout life move ahead: giving God the glory, rejoicing in salvation from day-to-day, heeding the warnings, and in it all and through it all giving thanks to God for what He has done and what He intends to do. Our great God has redeemed us: we will ever bless Him! He is fully able likewise to keep us to the very end: we will ever praise His name!

Let us close with the beautiful doxology of Jude 24–25:

> Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen.

[1]In the previous chapters 1-3: "Calling," "Regeneration," and "Justification." Also, as was noted in chapter 4, "Sanctification," sanctification in its beginning is an aspect of the event of salvation.

[2]The noun form proskarteresis is used here. The verb form proskartereo can also be translated "to continue steadfastly in," "to be constant in," or "to devote self to."

[3]Cf. Romans 12:12: "Be constant in prayer."

[4]The Greek word is hypomones. The word "endurance" in the following quotations above is also from hypomone, and so could be translated "perseverance."

[5]By virtue of their sanctification in Jesus Christ (see the previous chapter).

[6]The Greek phrase is epitelesei achri, "perfect it until" (NASB).

[7]The Greek word is aptaistous, "stumbling" (NASB).

[8]The Greek word is bebaiosei, “keep you strong” (NIV), “confirm you” (KJV, NASB). I have substituted “strengthen” (see BAGD) for “sustain” in RSV.

[9]The Greek word is terëthein, “preserved” (NASB).

[10]Jesus also added these words, “And no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand” (v. 29). Hence, here is a kind of double safeguard!

[11]The Greek word is symphytoi, “planted together” (KJV), “become incorporate with” (NEB).

[12]The Greek word is parakleîon. The Holy Spirit is the Paraclete. Other translations such as “Comforter” (KJV), “Counselor” (NIV), “the Advocate” (NEB), and “the Helper” (NASB) express aspects of the rich meaning in the word parakletos.

[13]The Greek word is arrabon, “pledge” (NASB, NEB), “earnest” (KJV), “deposit” (NIV).

[14]“ … the doctrine of perseverance has to do with divine preservation, with our being preserved for our inheritance” (G. C. Berkouwer, Faith and Perseverance, 225).

[15]Berkouwer views the divine preservation (n. 14), with the corollary of perseverance, as basically unconditional. Although he mentions “conditionality,” Berkouwer proceeds to speak of “the irresistibility of God’s sovereign grace” (ibid., 90). Hence persistence in salvation is sovereignly assured, thus unconditional. I gladly affirm “God’s sovereign grace” (though not its “irresistibility”), and God’s preservation but not regardless of the human situation. (For a helpful critique of Berkouwer’s position see I. Howard Marshall’s book, Kept by the Power of God, “The Solution of G. C. Berkouwer,” 204-6).

[16]The Greek word is meine, “remains” (KJV, NIV), “dwells” (NEB).

[17]The thrust of these words of Jesus is, first, on fruit-bearing and, second, on answers to prayer. He does not speak directly of abiding so that salvation or eternal life may continue. However, the words that follow, quoted in the next paragraph, unquestionably have implications related to that.

[18]The Greek phrase is eblethë exo, “thrown away” (NASB, NIV).

[19]The Greek word is epimenete, both here and in other verses quoted after this.

[20]Or, simply, “in faith” (as NASB mg suggests). The NEB and NIV translate the phrase “in your faith.”

[21]The Greek word is metakinoumenoi, “not moved away from” (KJV, NASB, cf. NIV).

[22]The Greek word is epimene, literally, “continue in.”

[23]The Greek word is hypomenomen. See earlier use of this word in reference to Christian life in general. The KJV translates hypomenomen as “suffer.” However, in this context (and in the next quotation) the idea is more concretely that of enduring or holding on to the end.

[24]The LXX reading of Habakkuk 2:3-4.

[25]The Greek phrase is metochoi … gegonamen, literally, “we have become sharers.”

[26]The Greek word is bebaian, “make firm, establish” (BAGD). This word is also used in Hebrews 3:14.

[27]See our discussion of this in chapter 1, “Calling.”

[28]The Greek word is apostënai, literally, “to apostatize,” hence, to “fall away,” “desert,” “depart.”

[29]Or “and then have fallen away” (NASB), “and after all this have fallen away” (NEB). There is no word “if” in the Greek text. The word for “commit apostasy” or “fall away” is par ape sontas.

[30]“Again” is not in the RSV; I have added it here. The Greek word is anastaurountas, which can be translated simply “crucify” (so in extra-biblical Greek, according to BAGD). However, the prefix “ana” can mean “again” (so, according to BAGD, ancient translators and Greek fathers understood it). The NASB, NIV, and KJV convey this note in their translation; not so RSV and NEB. The context, I believe, calls for “crucify again,” since it is something apostates do-not the original crucifixion.

[31]The Greek word is paradeigmatizontas, “put [Him] to open shame” (NASB).

[32]The Greek word is photisthentas; cf. Hebrews 10:32; see also 2 Corinthians 4:6. These texts refer unmistakably to the enlightenment of salvation.

[33]The Greek phrase is geusamenous te tes doreas tes epouraniou. Geusamenous, translated here as “tasting,” means also “to enjoy,” “to eat” (cf. Luke 14:24; Acts 10:10; 20:11), thus to “experience” (see Thayer). Dorea is used to refer to the gift of salvation in Romans 5:15, 17; to the “inexpressible gift” of God’s “surpassing grace” in Christ in 2 Corinthians 9:15. It also is used in connection with the Holy Spirit in

Acts: the “gift of the Holy Spirit” (2:38; 10:45). However, in the present context of “tasting,” it seems more likely to refer to the gift of salvation.

[34]The Greek word is metochous. Hebrews 3:1 reads: “holy brethren, who share in a heavenly call,” literally, “sharers [metochoi] of a heavenly calling”; Hebrews 3:14: “for we share in Christ,” literally, “we have become sharers [metochoi] of Christ.” Hence, the reading (in Heb. 6:4) might preferably be “becoming sharers of the Holy Spirit.” This points to the profound experience of the Holy Spirit such as is recorded in the Book of Acts (e.g., chaps. 2, 8, 10, and 19), which the early church knew, and which is being experienced afresh in the Pentecostal/charismatic renewal of the twentieth century.

[35]The Greek phrase is dynameis te mellontos aionos. After becoming sharers of the Holy Spirit is the experience of these dynameis, or miracles. Hebrews 2:4 speaks of God’s bearing witness “by signs and wonders and various miracles (dynamesin) and by gifts of the Holy Spirit.” The “gifts of the Holy Spirit” accompanying the gospel in the early church are likewise reappearing on the contemporary scene.

[36]The Greek word is phrouroumenous; “kept” (KJV), “protected” (NASB), “shielded” (NIV).

[37]Understood as abiding, continuing, enduring, confirming faithfulness.

[38]. Howard Marshall writes that in the New Testament “the believer is not told that he is one of the elect and cannot fall away, nor is there any particular character of his faith which indicates that he is the kind of person who cannot fall away. He is simply told to continue in obedience and faith and to trust in God who will keep him from falling. He perseveres by persevering. Perseverance is not some particular quality of faith or something to be added to faith, but the fact that faith continues” (Kept by the Power of God, 208).

[39]The case of Judas Iscariot is just that. Jesus in His prayer to the Father (John 17) says, “While I was with them, I kept them in thy name, which thou hast given me; I have guarded them and none of them is lost but the son of perdition” (v. 12). Judas was numbered among those “given” to Jesus by the Father; he was chosen by Jesus as the other eleven apostles were. But somewhere along the way Satan got into him: “the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Isariot… to betray him” (John 13:2 KJV). Jesus did speak of Judas earlier as “a devil”-“Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?” (John 6:70 KJV). But he was a devil by defection from his earlier faith (as John 13:2

demonstrates). That Judas became apostate is clear from the later words of Peter (after Judas' suicide) concerning the need to select another apostle "to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside [Gr. parebe, "by transgression fell" KJV], to go to his own place" (Acts 1:25). This sad record of Judas' life and death is a demonstration that even with Jesus' keeping and guarding (John 17) of those the Father had given Him, such a one could still defect and be lost.

[40]The Greek word is sbennute, to "extinguish," "put out" (as a fire); also to "quench," "stifle," "suppress" (BAGD). Although the context of 1 Thessalonians is not directly soteriological, it does suggest that the Holy Spirit may be quenched or extinguished. This then surely affects one's salvation.

[41]In Greek the present tense often means duration, thus the sense here would be "whoever believes, and keeps on believing." See A. T. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament, 879, on the frequent "durative" significance of the present tense. Robertson says that "the verb and context must decide" whether the meaning is linear or durative. I believe the durative here is the proper understanding.

[42]It is sometimes said that since we have been "born again" to eternal life it would be impossible to be "unborn." While this is quite true, what is "born again" may die. It is possible that the "twice dead" of Jude 12 refers to such persons (Jude 5 speaks of how God "saved a people out of the land of Egypt" and "afterward destroyed those who did not believe"). In any event, we must "grow up to salvation" (1 Peter 2:2), and this does not automatically happen.

[43]" … the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. 8:27).

[44]The one exception to this is the "sin unto death," which will be discussed later (pp. 132-33).

[45]The Council of Trent contrariwise speaks of a forfeiture of the "grace of justification," which is recoverable through the sacrament of penance. "Those who through sin have forfeited the received grace of justification, can again be justified when, moved by God, they exert themselves to obtain through the sacrament of penance the recovery, by the merits of Christ, of the grace lost" (Decree Concerning Justification, chapter XIV). Justification-salvation-rather occurs once only.

[46]The Greek word is apostenai.

[47]The literal translation of kardia ponera apistias in the quotation above.

[48]It is sometimes suggested that such a warning refers only to a hypothetical possibility. This is said from the perspective that no true believer could actually "fall away" from God. Such, however, is contrary to the most obvious meaning of the passage and the immediate context (see prior discussion). Moreover, such an interpretation dilutes the seriousness of the warning.

[49]The Greek word is aposte sont ai, "will abandon the faith" (NIV).

[50]There is no such thing as "limited apostasy." The expression is self-contradictory as well as foreign to New Testament teaching. Apostasy means abandonment of faith and thereby of salvation.

[51]The Greek word is *pros. Pros* is likewise the Greek word for the "leading to ["unto"]" in the following two statements.

[52]It is sometimes said that such a view affords "a lifetime indulgence for sinning." That may be an extreme statement, but at the least such a view may make for a lax faith and a sad end. Remember that it is neither the "cold" nor the "hot" but the "lukewarm" whom Christ says that He will "spew out" of His mouth (Rev. 3:16).

[53]The Westminster Confession of Faith speaks contrariwise: "They whom God hath accepted in the Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved" (chapter XVII.I).

[54]This precisely is the error in the Westminster Confession's teaching. The next section (II) reads: "The perseverance of the saints depends not upon their free will, but on the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ; the abiding of the Spirit and of the seed of God within them; and the nature of the covenant of grace…." However true all these ways are as a basis for perseverance, there is no mention of faith. Perseverance, however, is through faith, not without it.

[55]Apostasy, as earlier observed, means "falling away" in the sense of "departure," "abandonment," hence a forsaking of what one originally had (not what one did not have!). Thus there is already a linguistic self-contradiction in the statement above.

[56]The preceding verse says that "many antichrists have come." It is "they" of whom John speaks in 2:19.

[57]The “antichrists” referred to are those who embody the spirit of the antichrist: “This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22).

[58]John Calvin is a significant case in point. In his exegesis of Hebrews 6:4-6, though he first speaks of the “enlightenment” or illumination, and “tasting” as pertaining to genuine faith, when he proceeds to deal with the fact that Hebrews speaks also of the same persons as falling away, Calvin does an about-face and refers the language of enlightenment and tasting to “the reprobate” since from his theological perspective it is only the reprobate who can so fall. Calvin states that he cannot see why God “should not grant the reprobate also some taste of his grace, why he should not irradiate their minds with some sparks of his light … in some sort engrave his word on their hearts…. There is therefore some knowledge in the reprobate which afterwards vanishes away …” (Commentaries, Hebrews, 138, Beveridge trans.). This is e/segesis, not exegesis, and badly in error.

[59]Recall the expression in the Westminster Confession, note 53.

[60]The Greek word is pepeismetha, “persuaded” (KJV), “confident” (NIV), “feel sure” (RSV).

[61]In Hebrews there is emphasis on “not forsaking our own assembling together” (10:25 NASB) a few verses prior to the statement about “trampling under foot the Son of God.”

6
The Holy Spirit

We now begin a study of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This area of theology is often the least comprehended. Many persons profess to some knowledge of, or about, God the Father and Jesus Christ but express much uncertainty concerning the Holy Spirit.[1] They may well have heard terminology concerning the Holy Spirit, but they are largely unaware that He really exists,[2] performs such and such a role, and may even be experienced.

I. NAME A. The Holy Spirit

A. The Holy Spirit

Since we are discussing the Holy Spirit, it seems logical to begin with reflection on the name itself. Let us consider each word in reverse order.[3]

1. Spirit

The word *spirit* conveys the note of intangibility, incorporeality, thus *immateriality.* The spirit in a person, for example, is other than body and thus has no substantial existence. Spirit is not substance—even substance in its most rarefied or shadowy form. Yet it represents the essential reality of human existence, operating through soul and body. Spirit cannot, like an object, be located, perceived, weighed, dissected: it is immaterial.

In the Scriptures "spirit" is sometimes contrasted with "flesh": "The Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses are flesh, and not spirit" (Isa. 31:3). Or the contrast is with "flesh and bones": "A spirit has not flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39).

The word *spirit* also signifies *freedom of movement.* Since spirit knows no corporeal limitations, it does not follow a prescribed pattern. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor. 3:17). Concerning those who are "born of the Spirit," Jesus says, "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). There is spontaneity and freedom in the Spirit.

The spirit of man is circumscribed by the limitations of a tabernacle of flesh. But with God who has no such limitations, His freedom of spirit is limitless. He is bound in no way to places or things. He does what He pleases: He is totally free. As spirit He may voluntarily limit Himself for a time, as in the Incarnation: "The Word became flesh" (John 1:14). But a voluntary action is no ultimate limitation. The Son is free and offers to all others the freedom that He Himself knows: "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

Finally, *spirit* represents *energy, drive*, and *dynamic movement.* Spirit, as noted, is immaterial reality and moves in freedom. But it also signifies vital force. At the inception of creation a force moved over the primeval waters. That force was "the Spirit of God" (Gen. 1:2). Spirit has energy, power, force, and

drive. Thus the Holy Spirit overshadows the Virgin Mary and makes her womb capable of bearing the Son of God (Luke 1:35). By the power of the Holy Spirit Jesus casts out demons (Matt. 12:28). And on the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit comes in hurricanelike force: the sound from heaven was “like the rush of a mighty wind” (Acts 2:2).

Spirit brings power *(dynamis).* Those on whom the Spirit comes receive that “dynamite”: “You shall receive power *[dynamis]* when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8). The Spirit delivers the energy of God.

2. Holy

The word *holy* in the name stresses *sacredness.* The holy is that which is set apart from the common and the ordinary. “I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst” (Hos. 11:9) is an expression of the otherness of the holy from all things human. Wherever the holy is present, reverence is the proper response. Thus God said to Moses at the burning bush, “Put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Exod. 3:5). The holy is the hallowed, the sacred.

Holiness also connotes *utter purity and righteousness.* Holiness is the white heat of perfect righteousness that is a consuming fire against any trace of evil or corruption. “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil and canst not look on wrong” (Hab. 1:13). Such is the word of the prophet about God; hence, it is true about His Holy Spirit. In the early church the Holy Spirit was dynamically experienced. Ananias and Sapphira, after lying about the sale of property, fell down dead, for they had lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1–10). The Holy Spirit is wholly pure in Himself and righteous in all His dealings.

Holiness, further, expresses the high note of *majesty* and *glory.* God is One who is “majestic in holiness, awesome in glory” (Exod. 15:11 NIV). In regard to holiness and glory the prophet Isaiah heard the voices of the seraphim crying out, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa. 6:3). The prophet later spoke of God’s “holy and glorious habitation” (Isa. 63:15). Peter wrote of his experience “on the holy mountain” (the Mount of Transfiguration) with Jesus where they “were eyewitnesses of his majesty … and the voice [of God] was borne to him by the Majestic Glory” (2 Peter 1:16–18). Holiness, majesty, glory—all belong together. This surely is true in the name of the Holy Spirit, for He is “the Spirit of glory” (1 Peter 4:14 NIV).

3. The

Finally, the article *the* speaks quite simply of *singularity* and *uniqueness.* There are many “spirits”—angels, demons, even human (the spirit in man), but there is only “one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). Other spirits are called holy, such as the “holy angels” (Mark 8:38), who are “ministering spirits” (Heb. 1:14). But no such holy spirit is “the Holy Spirit.” Christians have sanctified spirits that someday will be spirits perfected in holiness—hence “holy spirits.” But we will never be “the Holy Spirit.”[4]

“The Holy Spirit” is the source of all freedom and energy, the quintessence of all righteousness and purity: there can be no other.

B. Variations

Thus far we have considered the name “the Holy Spirit.” Now it is important to observe a number of variations on this name in the Scriptures.

1. The New Testament

The nomenclature of “the Holy Spirit” is frequently interchanged with other expressions in the New Testament. For example, “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit for forty days …” (Luke 4:1–2). Here and in many other places “the Holy Spirit” and “the Spirit” are used interchangeably and synonymously. Frequently, the expression “the Spirit of God” is used in conjunction with “the Holy Spirit.” Jesus said that He cast out demons “by the Spirit of God” and thereafter warned about speaking “against the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 12:28, 32).

Sometimes instead of “the Holy Spirit” there are several other expressions used interchangeably. In one verse in Romans Paul speaks of “the Spirit,” “the Spirit of God,” and “the Spirit of Christ”: “But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him” (8:9). When He commissioned the Twelve, Jesus spoke to them of “the Spirit of [their] Father” (Matt. 10:20). In similar statements in Mark 13:11 and Luke 12:12 the phrase used is “the Holy Spirit. However, the most common expression by far for the Holy Spirit is simply “the Spirit.”[5]

It is apparent that the Holy Spirit, while a distinguishable entity, is inseparable from Christ and the Father. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Father and of Son. But also the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, hence identical with the reality of God Himself.

2. The Old Testament

In the Old Testament it is significant to observe that the phrase “the Holy Spirit” is not found. The nearest approximation is “your Holy Spirit” and “his Holy Spirit.” In Psalm 51 David said, “Do not cast me from your presence or

take your Holy Spirit from me" (v. 11 NIV). Isaiah the prophet, speaking about the history of Israel in their wilderness journey, declares, "Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy…. Where is he who set his Holy Spirit among them?" (63:10–11 NIV).[6] The distinctive New Testament expression, "the Holy Spirit," seems close at hand, but has not yet been used.[7]

Quite frequently the Old Testament speaks (as the New Testament does later) of "the Spirit" and "the Spirit of God." Genesis 1:2 depicts "the Spirit of God … moving over the face of the waters." This expression is found in a number of other places.[8] Numbers 11:26 says, "The Spirit also rested on them [two people prophesying]" (NIV). This shorter form also occurs in other places.[9] A possessive pronoun often occurs in such statements as this: "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever" (Gen. 6:3 NASB); "When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created" (Ps. 104:30); and "If he should take back his Spirit to himself" (Job 34:14).[10] All of these expressions—"the Spirit," "the Spirit of God," "my Spirit," "thy Spirit," and "his Spirit"—speak of a very close relationship between the Spirit and God. This is also the case for "your" and "his Holy Spirit" noted in the previous paragraph.

The most common expression, however, in the Old Testament is "the Spirit of the LORD."[11] For example, "the Spirit of the LORD came upon him" (Judg. 3:10).[12] Significantly, this frequent Old Testament expression is carried over into the New Testament only a few times.[13] One instance occurs in Luke 4:18 when Jesus quotes Isaiah 61:1—"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." Other instances show that "the Spirit of the Lord" has now become identified with the ascended Christ; for example, Paul writes, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor. 3:17).[14]

In conclusion, "the Holy Spirit"—a New Testament expression—goes by many other names in the Old and New Testament Scriptures. Whether it is "the Spirit of God," "the Spirit of the Father," "the Spirit of the Lord," "the Spirit of Christ," or simply "the Spirit," it is the same reality.

II. TITLES AND SYMBOLS

A. Titles

Next, we observe particularly in the New Testament a number of descriptive titles that are given to the Holy Spirit.

1. The Spirit of Truth

The first title, "the Spirit of truth," is found in the Gospel of John. Jesus in his final discourses uses this expression three times. First: "I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete,[15] to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him" (14:16–17). Second: "When the Paraclete comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me" (15:26). Third: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (16:13). That "the Spirit of truth" is the Holy Spirit is apparent from another verse: "The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things" (14:26).

Several things regarding "the Spirit of truth" stand out from these passages. First, "the Spirit of truth" points to what the world "cannot receive"—a reality incomprehensible to the natural man. Paul writes, "A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him" (1 Cor. 2:14 NASB). Hence, the Holy Spirit is the source of spiritual truth, which cannot be apprehended without an alteration of the natural man.

It would be a mistake, however, to view "the Spirit of truth" as truth wherever it is known. The world does have knowledge in many areas (and for all this we may be grateful). But it does not have the knowledge of truth that is spiritual and therefore ultimate. Hence, when Jesus speaks of the Spirit of truth coming "to guide … into all the truth," He does not refer to truth at large or *in toto*, but to truth that relates to the spiritual realm.[16]

Furthermore, John earlier records that Jesus Himself is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (14:6). It follows, then, that the "Spirit of truth" will testify of Him: "He will bear witness to me." He will not speak of Himself; He will bear witness totally to the truth incarnate in Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth.

2. The Spirit of Holiness

In the Epistles we observe a number of titles for the Holy Spirit. Let us note, first, "the Spirit of holiness." Paul wrote that Jesus was "designated[17] Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). It seems obvious to say that the Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of holiness." However, by using the word "holiness," Paul stresses the sanctity of Christ in His resurrection (death could not hold fast the sinless Christ), and by the substantive "Spirit," Paul refers particularly to the role of the Holy Spirit in Christ's resurrection.[18] Hence, by this "Spirit of holiness," Christ was demonstrated to be the "Son of God in power." The "Spirit of holiness" was the profoundest reality in the life of Christ. From His conception by the Holy Spirit[19] throughout His years on earth, He lived a life of perfect holiness.[20] According to that same reality, the Spirit of holiness, He was declared to be "the Son of God in power."

The "Spirit of holiness," accordingly, is both the Spirit that makes holy and the Spirit of resurrection. He is the sanctifying Spirit who would have all persons live in purity before the Lord. And at their death He will give life to those in whom He dwells: "He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you" (Rom. 8:11).

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of holiness.

3. The Spirit of Life

In Romans Paul also speaks of the Holy Spirit as "the Spirit of life." "For the law of the Spirit of life has set me free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death" (8:2).[21] The Holy Spirit is the Spirit who "gives life." No longer is there bondage to sin, death, and the law.[22] The Holy Spirit has wrought life and freedom for all who belong to Christ.

Moreover, it is now possible by "the law of the Spirit of life" to fulfill "the just requirement of the law" (Rom. 8:4). For if we walk "not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (v. 4), this will happen. Whereas the believer has been freed from bondage to the law (the "written code," the "letter"), he is now able by the Spirit of life to fulfill its requirements. How true also are these words of Jesus: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing" (John 6:63).[23]

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life.

4. The Spirit of Adoption

In Romans 8 Paul later speaks of the Holy Spirit as "the Spirit of adoption": "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption,[24] whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (v. 15 KJV). Two things are said here: first, we are children of God by adoption; second, we have received the Spirit following this adoption. Paul elaborates on this theme in his letter to the Galatians, speaking of our redemption through Christ "so that we might receive adoption as sons" (4:5). Then he adds, "To prove that you are sons, God has sent into our hearts the Spirit of his Son crying 'Abba! Father!'" (v. 6 NEB). "The Spirit of adoption" is the Holy Spirit whom God sends to certify our adoption into the family of God.

It is striking to note that at His reception into our hearts the Holy Spirit cries out—or enables us to cry out—"Abba! Father!" This appellation signifies a deep personal relationship with God established by the Spirit, for "Abba" is the Aramaic name for "Father" used only in the home, especially by a child in addressing an earthly father.[25] It was the term used by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when He prayed in great anguish to the heavenly Father, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mark 14:36). Thus "the Spirit of adoption" enables us to address God, not only as "Father," but with the kind of personal feeling that a word like "Dad" or "Daddy" conveys.[26] Truly, what a blessing it is to receive the Holy Spirit into our hearts!

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of adoption.

5. The Spirit of Grace

The Holy Spirit is also referred to as "the Spirit of grace" (Heb. 10:29). To better appreciate the meaning of this expression, we need to note that the context speaks of one who has "trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy[27] thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted[28] the Spirit of grace" (NIV). "The Spirit of grace" is thus the Spirit that has been graciously[29] at work in salvation.

The Holy Spirit makes available all that the Son of God has done to bring about our salvation and new life. It is wholly a matter of grace.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of grace.

6. The Spirit of Glory

Peter writes, "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit[30] of glory and of God rests upon you" (1 Peter 4:14 NASB).

The Spirit of glory is the Spirit of God[31] and rests particularly on those who suffer for Christ's sake. This suggests that the glory yet to come already rests on those who belong to Christ.

Indeed, wherever the Holy Spirit is, there is glory. In the Old Testament the inauguration of the tabernacle and the temple climaxes when "the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle/temple" (Exod. 40:35; 2 Chron. 7:1). In the New Testament the climactic moment in the inauguration of the church occurred when "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4). Truly, to be "filled with the Holy Spirit" is to be filled with the glory of God!

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of glory.

7. The Eternal Spirit

Finally, the Holy Spirit is "the eternal Spirit." The letter to the Hebrews speaks of Christ "who through the eternal Spirit[32] offered himself without blemish to God" (9:14). The sacrifice of Christ was far more than a temporal event: it was an action through the eternal Spirit that wrought our redemption.

The Holy Spirit is without beginning or ending: He is the eternal Spirit.

B. Symbols

Let us next observe a number of symbols of the Holy Spirit. These symbols depict various operations of the Holy Spirit. Since the Holy Spirit is incorporeal and intangible (see above), such symbols (images, representations, or likenesses) give us further insight into the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

1. Wind

Wind is one of the most vivid representations of the Holy Spirit. The creation account in Genesis, which usually reads, "The Spirit of God was moving over the face of the water" (1:2), is sometimes translated "the wind[33] of God was moving… ." The Hebrew word *rûah* and the Greek word *pneuma* have both meanings. Consequently, only the context can determine the proper translation. John 3:8 is a well-known example of linguistic double entendre: "The wind *[pneuma]* blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit *[pneumatos]*."

Wind as a symbol of the Holy Spirit is strikingly depicted in the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Acts 2:2 reads, "And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty[34] wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting." This mighty windlike sound was the Holy Spirit: invisible, but nonetheless powerfully felt by all.

Sometimes *rûah* may better be translated "breath." This is especially the case in Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones. The Lord spoke to the bones: "Behold, I will cause breath[35] to enter you, and you shall live" (Ezek. 37:5). Again the Lord said, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live" (v. 9). The word "breath" here undoubtedly symbolizes the Spirit of God. After His resurrection Jesus "breathed on them [the disciples] and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (John 20:22). Breath (breathing) is a clear representation of the Holy Spirit.

Wind or breath is a vivid figure of speech that depicts the Spirit of God as a moving force and divine kind of energy.

2. Fire

Another outstanding symbol of the Holy Spirit is *fire*. That the two are closely connected is seen in this statement about Jesus: "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16). The baptism with the Spirit is closely conjoined with fire. And this fire, as the succeeding statements suggest, deals with the consuming of evil: "The chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12; Luke 3:17).

The two Gospel accounts call to mind another in Isaiah. The picture there is of a coming day "when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning"[36] (4:4). The "spirit [or Spirit] of burning" likely symbolizes the Spirit of God in His role as fire cleansing away evil. The result: "The LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion … a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night" (4:5). The fire of judgment becomes the flaming fire of glory!

Let us return to the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. We have already observed the symbolism of wind—the Spirit, like the sound of a rushing mighty wind. Verses 3–4 read, "And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Here is the fulfillment of the promise: "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." This fire in the mouth and on the tongue would consume the chaff and make salvation possible as the gospel was proclaimed. Thus the Holy Spirit and fire are closely and vitally related.

3. Water

Another striking symbol of the Holy Spirit is *flowing water.* This is portrayed in the statement of Jesus: "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart[37] shall flow rivers of living water.' Now this he said about the Spirit" (John 7:37–39). Jesus had spoken earlier to the woman of Samaria about "living water" that He would give to everyone (4:10). He added, "The water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (v. 14).[38] Accordingly, the "living water" that Jesus gives and that wells up to eternal life when it flows out is the activity of the Holy Spirit. Water overflowing and outpouring: this is a

vivid representation of the Holy Spirit.

The scripture that Jesus quoted, while nowhere to be found exactly in the Old Testament,[39] seems to relate particularly to these prophetic words in Isaiah: "Fear not, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen. For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring" (44:2–3). Thus the natural outflowing of water on a thirsty and dry ground corresponds to the spiritual outpouring of the Spirit of God. Earlier in Isaiah reference was also made to an outpouring of the Spirit: "… until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high" (32:15).[40] Again the imagery is that of water pouring down, hence of flowing water.

Other Scriptures that depict flowing water[41] possibly refer to the Holy Spirit. Ezekiel had a vision of the temple from which water issued (47:1–9). Shallow at first, the water deepened into a river in which "everything will live wherever the river goes" (v. 9). Zechariah speaks of the coming day of the Lord with these words: "On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem" (14:8). Finally, the Book of Revelation has the climactic picture of the holy city with "the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city" (22:1–2). Such extraordinarily beautiful passages that speak of living, flowing water have a profound spiritual quality that express the very activity of the Spirit of the living God.

4. Dove

Still another memorable symbol of the Holy Spirit is the *dove*. According to all four Gospels, at the baptism of Jesus the Holy Spirit came as a dove upon Him. Luke writes, "The Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove" (3:22). Moreover, according to John 1:32, "it remained on him."

The full meaning of the dove symbolism is not clear. The dove, however, often represents gentleness[42] and innocence. When Jesus sent forth His twelve disciples He said, "Be as wise as serpents and innocent[43] as doves" (Matt. 10:16). In Jewish tradition the "voice of the turtledove" (Song of Sol. 2:12) was interpreted as "the voice of the Holy Spirit of redemption." In a similar way the picture of the dove at the initiation of Jesus' ministry suggests the anointing of Christ with the Holy Spirit for the work of redemption.

Other Old Testament pictures come to mind. We have observed in Genesis 1 how the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters, and that "Spirit" and

"wind" are interchangeable terms. The word "moving" may be translated as "hovering" or "brooding,"[44] either of which suggests a bird, possibly a dove,[45] close upon the waters to bring forth life: thus a life-giving Spirit. Also in the Flood narrative it was a dove that Noah sent three times to discover whether the waters had subsided from the face of the earth. The dove is thus a picturesque emblem of life returning to a flood-ravaged world. It represents the Spirit as the "Spirit of life." The dove is also a bird used in the Old Testament sacrifices;[46] hence it may relate to Christ as He who came to offer Himself for the sake of the world.

All in all, the dove as the anointing of One who in gentleness would not "break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick" (Matt. 12:20), and who in perfect innocence and purity lived out his days, seems to be the most meaningful understanding of this beautiful symbolism.

5. Seal

The Holy Spirit is also symbolized as a *seal.* Paul uses this language in Ephesians 1:13–14: "In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which[47] is the guarantee[48] of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it." Later in the letter he adds, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30).

These passages depict the Holy Spirit as a seal in the sense of designating both God's ownership and His protection. A seal is a mark of ownership and a proof of identity; thus those sealed unmistakably belong to a certain person. When the Holy Spirit is given to the believer, that event is a validation that he belongs to God; it is the ratification of his status in Christ: he is God's inviolable possession. A seal also makes secure: it is a mark of protection placed on something or someone. In the Book of Revelation this word goes forth: "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads" (7:3). This sealing protects them during great suffering and tribulation. So, likewise, does the Holy Spirit seal a person "for the day of redemption."

The Holy Spirit is also a seal in the sense of being a guarantee or pledge. A seal is a pledge of something not yet received, but is guaranteed to become a possession in the future. So the seal of the Holy Spirit is "the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it." As Paul says elsewhere, God "has

put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee" (2 Cor. 1:22).[49]

The seal may also signify a mark of confirmation and dedication. It is said of Jesus in John 6:27 that "on him has God the Father set his seal." This happened when the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus and the Father declared, "Thou art my beloved Son" (Luke 3:22). This heavenly confirmation and dedication—the sealing by the Holy Spirit—was for Jesus' ministry in the years ahead. So, we may add, likewise the believer who receives the seal of the Holy Spirit is thereby dedicated for ministry in the mission of Jesus Christ.

6. Oil

Finally, the Holy Spirit may be viewed as a heavenly anointing, an unction from on high, the *oil of God*.

In the Old Testament a vivid scene occurred when God said to Samuel concerning the youthful David: "'Arise, anoint him; for this is he.' Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward" (1 Sam. 16:12–13). The horn of oil used in the anointing clearly symbolizes the Holy Spirit's consecration of David to the kingship. In Jesus' own case, not long after the Spirit came upon Him at His baptism, He said, "The Spirit of the Lord … has anointed me" (Luke 4:18). Hence, the idea of anointing—symbolically with oil—is inseparable from Jesus' own consecration for the total ministry to which He had been called.

Similarly John writes about the believer, "You have an anointing[50] from the Holy One" (1 John 2:20 NIV). Later he adds: "The anointing which you received from him abides in you … his anointing teaches you about everything" (2:27). Reference undoubtedly is made to the Holy Spirit who (according to John 14:26) "will teach you all things." Thus is the Holy Spirit the heavenly oil (or unction) whereby the believer is anointed and led into all truth.

Oil is a vivid symbol of the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

III. NATURE

Having discussed the identity of the Holy Spirit in terms of name, titles, and symbols, we do well to consider more specifically the nature of the Holy Spirit. Our reflections have largely centered on what the Holy Spirit is like. Let us move on to the question of who, or what,' the Holy Spirit is.

A. God

The Holy Spirit is God. Whatever the various names or whatever the titles or symbols, all refer to God Himself. The Holy Spirit is not some reality less than God or other than God: He is God.

1. Divine Recognition and Identification

The Holy Spirit is recognized as God. This is particularly clear in the New Testament with the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Book of Acts, which records this event, recognizes throughout that the Holy Spirit is God. An outstanding example is the story of Ananias and Sapphira, who lied about their property. Peter said to Ananias, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" (5:3). Then Peter added, "You have not lied to men but to God" (v. 4). This is an unmistakable identification of the Holy Spirit with God. Other examples of such identification in the Book of Acts are the declaration of Agabus the prophet, "Thus says the Holy Spirit" (21: 11),[51] and Paul's reference to an Old Testament command of the Lord, "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet …" (28:25). In all these cases the Holy Spirit, acting in the community of faith, is identified with God.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit in language that can only signify deity. On one occasion after casting out demons, He said that this had been done by the Holy Spirit: "It is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons" (Matt. 12:28). In response to the Pharisees who attributed these exorcisms to the power of Beelzebul, the prince of demons, Jesus replied, "Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (vv. 31–32). The Holy Spirit can be no one less than Almighty God.

In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit is not explicitly called God. However, the many references to "the Spirit of the Lord," "the Spirit of God," and to "the Spirit" suggest a recognition of the Holy Spirit as God. On first reflection it might seem that the Holy Spirit is less than, or other than, God from such terminology. Is not the Spirit in such expressions simply an aspect of God

(perhaps His inner nature, like the spirit of a man)? However, reference to "the Spirit" is a clear recognition of God Himself.

Let us return to the New Testament. Here we further observe a witness stemming from Christian experience. Paul speaks of believers as "being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:22 NASB). "The Spirit" is unmistakably God Himself present among His people. Moreover, every Christian personally enjoys the inner presence of the Holy Spirit and knows that this is nothing less than God taking up residence in his life. Furthermore the believer who knows the experience of being "filled with the Holy Spirit"[52] is acutely aware that the infilling Spirit is none other than God. The fact that gifts —including miracles—are multiplied through this same Holy Spirit is further evidence of the identification of the Spirit with God.[53]

The Holy Spirit is to be unmistakably recognized and identified as God.

2. Divine Perfections

The Holy Spirit also has the perfections of God.[54] This is additional evidence that the Holy Spirit is God. Let us observe these perfections in turn.

First, the Holy Spirit is *omnipresent.* This is vividly stated in Psalm 139: "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there thy hand shall lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me" (vv. 7–10). The Spirit of God—the Holy Spirit—is everywhere-present and ever-present. In the New Testament Jesus tells his disciples both present and future, "The Father … will give you another Paraclete, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16–17). Thus, in a special kind of way, the Holy Spirit is continually present with those who have received Him.

Second, the Holy Spirit is *omniscient.* The prophet Isaiah asks this pointed question: "Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as his counselor has instructed him?" (Isa. 40:13). The clearly implied answer is "No one," for the Spirit has all knowledge. In a memorable passage Paul writes, "The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:10 NIV).[55] Since the Spirit searches all things, even fathoms[56] all things, truly He is omniscient. One further confirmation: Jesus said to His disciples that when the Spirit came, He would "guide you into all the truth … [and] declare to you the things that are to come" (John 16:13). Since the Holy Spirit does this, He lacks no knowledge. He

has the omniscience of God Himself.

Third, the Holy Spirit is *omnipotent.* He is identical with Almighty God. This is dramatically set forth in the words of Elihu: "The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life" (Job 33:4 NIV). This is a Hebraic parallelism; hence, "the Spirit of God" and "the breath of the Almighty" are essentially the same. The Spirit of God is omnipotent—all-powerful—and the evidence of this is His work in creation.

This calls to mind the words of Paul concerning the spiritual gifts: "One and the same Spirit works[57] all these things" (1 Cor. 12:11 NASB).[58] Although these words do not directly speak of omnipotence, the implication is certainly there. The Holy Spirit "works all these things" as an aspect of His working out of all things.

In summary, the Holy Spirit demonstrates the "alls" or "omnis" of God. He is all-present, all-knowing, all-powerful: omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent. Truly the Holy Spirit has the perfections of God.

3. Divine Work

The work of the Holy Spirit is the work of God. This was illustrated in a number of preceding statements. Moreover, in our previous discussion of such doctrines as creation, providence, the Incarnation, regeneration, and sanctification, we have observed in various ways the divine Spirit at work.[59] So I will not elaborate this further here.

One point needs to be made, however. Since the Holy Spirit is invariably shown to be doing the work of God (and of that there can be no question), then He must be God. For the picture is never that of one less than God[60] performing God's work; rather the Holy Spirit is God Himself in action.

B. Person

The Holy Spirit is a person. When referring to the Holy Spirit, personal pronouns, such as “He” and “Him,” are properly used. The Holy Spirit is not merely a divine influence or power but is a person in His own right.

The personhood of the Holy Spirit becomes fully apparent with the revelation of God in the New Testament, particularly in the Book of Acts and the Epistles. This is due to the fact that the coming of the Spirit follows the Gospel accounts. Only when the Holy Spirit has come is it possible to have a full apprehension of His personal nature.[61] However, as will be noted after this, there are intimations of the Spirit’s personhood prior to Pentecost.

1. Personal Designations

In the final discourses of Jesus recorded in the Fourth Gospel, the Holy Spirit is referred to several times as “the Paraclete.”[62] However the term is translated —“the Comforter,” “the Counselor,” “the Helper,” “the Advocate”—reference is thereby made to a person. Hence, this cannot signify a mere influence or force. Also in John 16:13, though the words for “the Spirit” are neuter,[63] a masculine pronoun follows: “When the Spirit of truth comes, *he*[64] will guide you into all the truth.” Thus, “the Spirit of truth”— “the Paraclete”—is definitely a person.[65]

It is important to recognize that when the Holy Spirit does come—as the Book of Acts records—He comes as a person. Language such as the “outpouring” and “falling” of the Holy Spirit and being “baptized in” and “filled with” the Holy Spirit[66] therefore does not refer to some impersonal power or force, but rather to the *way* in which He comes. The language thenceforth used in Acts about the Spirit unmistakably refers to the coming of a person. Perhaps the most dramatic example occurs in Acts 13:2: “The Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for *me* Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’” Note the two personal pronouns. The Holy Spirit definitely is a person—spiritual, to be sure, rather than corporeal—who, as Jesus promised, had come to be with the church.

One of the most striking features of the contemporary spiritual renewal is the strong sense of the personhood of the Holy Spirit. For many people prior to the renewal the Holy Spirit was little more than an unknown entity.[67] While a

doctrinal recognition of personhood may have existed, there was little or no confirming experience. Now the Holy Spirit, dwelling within and moving among the believing community, is known to be a personal reality.

2. Personal Characteristics

We observe next that there are a number of personal characteristics that relate to the Holy Spirit. For example, there is *intelligence.* As we have just noted, when Barnabas and Saul were set apart, the Holy Spirit spoke—"the Holy Spirit said… ."[68] Indeed, the Book of Acts constantly shows the Holy Spirit guiding the young church with His wisdom and intelligence. An outstanding example of this occurred at the Jerusalem council, convened to resolve the thorny issue of the circumcision of the Gentiles. After much deliberation by the apostles and elders, a letter was sent to the Gentiles that included the statement "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us …" (Acts 15:28). Thus the Holy Spirit is a person who acts as the primary guide and director of the church. Paul also spoke of "the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. 8:27). The Spirit knows the will of God and makes intercession accordingly.

Next, there is *will.* Paul and Timothy on their second missionary journey were "forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia" (Acts 16:6). When "they attempted to go into Bithynia, … the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them" (v. 7). It was the will of the Holy Spirit that constrained them. Looking back into the Old Testament, we note the words of Genesis 6:3: "My Spirit shall not strive with[69] man forever" (NASB). The Spirit is depicted as struggling with man. The will of the Holy Spirit is also shown in Paul's discussion about the spiritual gifts: "the same Spirit … apportions to each one individually as he wills" (1 Cor. 12:11).

Likewise, the Spirit is depicted as having *feelings.* In both the Old and the New Testament the Holy Spirit is said to grieve. The prophet Isaiah, rehearsing Israel's false ways, says, "They rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit" (Isa. 63:10 NIV). And the apostle Paul urges believers, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed" (Eph. 4:30). The Holy Spirit may be grieved because He has feelings. In a profound statement describing the feelings of the Holy Spirit, Paul says that "the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs[70] too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26). These "sighs," or "groanings," depict the profound depth of the Spirit's feeling. The Spirit not only searches out "the deep things"

but also feels them through and through.

3. Personal Relationships

The Holy Spirit likewise is shown to be personally related to others. The primary example surely is His personal relationship to Jesus. Jesus at the beginning of His ministry was "led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness" (Luke 4:1–2).[71] Thus a close relationship is indicated. It is particularly apparent in Jesus' words about "the Spirit of truth": "He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16:14). Throughout the Book of Acts the personal relationship of the Holy Spirit to the early Christians is demonstrated. On one occasion Paul said, "The Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me" (Acts 20:23). Also we find in the New Testament the expression "the fellowship[72] of the Holy Spirit." Paul closes his letter to the Corinthians with these words: "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). This beautiful benediction speaks of a close personal relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Christian community.

This personal relatedness to the Holy Spirit has become very meaningful in the spiritual renewal of our time. The Spirit, to be sure, always points beyond Himself to Christ ("He will glorify me," said Jesus). Yet it is through a close, inner relationship with the Spirit that this takes place. The Holy Spirit has become, in truth, Counselor, Comforter, Helper, Advocate. What a joy to know Him personally!

C. Distinct

The Holy Spirit, while being God, is also distinct. Even as Christ was both God and with God,[73] so the Holy Spirit is both God and from Him.

Genesis opens with God in action: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (1:1), and thereafter a further action: "The Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters" (v. 2). Thus both God and the Spirit of God are deity: the one God. Yet they are not identical: there is a distinction—not a separation—between them.

The Spirit comes from God. Many verses in the Old Testament declare that "the Spirit of the LORD came upon [someone]."[74] Sometimes the Spirit is said to be "sent forth": "Thou dost send forth Thy Spirit, they are created" (Ps. 104:30 NASB). Furthermore, God will one day "pour out" His Spirit (Isa. 44:3). All such statements point to a movement of the Spirit from God but without the Spirit's ceasing to be God.

Turning again to the words of Jesus about the Paraclete, we note that Jesus talked about the "sending" of the Holy Spirit. He spoke of "the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit," whom the Father would send in His name (John 14:26). Again, Jesus spoke of "the Paraclete" whom he would send to them from the Father, "even the Spirit of truth" (15:26). Similarly, He says concerning the Paraclete, "If I go, I will send him to you" (16:7). So the Holy Spirit was to be "sent" by both Father and Son. On the Day of Pentecost after the event had occurred, Peter declared that Jesus "being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit … has poured out this which you see and hear" (Acts 2:33). In summary, on the basis of both John and Acts, we may say that while the Paraclete, or Holy Spirit, is sent by both Father and Son, He is sent by the Father through the Son.

But now a further matter needs to be recognized, namely, that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. This is made clear in the additional words of John 15:26: "who proceeds[75] from the Father." While the sending of the Holy Spirit is from both Father and Son in the sense that He is sent by the Father through the Son, the Spirit proceeds only from the Father.[76]

We may properly speak of this as an eternal procession. While Jesus referred to an imminent event when the Holy Spirit would be sent, His statement that the Spirit "proceeds"—present tense—points to an ongoing, thus eternal, reality.

Hence, we may say that in the mystery of the Godhead the Father is the eternal source of the Holy Spirit (even as He is the eternal begetter of the Son): the Spirit proceeds or, perhaps emanates, not outwardly but inwardly. There is dynamic movement within the Divine Being. This is not a movement by the Father's will, as is the sending of the Spirit, but belongs to His inward being; hence it occurs by nature, not by volition.

Thus the Holy Spirit is not only God and a person, but He also has His own distinct reality.[77] He is not simply the personal God acting in a certain manner. Rather here is a paradox: the Holy Spirit is God—not some Spirit other than or lower than God; yet He is not simply identical with God—He is the Spirit of God. Since this is also true of the Word of God, the eternal Son, we are brought into the mystery of the Triune Godhead or the Trinity: one God in three persons —Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Now to return to the event of the sending[78] of the Holy Spirit: the procession is the same, but the sending involves both Father and Son. Since the Holy Spirit in this sense comes after the Incarnation and His coming is based on the action of Father and Son, He is often described as the "Third Person" of the Trinity. However, this does not mean any subordination of the Holy Spirit, for He equally shares the eternal being of the Godhead. The important matter is to affirm the eternal distinctiveness of the Holy Spirit.

This subject, described biblically and theologically, is confirmed by Christian experience. That the Holy Spirit is the one God, that He is a person, and that His person is a distinct reality—all of this transcending intellectual comprehension—is the universal affirmation of those who have experienced the mystery of His sending and coming. We know that He is wholly God and that He is profoundly personal. He is not the Father or the Son but is deeply experienced through their activity. He is, to be sure, the Spirit of both (such has been confirmed again and again); however, He is identical with neither. Thus the Christian faith can rejoice in singing the Doxology, "Praise Father, Son, *and* Holy Ghost!"

[1]Especially is this the case when the nomenclature is "Holy Ghost." The King James Version of the Bible uses this antiquated language as do many familiar liturgies, hymns, and prayers. "Ghost" formerly meant Spirit, but now is associated with the realm of the spectral-hobgoblins, ghouls, and the like. Its continued usage in Christian faith is questionable. Of course, "spirit" is also sometimes used in the same way as "ghost"; however, it is much less subjept to misunderstanding.

[2]The disciples whom Paul encountered in Ephesus (Acts 19:2) reported, "We have never even heard that there is a rfoly Spirit." Most people today in a country of Christian influence, and presumably everyone in the church, have at least heard of the Holy Spirit; however, that may unfortunately be the limit of their knowledge.

[3]It seems proper to consider first the noun Spirit, then the adjective Holy, and finally the definite article the.

[4]The English expression "the Holy Spirit" may or may not have the article "the" in the Greek. For example, Luke 2:25-26 reads: "The Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit." The first Greek phrase, pneuma … hagion, has no article whereas the second, tou pneumatos tou hagiou, does. This is often the case in the New Testament; e.g., cf. Matthew 22:43 with Mark 12:36 where "David … in the Spirit" lacks the Greek article in Matthew but has it in Mark. The note of specificity and uniqueness is there regardless of the presence or absence of the Greek article. Hence all English translations properly read "the Holy Spirit" regardless of the Greek text.

[5]This abbreviated form is used over one hundred times in the New Testament.

[6]The NASB also capitalizes both Holy and Spirit in all three instances above; the NEB does not capitalize at all; the KJV does not capitalize in Psalm 51, but does so in both Isaiah statements; the RSV capitalizes only Spirit in the three verses. The Hebrew text provides no clue whether or not to capitalize.

[7]Doubtless one of the reasons for the hesitation of many translators to capitalize both "holy" and "spirit" is that it may convey a New Testament understanding not yet fully reached. However, whether capitalized or not in the Old Testament, there is not yet the New Testament terminology, "the Holy Spirit."

[8]See Exodus 31:3; Numbers 24:2; 1 Samuel 10:10; 19:20; 2 Chronicles 24:20; Job 33:4.

[9]See Numbers 11:25-26; 1 Chronicles 12:18; Isaiah 32:15; Ezekiel 2:2; 3:12, 14, 24; 8:3; 11:1; 43:5.

[10]I have capitalized the "S" because the reference is to God. The NIV keeps "spirit" in the main text but reads in the margin "Spirit."

[11]Literally, "the Spirit of Yah weh [YHWH]." English versions generally translate the tetragrammation "YHWH" as "LORD." However,

"Jehovah" is found in the ASV, "Yahweh" in the JB.

[12]See also Judges 6:34; 11:29; 14:6, 19; 15:14; 1 Samuel 10:6; 16:13-14; 2 Samuel 23:2; 1 Kings 18:12; 22:24; 2 Kings 2:16; 2 Chronicles 18:23; 20:14; Isaiah 11:2; 61:1; Micah 2:7.

[13]In addition to Luke 4:18 (next mentioned above) see Acts 1:8; 19:6.

[14]Also see Acts 8:39: "The Spirit of the Lord caught up Philip." Throughout the Book of Acts "the Lord" signifies the exalted Christ.

[15]I have retained the transliteration of the Greek word parakletos, Paraclete. The word is translated variously in English as "Comforter" (KJV), "Counselor" (RSV, NIV), "Helper" (NASB), "Advocate" (NEB and JB). "Paraclete," in some sense, is a title also; however, since it refers more specifically to a function or activity of the Holy Spirit, we shall discuss it later. "Another" (above) implies that there is already a Paraclete, namely Jesus Himself. F.F. Bruce {The Gospel of John, 301-2) writes: "Jesus' mention of 'another' Paraclete implies that they already have one, and this can only be Himself. In 1 John 2:1, indeed, Jesus is called 'our "Paraclete" with the Father.' " The Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit, is, however, distinct from Christ.

[16]Of course, God is "the God of truth" (see vol. 1, chap. 3, IV. C.) so that all truth ultimately comes from Him. Thus in the broader sense the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of God is the author and guide into any and every truth. Nonetheless, "the Spirit of truth" in the Fourth Gospel refers to what "the world cannot receive" (John 14:17) or know.

[17]Or "declared" (KJV, NIV, NASB, NEB), Greek horisthentos.

[18]Later in Romans Paul speaks of "the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead" (8:11).

[19]Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:35.

[20]See, e.g., John 8:46; Hebrews 4:15.

[21]I have adopted the NASB marginal reading for my translation. The KJV and RSV translate as "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." Both the NIV and NEB follow the NASB margin, but with a slightly different word order. I am convinced that the translation above is more consistent with the idea of the life-giving work of the Holy Spirit.

[22]Paul contrasts the law with the Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3:6: "The written code kills, but the Spirit gives life."

[23]NASB, similarly NIV. The JB, RSV, and NEB have "spirit" instead of "Spirit." Either is possible from the Greek text, for pneuma is always

lowercase whether referring to spirit or Spirit. The word for “flesh,” sarx, refers to corporeal existence, whereas in Romans 8:4 (quoted above) sarx signifies man’s sinful nature. In neither case can the sarx bring life.

[24]Likewise NASB and NIV marginal readings: “the spirit of adoption.” RSV has “the spirit of sonship,” NEB, “a Spirit that makes us sons.” The Greek word hyiothesias is a legal term meaning “adoption.” To be sure, we are “sons” due to adoption into God’s family. But if the word “adoption” is replaced by some other term or words, the means whereby this sonship occurs fails to be emphasized.

[25]“Abba” was “the form used in prayer and in the family circle” (BAGD). It was “the simple ‘speech of the child to its father’ “ (TDNT, 1:6). According to the early church father Chrysostom, fathers were called “Abba” by their little children (TDNT, l:6.nl2).

[26]There is obviously some danger of disrespect in such familiar language. Indeed when Jesus used it, it “must have sounded familiar and disrespectful to His contemporaries because used in the everyday life of the family” (TDNT, 1:6). TDNT concludes with this application for the believer: “Jewish usage shows how the Father-child relationship to God far surpasses any possibilities of intimacy assumed in Judaism, introducing indeed something which is wholly new.” On this matter also see J. Jeremias, New Testament Theology, 61-68.

[27]Or “common, ordinary, profane” (BAGD); Greek koinon.

[28]Or “outraged” (RSV), “affronted” (NEB), “done despite unto” (KJV). Another possible translation is “shown contempt for.” The Greek word is enybrisas.

[29]For “the Spirit of grace,” the NEB has “God’s gracious Spirit.”

[30]RSV and KJV have “spirit.” NASB (quoted above), NIV, and NEB capitalize Spirit, which seems more appropriate in the context of the verse.

[31]NEB brings this out well in its translation: “that glorious Spirit which is the Spirit of God.”

[32]So also KJV, NIV, NASB. NEB reads: “He offered himself without blemish to God, a spiritual and eternal sacrifice.” The NEB reading, however, clearly departs from the Greek text-dia pneumatos aioniou.

[33]So the NEB and AB. KJV, RSV, NIV, and NASB translate as “Spirit” (RSV footnote has “wind”).

[34]Or “violent” (NIV, NAS), “driving” (NEB); Greek biaias.

[35]RSV footnote has “spirit.”

[36]The NIV footnotes that “a spirit” in both cases could be translated “the Spirit.”

[37]Or “innermost being” (NASB), Greek koilias.

[38]For Old Testament parallels see Isaiah 12:3; 55:1; 58:11.

[39]Other Old Testament allusions include Jeremiah 2:13; Ezekiel 47:9; Zechariah 14:8.

[40]We will have occasion to look later into other passages that depict an outpouring of the Spirit (see chap. 8, “The Coming of the Holy Spirit”).

[41]See, e.g., Psalm 46:4; Proverbs 4:23; 18:4.

[42]“Gentle as a dove” is a common phrase, which illustrates my point.

[43]The KJV has “harmless.” However, the Greek word is akeraioi, which is better translated “innocent” or “pure” (BAGD).

[44]“Hovering” (NIV, NEB, NASB mg); “brooding” (BDB); Hebrew merahepet.

[45]One Jewish tradition (Babylonian Talmud Hagigah, 15a) translates Genesis 1:2 thus: “The Spirit of God like a dove brooded over the waters.”

[46]E.g., Genesis 15:9-10, Leviticus 12:6-8, and Numbers 6:10-11. Also note how the parents of the infant Jesus brought a sacrifice “according to what is said in the law of the Lord [in Leviticus 12:8] ‘a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons’ “ (Luke 2:24).

[47]Or “who” (NIV, NASB); Greek hos or ho (UBS).

[48]Or “pledge” (NASB, NEB); “deposit” (NIV); “earnest” (KJV); Greek arrabon.

[49]See footnote 48.

[50]Or “unction” (KJV); Greek chrisma. The symbolism of oil for the Holy Spirit became increasingly significant in the early church ceremony of initiation wherein immediately following baptism the chrism of oil was applied to the believer as his consecration in the Holy Spirit.

[51]“The Old Testament language that precedes a prophetic utterance is often “Thus says the LORD.” Since “the LORD.” is God, and “the Holy Spirit” is used in place of “the LORD” in Acts 21:11, the Holy Spirit is thus identified as God.

[52]See chapter 8, “The Coming of the Holy Spirit,” for more detail.

[53]According to 1 Corinthians 12:6, “God … works all things in all persons”

(NASB); according to 1 Corinthians 12:11, “One and the same Spirit works all these things” (NASB). Note, again, the identification of God and the Spirit.

[54]See vol. 1, chapter 3, V, “The Perfections of God.”

[55]The KJV, like NIV, has “deep things”; RSV and NASB translate the words as “the depths of God” (similarly NEB). The Greek is ta bathe tou theou. Though “depths” is the most obvious translation (cf. Rom. 11:33), it may be misleading, for the point is not that the Holy Spirit searches the “depths” of God’s being but the “deep things”-i.e., the “secret and hidden wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 2:7).

[56]The word translated “searches” in 1 Corinthians 2:10 might also be rendered “fathoms” (see BAGD). The Greek is eraunä.

[57]The Greek word is energei-operates, effects, works.

[58]See footnote 53.

[59]Vol. 1, chapters 5-6, and 13 and chapters 2 and 4 of this volume. However, there are many references to the work of the Holy Spirit in other chapters.

[60]The Holy Spirit is no more a demiurge (Plato’s subordinate deity who fashions the world) than is Jesus Christ. (On “demiurge” see vol. 1, chapter 5, pp. 99, 101.)

[61]The same thing essentially is true about the personhood of the Word of God. Only when the Incarnation actually occurs is this made unmistakably clear. The Holy Spirit is the last of the “persons” to be fully disclosed.

[62]See the prior discussion under II.A.l, “The Spirit of Truth.”

[63]The Greek words are to pneuma.

[64]The Greek word is ekeinos. This is quite significant, because the pronoun regularly agrees with the gender and number of the noun to which it refers.

[65]One can sense in these discourses the breaking through of the climactic revelation of the personhood of the Holy Spirit.

[66]See chapter 8, “The Coming of the Holy Spirit,” for more details.

[67]I recall the statement of a newly “Spirit-filled” person, who put it memorably: “For me the Holy Ghost is a ghost no longer!”

[68]Cf. Acts 8:29: “The Spirit said to Philip …”; 10:19: “While Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him …”; and 28:25: “The Holy Spirit was right in saying… .”

[69]RSV has “abide in,” NEB “remain in.” The Hebrew is yädon. KJV, like NASB, has “strive with”; NIV reads “contend with.” These latter translations contain more of a sense of the will of God’s Spirit.

[70]Or “with groanings” (KJV, NASB, similarly NIV, NEB). The Greek word is stenagmois. Cf. Acts 7:34: the “groaning” of the Israelites in Egypt.

[71]’Matthew 4:1 has “led up by the Spirit.” Mark 1:12 says “The Spirit sent him out into the desert” (NIV).

[72]The Greek word is koinonia.

[73]“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).

[74]This is mentioned especially in Judges and 1 Samuel (see chap. 7, “The Enabling Spirit”).

[75]The Greek word is ekporeuetai and literally means “goes out” (so NIV). The NEB translates it as “issues from.”

[76]This is the affirmation of the Constantinopolitan Creed of A.D. 381 (popularly known as the Nicene Creed): “We believe … in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver, Who proceeds from the Father … .” In the West at the Council of Toledo in A.D. 589 “and the Son” (filioque) was added, with the result that the “filioque” addition has come to be generally accepted as a part of the creed in Roman Catholicism and Protestantism (though not so in Greek Orthodoxy). A modification of the Toledo statement was sought at the Council of Florence in A.D. 1439, namely, that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son. This, I believe, is a more adequate statement than either that of Constantinople or Toledo.

[77]The technical term is “subsistence” or “hypostasis” (see discussion in vol. 1, chap. 4, “The Holy Trinity”). I have used “distinct reality” above; but this must not be viewed as “distinct being,” which would signify a separate deity.

[78]“Procession” technically refers to the eternal movement within the Godhead; “sending” to the occurrence which takes place in time.

7
The Enabling Spirit

Let us now consider the activity of the Holy Spirit within the community of faith.[1] The Holy Spirit imparts capability for the execution of various tasks and functions. For such accomplishments there is the Holy Spirit's endowment of wisdom and strength for the fulfilling of God's purpose.

I. SPECIAL TASKS AND FUNCTIONS

In the community of the Old Covenant numerous tasks and functions are shown to be activated by the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit is depicted as illuminator, energizer, and enabler.

A. Designing of Tabernacle and Temple

The first Old Testament reference to an enablement by the Holy Spirit is that of an artisan for the designing and building of the tabernacle. The man was Bezalel, and concerning him God spoke through Moses: “I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every craft” (Exod. 31:3–5). The main point of this account was not Bezalel’s natural capacity but his being illuminated and enabled by the Spirit so that a building of God’s own design could become a reality. God expressed His approval of the finished project when “the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (Exod. 40:34).

Later, for the building of the temple, God gave David himself the pattern and design to pass on to his son Solomon. According to Scripture, “he [David] gave him [Solomon] the plans of all that the Spirit[2] had put in his mind for the courts of the temple of the LORD and all the surrounding rooms, for the treasuries of the temple of God and for the treasuries for the dedicated things” (1 Chron. 28:12 NIV). Neither David’s plan nor anyone else’s became the design of God’s house; rather, the pattern was given him by the illumination of the Spirit of God. When the work on the temple was finished by Solomon, “the house of the LORD was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God” (2 Chron. 5:13–14). The temple, like the tabernacle, was given in plan and pattern by God’s own Spirit and was climactically filled with the glory of God.

B. Leading the People

During Israel's journey in the wilderness Moses found the task of leading the Israelites increasingly wearisome. To relieve Moses, God told him to gather seventy of the elders of Israel, saying, "I will take of the Spirit who is upon you, and will put Him upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you" (Num. 11:17 NASB). Thus both Moses and the chosen elders are pictured as endowed with the Spirit for leadership over the Israelites. By the Spirit of God Moses and the elders shared in meeting the problems, handling disputes, and generally dealing with the innumerable concerns of thousands of people over a lengthy period of their wilderness journey.

Many years later when Moses was told by God that he could not lead Israel into the land of Canaan, Moses prayed, "'May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, who will … lead them out and bring them in.' … So the LORD said to Moses, 'Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him … and commission him in their sight'" (Num. 27:16–19 NASB). The important matter is that Joshua was "a man in whom [was] the Spirit" and that by this Spirit he would lead the people. As a result: "Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses" (Deut. 34:9 NASB).

The Spirit in these cases endowed men for leadership. God gave Moses, the elders, and Joshua special wisdom and strength for both the wilderness journey and entrance into the Promised Land.

C. Judging

After Joshua's death Israel continued her struggle with the enemies who still remained in the Promised Land of Canaan. Then God raised up individuals called "judges" who were energized and enabled by His Spirit to fight against their enemies, render judgment, and variously rule over Israel. The Book of Judges frequently portrays the Spirit coming upon such persons. Othniel was the first of these judges: "The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel; he went out to war, and the LORD gave … [the] king of Mesopotamia into his hand" (Judg. 3:10). Upon Gideon the Spirit came forcefully: "The Spirit of the LORD took possession of[3] Gideon; and he sounded the trumpet" (6:34). Gideon, henceforward, was invested with the presence and power of the Lord. It is said of Jephthah, like Othniel, that "the Spirit of the LORD came upon" him (11:29). Finally, we should take note of Samson, for even as a youth "the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him" (13:25). Thereafter on three different occasions "the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon[4] him" (14:6, 19; 15:14), so that he tore apart a lion with his bare hands, slew thirty men of Ashkelon, and, snapping the ropes that bound him, killed a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass.

These accounts in the Book of Judges depict diverse people who acted not out of their own resources but from the divine investment of strength and wisdom.

D. Ruling

After the judges, kings ruled in Israel. The first two kings, Saul and David, likewise had the Spirit come upon them. Saul, as a recently anointed king, heard the Ammonite threats of atrocity, and "the Spirit of God came upon Saul mightily" (1 Sam. 11:6 NASB). As a result he mobilized the men of Israel and Judea to fight against the enemy.

Concerning David, Saul's successor, the text reads: "Samuel [the prophet] took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward" (1 Sam. 16:13). Of particular significance in David's case was the permanence of the endowment of the Spirit—"from that day forward." Regardless of what happened, either good or evil,[5] he remained until his death the Spirit-anointed ruler over Israel. Quite the opposite was Saul's case, for in the next verse we read, "The Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him" (1 Sam. 16:14).

After David there are no scriptural references to a spiritual anointing of the kings. One king followed another in dynastic succession or, with the division of the kingdom, by the overthrow of the then-reigning monarch. In regard to hereditary succession, I might add, there is no assurance of a spiritual anointing; for in such succession the throne is occupied by natural heirs rather than by those whom the Spirit endows.[6]

E. Prophesying

There are several references in the Old Testament to prophetic utterances coming from the Spirit of God. Prophecy broke out momentarily among the seventy elders of Israel whom Moses had selected. Moses took them out of the camp to the tabernacle (also called "the tent of meeting"), and "it came about that when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do it again" (Num. 11:25 NASB). While this prophesying clearly happened only once on the occasion of their appointment by Moses, it is significant that it did happen.

Two other men, Eldad and Medad, who had remained in the camp, also prophesied: "The Spirit rested upon them … and they prophesied" (v. 26 NASB). Joshua was quite disturbed and cried out to Moses, "Moses, my lord, restrain them." To this Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!" (vv. 28–29 NASB).

This passage about Eldad and Medad is very interesting because it shows that the Spirit of God could not be limited to a particular place (or occasion). The Spirit blows where and when He wills!

Perhaps the most striking example of the freedom of the Spirit occurred when a Mesopotamian, Balaam, gave oracles by the Spirit of God. "And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and saw Israel encamping tribe by tribe. And the Spirit of God came upon him, and he took up his discourse … 'Blessed be every one who blesses you, and cursed be every one who curses you'" (Num. 24:2–3, 9). However, even in this unique incident of a non-Israelite prophesying, the prophecy was directly related to Israel. Thus, it was an operation of *the* Spirit in connection with the community of faith.

I have already mentioned that the Spirit of God "came mightily" upon Saul. Thus he was endowed with special power for overcoming Israel's enemies. Also Saul was on occasion enabled by the Spirit to prophesy. Immediately after his anointing as king, Saul was told by Samuel (who had anointed him), "You will meet a band of prophets… .Then the Spirit of the LORD will come mightily upon you, and you shall prophesy with them and be turned into another man" (1 Sam. 10:5–6). Samuel's prediction was fulfilled shortly after, and many began to say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (v. 12). On a later occasion Saul sent messengers to capture David, but "when they saw the company of the prophets

prophesying, and Samuel standing as head over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied" (1 Sam. 19:20). This happened likewise with a second and third group of messengers, so that finally Saul himself went. "And the Spirit of God came upon him also, and as he went he prophesied[7] …. He too stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel, and lay naked all that day and all that night" (vv. 23–24).

Several points may be made here. First, Saul was never really designated a prophet, and yet he prophesied more than once; this was also true of Saul's messengers. Second, Samuel and his company of prophets were so anointed by God that they mightily affected those who came near them. Third, nothing is said about the content of the prophesying on the part of Saul, the band of prophets, or Saul's messengers,[8] though the rather bizarre action of divesting themselves of their clothes is depicted. All of this signifies again that limits cannot be placed on the Spirit of God.

In this same connection consider David. We have noted that with his anointing as king the Spirit of God came on him mightily "from that day forward." This also included a prophetic anointing. In 2 Samuel 23:1–2 is this climactic statement, "Now these are the last words of David … the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, 'The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was upon my tongue'" (NASB).

Let us briefly note other Scriptures that connect prophesying with the Spirit. It is said of Amasai, chief of thirty men, who joined David in his struggle against Saul: "Then the Spirit came upon Amasai … and he said, 'We are yours, O David'" (1 Chron. 12:18). In subsequent years a false prophet named Zedekiah angrily struck the prophet Micaiah and said, "How did the Spirit of the LORD go from me to speak to you?" (1 Kings 22:24; cf. 2 Chron. 18:23). Micaiah had declared a "lying spirit" to be in the mouth of Zedekiah and the other prophets who had falsely prophesied victory in a battle of Israel against the Syrians. In the time of King Jehoshaphat when Judah was under severe attack, "the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel … a Le vite," who cried out, "Fear not, and be not dismayed at this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God's" (2 Chron. 20:14–15). The result was that the Lord wrought a great victory without Judah engaging in battle. Later in the time of King Joash, "the Spirit of God took possession of[9] Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest; and he stood above the people, and said to them … 'Because you have forsaken the LORD, he has forsaken you'" (2 Chron. 24:20). Prophecy, again, is by no means linked only with those recognized as prophets, for Amasai was a warrior, and both Jahaziel and Zechariah belonged to priestly lines.

Little is said that directly connects the utterances of Israel's later writing prophets with the Spirit. The most frequent formula is "The word of the LORD came to …"[10] without reference to the Spirit's inspiration. Micah, however, has a direct reference, for he compared his ministry with that of the prophets who falsely cried "Peace": "But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin" (Mic. 3:8). Moreover, still later, Zechariah, a prophet after the exile, spoke reflectively of "the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets" (Zech. 7:12). He thus affirmed that the words of prophets before him had been given by God's Spirit.[11] In sum: the word of the Lord came by the enabling of God's Holy Spirit.[12]

F. Empowering

Occasionally in the Old Testament there are references to the Spirit of God as a dynamic, empowering force. The most significant is the angel's address to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah: "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts. What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain; and he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'" (Zech. 4:6–7). These remarkable words addressed to Zerubbabel concerning the postexilic rebuilding of the temple attest that it was only by the Spirit's empowering—not by human effort—that the "mountain" of obstacles and difficulties would be leveled and the task completed. The Spirit of power is also the Spirit of grace: God Himself would accomplish the work. Regarding the rebuilding of the temple, Haggai spoke similar words about the Spirit of God: "Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel … take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land … My Spirit abides among you; fear not … I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the LORD of hosts" (2:4–7). Again, this will happen by the power of God's Spirit.

The preceding texts declare the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish temple construction. There are other, quite different references to the Spirit as a moving force. Obadiah, an emissary of King Ahab, said to Elijah the prophet: "As soon as I have gone from you, the Spirit of the LORD will carry you whither I know not" (1 Kings 18:12). After Elijah had gone up by a whirlwind into heaven, the "sons of the prophets," not having seen it occur, surmised, "It may be that the Spirit of the LORD has caught him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley" (2 Kings 2:16). Ezekiel the prophet spoke several times of how "the Spirit of the LORD lifted [him] up" (3:12, 14; 8:3; 11:1, 24; 43:5). The prophet was taken to the exiles, or up between heaven and earth, or carried in visions from Chaldea to the temple in Jerusalem. The Spirit thus is not a blind, purposeless force but is the power of God to enable the prophet to behold and declare God's intention.

The Holy Spirit is truly the Spirit of power.

CONCLUDING SUMMARY AND REMARKS:

As we look back over these Old Testament accounts several comments are in order:

First, it is evident that the Spirit of God is largely depicted as the Spirit of enablement. The Spirit's activity was that of endowing an artisan, a judge, a king, a prophet, or a priest to perform certain functions or tasks. Whatever the individual's natural abilities and capacities, the endowment of the Spirit is shown to be something additional, hence supernatural. And it is by virtue of this special endowment that the person involved was enabled to fulfill a certain task or vocation.

Second, this activity of the Spirit is shown generally to be temporary and occasional. For example, in the case of Samson, the Spirit was said to come at various times upon Samson to enable him to perform mighty deeds. And even though from his early days the Spirit "began to stir" him, there was throughout his life a sporadic coming of the Spirit. In regard to Saul, the Spirit "came mightily" upon him that he might rally his fellow countrymen against the enemy. But later the Spirit of the Lord departed from him. In the case of prophets from Moses' elders onward, the Spirit was not a permanent possession to be used at will but came upon persons at the moment of their prophesying. It was God's endowment for the occasion of uttering His word of truth. In summary, the Spirit was able to "take possession" but was not possessed; the Spirit could "clothe" someone but, like clothing, was not a permanent vestment. Thus the endowment of the Spirit was largely transitory: for an occasion, for a task, or for an utterance. It was not an abiding reality.[13]

Third, it is apparent that this activity of the Holy Spirit relates in various ways to the life of the community of faith—the people of God. The Spirit "came upon," "took possession of," was "put upon"—all such expressions refer to an action of the Spirit wherein certain of God's people were enabled to serve His cause and kingdom.[14] The Spirit in this enabling activity had nothing as such to do with God's creative or redemptive work, nor with any divine action whereby the people of God were formed. Rather, the whole thrust of the Spirit of God presupposes the fact and existence of Israel as God's people. Thus the Spirit came to give direction, strength, and empowerment for their life and mission.

II. THE MESSIANIC VOCATION

We come now to the great and paramount task—namely, that of equipping the Messiah, the Anointed One.[15] The Messiah is described in both the Old and New Testaments as fitted by the Holy Spirit[16] for the exercise of His vocation.

A. The Coming One

In several passages the prophet Isaiah declares the coming and activity of One who would be endowed with the Spirit of the Lord. He would fulfill His mission under the Spirit's anointing.

We begin with this striking prophecy: "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD" (Isa. 11:1–2). We should note several things. First, the One to come would be from the line of David (the son of Jesse). And, like David, who was continuously anointed with the Spirit, the Spirit was to "rest"—that is, remain—on the Messiah. Second, it would be an abundant endowment of the Spirit, containing the sixfold aspects mentioned;[17] hence, the Messiah would receive of the Spirit far more bountifully than any who had preceded him. And, third, the Messiah would have from the Spirit the ideal qualities—intellectual (wisdom and understanding), practical (counsel and might), and religious (knowledge and the fear of the Lord) for rule and judgment. Therefore it is said, "He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear…. Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins" (vv. 3, 5). Peace will also abound: "They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (v. 9). Such are to be the glorious results of the coming of Him on whom the Spirit of God will rest.

Next we observe one of the "servant" passages that points to the Coming One.

> Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not fail[18] or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth (Isa. 42:1–4).

These words, quoted in the New Testament (Matt. 12:18–21) after Jesus compassionately healed many people, again depict the Messiah as One who is

endowed with the Holy Spirit. As a result justice, humility, tenderness, steadfastness, and patience will mark His way.

One other passage, and surely the most remarkable because it is quoted in part by Jesus as referring to Himself, is the following:

> The Spirit of the Lord GOD [19] is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn … [to give them] the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified (Isa. 61:1–3).

It is in this passage that the Spirit and the anointing are most clearly connected: the Coming One will carry out His mission through the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

These passages in Isaiah depict the Coming One as being endowed with the Spirit so that He would be able to fulfill His unique vocation. This vocation included various aspects of the endowment given to leaders and judges, kings and prophets. However, the Messiah would surpass all others in the manifoldness of His anointing, the breadth of His calling, and the results to be achieved. Under the continuing enablement of the Holy Spirit He would carry forward His total ministry.

B. Forerunners

Just prior to the coming of the Messiah and in connection with His birth and infancy, several persons in the New Testament are depicted as being enabled by the Holy Spirit to fulfill various roles. The Gospel of Luke sets forth their story.

The first reference is to John the Baptist: "He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power[20] of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children … to make ready for the Lord a people prepared" (Luke 1:15–17). John, therefore, was a climactic representative of the Old Testament prophetic line—going before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah. The last two verses of the Old Testament in the Book of Malachi record, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children" (4:5–6).[21] John, accordingly, is to be understood as Elijah, not literally, of course, but spiritually, as one who moved in his "spirit and power."[22]

In terms of the Spirit John the Baptist stands out above any Old Testament figure, for he was "filled with the Holy Spirit, even from[23] his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15). As we observed, it was said of David and his being anointed as king that "from that day forward" the Spirit of the Lord was upon him. But not of David or any other is there a suggestion that the Spirit was either upon him or filled him from his birth. John thus was an extraordinary figure with an unusual endowment, and, of course, with a unique role—that of preparing the way for the coming of the Lord.

The latter point is especially important: the purpose of John's endowment with the Spirit was totally directed beyond himself. It had nothing to do with his own salvation or edification, but everything to do with his mission, namely, that of making ready "for the Lord a people prepared." For so great a task John was fitted as none other; he was filled with God's Spirit from his birth onward.

We next note Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary truly is the supreme human example of the enabling power of the Holy Spirit: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power[24] of the Most High will overshadow you" (Luke 1:35). No human father, accordingly, was to be involved in the birth; it was to be the work of the Holy Spirit,[25] the *dynamis* from above.

We observe again that this enabling and energizing action of the Holy Spirit

was totally related to Mary's becoming the mother of the Lord. It had no relation to her salvation or sanctification.[26] The activity of the Spirit was for a particular purpose, and there is no suggestion in the Gospels that after Jesus' birth the Spirit remained upon her. Like others, she was to wait for the effusion of the Spirit at Pentecost.[27]

Not long after the announcement of the holy birth, Mary cried out in the presence of her kinswoman Elizabeth: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46–47). Such praise and rejoicing,[28] though not specified as being from the Holy Spirit, strongly suggests an anointing of the Spirit similar to Elizabeth's (see next paragraph) for the prophetic utterance that fell from her lips. Again this is not depicted in the Gospel as a continuing endowment of the Spirit.

Next let us observe the activity of the Spirit in relation to Elizabeth, the mother-to-be of John the Baptist. In the sixth month of her pregnancy she was visited by Mary. When Mary greeted her, "the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!'" (Luke 1:41—42). These words of blessing by Elizabeth preceded Mary's joyful exultation and are said to have resulted from her being "filled with the Holy Spirit."

It is quite significant that the occasion of Elizabeth's being thus spiritually "filled" was Mary's arrival, for Mary carried in her own womb the promised Son of God. On Elizabeth's part it was thus a responsive action to the presence of the coming Lord, so that by the Holy Spirit she broke forth into joy and blessing. However, this filling with the Spirit, for all of its profound character, was momentary, happening in a situation of extraordinary spiritual significance.

Concerning Zechariah, the husband of Elizabeth and father-to-be of John the Baptist, Luke writes, "And his [John's] father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying, 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us…. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way'" (1:67–68, 76). Thus Zechariah was enabled by the Holy Spirit to prophesy concerning both the Messiah to be born and the role of his own son, John.

The background of Zechariah's utterance in the Spirit is significant. There was a deep struggle between faith and doubt: first, difficulty in believing that a son could be born to him and Elizabeth since both were advanced in years, and, second, hesitation in regard to the name "John"—not a family name—which the angel had specified. Indeed, because of his doubt and hesitation Zechariah's

speech was taken from him until after the boy was born (Luke 1:18–22). Later when he wrote on a tablet, “His name is John,” and thereby submitted to God’s purpose and designation, “immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God” (1:63–64). Then Zechariah was “filled with the Holy Spirit,” and under that powerful anointing he blessed God yet further, unfolding the panorama of the coming ministries of both Jesus and John. It was against the background of revived faith and fresh obedience that Zechariah thus spoke by the Spirit.

The last in this series of accounts with reference to the Holy Spirit concerns Simeon, a man “righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25). There are in this account three distinct references concerning the Holy Spirit. “The Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple” (vv. 25–27 NASB).

Thus Simeon was prepared for the imminent arrival of Joseph and Mary with their infant child. He then took the child Jesus into his arms, blessed God, and rejoiced: “Mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel” (vv. 30–32). To a man richly endowed[29] with the Spirit came this extraordinary disclosure of God’s salvation, which was to include both Gentile and Jew. Here is recorded one of the greatest prophetic utterances in the Scriptures concerning the universality of God’s purpose in providing a salvation available to all.

Following this, Simeon blessed both parents and then proclaimed that the child Jesus in His role as Savior would be “set for the fall and rising of many in Israel” and indeed that Mary herself would have a sword pierce through her own soul (vv. 34–35). Thus Simeon by the Spirit was enabled to discern both the joy and the pain that was soon to come.

We may summarize the preceding accounts as follows. First, there is the *strong religious character* of all who were activated by the Holy Spirit. Of Zechariah and Elizabeth the Scripture says that “they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:6). Mary is depicted as one who “found favor[30] with God” (v. 30) and who humbly said, “I am the handmaid of the Lord” (1:38). Simeon was a man “righteous and devout” (2:25). John, son of righteous Zechariah and Elizabeth, was to be “great before the Lord” (1:15). All five persons represent the highest integrity of character, in many ways the finest flower of the Old Testament dispensation as transition is made into the New. Their righteousness, humility,

and devoutness are the background for the Spirit's activity.

Second, everything about the Holy Spirit in these several narratives *focuses on Jesus Christ.* It is obvious that the narratives are found in the beginning chapters of the Good News of Jesus Christ. But what is relevant to our concern is that all references to the Holy Spirit point directly to the coming of Jesus. John was filled with the Spirit to prepare a people for the advent of Christ; Mary was visited by the power of the Holy Spirit to bring forth the Son of God; Elizabeth was filled with the Spirit as-the babe in her womb leaped for joy at the presence of Mary, who had just conceived Jesus; Zechariah prophesied under the anointing of the Spirit concerning "the horn of salvation" God had raised up; and Simeon took the child Jesus under the Spirit's leading and blessed God for His coming salvation. The Holy Spirit is witness throughout to Jesus Christ.

Third, each instance of the Holy Spirit's activity is that of *supernatural enablement for a particular purpose.* In several instances the Holy Spirit was unmistakably the Spirit of prophetic utterance: Elizabeth, Zechariah, and Simeon all spoke prophetically under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. It was not words of their own devising, but they made their declarations by the enabling of the Holy Spirit. John was to be filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb so that his total life and ministry would be suffused with the spiritual power necessary to prepare the way for Christ. The Holy Spirit came upon Mary for the one purpose of enabling her womb to conceive the Son of God. Supernatural enablement, whether for uttering the word of God, preparing the way of Christ, or bringing forth the Son of God, is the activity of the Holy Spirit in these varied accounts.

Fourth, in all instances except that of John, these actions of the Spirit are *temporary and occasional*. For Elizabeth and Zechariah, both of whom were said to be "filled with the Holy Spirit," blessing and prophecy immediately followed. There is no suggestion in the narrative that this was a permanent endowment of the Spirit; rather it was one given at the moment to make possible a prophetic message. In the case of Mary, the Holy Spirit came upon her for the one great moment of divine conception; hence this was temporary and for the single occasion. The Spirit was "upon" Simeon as one "looking for the consolation of Israel" (Luke 2:25); he was "in" the Spirit when he met Joseph and Mary and blessed the Christ child. Only in the case of John—forerunner of Jesus, hence with a mission unparalleled among men—was the Spirit to be a continuing endowment from infancy to the end of his ministry.

Fifth, the context for the activity of the Holy Spirit is that of *faith, expectancy, and obedience.* I earlier called attention to the strong religious character of all the persons; here we note the importance of their openness to God's word and

promise. Zechariah, for all his righteous and unblemished character, had to move to the place where he could accept in complete faith and obedience the word from the Lord. The step from "You will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things come to pass, because you did not believe my words" (Luke 1:20) to "His name is John" (v. 63) is a critical one requiring faith and obedience. Only then was Zechariah filled with the Spirit and only then did he begin to prophesy. Mary, on the contrary, readily believed: "Let it be to me according to your word" (v. 38). Elizabeth pronounced a blessing on her: "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (v. 45). Simeon never wavered from the divine revelation that he would not die before he should see the Christ; and his faith and expectancy were abundantly rewarded.

Sixth, the atmosphere surrounding the activity of the Holy Spirit was permeated with *joy and blessing.* As the babe "leaped for joy" (1:44) in Elizabeth's womb, she was filled with the Holy Spirit and cried out with a loud voice blessing after blessing (vv. 41–45). Mary replied, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (vv. 46–47). Zechariah's tongue was loosed and he spoke, "blessing God" (v. 64). Later, filled with the Spirit, he cried forth, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel" (v. 68). Simeon in the Spirit came into the temple and took the infant Jesus into his arms; he "blessed God" and thereafter blessed both Joseph and Mary (2:27–28, 34). The Holy Spirit through all of this was active within an atmosphere of joy and blessing—even exultation.

Seventh, and finally, all this activity of the Holy Spirit is among those who are *people of God.* Zechariah was a priest "of the division of Abijah," and Elizabeth, his wife, was one "of the daughters of Aaron" (Luke 1:5)—hence a doubly strong priestly line. And, of course, from that line John himself came. Mary was betrothed to Joseph "of the house of David" (v. 27), and Simeon was obviously a devout Jew, one "looking for the consolation of Israel" (2:25). Mary spoke of "God [her] Savior" (1:47). Thus, all had a vital faith in the God of Israel and were in some sense already sharers in God's redemptive activity. Without being participants yet in the new covenant and the kingdom[31] to be fulfilled in Christ, these five persons represent the highest and noblest fruition of people moving in the Spirit just prior to the coming of Jesus Christ.

C. The Ministry of Jesus

We are now ready to view the ministry of Jesus as it relates to the Holy Spirit. Having noted the various Old Testament references to the Coming One and having considered the various forerunners in the immediate New Testament spiritual background, we are better prepared to consider the operation of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' own ministry.

1. The Background of Ministry

The ministry of Jesus began just after His baptism by John and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Him: "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened[32] and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, 'Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased'" (Mark 1:9–11).[33] All four gospels record this event as the background for Jesus' ministry. Luke specifically records that following the descent of the Spirit (3:22) "Jesus … began his ministry" (v. 23).[34]

It is therefore apparent that the coming of the Spirit upon Jesus was for the whole of His ministry. It was not for a particular or limited work and surely not for a special utterance or activity, but for the total vocation He fulfilled. With the coming of the Spirit He became the "anointed One" and therefore "the Messiah" or "the Christ." With that anointing He carried out His ministry and mission.

The coming of the Spirit upon Him was also a permanent endowment. According to the words of John the Baptist, "I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven; and He remained upon Him" (John 1:32 NASB). The word "remained" affirms the continuing character of the Spirit's anointing of Jesus. In this there is likeness to David on whom the Spirit came "from that day forward."

Also there was no limit or measure of the Spirit. As John's Gospel later records: "He whom God has sent utters the words of God, for it is not by measure that he gives the Spirit [to him][35] " (3:34). In this first reference to the measureless giving of the Spirit, it is clear that Jesus received the Spirit in abundance.

It is particularly important to recognize that this was a second operation of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus. The primary operation, of course, was the activity of the Spirit in His birth. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and so was born as the holy One, the Son of God.[36] At His baptism the second operation occurred in which Jesus was anointed by the Spirit for His entire life and ministry. Jesus was the divine and holy One at birth; He became the anointed One at His baptism. By no means, I would add, is this characterization of Jesus as a Spirit-endowed person a deemphasis of His divine Sonship; that is presupposed. He did not become the Son of God at baptism,[37] though surely at that event He was recognized as such: "Thou art my beloved Son." But He did become the Spirit-anointed Son, in the sense of the Messiah, as the Spirit descended upon Him.

There is something unmistakably unique about the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus. The Spirit had come upon others before, but there is a difference with Him. The imagery of the dove in relation to the descent of the Spirit is new and suggests fresh aspects of the kind of ministry Jesus would be fulfilling.[38] Also, the statement that the heavens were "opened," even "split" or "torn apart"[39] as the Spirit came down, points to an unprecedented irruption of the Spirit from the heavenly sphere into the earthly. The Spirit broke through with more intensity and character than before. This could also relate to what was previously noted, namely, that Jesus received the Spirit without measure: it was the limitless gift of the Holy Spirit from "opened" heavens.

The extraordinary Trinitarian character of the event of Jesus' baptism is also apparent. While our focus is on the Holy Spirit and His anointing of Jesus, surely we would err not to emphasize also how both the Father and the Son are involved. The voice that spoke from heaven was, of course, that of God the Father who addressed Jesus as "Son": "Thou art my beloved Son." Thus in one unique moment at Jesus' baptism, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were all represented. There is no other scene in the New Testament that more vividly depicts the Triune Godhead in personal interaction.

It is also apparent that in this event of the Spirit's coming upon Jesus, God the Father was thereby affirming Jesus' divine Sonship and setting His seal of approval on Him: "Thou art my beloved Son, with thee I am well pleased." As the Fourth Gospel later says, "On him has God the Father set his seal" (John 6:27). By this sealing there was the heavenly approval and confirmation of Jesus, both for who He was and for the vocation to which the Father had called him.

Now a further word about the relationship between Jesus' baptism and the descent of the Spirit upon Him. John came proclaiming the necessity of

“repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4). Jesus, having no sins to repent of, and over John’s protests,[40] insisted on John’s baptizing Him, for, said Jesus, “thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). By His baptism Jesus vicariously identified Himself with sinful humanity and man’s necessity for repentance and forgiveness. It was this act of identification by Jesus that was the background for the coming of the Holy Spirit and the commencement of Jesus’ ministry.

This does not mean, however, that the descent of the Spirit automatically followed Jesus’ baptism. It was not the corollary—as if to say that the descent represented the “righteousness” Jesus came “to fulfill.” No, that righteousness was already fulfilled through Jesus’ vicarious identification with humanity in the waters of baptism. Something else, therefore, was happening in the descent of the Holy Spirit, which, though occurring in conjunction with Jesus’ water baptism, was not its “spiritual side.”[41] They are not two sides of the same event; nor does the former (the water baptism) bring about the latter (the descent of the Spirit). The water baptism with all it represents was preparation and background but not the cause of the descent of the Spirit.

According to the Gospel of Mark, the descent of the Spirit occurred “immediately” (1:10) after Jesus’ baptism. Luke adds a further important statement that it happened in a separate distinct moment as Jesus was praying: “When Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him …” (3:21–22). It was at the moment of prayer, as Jesus looked toward the opening heavens, that the Spirit, like a dove, began His descent.

The point then is that the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus was for an entirely different purpose from His baptism. Baptism was the essential background for identifying Himself with the need of all people for repentance and righteousness. Now that this had been done, Jesus was prepared for the descent of the Spirit by which He would be anointed with power for the ministry that lay ahead. As Peter later said to the Gentiles at Caesarea, “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power” (Acts 10:38). It was for this, and this alone, that the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus following His baptism: to enable Him to fulfill His ministry and mission.[42]

There is another significant matter to consider. Following these words of John the Baptist, “I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him,” John added, “And I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in[43] water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining … this is the one who baptizes in[43] the Holy Spirit’”

(John 1:32–33 NASB).[44] Thus a close connection is drawn between the event of the Holy Spirit's coming and remaining on Jesus and of Jesus' baptizing others in the same Holy Spirit. This suggests that through both the Spirit's coming and His remaining on Jesus, He would also endow others with the same abiding Spirit of power for the ministry of the gospel.

It is also noteworthy that in the Fourth Gospel prior to John the Baptist's words about Jesus as the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit, John had declared about Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The Fourth Gospel does not, like the three Synoptics, actually describe Jesus' water baptism. Rather where it might have been expected, John the Baptist affirmed Jesus' saving work, and in so doing declared the inner significance of His baptism. Thus Jesus is portrayed, first, as the Lamb of God who saves and, second, as the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.[45]

Finally, to return to the earlier point of departure: the ministry of Jesus is set against the background of His baptism by John and the descent of the Spirit upon Him. This means that He who was already the Son of God is henceforward also the Spirit-anointed man. Thus verily is He the Messiah, Jesus the Christ.

2. The Commencement of Jesus' Ministry

The Holy Spirit is also shown to be active in the beginning of Jesus' ministry. According to Luke's Gospel, "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan" (4:1). The word "full"[46] further emphasizes that the Spirit without measure had descended upon Jesus following His baptism. Moreover, the word "full" further portrays the internal abundance of the Spirit. Jesus is both He *on whom* the Spirit came in totality and He *in whom* the Spirit was fully at work.

First, after Jesus returned from the Jordan, He was "led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil" (Luke 4:1–2).[47] This was the first thing that happened after the Spirit came upon Jesus. According to the Gospel of Mark, "immediately the Spirit impelled[48] him to go out" (1:12 NASB). Jesus was to be tempted by Satan as He began His ministry, and—of utmost importance—He had to overcome every ruse and device that Satan could use against Him. Jesus emerged victorious, and "when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13).

Second, at the conclusion of the temptations, "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, and a report concerning him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all"

(Luke 4:14–15). The implication is clear: Jesus, anointed by the Spirit and victor over every temptation the devil could conjure up, now returned in triumphant power. The devil—or Satan—was by no means yet defeated. But for the time he was out of the way, and Jesus now began to minister in great power. The "power of the Spirit" that Jesus had received at His baptism was already a power that had begun to overcome the wiles of Satan and bring about the establishment of a new order. As soon as Jesus returned to Galilee, and before there is any mention of His teaching or any other activity, a "news report" began to spread about Him. Doubtless there was something in Jesus' own presence and demeanor under the Spirit's anointing that made a great impression on people everywhere. Even more, as He began to teach, His praises were sung by one and all.

Third, Jesus came to His hometown of Nazareth and in the synagogue read from the Book of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18–19). At the conclusion Jesus announced the fulfillment of this prophecy: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21). He thereby declared His own anointing with the Holy Spirit for the purpose of carrying out His total ministry of preaching and teaching, healing and deliverance.[49]

Thus the ministry of Jesus had begun—and at every point we see the activity of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was *full* of the Spirit, *led* by the Spirit, *empowered* by the Spirit, and *anointed* with the Spirit. He clearly is the apex and transcendence of all people of the Spirit who have preceded Him.

3. The Continuation of Ministry

As Jesus carried forward His ministry through both word and deed, He did so in the power of the Holy Spirit. In regard to His teaching, this fact is implicit in such a statement as this: "They were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes" (Mark 1:22).[50] In another situation Jesus said, "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:63). Whenever He spoke or taught, His words were Spirit-anointed and life-giving.[51]

Jesus' works of healing and deliverance are also on occasion said to have occurred through this special power that was upon and with Him. The Scripture says that before Jesus healed a paralyzed man, "the power of the Lord was with him to heal" (Luke 5:17). Hence, this healing and others that followed were performed by the power [*dynamis*] of the Lord. In a case of deliverance later, Jesus made it unmistakably clear that the source of His power was the Holy

Spirit. After casting a demon out of a blind and dumb man and thereby healing him, Jesus said, “If it is by the Spirit[52] of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt. 12:28). This is not a conditional “if” but a factual statement:[53] Jesus emphasized that He exercised this ministry of deliverance by none other than the Holy Spirit. Although there are no other direct references in the Gospels to Jesus’ healing people and exorcising demons by the power of the Holy Spirit, the implication is clear: these deeds were done by “the power of the Lord,” “by the Spirit of God”—that same Spirit that came upon Him at the Jordan and remained on Him. After Peter’s statement “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power” are these words: “He went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed[54] by the devil, for God was with him” (Acts 10:38). Simon Peter had been with Jesus throughout His ministry and could certify that Jesus’ acts of healing and deliverance proceeded from His having been anointed by the Spirit of God.

It is important to recognize that the ministry of Jesus empowered by the Holy Spirit was an ongoing attack against the forces of evil that bound mankind. First, He had to withstand the assault against Himself and thus be fortified to help others. We have briefly noted Jesus’ temptations by Satan and how He rebuffed the devil at every turn. With Satan’s departure for a time, Jesus was able to return victorious in the power of the Spirit to begin His ministry of teaching and healing. Second, we observe that following the words “If it is by the Spirit of God I cast out demons” Jesus said: “How can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house” (Matt. 12:29). The “strong man” is, of course, Satan; the plundering of his house in this particular case was the liberation of a deaf and dumb person from Satan’s bondage. The binding of the “strong man” refers to Jesus’ so circumscribing and limiting Satan by the power of the Spirit as to render him incapable of holding on to his “demonized” captives. This binding surely began with Jesus’ initial defeat of Satan in the wilderness so that He was able to return to Galilee and “plunder” Satan’s house, with the result that in one place after another people were set free.[55] All of this occurred by the power of the Spirit, who rested upon and pervaded Jesus in an ongoing, liberating assault against the forces of the devil.

One of the most dramatic incidents in the ministry of Jesus occurred when He appointed seventy[56] persons to go forth ministering the word and healing the sick, and “the seventy returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!’” (Luke 10:17). Then Jesus replied in vivid language: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you

authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy" (vv. 18–19). Hence the seventy, while themselves not anointed by the Holy Spirit, were delegated authority by Jesus to "tread upon" Satan and his minions and thereby to cast out demons. When this happened, Jesus beheld as in a vision Satan suddenly falling from heaven![57] The imagery, while different from that of Satan as a strong man being bound in his house, is nonetheless clear: he falls precipitously from heaven as the seventy heal and cast out demons. Thus by delegated spiritual authority, the disciples of Jesus shared in His ministry to those bound by Satan.

The presence of the Holy Spirit on this occasion is shown by the following extraordinary statement about Jesus: "At that very time He rejoiced greatly[58] in the Holy Spirit" (Luke 10:21 NASB). This is the only reference in the Gospels to Jesus' exulting in the Holy Spirit.

Significantly, the occasion was the sharing of His ministry with His disciples. Satan was despoiled and his captives set free.

To summarize: The ministry of Jesus in word and deed was carried forward in the power of the Holy Spirit. In everything He did, Jesus knew in Himself a mighty force working that was beyond Himself. Accordingly, wherever Jesus was present, He could declare the Holy Spirit to be present also. Thus Jesus said on one occasion to His disciples: "He [the Spirit] dwells with you" (John 14:17). Jesus lived and moved in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

III. THE SPIRIT TO COME

During the earthly ministry of Jesus, the Spirit had not yet come. Jesus in His teaching made many references to the Spirit's impending arrival. Our attention will be focused on the relevant Scriptures.[59]

A. The Paraclete

First, we turn briefly to some of the Paraclete passages in the Fourth Gospel. Three such passages were earlier considered in our discussion of "the Spirit of truth"[60] —John 14:16–17; 14:26; and 15:26. Now I add a fourth-John 16:7: "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor ["Paraclete"] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." The Paraclete is the Holy Spirit who would come to Jesus' disciples, indeed, who was to be sent to them by Jesus. Moreover, Jesus added, "He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment" (v. 8 NASB). Thus Jesus' disciples would be enabled to minister the word with convicting power that leads to salvation. So they were to carry forward the ministry and mission of Jesus.

We should particularly note that the Holy Spirit would not come until Jesus went away. This means, of course, Jesus' departure to the Father; then Jesus would send the Spirit. He would come after Jesus had returned to heaven, and from there the Holy Spirit was to be sent forth to enable the disciples of Jesus to proclaim the gospel. Peter, who was the first to proclaim the message (Acts 2), later wrote of "those who preached the good news … through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven" (1 Peter 1:12). Only after Jesus went "away"—and only then —was the Holy Spirit able and willing to come.[61]

Here we readily observe a parallel between Jesus and His disciples. In His case, as we have noted, "the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended." Thus was Jesus the forerunner of those who later "preached the good news through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven." The same Spirit from heaven anointed both Jesus and His disciples at the beginning of their ministry.

Another parallel—perhaps less obvious but highly significant—is that in both cases the Holy Spirit came upon those who were "born" of the Spirit. Jesus Himself was born of the Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary; the disciples were born of the Spirit in the room where Jesus breathed upon them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). In Jesus' case, of course, it was generation; in the disciples' it was regeneration.[62] But for both, being born of the Spirit preceded the coming of the Spirit.

Before proceeding further, it is important to emphasize that the Holy Spirit would later come to the disciples as a newborn community of believers. To some extent the disciples had been believers for about three years; they had followed

Him and even did miracles in His name. But it was not until the resurrection of Jesus that faith was firmly established. *All* had forsaken Him—"they all forsook him, and fled" (Mark 14:50)—on the night of His betrayal. *None* believed He would rise from the dead. Even when the report came of His resurrection, "they did not believe [it]" (Luke 24:11). It was only the appearance of the resurrected Jesus (as all the Gospels report) that changed their disbelief to faith. It was on Easter evening that disbelief and doubt were at last completely dispersed: the Spirit was breathed into them, and they became a community of living faith. As such a community—reborn, regenerate, redeemed[63] from abject disbelief and despair—they would later experience the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Now let us look at the connection between the coming of the Holy Spirit and Jesus' "glorification." Jesus said: "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being[64] shall flow rivers of living water'" (John 7:37–38 NASB). Then the Scripture continues: "But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (v. 39 NASB). The glorification of Jesus accordingly had to take place before the Spirit could be given. Only after Jesus returned to heaven would this occur.[65] Once again, this will happen to those who are believers in Jesus.

In the words of John 7 we also observe that there is both a drinking and an outflowing of water. In relation to the former, Jesus had earlier spoken of drinking "living water" which would "become … a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:10, 14). Thus comparing these two passages (John 4 and 7), it is apparent that drinking means coming to Jesus in faith and receiving from Him the water of eternal life. In the case of the latter, there is an outflowing, indeed an abundance—"rivers of living water"—from those who believe. This occurred through the Holy Spirit after Jesus' final glorification. Thus living water is represented as both welling up to eternal life through faith in Jesus and flowing out for blessing through the activity of the Holy Spirit.

The latter point highlights the fact that the Spirit to come (or to be given) will be a source of blessing to others. Entrance into eternal life is, of course, the first and primary thing, without which there can be no ministry. But it cannot, and must not, end there. There should flow out of the believer such ministry—rivers of living water—as to be a blessing to all mankind.

One other matter calls for brief comment. In Jesus' first reference to the Paraclete, the Spirit to come, He spoke of Him as "the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him" (John 14:17). This further emphasizes the point that the Holy Spirit is available only to those

who are *not* of the world; hence He may be received only by those who believe.

B. The Gift of the Holy Spirit

Leaving the Paraclete passages and turning to the Gospel of Luke, we now reflect on an important Scripture dealing with the Spirit to be given. We have already noted that the Spirit to come would be a gift,[66] hence the gift of the Spirit. So we come to Jesus' words: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father[67] give the Holy Spirit[68] to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13). Although these words of Jesus do not directly speak (as in the Fourth Gospel) of the Spirit as yet to come, a study of the larger context makes this clear.

Jesus recounts a situation (vv. 5–12) in which a man needed bread to give to a late-arriving visitor. He goes to a friend's house at midnight, saying, "Friend, lend me three loaves." Despite the fact that the hour is late and he is in bed, the friend finally gets up because of the persistence of his neighbor and gives him the bread. Jesus thereupon adds: "Ask … seek … knock," concluding with the words about the heavenly Father giving the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. The purpose of the gift manifestly is that one may minister to the need of another, in this case to provide bread.

The still larger background of this passage on the giving of the Spirit is that of the Lord's Prayer. Jesus, after praying, was asked by one of His disciples, "Lord teach us to pray …" (Luke 11:1). Then Jesus gave some instructions: "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come.[69] Give us each day our daily[70] bread …"' (vv. 2–3). Hence, the request for loaves of bread in the story that follows, which is later connected with the Holy Spirit, seemingly relates to the petition for bread[71] in the prayer Jesus taught His disciples. This whole matter of prayer concerning the Holy Spirit may then be grounded in both the prayer life of Jesus and the prayer He taught His disciples.

Concerning Jesus' instructions about the Father giving the Holy Spirit "to those who ask him," what finally is of critical importance is His encouragement to His disciples to ask—yes, even to seek and knock. Through such persistence His followers might receive this best of all good[72] gifts, namely, the Holy Spirit. The Father delights to give good gifts to His children, far more than any earthly father does. Such a precious gift as the Holy Spirit will not be given indiscriminately to seekers and non-seekers alike, but to those who earnestly desire it. God is not a reluctant or grudging giver who must be badgered into

giving His favors. Hence, the persistence in prayer that is called for is not to overcome His unwillingness, but rather to demonstrate the wholeheartedness of those asking and thus to prepare the way for the extraordinary gift to be received.

Note carefully, this gift is the Holy Spirit Himself. The gift of the Holy Spirit is not some gift He makes or brings, but His own personal reality. To be sure, the purpose is to provide the resources for ministry; in this biblical story it was bread for another's needs. However, that purpose can be fulfilled only by one who has been visited by the presence and power of the Spirit of the living God. Only when and where Spirit is so experienced can there be an outreach of powerful ministry.

One further word: the Holy Spirit is given to those who are God's children. It is "the heavenly Father," the One who can be addressed as "Father" (Luke 11:2), who makes this amazing gift. Or, as the account also puts it, the gift is given to one who can address God as "Friend" (v. 5). Thus it is from within the context of a close relationship between God and man that the Holy Spirit is given and received.

C. Final Words of Jesus

Third, we turn to the final words of Jesus about the Spirit to come. Let us observe the relevant scriptures in the Book of Acts and the Gospel of Luke.

It was during the forty days after His resurrection, according to Acts, that Jesus delivered a charge to His disciples "not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he [Jesus] said, 'you heard from me, for John baptized in[73] water, but before many days you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 1:4–5). The coming of the Spirit was at hand—"before many days." Note three things about this: (1) there was "the promise of the Father," which can be none other than the Holy Spirit;[74] (2) Jesus said they had heard this promise from His lips; and (3) this had to do with being "baptized in the Holy Spirit."

This "promise of the Father" was previously mentioned in Luke's Gospel. Following Jesus' injunction that "repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations" (24:47) and that the disciples were "witnesses of these things" (v. 48), He said, "Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high" (v. 49). We observe several things: first, the message of the Gospel—repentance and forgiveness of sins; second, the disciples were to be witnesses; third, they would receive power from on high to carry forward their ministry. Although the Holy Spirit as such is not mentioned, there can be no question but that this power is to come from Him.

All of this presupposes that the disciples had themselves come to repentance and received forgiveness and hence had entered into a new life through Jesus Christ. As such a community of the "newborn," they were told by Jesus to remain in the city until they were endowed with power from on high (Luke), or until they were "baptized in the Holy Spirit" (Acts). Then, and only then, would they be truly ready to bear witness.

With this background, we may now review the earlier texts in the Synoptic Gospels where John the Baptist spoke first of his own activity of baptizing in water and then of Jesus' role of baptizing in the Holy Spirit. "I have baptized you in water; but he will baptize you in the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8); "I baptize you in water; but he who is mightier than I … will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire" (Luke 3:16); "I baptize you in water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I … he will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire"

(Matt. 3:11).

John's baptizing in water, according to Matthew, was "for repentance." Indeed, as Mark and Luke earlier recorded it, John came "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). John's baptizing in water, however, was not the primary thing: first was the call to repentance. Before Matthew makes any mention of baptism, he records that John came preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (3:2). After this, multitudes of people "were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins" (v. 6). In this manner John came "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." Hence, John's baptizing in water was in relation to repentance and forgiveness, which, as we noted, are the heart of the Gospel; they are needed for salvation.

This does not mean that John's call for repentance with its accompaniment of water baptism actually brought about salvation, but it prepared the way for Jesus and His work.[75] It pointed to Jesus as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).[76] John adds a few words later: "For this I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel" (v. 31). Hence John's baptizing in water for repentance was the preparation for, even the outward form of, the actual "taking away"—the washing away, the removal—of sin that would be effected through being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. John came preaching, "Repent," and then he baptized people "for the forgiveness of their sins." This foreshadowed Peter's preaching on the Day of Pentecost: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of the Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38). The *only* difference (but *the* critical difference that makes for salvation) was the statement "in the name of Jesus Christ"—the very One John had proclaimed as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." The call for repentance was still there and the method of water baptism was still utilized. But now baptism could be done in the name of Jesus Christ who had taken away the sin of the world, making salvation possible. John's preparation was over; the reality was here!

Since John's baptizing in water was fulfilled through salvation in Jesus, we may better appreciate the fact that John spoke of a separate matter when he said about Jesus: "He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit." What the latter meant, however, could not be understood, or indeed could not happen, until Jesus had completed His work of redemption by taking away the sin of the world. After this initial proclamation by John the Baptist that Jesus would baptize in the Holy Spirit, nothing further is directly said[77] on this matter in any of the four Gospels. The expression is not used again until the Book of Acts when Jesus Himself

said, “Before many days you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit” (1:5). This, however, was *after* Jesus through His death and resurrection had wrought mankind’s redemption and His disciples had received it. Only then could the significance of this baptism in the Spirit become manifest: it will be *an immersion in the Spirit as total as John’s immersion in water.*[78] Its purpose will be witness and ministry in the name of Christ. Those who bear witness will do so with such power and effectiveness that their words will be as fire[79] to purge away sin and evil, to bring forth good, and to gather people into the household of God.[80]

But the order of this is urgently important: there must first be the taking away of sin before this baptism in the Holy Spirit can occur. There cannot be the latter without the former, and the former is incomplete without the latter. The disciples were not allowed to enjoy their new life in Christ and forget the world outside; rather they needed a baptism in the Spirit that would empower their witness so that others might likewise enter into life and salvation.

This leads to the last words of Jesus to His disciples about the coming of the Holy Spirit. The forty days together had drawn to a close, and before He left them, Jesus said, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end[81] of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The Spirit would come to bring power —*dynamis*—and in that power they were to bear witness to all the world.

Here we must end our discussion concerning the Spirit to come. For the next word is that He did come at Pentecost—and comes again and again. This extraordinary event must be reserved for a comprehensive discussion in the pages that follow.

[1]In previous chapters of Renewal Theology I have discussed the activity of the Holy Spirit in such other areas as creation and providence, the Incarnation, calling, regeneration, and sanctification. As we move on in this chapter (7) and several chapters to come (8-14), our focus will be on the community of faith.

[2]“…the pattern of all that he had by the spirit” (KJV). The key phrase in Hebrew, häyäh bâruah immô, literally means “was by the Spirit [who was] with him.”

[3]The Hebrew word is lâbesâ and literally means “clothed itself with” (BDB).

[4]The Hebrew word is wattislah and literally means “and rushed upon”

(BDB).

[5]In Psalm 51 David, who had committed adultery with Bathsheba, prayed earnestly to God: “Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me” (v. 11). These words point to David’s continually being endowed by the Spirit and his deep concern not to lose what God had given. David was forgiven, and the endowment remained.

[6]“… from the time of Solomon the spirit is never again mentioned in relation to a reigning monarch nor is a king’s successor ever designated by the gift of the spirit. As soon as the monarchy became a dynastic institution, its successive rulers could no longer be charismatically designated. It had forfeited the gift of the spirit” (L. Neve, The Spirit of God in the Old Testament, 38-39). I am inclined to agree with this statement.

[7]Or “he went along prophesying continually” (NASB). The NEB translation, “in a rapture as he went,” is quite misleading.

[8]It would be too hasty a judgment, however, to term these prophetic utterances purely ecstatic, that is, devoid of intelligible content. To be sure, no content is mentioned, and there are unusual external phenomena. But there is no suggestion that the utterances were emotional, irrational outbursts (especially in 1 Sam. 10). Further, it was in this context of prophesying that Saul was “turned into another man.”

[9]The RSV margin reads “clothed itself with”; the Hebrew word again is lâbesâ.

[10]E.g., Hosea, Joel, Micah, Zephaniah, and similarly many other prophets.

[11]Similarly Ezra the priest, at the rebuilding of the temple and reading of the law, prayed to the Lord: “Many years thou didst bear with them [Israel], and didst warn them by thy Spirit through thy prophets; yet they would not give ear” (Neh. 9:30).

[12]See also New Testament reflections re the Holy Spirit and the prophets, e.g., Acts 28:25; Hebrews 3:7; 10:15; 1 Peter 1:11.

[13]David, as we have noted, was an exception. The Spirit came upon him “from that day forward.” Moses also had such an anointing of the Spirit that God could say, “I will take of the Spirit who is upon you, and will put Him upon them [the elders]”; hence there was more than a merely transient Spirit upon Moses. However, there is no direct biblical reference to this being a permanent endowment. Joshua could also be an exception, for when he took the mantle of authority from Moses to lead

the Israelites into Canaan, he was spoken of as a man "in whom is the Spirit" and also as one "filled with the spirit of wisdom." Again there is no specific biblical affirmation of Joshua's endowment as permanent.

[14],4The only seeming exception to this is Balaam, a non-Israelite; however, even he was used by the Spirit to serve the cause of God's people as he prophesied divine blessings upon Israel.

[15]The title "messiah," meaning an "anointed one," occurs many times in the Old Testament and usually designates the king of Israel or Judah; however, reference is also occasionally made to priests and prophets. Of course, "the Messiah" refers to the coming Anointed One, who in the New Testament is "the Christ." Christos is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word màsîah.

[16]This, to be sure, is only one aspect of the way whereby the work of the Messiah or Christ is to be carried out. See vol. 1, chapter 13, "The Incarnation," for the full picture of Christ as "The Son of God" and "The Son of Man."

[17]The phrase "the sevenfold Spirit" comes from the LXX and Vulgate readings that add "piety" (see JB footnote; cf. Rev. 1:4; 3:1). The sevenfold Spirit in church tradition is reflected in the ninth-century hymn Veni Creator: "Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire, and lighten with celestial fire; Thou the anointing Spirit art, who dost Thy sevenfold gifts impart." Incidentally, the "sevenfold gifts" of the Spirit are not to be confused with the nine gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, though there is some overlapping (see chapter 13, "The Gifts of the Holy Spirit").

[18]Or "falter" (NIV); the Hebrew word is yikheh. Isaiah suggests a metaphor of a lamp or fire that does not grow dim.

[19]The Hebrew word translated "GOD" is actually YHWH, which is ordinarily rendered in English translations as "LORD." "Lord LORD" would, of course, be an awkward sounding translation. The NIV has "Sovereign LORD" rather than Lord GOD," thus retaining "YHWH" as "LORD."

[20]The Greek phrase is en pneumati kai dynamei.

[21]Note the almost identical words about fathers and children in Malachi and Luke.

[22]Jesus Himself also identified John with the Elijah to come: "If you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come" (Matt. 11:14; cf. Matt.

17:12-13; Mark 9:13).

[23]Or “while yet in” (NASB); the Greek phrase is eti ek koilias. The KJV reading is the same as RSV above (likewise margins of NASB and NIV).

[24]The Greek word is dynamis.

[25]See vol. 1, chapter 13, “The Incarnation,” III.B.l.

[26]The New Testament nowhere speaks of a special action of the Holy Spirit making Mary holy from birth, a so-called “immaculate conception.” The action of the Spirit regarding Mary is rather enabling her womb to conceive and bear the Messiah, hence producing a “virgin birth.” (For fuller discussion see vol. 1, chapter 13, “The Incarnation,” III.B.2.)

[27]See Acts 1:14.

[28]The Greek word for rejoicing in this passage is agalliao, to “exult,” “rejoice exceedingly” (Thayer). It is used later in Luke where it is written that Jesus “rejoiced in the Holy Spirit” (10:21). Thus it is hardly too much to suggest that Mary’s rejoicing here was likewise “in the Holy Spirit.”

[29]Note the three prepositions regarding the Holy Spirit in Luke 2:25-27: “upon” (epi) “by” (hypo) and “in” (en).

[30]“Favor” here signifies a life or demeanor pleasing to God. It is later said of Jesus Himself that He “increased … in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52).

[31]Later concerning John, Jesus said, “I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he” (Luke 7:28).

[32]The Greek word is skizomenous and literally means “be divided,” “split,” “torn apart” (BAGD); cf. Luke 23:45; Matt. 27:51. The NEB and NIV read “torn open.”

[33]See also Matthew 3:13-17; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:32-33.

[34]The Greek phrase is kai autos en Iesous archomenos and literally means, “And Jesus Himself was beginning …. “ The word “ministry” is implied.

[35]The KJV puts these words in italics because they are not in the original text. I believe the primary reference is to Jesus, but it also is true that whenever and to whomever God gives the Spirit, it is “not by measure.”

[36]Recall these words to Mary: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

[37]As Adoptionism affirms (see vol. 1, chap. 13, “The Incarnation/’ nn. 43

and 46).

[38]Recall the previous discussion of the symbol of the dove and its significance.

[39]See footnote 32.

[40]"John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'" (Matt. 3:14).

[41]As if, so to speak, water were the "natural" or "physical" aspect and the Holy Spirit were the "spiritual." No, the "spiritual side" of water baptism was the "righteousness" about which Jesus spoke.

[42]"It was the spiritual, invisible, but effectual anointing of the Christ with Holy Spirit and power for His unique work: not for the Ministry only but for the whole term of the Messianic office." (H. B. Swete, The Holy Spirit in the New Testament, 47).

[43]The KJV, RSV, and NIV read "with." The NEB, like NASB, reads "in." Either is a possible translation of the Greek preposition en (also "by" is frequently the translation elsewhere). My preference here is "in" because of the basic meaning of the word "baptism." The Greek word for "baptize," baptizo, signifies " 'dip,' 'immerse' " (BAGD), "submerge" (Thayer). Hence "in" is the most suitable preposition.

[44]For the Gospel parallels about Jesus' baptizing in the Holy Spirit see Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; and Luke 3:16. Matthew and Luke read, "… in the Holy Spirit and fire."

[45]The purpose of this baptism in the Holy Spirit I will discuss later.

[46]The Greek word is plëres.

[47]The meaning is "to be tempted by the devil," as the Gospel of Matthew makes clear (4:1).

[48]The Greek verb, translated "impelled," ekballei, has the forceful sense of "drive out, expel, throw out more or less forcibly" (BAGD).

[49]"As the mission on which he is sent goes deeper into the heart of things than that of the Old Testament priest or prophet, so the anointing he has received is no mere formal appointment to an office, or even a special gift of prophetic power, but the flooding of his whole humanity with the light and power of the Divine Spirit" (H. Swete, The Holy Spirit in the New Testament, 116).

[50]Cf. Matthew 7:28; Luke 4:32.

[51]"Whether He taught the multitudes in parables, or delivered the new law of liberty to His disciples, or gave commandment to His chosen Apostles,

the Spirit of God, it was plain, spoke by His lips" (H. Swete, The Holy Spirit in the New Testament, 58).

[52]Luke 11:20 reads "finger of God." "Finger" represents power (e.g., note Exod. 8:19; 3:18; Deut. 9:10; Ps. 8:3), but even more the Spirit of God (cf. Ps. 8:3 with 33:6b).

[53]Over against the Pharisees who were saying, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons" (Matt. 12:24).

[54]The Greek word is a form of katadynasteuo-"oppress, exploit, dominate" (BAGD).

[55]The repulsing of Satan in the wilderness did not yet represent a full victory. There Satan was strongly rebuffed; hence Jesus in His ministry continued to plunder his house. But it was not until Jesus went to the cross that Satan was actually dispossessed. Jesus later said on the eve of His death, "Now shall the ruler of this world be cast out" (John 12:31). After that Satan no longer had control over the world nor did he possess it as his "house."

[56]Or "seventy-two." The early Greek manuscripts vary.

[57]"In a moment of ecstatic vision (during the absence of the missioners?) Jesus had seen Satan defeated and cast from heaven (cf. the imagery of Isa. 14:12, Rev. 12:7-9). Here, and in the saying in 11:20 ["if it is by the finger (Spirit) of God that I cast out demons …"], Jesus interprets successful exorcism as evidence that the forces of evil are dethroned and the new age has begun" (IB, 8:189).

[58]The Greek word here is ëgalliasato and is translated "exulted" (NEB) and "full of joy" (NIV). It was a rejoicing of a quality and character beyond anything ordinary, for it was "W the Holy Spirit."

[59]There are a number of Old Testament references to the coming Spirit-e.g., Isaiah 44:2-3; Ezekiel 39:29; and especially Joel 2:28-29. Here, however, it is my intention to follow closely upon what has just been written in the previous section, "The Messianic Vocation." The Old Testament references will be noted in the next chapter, "The Coming of the Holy Spirit," III. A.

[60]Chapter 6, II.A.l.

[61]Thus the coming of the Spirit that Jesus promised is not to be confused with Jesus breathing on the disciples and saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). This insufflation of the Spirit occurred on the day of Jesus' resurrection; Jesus had not yet gone "away." Recall from our

previous discussion (in chap. 2, “Regeneration”) that the resurrected Lord breathed the Holy Spirit into the disciples for the restoration of liferegeneration. Thereby the Holy Spirit came to dwell within them. Thus on their behalf Jesus’ words were fulfilled: “He dwells with you, and will be in you” (John 14:17). But the Holy Spirit had not yet come from the ascended Lord for ministering the gospel. Indeed, the disciples did no ministering until fifty days later when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost.

[62]Of course, not all who were later to receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost were in the room. Possibly only ten disciples were present, as Judas was dead and Thomas was absent. However, it seems likely that the account in John 20:22 represents the sequence of regeneration preceding the later coming of the Holy Spirit.

[63]The word converted could also be used. Jesus had said to Peter shortly before his denial: 4? have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again [Gr. epistrepsas], strengthen your brethren” (Luke 22:32). This “turning again” or “turning around” or “conversion” (KJV translates: “when thou art converted”) occurred on the day of Jesus’ resurrection. Incidentally, the words of Jesus about Peter’s faith not failing were true in the sense that neither he nor the other disciples, despite their forsaking of Jesus and disbelieving the reports of His resurrection, ever completely lost faith. On Easter all disbelief was driven out and a firm and unshakable faith was established. This “turning again” was so total in nature that it brought a lasting conversion. Furthermore, Peter later used the same expression “turn again” to refer to the conversion of others: “Repent therefore, and turn again [Gr. epistrepsate], that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). Likewise the sins of Peter and the other disciples had been blotted out by the risen Lord so that new life began on Easter day!

[64]The Greek word is koilias and means “the hidden, innermost recesses of the human body” (BAGD). The KJV has “belly,” RSV “heart”; NIV simply says “within him.” NASB, I believe, best catches the meaning of koilia in this context.

[65]The theme of “glorification” in the fourth Gospel is a complex one. According to John 13:31, just after Judas had gone out to betray Him, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified; if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.” Three moments in glorification are given: present

("is glorified"), future ("will glorify"), immediate future ("glorify at once"). Earlier Jesus had said, "It is my Father who glorifies me" (8:54)-hence, at whatever the moment. Jesus, prior to Judas' departure from the meeting of the disciples, said, "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified" (12:23)-thus immediate future. Still later, after Judas had left, Jesus prayed, "And now, Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made" (17:5). Although the word "now" is used, it is evident that this full glorification "in thy own presence" could not occur until Jesus had returned to heaven. This would be the climactic glorification and doubtless the glorification referred to in John 7:39 above. (Also see John 12:16: "When Jesus was glorified … ." The perspective here is that of the final glorification; cf. Acts 3:13: "The God … of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied," a statement that points to Jesus' resurrection and exaltation [cf. Acts 2:32-33].)

[66]E.g., John 7:39: "The Spirit was not yet given" (NASB).

[67]The Greek phrase is ho patèr ho ex ouranou and literally means "the Father out of, or from, heaven" (see NASB mg). Note how this accords with the Spirit coming from heaven upon Jesus.

[68]The parallel text in Matthew 7:11 reads "good things" (Gr. agatha).

[69]It is interesting that a variant reading of "Thy kingdom come" is "Thy Holy Spirit come upon us and cleanse us." According to IB, "there is some support in minuscule MSS and in the fathers" for this latter rendering, so that some scholars "have maintained that this is the original Lukan reading" (Luke 11:2b in loco). Swete, while stating that it is "clearly a gloss," adds: "But it expresses the great truth that the Kingdom of God as an inward power is identical with the working of the Spirit of God, and it is valuable as an ancient interpretation of the clause" (The Holy Spirit in the New Testament, 121).

[70]The Greek word translated "daily," epiousion, may be rendered in a number of ways (e.g., RSV margin has "for the morrow"). BAGD mentions, as one possibility among many, that it may refer "to the coming kingdom and its feast." This possible translation would closely relate to the preceding variant ("Thy Holy Spirit come …") and to "the coming kingdom."

[71]The Greek word for "bread" and "loaf" is the same: artos.

[72]The agatha of Matthew 7:11 comes to a focus surely in the Holy Spirit Himself.

[73]The Greek preposition is en. As I earlier stated (see n. 43), the connection with baptism suggests that "in" is the best translation. So I am substituting "in" for "with" ("with" is found in KJV, RSV, NIV, NASB, and NEB) in this verse and in similar contexts on the succeeding pages.

[74]This is further confirmed in Peter's words on the Day of Pentecost about Jesus: "[He] received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:33).

[75]Recall the words of the angel to Zechariah about John: "He will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God … to make ready for the Lord a people prepared" (Luke 1:16-17). Zechariah later prophesied, "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins" (vv. 76-77). Although John the Baptist did not himself bring salvation, he gave "knowledge of salvation" and so prepared the way for the One who actually brought it.

[76]It is quite significant that in the Fourth Gospel just after mention is made of John's baptizing, the following verse reads, "The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God… .' " (1:28-29).

[77]Luke 24:49 is the closest approximation. Of course, these words also occur after Jesus finished His work of redemption.

[78]As mentioned in footnote 43, the word "baptize" in Greek (baptizo) basically means "immersion."

[79]Recall the words of John the Baptist about Jesus: "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." Then he added, "His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:11-12 NASB; cf. Luke 3:16-17). Baptism in the Spirit, accordingly, will make for a ministry of fire-fire in manner and utterance (cf. Acts 2:3-4)-that will both purge and consume, yet also make for salvation. (See the earlier discussion of the Holy Spirit as fire, chap. 6, II.B.2.)

[80]A further word about "baptism in the Holy Spirit": The meaning of this expression is best understood in the light of Jesus' own use of it: "John baptized in water, but before many days you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). If we had only the earlier words of John the Baptist, baptism in the Spirit might seem to refer to regeneration, namely, that John's baptism in water was the outward preparation in water for the

inner experience of new life, or regeneration, that Jesus' act of baptizing in the Spirit brings. Similarly Calvin, in commenting on Matthew 3:11, says, "Christ alone bestows all the grace which is figuratively represented by outward baptism … and bestows the Spirit of regeneration" (Commentaries, Harmony of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, 1:199, Beveridge trans.). The point is that, however John the Baptist may have understood the words, there is nothing further said about them in any of the Gospels. Jesus' words in Acts therefore are decisive (whether viewed as interpretation or reinterpretation). And, as we have already noted, they must refer especially to His action in the Spirit for the enablement of ministry (see chap. 10, "The Mission of the Holy Spirit," for further elaboration). Incidentally, Calvin in his Institutes speaks of baptism in the Spirit as "the visible graces [or gifts] of the Holy Spirit given through the laying on of hands" and adds, "It is nothing new to signify these graces by the word 'baptism' " (4.15.18, Battles trans.). In this statement Calvin goes beyond the view that identifies Spirit baptism with regeneration. In so doing he is much closer to the picture in Acts.

[81]The Greek word is eschatou; "the uttermost part" (KJV), "the remotest part" (NASB). Thayer suggests "the last in time or place," hence the last place, however distant or small.

8
The Coming of the Holy Spirit

I. INTRODUCTION

We will now consider one of the most stupendous and mighty acts of God—the coming of the Holy Spirit. Let us consider this event as set forth primarily in the Book of Acts. Although we will note relevant references in the Gospels and Epistles, our primary concern will be the narratives in Acts that variously depict this coming. The Gospels, as we have seen, point forward to it, and, as will be noted, the Epistles presuppose it. Hence, although consideration will also be given to the Epistles, the focus of our attention will be on the narratives in Acts.

Before proceeding further, let me emphasize that the coming of the Holy Spirit is a gracious act of God. It is a gift, or, to be specific, it is the gift of the Holy Spirit. As the Fourth Gospel puts it, "As yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (7:39). As we have seen, there are also several allusions to the coming of the Holy Spirit in the same Gospel: "When the Spirit of truth comes …" (16:13; cf. 15:26; 16:7). The word "coming" expresses the idea of event, happening, action; the word "gift" indicates that this coming is an act of God's grace. God gives the Holy Spirit.

Since the Spirit's coming is a gracious gift from God, the proper human response is that of reception. It is a gift to be received. Thus when the word "receive" is used in connection with the Holy Spirit, it refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is important to recognize because words such as "giving" and "receiving" in association with the Holy Spirit refer to the event of the Spirit's coming.

We shall later note a variety of linguistic expressions in Acts for the coming of the Holy Spirit.[1] But first let us observe a number of passages primarily in Acts but also in the Epistles where giving or receiving the Holy Spirit is stated or implied.

First, of course, is the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2). It was there that the waiting disciples of Jesus received the promised Holy Spirit (vv. 1–4). Although the word "received" is not used in this account, Peter years later declared of the Gentiles in Caesarea: "[They] have received the Holy Spirit just as we have" (Acts 10:47). "Just as we have" refers to the event of Pentecost. The second recorded instance of receiving the Holy Spirit is in Samaria (Acts 8). Peter and John went down from Jerusalem to Samaria and ministered to the

Samaritans, and as a result the Samaritans "received the Holy Spirit" (v. 17). The third instance relates to Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9). Ananias went to Saul's lodging in Damascus and prayed for him that he might be "filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 17). Although the word "received" is not used in this case, the term "filling' implies that Saul received the Holy Spirit.[2] The fourth narrative specifically relating to the reception of the Holy Spirit concerns the Caesareans (Acts 10)—the Roman centurion Cornelius, his household, and friends. Luke, in describing the event, refers both to "the gift of the Holy Spirit" (v. 45) and the fact that they had "received the Holy Spirit" (v. 47). The fifth recorded instance of the reception of the Holy Spirit concerns some twelve disciples in Ephesus (Acts 19). When Paul found them, he asked, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" (v. 2) and shortly thereafter ministered the Holy Spirit to them.

As I have said before, we will focus primarily on these passages in Acts because they alone depict the event of the Holy Spirit's coming.[3] In these five narratives various perspectives on the coming of the Holy Spirit will be observed; hence what is stated in them will be our main concern. This is by no means to suggest that the passages shortly to be quoted from some of the Epistles are of less importance. However, they are generally quite brief and compact; moreover, they refer to something that had *already* happened and thus give little or no detail. Hence, a better and fuller understanding will often call for a return to the events recorded in Acts.[4]

Several passages in the Epistles speak of a giving or receiving of the Holy Spirit. In Romans Paul writes that "the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (5:5 NASB). Later in the same letter Paul says, "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit[5] of adoption, whereby we cry, *Abba*, Father" (8:15 KJV). In 1 Corinthians Paul declares, "We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God" (2:12 NASB). In 2 Corinthians there are several references: "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our heart as a pledge"[6] (1:21–22 NASB); "Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge" (5:5 NASB); and "If you receive a different spirit from the one you received,[7] or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough" (11:4). In Galatians Paul asks, "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing with faith?" (3:2 NASB) and later speaks about "the blessing of Abraham" coming "to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (v. 14 NASB). In Ephesians

Paul writes about “the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance” (1:13–14 NASB). In 1 Thessalonians Paul declares, “He who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit” (4:8 NIV). Finally, in 1 John are these statements: “We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us” (3:24 NASB) and “By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit” (4:13 NASB).

It is apparent that the coming of the Holy Spirit, particularly expressed in terms of giving and receiving, is both described in its occurrence in a number of passages in Acts and declared as an accomplished fact in many Epistles. As we proceed in our study, we will look first to the paradigmatic record in Acts and trust that this will cast further light on the whole of the New Testament. Beyond that, our concern will be to elaborate connections with the spiritual renewal of the twentieth century.

One more prefatory remark: Since the first and, in many ways, the decisive coming of the Holy Spirit was on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, we will give much attention to this initial event. By no means will we end there, but its significance for what follows cannot be exaggerated.

II. BACKGROUND

As we move ahead, we need to bear in mind certain factors that prepared the way for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Our discussion will be, in part, a review of some things previously said; however, because of the importance of this background, further reflection is in order.

A. The Promise of the Father

There are many promises of God in the Bible, but "the promise of the Father" uniquely relates to the coming of the Holy Spirit. First, there are the words of Jesus to His disciples as recorded in the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts: "Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you" (Luke 24:49) and "While staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4). That this promise of the Father is the coming of the Holy Spirit is apparent from both contexts.[8]

Next, the Book of Acts records the words of Peter in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost: "Having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he [Jesus] has poured out this which you see and hear" (2:33). Peter was thereby referring to the coming of the Spirit that he and many others had just experienced (see vv. 1–4). The Spirit had come, and Peter related this occurrence to the promise "from the Father," which is "the promise of the Holy Spirit." Accordingly, the promise of the Father stood as background for the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

Likewise, on the same day the promise was extended to Peter's audience, to their children, and to people of distant times and places. So Peter declared: "You shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself" (Acts 2:38–39 NASB). Although the word "Father" was not directly mentioned, this is doubtless the same promise of the Father that Peter had mentioned a short time before.[9]

It is apparent that the coming of the Holy Spirit is to be a continuing occurrence. The promise of the gift of the Spirit was fulfilled at Pentecost, but the promise was by no means to be limited to the original company of disciples. Unlike the coming of Christ in the Incarnation, which was a once-for-all event, the coming of the Holy Spirit would occur an unlimited number of times.[10]

In the accounts that follow Pentecost in Acts, no further reference is directly made to the promise of the Father, i.e., the promise of the Holy Spirit. The closest reference is the Caesarean account in Acts 10, where, as we have noted, the event is described, in part, as a receiving of "the gift of the Holy Spirit." Since Peter's words at Pentecost stated clearly that the promise of the Father is the gift of the Holy Spirit, the centurion and his company surely experienced the fulfillment of that promise. The same thing is doubtless the case for all the other

narratives in Acts that tell of the giving and receiving of the Holy Spirit.

References are made in two of the Epistles to the promise of the Holy Spirit. Both scriptures were quoted previously but without attention called to the word "promise": Paul speaks in Galatians 3:14 about receiving "the promise of the Spirit" and in Ephesians 1:13 about "the Holy Spirit of promise" (NASB). The Galatians had received the Holy Spirit, and the Ephesians (to add the context) were "sealed in Him [Christ] with the Holy Spirit of promise." Thus it is clear that in Galatia and Ephesus the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit, was specifically fulfilled. By implication all references to the giving or receiving of the Holy Spirit in the other Epistles were instances of the fulfillment of the promise of the Father.

We may, accordingly, affirm that the same promise of the Father continues through the ages. The words of Jesus as recorded in both Luke and Acts, the message of Peter that the promise is for generations to come, the various incidents thereafter in Acts, and the many references in the Epistles—all these are evidence of a continuing promise.

B. The Exaltation of Jesus

The second background factor for the coming of the Holy Spirit is the exaltation of Jesus. After His resurrection and ascension Jesus was seated at the right hand of the Father, and from that place of exaltation He sent forth the Holy Spirit.

On the Day of Pentecost Peter made clear that what had happened to the disciples in Jerusalem came from the exalted Jesus. He said, "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God … he [Jesus] has poured out this …" (Acts 2:33). These words of Peter were similar to those of Jesus (already quoted): "Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you." They emphasize that the fulfillment of the promise came only after Jesus had returned to heaven. From there He poured forth the Holy Spirit.

John wrote, "As yet the Spirit had not been given,[11] because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39). Since the word "glorified" in John's Gospel signifies exalted,[12] this statement shows that the exaltation of Jesus must precede the giving, i.e., the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel of John has several further references by Jesus Himself to the future sending, or giving, of the Holy Spirit. The first two of Jesus' statements point to the Father as the One who would be the primary agent: "I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete"[13] (14:16) and "The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name …" (14:26). In the succeeding two references Jesus points to Himself: "When the Paraclete comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father …" (15:26) and "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (16:7).

The sequence above is quite illuminating. Following the scripture from John 14:16 to John 16:7, we see this picture: (1) The Father will give the Spirit at the request of Jesus, (2) the Father will send the Spirit in Jesus' name, (3) Jesus will send the Spirit from the Father, and (4) Jesus will send the Spirit.

Thus as Jesus unfolds the wonder of the sending of the Holy Spirit, there is a progression from the Father to the Son. Since the Father is primary in all activity, He ultimately gives, or sends, the Holy Spirit,[14] as the first two Johannine passages disclose. However, even in these two passages the Son is intimately

involved, for it is at His request that the Father sends the Spirit, and He does so in the Son's name. But once it has been clarified that the Father's role is primary, Jesus moves on to state that it is through Himself that the Spirit comes. Then follows the transition in the third passage where Jesus says that He (not the Father) will send the Spirit but that the Spirit is "from the Father." Here the extraordinary balance is shown. While it is Jesus finally who sends the Spirit, the Spirit, nonetheless, is from God the Father. Only after these three passages, which discuss the relationship between the Spirit and the Father, does Jesus finally say—with no reference to the Father—that the Son will send the Holy Spirit.

One additional point from John's Gospel is that Jesus speaks of the Spirit as proceeding from the Father: "The Spirit of truth … proceeds from the Father" (15:26). Thus not only is the Father the primary agent in the sending of the Spirit, but He is also the source of the Holy Spirit: the Holy Spirit "proceeds" from Him. Thus the Holy Spirit originates from the eternal source of all things. The Holy Spirit is from God the Father, and is therefore Himself also God. Hence when the Holy Spirit is sent to the world, nothing less than the eternal God Himself comes.

In regard to the sending of the Holy Spirit, we may say that both the Father and Son send the Holy Spirit in the sense that the Father sends the Spirit *through* the Son. There is no sending of the Holy Spirit by the Father except through the Son. Therefore the Holy Spirit, who is sent by the Father, is received only through the mediation of Jesus Christ. Thus, in the ultimate sense, the Holy Spirit is sent from the Father, but in a proximate sense He comes from the Son.

We return in our reflection to the exalted Jesus. For the Son through whom the Holy Spirit comes is the One at the Father's right hand. He who has been exalted by the Father to the place of honor and majesty sends forth the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit thus comes from heaven to earth, even from the Lord Jesus.

The coming of the Holy Spirit, accordingly, is not a divine event to which Jesus is only peripherally related, but a coming in which He is the essential channel. The Holy Spirit, though distinct from Jesus, is the Spirit issuing from Jesus. He is sent by Jesus. Thus it is not as if the exalted Jesus were one force among many from whom the Spirit might come. "All authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18) has been given the exalted Lord, and from Him alone does the Holy Spirit go forth.

Now to return to the record in Acts, we recognize that every coming of the Holy Spirit recorded in Acts was from the exalted Lord Jesus. Although Jesus is not specifically said to be the channel after the Jerusalem Pentecost, this is clearly implied. For example, in the Caesarean account the Scripture states that

“the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also” (Acts 10:45 NASB). Since Peter had said it was Jesus who poured out the Spirit in Jerusalem, He was doubtless the One responsible again. Saul of Tarsus was confronted on the road to Damascus by the exalted Lord Jesus (Acts 9:3–5) and three days later was filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit surely came from the exalted Lord. The same thing must also have been true of the giving of the Spirit in Samaria and Ephesus.

It follows that at any time thereafter when the Holy Spirit comes—in the Epistles or in later history—He comes from the exalted Lord. Christ today is at the right hand of the Father and from there the Holy Spirit is sent forth.

C. The Occurrence of Salvation

The final background factor for the coming of the Holy Spirit is the occurrence of salvation. Those who turn to Christ in true faith and thereby enter into a new life in His name may receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Against the background of salvation, however worded,[15] the Holy Spirit is given.

We have earlier observed that the original disciples who received the promise of the Holy Spirit had entered into a new life in Christ. They had come to a vital faith in Christ as He who had lived, died, and risen again. As a community redeemed from their old life, they were told to wait for the Holy Spirit to come. Hence when the extraordinary event did occur, it happened to those who had already repented and now truly believed in Jesus Christ.

On the Day of Pentecost after the Holy Spirit had come to the waiting disciples, Peter affirmed that the same gift of the Holy Spirit was promised to all who likewise repented and believed. Just prior to the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit Peter declared, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38). By such repentance and faith there would be salvation;[16] and to such persons the Holy Spirit was promised.

The Samaritans' reception of the Holy Spirit through the ministry of Peter and John has already been noted (Acts 8:14–17). Some time before this occurred Philip had "proclaimed to them the Christ" (v. 5), and as a result the Samaritans came to faith and were baptized. The Scripture reads, "When they believed Philip as he preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (v. 12). Their baptism betokened repentance and faith,[17] through which they entered into salvation. Their conversion[18] to Christ, accordingly, was the background for their later reception of the Holy Spirit.

Now we turn to Saul of Tarsus. Saul's being "filled with the Holy Spirit" at the hands of Ananias was preceded by the encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus. In this encounter Saul was radically changed. Jesus became Saul's Lord—" 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told …"' (Acts 22:10).[19] Saul (Paul) later wrote to the Corinthians, "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1). It was at the moment of the vision vouchsafed to Paul on the road to Damascus that he

became a new man in Christ. As one converted, saved, made new—whatever the language—Paul later received the Holy Spirit.[20]

In Caesarea, as we have noted, the centurion and his household received the Holy Spirit. Peter had preached the gospel, saying, “To him [Christ] all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (Acts 10:43). So it was that these Gentiles repented and believed, for in later words regarding this incident the apostles and brethren in Jerusalem declared, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18). Against the background of their repentance and faith (to return to the event in Caesarea), the Holy Spirit came: “While Peter was still saying this [the words about belief and forgiveness], the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word” (Acts 10:44). That this was the occasion of the Caesareans’ receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit is further attested by Peter’s later reference to them as “the people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have” (v. 47). But the relevant point here is that it was the Gentiles’ “repentance unto life,” i.e., their salvation, that was background for the reception of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, in the case of the Ephesians who received the Holy Spirit through the ministry of Paul, it is apparent that they had come to faith in Christ. As we noted, Paul asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” (Acts 19:2). It turned out that these Ephesians were only disciples of John the Baptist and knew nothing about the Holy Spirit: “No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit” (v. 2). Thereafter Paul characterized John’s message as “‘telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.’ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (vv. 4–5). This was clearly the hearing of faith through which they received salvation, else Paul would not have baptized them. Following this, “when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them” (v. 6). Thus, once again, the occurrence of salvation was background for their receiving the Holy Spirit.

It is unmistakable that in all these accounts of the coming—the gift—of the Holy Spirit in Acts the occurrence of salvation was also essential background. Indeed, this was the subjective factor preparatory to the reception of the Holy Spirit. The other two background factors, the promise of the Father and the exaltation of Christ, were totally objective (though totally essential). Salvation, on the other hand, was deeply experiential; people repented and believed. Only when this occurred could the Holy Spirit be received.

Let me add a word concerning Peter’s statement on the Day of Pentecost that the promise of the Holy Spirit was to “as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself” (Acts 2:39 NASB). This calling of God “to Himself” may be spoken of

as “effectual calling”—namely, the calling of God that results in salvation.[21] This call of God includes repentance and faith (as v. 38 states). Hence, the critical point again is that those effectually called—those who truly repent and believe—are promised the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In the Epistles all the aforementioned passages that speak of the giving or receiving of the Holy Spirit likewise presuppose salvation. To put it another way, in none of these scriptures is the giving of the Spirit said to be for salvation, nor is the receiving of the Holy Spirit a receiving for salvation. Romans 5:5, which speaks of “the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (NASB), is set against the background of justification and its effects (vv. 1–5); and Romans 8:15, which refers to having “received the Spirit of adoption” (KJV), means the reception of the Spirit consequent to our adoption as sons.[22] First Corinthians 2:12 speaks of receiving the Holy Spirit, not for salvation but “that we might know the things freely given to us by God” (NASB). In 2 Corinthians those whom God has established and anointed are also “sealed” and given “the Spirit in [their] hearts as a pledge” (1:22 NASB). In 2 Corinthians 5:5 the Holy Spirit again is a pledge, in this case of God’s future purpose for those who belong to Christ.[23] In Galatians 3:14 the Holy Spirit is promised to those who have experienced the blessing of Abraham, namely, justification (see vv. 6–9) or, through Christ, redemption (see v. 13). In Ephesians the background for “the Holy Spirit of promise” is again salvation, for the Scripture reads, “In Him [Christ], you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise” (1:13 NASB).[24] First Thessalonians 4:8 speaks of “God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you” but does not specify prior salvation. However, nothing is stated in the immediate context (see vv. 1–7) that suggests that the gift of the Spirit is for salvation. Finally, according to 1 John, it is “by the Spirit which He has given” that “we [believers] know … that He [Christ] abides in us”[25] (3:24 NASB). The gift of the Spirit was not for salvation but for assurance of Christ’s continued abiding.

In summary, it is apparent also from the Epistles that the giving or receiving of the Holy Spirit is set against the background of salvation. It is those who truly believe—whom God has justified, adopted as children, and established in faith—that receive the Holy Spirit. Nothing is stated in the Epistles as to how this reception occurred. For that we must look back to the Book of Acts. But it is clear that both share a common background of salvation.

To round out the picture, we must return to the Gospels and recall some words in the Gospels of Luke and John. In the former Gospel Jesus speaks of the gift of

the Spirit thus: “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13). It is apparent that those who are already God’s children,[26] children of the heavenly Father, may ask for and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. According to the Fourth Gospel, Jesus declared, “If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.’” Then John adds, “By this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive” (7:38–39 NASB). Believing, again, precedes receiving.[27]

The Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles agree in affirming that the coming of the Spirit presupposes the occurrence of salvation. But, to repeat, it is only in the Book of Acts that various narratives depict the actual coming—the giving and the receiving—of the Holy Spirit.

Let us observe some of the descriptive language for this event.

III. DESCRIPTION

We arrive at a consideration of the actual coming of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit promised by the Father and sent by the Son now comes into our time and history. God gives His Holy Spirit to human beings in various places and situations. It will be our procedure to observe the several terms[28] used to describe these occurrences and thus to reflect on the significance of the Spirit's coming.

A. Outpouring

Peter described the coming of the Holy Spirit to the waiting disciples on the Day of Pentecost as the *outpouring* of the Holy Spirit: "He [Jesus] has poured out[29] this …" (Acts 2:33). Peter was referring to the mighty coming of the Holy Spirit that he and other disciples of Jesus had experienced a short time before.

Peter had earlier used the concept of "outpouring" when he quoted from the prophecy of Joel: "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit'" (2:16–18). "All flesh" meant both male and female, both young and old, both masters and servants. No longer would God's Spirit come only to a few (such as rulers, priests, and prophets),[30] but He would be poured out even on the lowliest of servants.

It is quite possible that those who had awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit —"in all about a hundred and twenty" (Acts 1:15)—included this wide range of persons mentioned in Joel's prophecy. The initial group gathered in the Upper Room contained the eleven apostles, several unnamed women,[31] Mary the mother of Jesus, and Jesus' brothers (v. 14)—hence already a varied group of people. With the number of believers increasing to some one hundred and twenty the range would surely be even wider. It is not difficult to visualize the prophecy of Joel being thus fulfilled when the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost.[32]

However, the "all flesh" on the Day of Pentecost, despite the diversity, was represented by Jews only. This, to be sure, was no small thing, for Israel had never before known such a visitation of the Spirit. Other Old Testament prophets had also spoken of a day when the Spirit would be poured out specifically on Israel. Isaiah declared, "Thus says the LORD…. Fear not, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen … I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring" (Isa. 44:2–3). Ezekiel similarly spoke for the Lord: "I will not hide my face any more from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, says the LORD God" (Ezek. 39:29). The Spirit of God would some day be poured out on Jacob's house, the house of Israel.

On another occasion after Pentecost the Spirit was said to have been poured out, this time on Gentiles. This occurred when Peter preached the gospel to the

Roman centurion Cornelius and his household in Caesarea. Luke writes, "All the circumcised [i.e., Jewish] believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out[33] upon the Gentiles also" (Acts 10:45 NASB). The astonishment of the Jewish believers who came with Peter is quite noticeable. They themselves had doubtless experienced the Spirit's outpouring, but for all its extraordinary range—not limited to any sex, age, or class—the Jewish believers were scarcely prepared for this extension to the Gentile world. The "all flesh" prophesied by Joel actually, and amazingly, also came to include Gentile flesh!

From the reading of these two accounts concerning the Jewish disciples in Jerusalem and the Gentiles in Caesarea, it is apparent that the outpouring of the Spirit occurred on both occasions.[34] There is no suggestion that the coming of the Spirit in Jerusalem was a once-for-all matter, or that somehow what happened in Caesarea was secondary or subordinate. The word "outpouring" is used in connection with both occasions, and the word "also" points to the equivalence of the two outpourings. Furthermore, some additional words of Peter underscore this point; for shortly after the Holy Spirit had been poured out, Peter asked rhetorically: "Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (Acts 10:47). *"Just as we have,"* Peter said; in other words, there was no real difference.[35] When Peter later described his Gentile mission, he emphasized how "God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us …" (Acts 11:17). *"The same gift":* the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Caesarea was identical in essence with that in Jerusalem.

The other accounts in Acts of the coming of the Holy Spirit do not include the word "outpouring." However, another Scripture passage in the Epistles may be noted. Paul declares in Titus 3:5–6 that Christ "saved us … by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out[36] upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (NASB). If Paul is here speaking of the same outpouring of the Spirit as is found in Acts,[37] it is apparent that this outpouring extended beyond Acts into the life of the early church.[38]

In this connection it is interesting to observe that reference was made in two early noncanonical writings to outpourings of the Holy Spirit. In his first letter (ca. A.D. 96) to the church in Corinth, Clement of Rome wrote, "A profound and abundant peace was given to you all, and ye had an insatiable desire for doing good, while a full outpouring of the Holy Spirit was upon you all."[39] The Epistle of Barnabas (not later than A.D. 130) begins: "All hail, ye sons and daughters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ…. I rejoice exceedingly and above measure in

your happy and honoured spirits, because ye have with such effect [or "so greatly"[40]] received the engrafted spiritual gift…. I truly perceive in you the Spirit poured forth from the rich Lord of love."[41] *A full outpouring of the Holy Spirit* (Clement) and *the Spirit poured forth from the rich Lord of love* (Barnabas): both statements clearly attest to an abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit in at least certain areas of the early church. The word "abundant" is surely to be connected with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. When God gives, He does not hold back. According to the Gospel of John, "it is not by measure that he gives the Spirit" (3:34).[42] The gift of the Holy Spirit is one of plenitude and boundlessness.

Finally, it is important to emphasize several things. First, there had been no outpouring of the Spirit prior to Pentecost.[43] We have observed certain Old Testament prophecies that pointed to a future outpouring, particularly the prophecy of Joel that Peter declared to be fulfilled at Pentecost: "*This* is what was spoken by the prophet Joel."

Second, since the Holy Spirit came from the exalted Lord Jesus (recall Acts 2:33), crucified and risen from the dead, it could not have happened at any time prior to His exaltation. It was only *after* Christ had completed the work of redemption that the Holy Spirit was poured out.

Third, accordingly, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was an event in which Christ was the essential channel. The promise was from the Father, and in that sense He was the initiator. But the Spirit came only *through* Jesus.[44] Even as Christ was the mediator in redemption, so was He the channel in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was not a once-for-all event. The Incarnation, to be sure, happened only once, but Christ thereafter from the Father's right hand poured forth the Spirit at least in both Jerusalem and Caesarea. The coming of the Spirit, accordingly, was a repeated event.[45] He came and came again.

Fifth, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit stands as a continuing promise for all future generations. To all who will come to repentance and faith in Christ[46] —all whom the Lord effectually calls—the promise is given: "You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

It is the conviction of those in the contemporary Pentecostal/charismatic renewal that this renewal is an outpouring of God's Holy Spirit.[47] Since the beginning of the twentieth century there have been three major Pentecostal/charismatic movements: (1) the classical Pentecostal (beginning in 1901) now represented by a number of Pentecostal denominations, (2) the neo-

Pentecostal/charismatic (beginning about mid-century) within the traditional Protestant churches, and (3) the Catholic charismatic (beginning in 1967) within the Roman Catholic Church. These three movements, according to Vinson Synan, Pentecostal historian, are three streams that basically constitute one outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Synan writes, “There is only one outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the latter days, although the streams flow through channels known as ‘classical Pentecostalism,’ Protestant ‘neo-Pentecostalism,’ and the ‘Catholic charismatic renewal.’ In the end it adds up to one great historical phenomenon which has had a profound effect on Christianity around the world.”[48] That there are three streams but essentially one latter-day outpouring is the general testimony of the worldwide Pentecostal/charismatic renewal.[49]

B. Falling On

A second descriptive term used for the coming of the Holy Spirit is *falling on.* This language occurs in both the Samaritan and the Caesarean accounts.

Let us begin with the event in Caesarea, for prior to the use of the word "outpouring" the term "falling on" is used. Luke writes, "While Peter was still saying this [his sermon to the Gentiles], the Holy Spirit fell on[50] all who heard the word" (Acts 10:44). Later Peter, rehearsing the event, stated: "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on[51] them just as[52] on us at the beginning" (11:15). Unquestionably, the Holy Spirit had fallen on the centurion and his company.

We note with interest that in both Luke's description and Peter's later account there is a note of *suddenness:* "While Peter was still saying" and "As I began to speak" both suggest an unexpected occurrence. There was a divine interruption of Peter's speaking activity; the Holy Spirit suddenly fell.

This matter of suddenness may also be observed in the account of the Pentecostal event in Jerusalem. On the Day of Pentecost the Jewish disciples were all gathered together when "suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind" (Acts 2:2). This was unmistakably the coming of the Holy Spirit and happened suddenly with no advance notice.[53]

Immediately we should add the word *forcefully.* For the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost "like the rush of a mighty wind" was forcible,[54] strong, and driving. There was nothing quiet or hidden about it; it made an impact on all. The expression "fell on" suggests the same note of forcefulness; for when something—or someone—falls upon a person or a group, the effects are doubtless felt! We are dealing here, of course, with the Holy Spirit, not a thing or impersonal force; His coming was with far more memorable impact.

In all of this the *sovereignty* of God is much to be emphasized. The word "falling" connotes an action from above, from heaven to earth and therefore wholly initiated by God. This did not eliminate the human factors involved (which will be discussed later);[55] however, in both Jerusalem and Caesarea God moved in a sovereign manner to send down the Holy Spirit.

Next we observe that the word "falling" was used indirectly in another account often described as the "Samaritan Pentecost." Philip had preached the gospel to the Samaritans, and as a result they came to faith in Christ: "They believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the

name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12). However, in regard to the Holy Spirit, the narrative states that He "had not yet fallen on any of them" (v. 16). After that Peter and John came down from Jerusalem and "laid their hands on them [the Samaritans], and they received the Holy Spirit" (v. 17). Hence, by implication the Holy Spirit fell on them also, and as a result the Samaritans received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We should observe that the apostles Peter and John laid hands on the Samaritans prior to their receiving the Holy Spirit. The laying on of hands did not happen later in Caesarea (nor earlier in Jerusalem), but the result was the same. The Holy Spirit fell on all those assembled. [56] Hence, in both Samaria and Caesarea the promise of the Holy Spirit was truly fulfilled.

In the twentieth-century Pentecostal/charismatic renewal, there is frequent testimony to a "falling" of the Holy Spirit. This is said sometimes to occur through the laying on of hands (as in Samaria),[57] sometimes without hands (as in Jerusalem and Caesarea).[58] In any event this "falling" is viewed as a sovereign act of God whether or not mediated through a human instrument.

C. Coming On

The primary term for the coming of the Holy Spirit is simply *coming on.* Jesus had said to His disciples shortly before Pentecost: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on[59] you" (Acts 1:8 NIV). Accordingly, Acts 2:1–4 describes the Holy Spirit's coming on them. The expression "coming on" is not, as such, used in the Pentecostal narrative; however, the fact that "there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting *on* each one of them" (v. 3) depicts the "on-ness" of the Holy Spirit's coming.

Prior to Pentecost, it was not as if the Holy Spirit were absent from the disciples. The risen Jesus had breathed on a number of His disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22);[60] moreover during the forty days prior to His ascension Jesus had been giving "commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles" (Acts 1:2). But, still, the Holy Spirit had not yet come on them.

But had this not happened before? As we have earlier observed, there are a number of references in the Old Testament to the Spirit's coming upon various persons. For example, the Scripture says that the Spirit of the Lord "came upon," "clothed," or "came mightily upon" several of the judges. Much the same thing was said of Saul and David. However, this was largely temporary to enable a person to fulfill a certain role or function, such as judging, ruling, or prophesying.[61] But with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the situation was quite different, for the Holy Spirit came to remain.[62]

In regard to the Spirit's remaining, we may call to mind that when the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus, the Spirit remained. John the Baptist declared, "I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him" (John 1:32 NASB). John added that God the Father said to him, "He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit" (v. 33 NASB); consequently, the Spirit will remain on all who receive Him through Jesus Christ.[63]

Before proceeding further we should observe one additional instance in the Book of Acts where the language of "coming on" is used. This is the later account of the apostle Paul ministering to the disciples in Ephesus. These Ephesians had come to faith in Christ and been baptized by Paul. Then the climactic moment occurred "when Paul laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them" (19:6). In correspondence with the earlier significance in

Acts, this coming on was a permanent one.

Now we may raise the question, What did this coming on and remaining mean? Perhaps the best answer is that it signified a *taking possession* by the Holy Spirit. Henceforward, the Holy Spirit was to be the controlling factor in their lives and ministry. It was not that the Jewish disciples or the Ephesians possessed the Holy Spirit after His coming; rather, it was that the Holy Spirit possessed them.

Here we quote some earlier words of Jesus: "Stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). The picture of being clothed, or endued, with the Holy Spirit contains the note of a continuing endowment. When the Holy Spirit comes and endues, not only will there be total possession but also activity after that will be vested with His presence and power.

"Coming on" and "being clothed with" are two aspects of the same operation of the Holy Spirit. The former terminology, in the active voice, expresses the divine side, namely, that the Holy Spirit thereby lays claim to or possesses people. The latter terminology, in the passive voice, expresses the human aspect, namely, that people are thereby invested with the Holy Spirit. A person does not himself put on the Holy Spirit; rather, the Holy Spirit clothes the person. Possession *by* the Holy Spirit and investment *with* the Holy Spirit: these are two aspects of God's gracious action.

In the contemporary spiritual renewal there is frequent testimony to the Holy Spirit's possession and investment. Whatever may have been the previous relation to God, many people sense a fresh and total claim on their lives. "I may have had the Spirit before, but now the Spirit has me"—such is a typical testimony of participants in the renewal. This points to a dispossession of the self so that one may be possessed by the Holy Spirit.[64]

Before going farther it is important to stress that the terminology thus far used in this chapter—"outpouring," "falling on," and "coming on"—points to a coming of the Holy Spirit from without and beyond. The experience of the Spirit thus depicted is not some kind of mystical participation in the immanent presence of God. Rather, the language suggests a profound experience of the transcendent God coming powerfully to people. In some ways it is a kind of spiritual invasion from the heights to the depths. But the coming from without and beyond is by no means to break down or destroy. It is rather (as we will discuss more fully later) a gracious act whereby human beings may better become participants in the purpose and activity of God.

D. Baptizing

Another term related to the coming of the Holy Spirit is *baptizing*. As we have earlier noted,[65] Jesus said to His disciples: "John baptized in[66] water, but before many days you shall be baptized in[66] the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5).

Accordingly, the event on the Day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2:1–4 was the fulfillment of this promise; they were all baptized in the Holy Spirit. Although the expression is not used in Acts 2,[67] it undoubtedly applies. The phrase "baptized in the Holy Spirit" is found on one other occasion in Acts when Peter recounted what had happened to the Gentiles in Caesarea. We have previously noted that Peter said, "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning" (11:15). Then Peter continued, saying: "And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized in water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit'" (v. 16). Thus although the expression "baptized in the Holy Spirit" is not directly used in either account (Acts 2 or Acts 10), it is apparent that both occasions were baptisms[68] in the Holy Spirit.[69] By extension, since we have noted the use of such other terms as "outpouring," "falling on," and "coming on" associated with the coming of the Holy Spirit, we may properly speak of all these as occurrences of being baptized in the Holy Spirit.

It is important to emphasize that the expression cannot properly be rendered as "baptized *by*[70] the Holy Spirit." "By" would imply that the Holy Spirit is the agent. However, it is evident that Jesus is the agent, the baptizer, not the Holy Spirit. This is especially apparent when we recall the words of John the Baptist: "I have baptized you in water; but he [Jesus] will baptize you in the Holy Spirit."[71] Even as water is not the agent in water baptism, neither is the Spirit the agent in Spirit baptism. Water and Spirit are the elements in which baptism takes place.

One additional place (besides Acts and the Gospels) that possibly refers to being baptized in the Holy Spirit is 1 Corinthians 12:13. This text, however, reads in the Revised Standard Version: "By[72] one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit." It could be argued that Paul is dealing with a different matter here, namely, a baptism *by* the Holy Spirit, so that the Holy Spirit (unlike the cases in the Gospels and Acts) is the agent. However, since the Greek word translated

"by" (*en*) is the same as that in the Gospels and Acts, it would seem preferable to translate it thus: "*In* one Spirit[73] we were all baptized… ." Accordingly, the Holy Spirit is again seen as element and not agent, and Christ (though not mentioned directly) is implied to be the agent.[74] That this is the more likely interpretation also follows from the second half of the verse: "all were made to drink of one Spirit." Incidentally, this latter statement may also be translated "all were imbued [or "saturated"][75] with one Spirit." Since the word "baptize" means to immerse, the best translation of the verse would then be "In one Spirit we were all immersed … and all were saturated with the Holy Spirit."[76] In any event it seems clear that Paul, like the Gospels and Acts, is also talking about a baptism *in* the Holy Spirit.

The significance of the expression "baptized in the Holy Spirit" now stands forth clearly. It depicts vividly the idea of being enveloped in the reality of the Holy Spirit. Since to be baptized in water means literally to be immersed in, plunged under, and even drenched or soaked with,[77] then to be baptized in the Holy Spirit can mean no less than that. In immersion no part of the body is left untouched; everything goes under. So with Spirit baptism the whole being of a person—body, soul, and spirit—is imbued with the Spirit of God. Likewise, the community of those who are so baptized is profoundly affected in its total life. Both individual and community are touched in every area by the presence and power of the living God.

Let us look again at the contemporary spiritual renewal.[78] There is no expression more commonly used for a decisive event in many lives than being "baptized in the Holy Spirit." For what has been said about the entire person being enveloped—immersed, imbued, saturated—in the reality of God is the testimony of countless numbers of people.[79] Many also declare that the experience of a Pentecostal baptism has at last cleared a way for God to operate in a more fruitful way in their lives.[80] Baptism in the Holy Spirit has been the gateway into a new dimension of the Holy Spirit's presence and power.[81]

E. Filling

One final term used in connection with the coming of the Holy Spirit is *filling.* It is found particularly in the accounts concerning the disciples in Jerusalem and Saul of Tarsus in Damascus.

Interestingly, the first thing said concerning the disciples at Pentecost is that "they were all filled with[82] the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4). Peter later speaks of this as the "outpouring of the Holy Spirit" (as we have noted before), but primarily the narrative says that they were "filled."

Before the disciples were filled, the house was filled. The sound from heaven came "like the rush of a mighty wind" and "filled all the house where they were sitting" (2:2). The filling of the house suggests the presence of God in an intensive manner throughout the place of assembly. Those gathered knew themselves to be surrounded by and enveloped in the presence of the Holy Spirit. What was felt outwardly in fullness then became an inner total experience. They were all—as community and as persons—filled with the Spirit of God. Also, before the disciples were filled, "there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them" (2:3). Two comments: first, this calls to mind the words that Jesus would baptize with "the Holy Spirit *and with fire*" (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16); second, the tongues "resting on each" contains the imagery of the Holy Spirit descending on—as in the language of "pouring out on," "falling on," and "coming on"—so that the movement is from heaven to earth. Hence, the disciples were filled from beyond themselves. It was not simply an intensification of an inward spiritual presence: it was a divine visitation in fullness.

Next we turn to the account of Saul of Tarsus and note how he was filled with the Spirit. Three days after Saul's encounter with the glorified Jesus, Ananias went to the blinded Saul: "So Ananias departed and entered the house. And, laying his hands on him, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you … has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 9:17). So did Saul, later to be called Paul, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Thus the experience of Saul of Tarsus was like that of the disciples at Jerusalem who were also filled with the Spirit. It came from the exalted Lord Jesus in each case and prepared both the disciples and Saul for the work that lay ahead. Indeed, it was the gift of the Holy Spirit promised by God to all He calls

to Himself. Accordingly, being “filled with the Holy Spirit” in these two cases was clearly identical with the experience of the Samaritans, the people of Caesarea, and the disciples at Ephesus. It was the initial experience of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit.

There is one other report in Acts of a being “filled with the Holy Spirit”: “The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:52). However, this text refers to those in Antioch of Pisidia who had been disciples for some time, and therefore probably refers to an ongoing filling.[83]

Other references in Acts to being “filled with the Spirit” concern persons who had been filled earlier. Peter, when he later addressed the high council of Jews, was “filled with the Holy Spirit” and spoke to them (4:8). Afterward when Peter and the company of disciples prayed for boldness to speak the word, “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (4:31).[84] Saul of Tarsus, now called Paul, is described as “filled with the Holy Spirit” when he discerned the evil intentions of Elymas the magician and spoke against him (13:9). It would seem from these passages that, in addition to the initial experience of being filled, there may be subsequent fresh fillings with the Holy Spirit.

There is also reference to a condition of fullness: some persons are said to be “full of the Holy Spirit.” Stephen and Barnabas are described as men “full[85] of the Holy Spirit” (6:5; 7:55; 11:24). The requirement for those elected to serve tables (including Stephen) was that they be men “full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (6:3). Indeed, it is also important for us to note that Jesus Himself, following His baptism by John, is described as being “full of the Holy Spirit”: “And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan” (Luke 4:1). The language of spiritual fullness bespeaks God’s overflowing gift of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, along with the initial reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit described as “filling” in the case of the first disciples and Saul of Tarsus, there are later repetitions of being filled as well as emphasis on continuing fullness. Such fillings in no way invalidated the initial filling but serve to show that the concept of filling is quite complex in richness and meaning.

In this connection we may note the words of Paul in Ephesians 5:18: “Be filled with the Spirit.” These words might better be translated, “Be continuously filled [or “keep on being filled”][86] with the Spirit.” This is the call to a dynamic Christian life in the ongoing filling by God’s Holy Spirit.

What, then is the overall significance of being “filled” or “full”? It points to that dimension of the Spirit’s bestowal that relates to interiority, that is to say, the whole community or person is inwardly pervaded by the Holy Spirit. Even as the

sound of a mighty wind filled all the house (which signifies every room, nook, and corner), so for all persons who are filled, every aspect of individual and communal life is touched. The human situation is pervaded in a total way by the Spirit of the living God.

In the spiritual renewal of our time there are countless numbers of persons who testify to the reality of being filled with the Holy Spirit. There may have been a sense of emptiness for some time, and now God has come in His fullness. There may have been an increasing yearning to glorify God in all that one is and does, and now God has flooded one's being with His presence. There may have been a deep desire to be used more effectively in sharing the good news of the grace received in Jesus Christ, and now God has filled one's life and speech with fresh power. Such testimony to being filled with the Holy Spirit points to a profoundly internal experience of the Spirit of God moving throughout like wind or fire until all barriers are breached and the Holy Spirit pervades everything.[87]

This is a totality of penetration with the Holy Spirit whereby, in a new way, all areas of one's being—body, soul, and spirit (the conscious and subconscious depths)—become sensitized to the divine presence and activity. Likewise, a community of people filled with the Holy Spirit finds that their relationship not only to God but also to one another becomes suffused with a profound sense of God's moving in and through whatever takes place. Further, the experience of being filled may occur afresh by God's sovereign action and in response to new situations. However, any renewed filling is against the background of the original breakthrough of God's Spirit when the Spirit moved throughout and all barriers were broken down. For the Holy Spirit is free to move again and again, as all of life becomes redolent with the presence and wonder of Almighty God.

Concluding Remarks

1. Our discussion of descriptive terms leads us to recognize that they depict various aspects of the Holy Spirit's coming. In one sense, this is an invasion from without (the Spirit poured out on, falling on, coming on); in another, it is an immersion (being baptized in); in still another sense, it is a penetration, a permeation (being filled with). The first expresses the movement of the Holy Spirit from "on high," coming from heaven to earth, powerfully coming on people; the second depicts the ensuing situation of people so affected that they are enveloped in the reality of the Holy Spirit; the third pictures the Holy Spirit moving within to activate persons in the entirety of their existence. These are all ways of expressing the extraordinary event of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The coming of the Holy Spirit is thus expressed in many ways. Both individually and in their totality these expressions say much. But since they all relate to the coming of God Himself in the Holy Spirit, the event is far more than any words can contain.

2. What lies at the heart of the coming of the Holy Spirit—and what these terms variously express—is the event/experience of the *dynamic presence* of God in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is poured out on, falls on, comes on; hence there is movement, action. As a result people are baptized in and filled with the Holy Spirit. All this points to a momentous event and experience of the Holy Spirit.

We are to recognize this as the active presence of God. God, to be sure, is everywhere present; indeed, "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). However, omnipresence is not the same as dynamic presence, namely, His presence as event—dynamic event. The heart of Pentecost and its continuation is dynamic event: it may be expressed as "God has come." The "sound … from heaven" like "the rush of a mighty wind" on the Day of Pentecost and "tongues as of fire" resting on each person dramatizes the divine action and presence. It is the Spirit of the living God moving dynamically onto the human scene. Although the same imagery is not repeated in other accounts, the language of "coming on," "falling on," and "filling with" continues to emphasize this divine momentum and resulting presence.

3. Since it is God Himself in the person of the Holy Spirit who comes, His very coming is a manifestation of glory. For wherever God is present His glory shines forth.

We have already observed that on the Day of Pentecost the house was filled with a sound from heaven and immediately thereafter the gathered disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. The Old Testament background is found in the accounts of the fillings of the tabernacle and temple with God's glory. After the tabernacle in the wilderness was completed, "the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Exod. 40:34). Many years later, when the temple was made ready, "fire came down from heaven … and the glory of the LORD filled the temple" (2 Chron.

7:1). The presence of God's glory was so awesome that Moses could not enter the tabernacle (Exod. 40:35) nor could the priests go into the temple (2 Chron. 7:2; cf. 1 Kings 8:11). God's glory, in cloud and fire, was overwhelmingly present. But at Pentecost the far greater thing was not the filling of a tabernacle or temple (or even a house) but the fact that *people* were filled with God's glory. Truly the Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of glory."[88]

Hence every coming of the Holy Spirit is a manifestation of glory. Moreover, it centers in Jesus Christ. The Incarnation itself was a manifestation of Christ's glory. So the Gospel of John affirms, "We have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (1:14). The Transfiguration was a manifestation of His glory. So Peter writes, "We were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory" (2 Peter 1:16–17 NIV). The death of Christ was a manifestation of His glory. So Jesus Himself said on the evening before His crucifixion: "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified" (John 12:23). Hence when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, Christ was again glorified, for Jesus had said, "He [the Holy Spirit] will glorify me" (John 16:14). This means that the glory manifested through the Holy Spirit was the glory of Christ, for in Him all the fullness of God's glory dwelt.

A further word of Jesus in the Gospel of John is quite relevant. In His prayer to the Father Jesus said, "The glory which thou hast given to me I have given to them" (17:22). This statement refers primarily to future believers,[89] and although the words might seem to refer to the past—"I have given"— they actually point to the future as an accomplished fact.[90] The glory of Jesus, therefore, will be given to those who believe in Him. Therefore when Christ gave the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost[91] and later, He was giving the gift of His glory.

EXCURSUS: THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND SALVATION

It is important to reiterate that none of the New Testament accounts of the coming of the Holy Spirit are concerned with salvation. The occurrence of salvation was essential background for the gift of the Holy Spirit, but the Spirit was not given to bring about salvation.

I stress this because of a frequently expressed view that the gift of the Spirit was integral to salvation. From this perspective the gift of the Holy Spirit, for example, is viewed as the gift of saving grace;[92] or it is the means of inward cleansing;[93] or it is the application of Christ's "saving benefits."[94] The gift of the Holy Spirit, however, as we have observed goes *beyond* salvation;[95] it is promised to those who repent and come to faith in Jesus Christ.

None of this concerning the gift of the Holy Spirit denies the prior operation of the Holy Spirit in salvation. There could be no repentance and faith without the work of the Holy Spirit making such possible. As Jesus said about the Holy Spirit, "He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin" (John 16:8 NASB). Hence, on the Day of Pentecost the conviction that resulted in repentance and faith was due to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, operating through Peter's preaching, produced conviction—and without such, salvation could not occur. But salvation itself was not the gift of the Spirit.

Accordingly, we may say that in all the Acts accounts of the gift of the Spirit being received there is the prior activity of the Holy Spirit in repentance and faith, or to use another term, in regeneration. While not explicitly stated after Pentecost, it is presupposed in the various accounts of the reception of the Holy Spirit.[96] All who believed did so by virtue of the Spirit's convicting power uniting them to Christ and bringing new life within.[97]

It should be added that Acts has little to say about the activity of the Holy Spirit in the occurrence of salvation because the focus of the book is on the role of the Spirit in the outreach of the gospel.[98] This is a marked difference, for example, from the letters of Paul in which much attention is given to the Holy Spirit in the Christian life.[99] The Book of Acts, on the other hand, deals almost wholly with the Holy Spirit in witness and in mission.[100]

THEOLOGICAL COMMENT

A final theological comment: In the history of the church's reflection on the Holy Spirit there has traditionally been the tendency to subordinate the work of the Spirit to the work of Christ. Despite the orthodox formulation of the *ontological* equality[101] of the Spirit and the Son, there has tended to be a *functional* subordination. The role of the Holy Spirit in connection with Christ has been viewed largely as applying the benefits of Christ to the believer,[102] whereas His further work in the Pentecostal coming has been seriously neglected. With the emphasis on the former, the Holy Spirit's work has been functionally subordinated to that of Christ, hence a work of applicative instrumentality.[103] Accordingly, it has been insufficiently recognized that not only does the Spirit point to Christ but also Christ points to the Spirit, and that beyond the Spirit's work in uniting to Christ (the area of salvation) is Christ's mediation of the Spirit to others. Indeed, this latter act of mediation, from the Father through the Son, is that climactic act of the sending of the Holy Spirit. This act, presupposing redemption, represents the coming of the Spirit to a redeemed humanity. The nature of this coming, its various aspects, its purpose, and its results have been given little attention.

We may be very grateful that in the contemporary spiritual renewal the Holy Spirit is being recognized for His unique and distinctive work. It is a challenging day to be alive both theologically and experientially!

[1]See III, below.

[2]This will be apparent later when we observe that the word filled is one of the terms used in Acts to describe what happened when the Holy Spirit came.

[3]Hence, I do not include at this juncture the account in Acts 2:42-47 describing the enlarged community of believers. The actual event of the Spirit's coming is not described as in Acts 2:1-4 and the other passages in Acts mentioned above.

[4]A proper methodology entails, wherever possible, giving priority to the narrational and descriptive over the didactic. For example, in regard to the study of the Incarnation, it is better to begin with the narratives in the Gospels before proceeding to the briefer references and interpretation in the Epistles. This is likewise true about the coming of the Holy Spirit. Since Acts is the actual record of this event, its narration is the primary place to gain perspective and understanding. Not all agree on that, I

recognize. For example, John R. W. Stott writes that the "revelation of the purpose of God in Scripture should be sought primarily in its didactic rather than its descriptive parts. More precisely, we should look for it… in the sermons and writings of the apostles, rather than in the purely narrative portions of the Acts. What is described as having happened to others is not necessarily intended for us" (Baptism and Fullness, 15). Such an approach, I submit, reverses tfiè proper order of understanding. Actually, it is a combination of the two, the narrational or descriptive and the didactic, with the former having priority, that is the best hermeneutical procedure. (For a helpful critique of the position represented by Stott, see Roger Stronstad, The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke, 5-9.)

[5]RSV and NASB have "spirit." However, as John Murray writes, "The spirit of adoption whereby we cry, 'Abba, Father,' is the Holy Spirit" (Epistle to the Romans, NICNT, 296).

[6]Or "earnest" (KJV); "guarantee" (RSV); "deposit" (NIV). The Greek word is arrabon.

[7]"The one you received" was, of course, the Holy Spirit.

[8]In Luke 24:49 Jesus continued by saying, "But stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high." According to Acts 1:5, Jesus declared, "Before many days you shall be baptized with [or "in"] the Holy Spirit." (Recall our brief discussion in the preceding chapter.)

[9]So F. F. Bruce says, "The free gift which is promised … to those who repent and are baptized is the Holy Spirit Himself" (The Book of the Acts, NICNT, 77). I will discuss the priority of repentance and baptism in section C. below.

[10]This is not to deny the distinctiveness of the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. That event was indeed a new and mighty act of God, but it was still the first in an unlimited number that came later.

[11]The preponderance of Greek manuscripts omit the word "given" ; hence the text could be read simply, "The Spirit was not yet." However, English translations usually provide the word "given." This appears to be the intended meaning of the text.

[12]See prior discussion in chapter 7, III. A. about the use of the word "glorification" in the Fourth Gospel. The climactic glorification is that of Jesus to the right hand of the Father.

[13]Instead of "Counselor." See earlier discussion under "The Spirit of

Truth," chapter 6, II.A. Also recall chapter 7, III.?., "The Paraclete."

[14]Even as He gives, or sends, the Son. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son…. For God sent the Son into the world" (John 3:16-17).

[15]I have previously discussed salvation under the headings of calling (effectual), regeneration, justification, and (initial) sanctification (chaps. 1-4). Through repentance and faith this salvation occurs.

[16]Peter later adds the words, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" (v. 40 NASB).

[17]James D. G. Dunn in his book Baptism in the Holy Spirit says that the Samaritans' faith was "simply an assent of the mind to the acceptability of what Philip was saying" (p. 65). It was a matter of believing Philip-"they believed Philip"-but did not truly believe in Christ. Dunn's interpretation, I submit, is quite inadequate. Believing Philip surely means believing "the good news" that Philip proclaimed; and undoubtedly Philip understood it that way, for he thereupon baptized the Samaritans. Would Philip have done this on the basis of "simply an assent of the mind"? Or was Philip perhaps misled? The question scarcely merits an answer. It is true that Simon the magician also "believed" and was "baptized" (v. 13) and later was called to further repentance by Peter (vv. 20-22). But the text does not suggest that Simon's earlier faith and baptism were not genuine (indeed, he said to Peter, "Pray for me to the Lord" [v. 24]). The record in Acts also confirms the authenticity of the Samaritans' faith in v. 14: "Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God … ," "received the word of God" can hardly mean anything less than true and genuine faith (cf. Acts 11:1 where the same expression "received the word of God" is used concerning the Caesareans' faith, the genuineness of which is beyond dispute).

[18]"Conversion" is another term that may be used to refer to the occurrence of salvation. See earlier discussion in chapter 2, "Regeneration," IV.C.

[19]This is Paul's later recounting of his experience. In the first account in Acts 9 Saul simply says, "Who are you, Lord?" (v. 5), which could possibly be translated as "Sir" (as in Acts 16:30, "Sirs" [NASB]) because Saul did not yet know the identity of the speaker. According to I. H. Marshall, " 'Sir' … is the reverential address one would expect to be used in replying to any heavenly figure [10:4]" (The Acts of the Apostles, TNTC, 169). However, it is apparent from the account in Acts 22:10, where "Lord" is twice used, that this word signified a new

relationship to Jesus Christ. William Neil puts it well: “In Paul’s own account [Acts 22], after Jesus has disclosed his identity he [Saul] calls him Lord, with the full significance of the term” (The Acts of the Apostles, NCBC, 129). Hence, on the road to Damascus Saul gave himself totally over to Christ. In the words of A. T. Robertson, “Saul surrendered instantly. This … was the conversion of Saul” (Word Pictures in the New Testament, 3:117).

[20]In Paul’s account of his experience in Acts 22 he speaks of Ananias saying to him, “Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name” (v. 16). This could suggest that Paul’s conversion did not occur until Ananias baptized him. However, it is clear from the initial account in Acts 9 that Paul had been converted and filled with the Spirit before baptism occurred (see vv. 17-18). Paul’s baptism is better viewed as an outward sign of an inward washing that had already occurred.

[21]See chapter 1, “Calling.” F. F. Bruce writes in regard to this verse of “those whom the Lord Himself has called-and called effectually” (The Book of the Acts, NICNT, 78).

[22]This is particularly apparent in Galatians 4:5-6 where Paul first speaks of our “adoption as sons.” Then he adds, “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts.” (See also my earlier discussion of “The Spirit of Adoption” in chapter 6, II.A.4.) John Murray writes that the Holy Spirit “is called The Spirit of adoption,’ not because he is the agent of adoption but because it is he who creates in the children of God the filial love and confidence by which they are able to cry, ‘Abba, Father’ “ (The Epistle to the Romans, NICNT, 296).

[23]Second Corinthians 11:4 (earlier quoted) is a somewhat different passage. In consecutive verses Paul speaks of receiving “a different spirit” and accepting “a different gospel.” Paul does not say how one relates to the other. However, the very fact that both are mentioned shows that accepting the gospel (i.e., salvation) and receiving the Spirit are not the same thing. Moreover, the preceding phrase, “if some one comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached,” suggests the priority of the gospel of salvation through Christ over receiving the Holy Spirit.

[24]A parallel with the account of Paul’s ministry to the Ephesians in Acts 19 is apparent. Both in Acts 19 and Ephesians 1 salvation is the background for the reception of the Holy Spirit.

[25]Cf. 1 John 4:13.

[26]According to Paul, as noted, we are God’s sons, i.e., children by adoption

into His family. All people are, of course, God's creatures, but only those whose status has been changed through faith are His children. So the Fourth Gospel puts it: "To all who received him, those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (1:12 NIV).

[27]According to John 7:39, neither had the disciples come to full faith nor had the Spirit yet been given (the words continue: "for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified"). Nonetheless, the sequence is clear: coming to Jesus and drinking, hence believing in Him, results in salvation, or eternal life (cf. John 4:10-14). Such believing is the background and basis for the outflow of living water that occurs through the receiving of the Holy Spirit.

[28]Some of these terms have appeared in previous quotations, but I have called no particular attention to them. We will now consider them in some detail.

[29]Or "poured forth" (NASB), "shed forth" (KJV). The Greek word is execheen (from ekcheo). and has the basic meaning of outpouring.

[30]Recall my earlier discussion in chapter 7, I., under "Special Tasks and Functions."

[31]Luke, the author of Acts, in his Gospel account of the resurrection of Jesus had spoken of "Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women" (Luke 24:10) as those who, first informed by the angels about Jesus' rising from the dead, then reported the Resurrection to the apostles. Probably they were all in the room also awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit.

[32]From the reading of Acts 2 alone one could possibly believe that the coming of the Holy Spirit was to the eleven apostles only. According to verse 1, "they were all together in one place." Verse 14, which later refers to "Peter, standing with the eleven," might suggest that the Pentecostal outpouring was only upon the apostles. However, Acts 1 so definitely points to the one hundred and twenty that there can be little doubt that the larger group was included. As I. H. Marshall says, "The whole group of 120 people is doubtless meant, and not just the … apostles" (The Acts of the Apostles, TNTC, 68). Ernst Haenchen similarly writes, "At the dawning of the day of Pentecost, the Christians, i.e., the one hundred and twenty persons of 1:15, were all gathered together" (The Acts of the Apostles, 167).

[33]The Greek word is ekkechutai (likewise from ekcheó).

[34]This serves to demonstrate, as earlier noted, that the coming of the Holy

Spirit is a continuing event.

[35]There were additional sound and light effects (see Acts 2:2-3) preceding the first outpouring of the Spirit in Jerusalem; however, the reception of the Spirit was identical (including speaking in tongues; see the next chapter).

[36]The Greek word for "poured out," execheen, in Titus 3 is a form of the same word eke he o found in Acts 2 and 10.

[37]Charles L. Holman writes that "the language and context of Spirit reception in these two verses point back quite distinctly to the pentecostal outpourings described by Luke in Acts, and especially to the initial outpourings on the day of Pentecost" ("Titus 3:5-6: A Window on Worldwide Pentecost," in Probing Pentecostalism, 55). I agree with this statement. The problem, as Holman also sees it, is "whether such an outpouring was considered integral to one's salvation experience." "However," Holman adds, "Titus 3:6 is quite parenthetical in the train of thought in 3:5-7 and is thus somewhat dissociated from a necessary connection with the 'salvation' of verse 5, which does include a work of the Spirit" (67, italics his). If that is the case, I would add-in line with a hermeneutic that gives primary importance to the narration in Acts-that the outpouring of the Spirit, while surely presupposed, is not integral to the salvation experience.

[38]Another passage that associates the Holy Spirit and outpouring is Romans 5:5 (earlier quoted) where Paul writes, "The love of God has been poured out [ekkechutai] within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (NASB). Paul is speaking here of a result of the Spirit's being given, namely, God's love "poured out." Still the same Greek word is used for "poured out," and in the larger context of Romans 5:1-5 it may refer to an ensuing experience of the Holy Spirit.

[39]The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, 2:2, Ante-Nicene Fathers, 1:5. The Greek phrase for "full outpouring of the Holy Spirit" is plëres pneumatos hagiou ekchusis. Exchusis is likewise from the root ekcheo.

[40]The Greek word is outos.

[41]XThe Epistle of Barnabas, Ante-Nicene Fathers, 1:137. The Greek word for "poured forth" is ekkechumenon.

[42]It is unclear in this text whether the one giving is the Father or the Son. In either case, it is a divine giving. Incidentally, KJV adds "unto him" (in italics, signifying that the words are not in the Greek). But this, I believe, misses the important note that to whomever God gives His Spirit, it is

without measure. (See also chap. 7, note 35.)

[43]There were occasional endowments of the Spirit under the old covenant, but none could rightly be called an outpouring of the Spirit. Keil and Delitzsch, commenting on Joel's prophecy, say it well: "Even if the way was opened and prepared for by the prophetic endowment of particular members of the old covenant, these sporadic communications of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament times cannot be regarded as the first steps in the outpourings of the Spirit of God" (Commentary on the Old Testament, Minor Prophets, 10:216-17).

[44]Recall my earlier discussion of this.

[45]This needs continual emphasis because of the erroneous teaching that the Holy Spirit was given to the church at Pentecost. As a case in point, the Roman Catholic Church officially views the original Pentecostal event as a permanent gift of the Holy Spirit wherein the Holy Spirit became "the soul" of the church.

[46]Eduard Schweizer writes that, according to Luke, "the outpouring of the Spirit can be repeated wherever men come to faith" (TDNT, 6:411). Hence, I would add, this applies to people of any time and place.

[47]I have been careful to say "an outpouring of God's Holy Spirit." Hence what follows about the Pentecostal/charismatic renewal by no means is intended to rule out other outpourings-or claims to such outpourings-since New Testament times. I will, however, be dealing basically with the Pentecostal/charismatic renewal in what follows. Renewal Theology (both volumes 1 and 2) is particularly related to this renewal.

[48]In the Latter Days: The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Twentieth Century, ix.

[49]Synan, on the size of the renewal, quotes from David Barrett's World Christian Encyclopedia (1980) thus: "All persons professing or claiming to be Pentecostal-charis- matics [number] over 100,000,000 world-wide" (Ibid, p. 18). It is interesting that Barratt himself, at the North American Conference "The Holy Spirit and World Evangelization" held in 1987, declared that "the worldwide charismatic movement has tripled in the past 10 years to total 277 million adherents worldwide" ("The Holy Spirit and World Evangelization," Christianity Today [Sept. 4, 1987], 45).

[50]The Greek word is epepesen, from epipipto (epi-"upon," pipto-"fall").

[51]Again the Greek word is epepesen.

[52]Recall Peter's "just as" in the prior discussion of "outpouring."

[53]Jesus, to be sure, had told His disciples to "wait for the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4). But He had by no means told them just when the promise would be fulfilled.

[54]The Greek word translated "mighty" is biaias, meaning "violent" or "forcible" (BAGD).

[55]See chapter 11.

[56]For further discussion of the laying on of hands, see chapter 11.

[57]The beginning of the Pentecostal renewal is generally dated to the first day of the twentieth century and to the experience of Agnes Ozman. She had asked Rev. Charles Parham to lay hands on her according to the example in Acts. She said, "It was as his hands were laid upon my head that the Holy Spirit fell upon me and I began to speak in tongues, glorifying God…. I had the added glory and joy my heart longed for and a depth of the presence of the Lord within that I had never known before, It was as if rivers of water were proceeding from my innermost being" (Klaude Kendrick, The Promise Fulfilled, 52-53). Note the words "The Holy Spirit fell… ."

[58]Rev. James Brown, one of the first Presbyterian ministers to become active in the "neo- Pentecostal" renewal, writes about an experience in his church: "There came a day when the Spirit of God invaded our small Saturday evening prayer group, where we met to pray for the Sunday worship service. Literally, the Spirit fell! He electrified everyone in the room! Immediately the gifts of the Spirit began to be distributed among us and we began to see signs, wonders, and miracles" (Presbyterians and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, "Signs, Wonders and Miracles," 6-7). Again note that "the Spirit of God invaded … the Spirit fell… ."

[59]The Greek word is epelthontos ("coming upon") from eperchomai.

[60]See the earlier discussion of this in chapter 7, III.A. This was the occasion when Jesus breathed new life into the disciples. Thus they "received" His Spirit within themselves. This was not yet the giving and receiving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Leon Morris writes, "It is false alike to the New Testament and to Christian experience to maintain that there is but one gift of the Spirit…. John tells us of one gift and Luke of another" (*The Gospel According to John*, NICNT, 847).

[61]'See my earlier discussion of this in chapter 7, I. Recall that David was the only expressed exception to the temporariness of the Spirit's coming:

"The Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward" (1 Sam. 16:13).

[62]See the prophecy of Isaiah 59:21: "This is my covenant…. My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever" (NIV). This refers to believers under God's future covenant.

[63]The picture, mentioned earlier, of the Spirit's resting on the disciples at Pentecost suggests this remaining.

[64]In the Roman Catholic spiritual renewal Leon Joseph Cardinal Suenens has played a leading part. He writes in his book A New Pentecost?: "We are not alone any more, we know we are guided by the Holy Spirit. As we dispossess ourselves, our being is possessed by God. The void is filled…. Those who allow themselves to be possessed by God resemble the log that little by little becomes white-hot. Their life, nourished by the fire of the Holy Spirit, becomes fire in turn. Is not this the fire of which Jesus spoke when he said: 'I have come to bring fire on the earth…' (Luke 12:49)? This is what it means to experience the Holy Spirit, who alone can renew the face of the earth!" (p. 70).

[65]Refer to chapter 7, III.C.

[66]I am continuing to substitute "in" for "with." Recall chapter 7, n. 43.

[67]The expression used in Acts 2:4 was "filled with the Holy Spirit" (see discussion of "filling" in next section). However, 2:1-4 was unmistakably the fulfillment of Jesus' promise.

[68]The noun baptism is not found in relation to the Holy Spirit. The coming of the Spirit is an event, a dynamic occurrence, a "being baptized." However, I do not think it improper to use the substantive form (similarly with "outpouring," which as such does not appear either; the text each time has "poured out") if one bears in mind its eventful quality.

[69]F. F. Bruce errs, I believe, in saying that "the baptism of the Spirit which it was our Lord's prerogative to bestow was, strictly speaking, something that took place once for all on the day of Pentecost" (The Book of Acts, NICNT, 76). Peter's own words in Caesarea contradict Bruce's statement.

[70]The Greek preposition en may, in some other contexts, be translated "by" ("in," "with," or "by"); it is inaccurate here (for the reasons stated above). Likewise, "of" is incorrect.

[71]"Mark 1:8. Recall the parallels in Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16; John 1:33.

[72]"By" is found also in KJV, NASB, and NIV.

[73]So reads the AS v.

[74]Gordon Fee says, "Nowhere else does this dative [en] with 'baptize' imply agency [i.e., that the Spirit does the baptizing], but it always refers to the element 'in which' one is baptized" (The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 606). John R. W. Stott writes, "If 1 Corinthians 12:13 were different [from the Gospels and Acts passages] and in this verse the Holy Spirit were himself the baptizer, what would be the 'element' with which he baptizes? That there is no answer to this question is enough to overthrow this interpretation, since the baptism metaphor absolutely requires an element, or the baptism is no baptism. Therefore, the 'element' in the baptism of 1 Corinthians 12:13 must be the Holy Spirit, and (consistently with the other verses) we must supply Jesus Christ as the baptizer" (Baptism and Fullness, 27). This is well said. See also the helpful discussion in John Rea's book, Layman's Commentary on the Holy Spirit, 146-51, and the chart on 256.

[75]See the article on potizo in Thayer where "imbue" and "saturate" are given as possible translations.

[76]Similarly EGT, in loco, says that the Corinthians "were at once immersed in … and saturated with the Holy Spirit; the second figure supplements the first." In line with the second figure "baptism with the Holy Spirit" is a possible translation.

[77]BAGD points out that in the non-Christian literature of the period the word baptizó often meant "plunge, sink, drench, overwhelm … soak." Such contemporary meanings certainly affected the New Testament usage of the word.

[78]Prior to the twentieth-century Pentecostal renewal, Charles Finney (1792-1875), an evangelist and later founder of Oberlin College, had used the expression "baptism of the Holy Ghost" about an early experience in his life. A few hours after what Finney described as a face-to-face encounter with Christ, the following occurred: "I received a mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost … without any recollection that I had ever heard the thing mentioned by any person in the world, the Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul…. Indeed it seemed to come in waves and waves of liquid love…. It seemed like the very breath of God … it seemed to fan me like immense wings…. I wept aloud with joy and love; and I do not know but I should say I literally bellowed out the unutterable gushings of my heart. These waves came

over me and over me, one after the other, until I recollect I cried out, 'I shall die if these waves continue to pass over me' … yet I had no fear of death" (Charles G. Finney: An Autobiography, 20- 21). Finney's experience of a "mighty baptism" is being variously attested in the twentieth century.

[79]"Talk about a baptism, it was just like I was being plunged down into a great sea of water, only the water was God, the water was the Holy Spirit" (Catholic Pentecostals, 16) This testimony of one of the first Roman Catholics in the renewal to his "baptism in the Spirit" is typical.

[80]One of the leaders of the Azusa Street revival in California that ushered in the worldwide twentieth-century Pentecostal renewal was Frank Bartleman. Bartleman wrote about His own Spirit-baptism several years later: "When my day of 'Pentecost' was fully come [in 1906] the channel was cleared. The living waters burst forth. The door of my service sprang open at the touch of the hand of a sovereign God. The Spirit began to operate within me in a new and mightier way. It was a distinct, fresh climax and development, an epochal experience for me." Then referring to the many who had come to Azusa Street, Bartleman added: "And for this we had been shut up as a company. The preparation was world-wide, among the saints of God. The results have already made history. In fact this has proven an epoch in the history of the church just as distinct and definite as the Spirit's action in the time of Luther and Wesley, and with far greater portent. And it is not yet all history. We are too close to it yet to understand and appreciate it fully. But we have made another step back in the way to the restoration of the church as in the beginning. We are completing the circle" (Azusa Street [originally entitled, How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles], 74-75).

[81]In accordance with this Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes that "the doctrine concerning baptism with the Holy Spirit [is] … the most urgent, vital and crucial matter for the *Christian church at the present time." (Joy Unspeakable: Power and Renewal in the Holy Spirit, 267).*

[82]Or literally, "filled of the Holy Spirit"; the Greek phrase is eplesthesan pneumatos hagiou. The genitive case is also used in other passages we will note. According to BDF, this form "with verbs meaning 'to fill, be full of' is well preserved" (p. 95).

[83]The Greek word for "filled" here is eplerounto, the imperfect tense, and may be translated "were continually filled" (NASB) or "continued to be full" (PHILLIPS).

[84]I. H. Marshall writes: “The story [in Acts 4:23-31] undoubtedly means that the disciples received a fresh filling with the Spirit …” (The Acts of the Apostles, TNTC, 107). F. F. Bruce likewise speaks of this as “a fresh filling of the Spirit” (The Book of Acts, NICNT, 107). Howard Ervin, contrariwise, denies that there can be repeated fillings with the Spirit and claims that Acts 4:31 refers to the disciples’ initial and only filling (Spirit-Baptism, chap. 8, “One Baptism, One Filling”). I hold (in agreement with Marshall and Bruce) that this is “a fresh filling” since many in the narrative had doubtless been filled on the Day of Pentecost.

[85]The Greek word for “full” is pleres and, according to Thayer, means “thoroughly permeated with.” A form of this word is found in the references in Acts and Luke.

[86]The Greek verb is plerousthe, a present imperative passive. According to Francis Foulkes, “the Christian is to leave his life open to be filled constantly and repeatedly with the Holy Spirit” (Ephesians, TNTC, 152). So reads this text in Ephesians. According to Thayer (article on πληρόω), “Christians are said to be πλήρουσθαι … as those who are pervaded … with the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit.”

[87]“How could a man think he was passing out the bread of life every Sunday and still remain so utterly hungry himself? I was empty, and I knew it. This was the end of the line.” So writes Erwin Prange about his situation as a Lutheran pastor in his first parish. Then “all at once a voice seemed to come from nowhere and everywhere…. The gift is already yours. Reach out and take it.’ “ As Prange then stretched out his hands toward the altar, palms up, jaws tightening, and mouth open, “in an instant, there was a sudden shift of dimensions, and God became real. A spirit of pure love pervaded the church and drenched me like rain. He was beating in my heart, flowing through my blood, breathing in my lungs, and thinking in my brain. Every cell in my body, every nerve end, tingled with the fire of His presence.” See Prange’s autobiographical account, The Gift Is Already Yours, 52-53. Although the language does not precisely describe being “filled with the Holy Spirit,” the experience was one of moving from emptiness to fullness, and such a fullness Prange vividly describes.

[88]Peter speaks of “the Spirit of glory” (1 Peter 4:14 NIV, NASB).

[89]After praying for His own disciples (vv. 6-19), Jesus said, “I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word” (v. 20).

[90]According to EGT, in loco, “the perfect tense is used, because the gift had already been determined.”

[91]“This is further evidenced by the fact that the words of John 17:22-“the glory which thou hast given me I have given them”-continue: “that they may be one even as we [Christ and the Father] are one.” At Pentecost after the Holy Spirit came, one of the distinctive marks of the new community of believers was their unity: “All who believed were together and had all things in common” (Acts 2:44) and “The company of those who believed were of one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32). See further discussion in chapter 12, “Effects of the Coming of the Spirit.”

[92]J. D. G. Dunn writes: “The gift of the Spirit… is the gift of saving grace by which one enters into Christian experience and life” (Baptism in the Holy Spirit, 226).

[93]. H. Marshall states in connection with Acts 2:38 that “it is the Spirit who accomplishes the inner cleansing of which baptism is the outward symbol” (The Acts of the Apostles, TNTC, 81).

[94]F. F. Bruce writes, “The gift of the Spirit may comprehend a variety of gifts of the Spirit, but first and foremost ‘the saving benefits of Christ’s work as applied to the believer by the Spirit’ “ (Bruce quotes another source with which he expresses agreement). Though Bruce sees a possible connection (“may comprehend”) elsewhere, he here gives primacy to the application of salvation.

[95]William Neil rightly sees the gift of the Spirit as the “gift of the new power which Peter’s audience has seen at work in the Pentecostal experience of the Apostles and their associates” *(The Acts of the Apostles*, NCBC, 79). Neil does not connect this gift with salvation. Eduard Schweizer writes that in Acts “salvation … is never ascribed to the Spirit. According to Ac. 2:38 the Spirit is imparted to those who are already converted and baptised” (TDNT, 6:412). Hermann Gunkel similarly declares, “For Acts it is a commonplace that to be a believer and to be seized by the Spirit are separate events” *(The Influence of the Holy Spirit*, 17). Kirsopp Lake states that in the various Acts passages that deal with the gift of the Spirit “there is no suggestion of regeneration by the Spirit, or of the view that salvation depends on it” *(The Acts of the Apostles*, 5:109). Nor does Calvin, it is interesting to observe, attach salvation to the early gift of the Spirit *(Acts of the Apostles*, 1:120). He writes concerning Acts 2:38: “Remission of sins and newness of life were the principal things, and this [the gift of the Holy Spirit] was, as it

were, *an addition* [italics mine].” The “addition,” according to Calvin, was “that Christ should show forth unto them his power by some visible gift.” Calvin thereafter adds that the Spirit is now given that “we may believe with the heart unto righteousness, that our tongues may be framed unto true confession … that we may pass from death to life” (p. 121) There is an obvious inconsistency in Calvin here, the gift of the Spirit meaning one thing in New Testament days and something else now. However, it is important to note that Calvin was on the right track about the biblical account in Acts, namely, that the gift of the Spirit was “an addition” to forgiveness of sins and new life.

[96]F. F. Bruce, in commenting on the account of the Samaritans receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, writes, “The prior operation of the Spirit in regeneration and faith is not in view here” (The Book of the Acts, NICNT, 188, n.34). Bruce is on target this time!

[97]Calvin says of the Samaritans’ reception of the Holy Spirit that “Luke speaketh not in this place of the common grace of the Spirit, whereby God doth regenerate us … the Samaritans were already endued with the Spirit of adoption” (Commentary on Acts, 1:338- 39). Their regeneration by the Spirit, their enduement of the Spirit of adoption preceded their reception of the Holy Spirit. R. C. H. Lenski says much the same thing: “They [the Samaritans] had been baptized as believers, they had received … the Holy Spirit in their hearts, and thus regeneration, conversion, justification, the power of a new life, in a word, salvation” (The Acts of the Apostles, 325). Later Lenski writes in connection with the Caesareans: “This falling of the Spirit upon people … is entirely separate from the Spirit’s reception by faith for salvation” (Ibid., 431).

[98]I will discuss this in more detail later.

[99]E.g., Paul writes about the life-giving Spirit (Rom. 8:2), walking by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), and being sanctified by the Spirit (2 Thess. 2:13), none of which is the concern of Luke in Acts. I should add that Paul, as we have seen, also speaks frequently of the giving and receiving of the Holy Spirit. Further, he has much to say about the gifts of the Spirit (as I will later discuss in detail). However, Paul’s basic concern is the role of the Spirit in the Christian life.

[100]On this matter of mission H. B. Swete comments, “The purpose of the Son’s mission was to give the rights of sonship; the purpose of the Spirit’s mission, to give the power of using them. As the former was realized in human history at the moment of the Incarnation, so the latter

connects itself historically with the moment of the Pentecostal coming" (The Holy Spirit in the New Testament, 204). This is an important distinction to maintain.

[101]Equality in being: the Spirit of the same essence (homoousios) as the Son, both equally God. Such was the church's formulation in the Nicene Creed. See vol. 1, chapter 4, "The Holy Trinity," III.A.

[102]E.g., Calvin's Institutes, Book III, chapter 1 on the Holy Spirit is entitled, "The Benefits of Christ Made Available to Us by the Secret Operation of the Holy Spirit."

[103]On the matter of viewing the Holy Spirit as applicative and instrumental, I would especially call attention to Hendrikus Berkhofs Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, where he writes, "This is the main pneumatological trend in ecclesiastical theology. The Spirit is customarily treated in noetical, applicative, subjective terms. He is the power which directs our attention to Christ and opens our eyes to his work. The main result of his work is the awakening of faith in Christ. His work is merely instrumental…. So the Spirit is a second reality beside Christ, but entirely subordinate to him, serving in the application of his atoning work" (p. 23). Berkhof expresses dissatisfaction with this long tradition and urges that "the Spirit is far more than an instrumental entity, the subjective reverse at Christ's work." I gladly confess to having received helpful insight from what Berkhof has said in this connection.

9
The Phenomenon of Tongues

An extraordinary feature related to the coming of the Holy Spirit was the phenomenon of people's speaking in tongues. Let us examine this from various perspectives, first in the Book of Acts and later in the Epistles.

I. OCCASIONS

On several occasions in Acts when the Holy Spirit came, people spoke in tongues. The disciples who gathered on the Day of Pentecost "were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues,[1] as the Spirit gave them utterance" (2:4). This tongues-speaking preceded Peter's later address to the multitude (vv. 14–36). In Caesarea, where Peter first preached the gospel to the Gentiles, speaking in tongues occurred after the Holy Spirit was poured out. Luke writes, "The believers … who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues[2] and extolling God" (10:45–46). When Paul laid his hands on the Ephesians, "the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues[3] and prophesied" (19:6). Thus the coming of the Spirit in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Ephesus was accompanied by speaking in tongues.

In the case of Samaria, speaking in tongues, while not specified, seems clearly to be implied. After the statement "they received the Holy Spirit" (8:17), the scripture reads, "Now when Simon [the magician] saw[4] that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them [Peter and John] money, saying, "Give me also this power, that any one on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit'" (vv. 18–19). What Simon saw, in all likelihood, was the Samaritans speaking in tongues, something extraordinary beyond his previous abilities in the realm of the occult. As a result he was willing to pay for the power to lay hands on others for similar miraculous results. That the Samaritans spoke in tongues was the most logical reason for his request. Both the word structure in Acts 8:18–19 and the context imply that the Samaritans spoke in tongues.[5]

Concerning Saul of Tarsus and his being filled with the Holy Spirit, the Book of Acts is silent about his speaking in tongues. However, by Paul's own later testimony he spoke of his personal practice. In writing the Corinthians Paul says, "I thank God that I speak in tongues[6] more than you all" (1 Cor. 14:18). It is quite possible, though Luke does not say so specifically,[7] that Paul first spoke in tongues when he was filled with the Spirit.

To summarize: the record in Acts clearly states that in the majority of cases—

three out of five—those who received the gift of the Holy Spirit spoke in tongues; there is strong likelihood that this happened in four out of five; and it is possible in all five instances that people did so speak. The evidence in Acts does not allow us to draw an absolute conclusion that speaking in tongues invariably followed the reception of the Spirit; however, the texts much incline in that direction.[8] It is of further significance that in the three accounts where tongues are explicitly mentioned, *all* of the people spoke in tongues. It was not the expression of one or two, or some, or many, but all. At Pentecost "they were *all* filled … and began to speak" (all 120 of them); at Caesarea "they heard *them* [the centurion and all his company] speaking in tongues; and at Ephesus immediately following their speaking in tongues the Scripture adds, "There were about twelve of them in *all*" (19:7).[9] Speaking in tongues, wherever mentioned, was not the activity of some but of the whole body of newly Spirit-filled believers.[10]

II. PRIMARY ACTIVITY AND EVIDENCE

Next it is clear that the *primary activity* consequent to the reception of the Holy Spirit was that of speaking in tongues. We focus on the word "primary," because although other things were mentioned, speaking in tongues was first. The Jerusalem disciples spoke in other tongues (2:4–13) and thereafter Peter both explained what had happened (vv. 14–21) and proclaimed the gospel (vv. 22–36); the Caesareans were heard "speaking in tongues and extolling God" (10:46); and the Ephesians "spoke with tongues and prophesied" (19:6). Speaking in tongues, wherever mentioned, was primary.

It follows that speaking in tongues was clear evidence that the Holy Spirit had been given. Speaking in tongues was *the* evidence in Jerusalem. The multitude whom Peter later addressed assembled at the sound of the 120 speaking in tongues: "At this sound[11] the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language" (2:6). Although the multitude was bewildered, this extraordinary speaking[12] was unmistakable evidence that something unusual had happened. Later, of course, Peter explained that this was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy about the outpouring of the Spirit. But the point here is that the particular evidence was the speaking in tongues.

We have earlier noted that speaking in tongues, in all likelihood, followed also the Samaritans' reception of the Holy Spirit. Here I simply mention the evidential character of such speaking. Speaking in tongues, it seems apparent, was the extraordinary occurrence that lay behind Simon the magician's offer. Speaking in tongues was also *the* evidence of a power Simon wanted for himself so that he could produce in others the same phenomenal activity.

In the later accounts of the reception of the Holy Spirit in Caesarea and Ephesus, speaking in tongues may properly be called *initial evidence*. We have already observed that speaking in tongues is mentioned along with extolling God (in Caesarea) and prophesying (in Ephesus). In the former instance this combination is definitely mentioned as evidence that the Holy Spirit had been given to the Gentiles: "The believers … who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. *For* they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God" (10:45–46). Speaking in

tongues was unmistakable evidence to Peter and those with him that the Caesareans had received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, when the Ephesians spoke in tongues and prophesied, it was also compelling evidence to Paul that they too had received the Holy Spirit.[13]

In summary, in all the accounts where speaking in tongues is specifically mentioned (in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Ephesus) and clearly implied (in Samaria), we may properly say that speaking in tongues was the primary evidence of the people's receiving the Holy Spirit.[14]

III. NATURE AND CONTINUATION

From what has been thus far said it is apparent that speaking in tongues was the same phenomenon in all the cases recorded. For example, even as it was "the same gift"[15] of the Holy Spirit in Caesarea as in Jerusalem, so likewise the speaking in tongues must have been the same phenomenon in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and elsewhere. They were all cases of glossolalia.[16] Further, since according to Acts 2:4 they spoke in *other* tongues, it would follow that all occurrences of tongues were other than what the participants ordinarily spoke. And the key to the otherness of their speech doubtless lay in the fact that the Holy Spirit was providing the utterance. What happened at Pentecost, namely, that they "began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance," must have been true in all other situations.

Hence, we may now refer to the nature of speaking in tongues as *spiritual utterance*—utterance or speech given by the Holy Spirit through the voices of people. This does not mean that the Holy Spirit did the speaking. Rather "they spoke," but the source was the Holy Spirit: "*as the Spirit* gave them utterance."[17] Accordingly, the speaking derived from the Holy Spirit was "other" than usual speech: it was spiritual, or pneumatic, utterance.

Before proceeding further, we should guard against three mistaken viewpoints. First, there is the view that speaking in tongues at Pentecost was *not* the same phenomenon that occurred later—that whereas at Pentecost foreign languages were spoken, in other situations they were "ecstatic or inspired" utterances.[18] This viewpoint actually distinguishes between two kinds of otherness: the otherness of foreign languages[19] and that of ecstatic[20] or inspired utterance. Such a distinction, however, brings inconsistency into the scriptural accounts and, for another thing, would have been wholly rejected by Peter, who made no differentiation between the tongues spoken at Caesarea and those spoken in Jerusalem.

A second view claims that all cases of glossolalia were basically emotional utterances. What occurred at Pentecost and after was an experience of great excitement in which noncognitive exclamations occurred. In relation to Pentecost, the apostles and others had been long awaiting the arrival of the

promised Holy Spirit, so when the event occurred and they were "filled," they gave vent to their excitement in highly emotional, even frenzied utterance. The wildness of Pentecost (from this perspective) is demonstrated by the reaction of many in the multitude, who said, "They are filled with new wine" (Acts 2:13). Since this was the case at Pentecost, all later glossolalic utterance, even if to a lesser degree, demonstrated a high level of emotional excitement. Glossolalia thus signified the removal of psychological inhibitions and the breaking out in exuberant nonsensical speech.[21] To reply: This view founders quickly on the fact that the primary glossolalia narrative, the account of Pentecost, demonstrates intelligible content in these utterances. For before the scornful words about "new wine" were expressed, the Scripture reads that "each one heard them speaking in his own language" (v. 6; cf. v. 11). Hence although the disciples at Pentecost—and others later—may not have been speaking foreign languages,[22] there was intelligible content. Thus that this was mere emotional utterance is clearly an inadequate viewpoint.

Third, there is the view that speaking in tongues refers to speaking foreign languages. On the presumption that speaking in "other tongues" at Pentecost refers to speaking the languages of many peoples, those who hold this view believe that tongues spoken elsewhere were likewise foreign languages.[23] Although this position is a consistent one, namely, that tongues was the same phenomenon throughout, it makes little sense that the Caesareans and Ephesians were speaking foreign languages. At Caesarea the only people present to hear the tongues were Peter and the "believers from among the circumcised" (10:45) who came with him; at Ephesus the only other person present was Paul. It would have been pointless to speak foreign languages on these two occasions.

To return to the main point, speaking in tongues in all cases was spiritual utterance. People were speaking, but the source was the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, it was not the normal speech of everyday language; it was *transcendent* speech. If the word *ecstatic* is used (as many interpreters do),[24] this must mean ecstasy in the sense not of the irrational but of the suprarational. Unmistakably at Pentecost, as we have noted, there was intelligible content even if there was an outward character that could be interpreted as the speech of inebriation.

Here we note again that the tongues at Pentecost are spoken of as "other tongues." The word "other" suggests that glossolalia is both different and meaningful, hence it quite possibly refers to *another kind of speech.* "Other" can refer to a qualitative difference,[25] hence in this case not additional tongues but tongues of a different kind. If that is the meaning of "other" in this text, it

underscores an amazing fact, namely, that the tongues being spoken were not like any other human tongues; indeed they were the Holy Spirit's own self-expression.

Let us look more closely. Some persons, as we have noted, view the tongues spoken at Pentecost as foreign languages. Earlier I have commented on the difficulty of harmonizing this with later instances of glossolalia. But now one may advance the argument that Pentecostal tongues must have been foreign languages because, according to Acts 2:6, "each one heard them speaking in his own language," and 2:11, "we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God" (NASB). What is said in these passages, however, is not the hearing *of* one's own language but the hearing *in* one's own language. Such being the case, at the same moment that "other tongues" were spoken through the Holy Spirit, they were immediately translated by the same Holy Spirit into the many languages of the multitude.[26] Closely related is the gift of interpretation that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians (12:10, 30; 14:5, 13). This gift follows a tongue and is given so that hearers can understand in their own language.[27] In any event the tongues spoken at Pentecost and thereafter were not foreign languages but pneumatic speech—the speaking by the Holy Spirit through the mouths of human beings.[28]

One additional word may be added about the otherness of tongues. That this was a different kind of speech is further evidenced by the words of Mark 16:17: "And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues."[29] The very word *new* in the Greek[30] suggests a contrast with the old. It follows that tongues at Pentecost and thereafter were not additional languages but tongues that had never been spoken before.

The quotation from Mark 16 also suggests that speaking in tongues will be a *continuing experience.* There is no intimation that new tongues will be spoken only once, any more than casting out demons will be a one-time experience. In all cases Acts, to be sure, records tongues only in immediate connection with the coming of the Holy Spirit; however, there is no statement that tongues ceased thereafter. In regard to Acts 2, it is possible that the statement that the Jerusalem disciples "*began*" to speak with other tongues intimates continuation.[31] In any event Paul refers to his own experience of glossolalia as a present and ongoing fact: "I thank God that I speak in tongues …" (1 Cor. 14:18). He did not say, "I spoke," but "I speak."[32] Hence speaking in tongues, it seems completely clear, was a continuing experience beyond the initial reception of the Holy Spirit.

It is also apparent that speaking in tongues continued in the church at Corinth.

The final words of 1 Corinthians 14:18 (quoted above) are "more than you all." This suggests that glossolalia was widespread in Corinth.[33] Indeed, speaking in tongues seems to have been practiced by everyone there; "more than you *all*" implies this. Also, Paul later wrote, "If … the whole church assembles and *all* speak in tongues … (v. 23).[34] All the Corinthian believers, it seems, spoke in tongues.[35] There needed to be regulation of the practice[36] but not its prohibition, for in the last words that Paul wrote on the subject he said, "Do not forbid speaking in tongues" (v. 39). Speaking in tongues, to summarize, clearly continued at Corinth as a common practice of the whole congregation.[37]

We should also note that Paul in this same letter identifies speaking in a tongue with praying in a tongue. After writing, "He who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret" (14:13),[38] Paul added, "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful" (v. 14). Hence glossolalia was for Paul a vehicle of prayer. It was also spiritual prayer, not mental; thus praying in a tongue was utterance transcending the limits of human conceptualization. Obviously such prayer was not praying in a foreign language but praying as the Spirit gave Paul utterance. It is apparent that Paul's praying in a tongue was the same in essence as that which occurred in all the Acts narratives.

Two further points are significant. First, Paul does not discount tongues because in their expression the mind is unfruitful. Nor does he discount the mind because of his ability to pray in a tongue. For after asking the question, "What am I to do?" (v. 15), Paul replied, "I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also." He gives priority to praying with the spirit, i.e., in a tongue, but affirms both spiritual and mental prayer as important. Second, Paul then added, "I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also" (v. 15). In this context it is apparent that singing with the spirit refers to singing in tongues and that singing with the mind relates to singing with understanding.[39]

Paul's letter to the Ephesians may provide some parallels to the above statements. There is likely reference to singing in tongues in chapter 5, where Paul writes, "Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs"[40] (vv. 18–19). These "spiritual songs," or "Spirit-inspired songs,"[41] were in all likelihood songs uttered in tongues.[42] If so, Paul's words here parallel his references to singing "with the spirit" in 1 Corinthians 14.[43] Also in regard to praying "with the spirit" (in 1 Cor. 14), there is a likely parallel with Paul's words in Ephesians 6 where the apostle says, "Pray at all times in the Spirit" (v. 18).[44]

That such praying is glossolalic prayer is suggested not only by the similarity

to the wording in 1 Corinthians 14 but also by the admonition “at all times.” Since praying with the spirit, unlike praying with the mind, does not call for mental conceptualization, it can be carried on in the midst of other activities.

Now we may move on to observe other possible allusions to glossolalia in the New Testament. Jude 20 may first be mentioned because the language is quite similar to that of Ephesians 6:18. Jude reads, “Pray in the Holy Spirit.” The reference seems clearly to point to glossolalia.[45] Next we turn to Romans 8:26, where Paul writes that “the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans[46] that words cannot express” (NIV).[47] Since the immediate background is that “we do not know what we ought to pray for” (also v. 26 NIV), the point of what follows is that the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf with deep articulations inexpressible in human words. Hence, these “groans” or “sighs” are not the activity of praying with the mind but with the spirit or, better, in the spirit. Indeed, this is the language of the Holy Spirit—glossolalic utterance.[48]

Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:19 may also refer to speaking in tongues: “Do not quench the Spirit.” The verse that follows reads, “Do not despise prophesying” (v. 20). Before examining these words in 1 Thessalonians, let us return for a moment to 1 Corinthians and note Paul’s words in 14:39: “Earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.” In that letter prophecy and tongues are conjoined in an affirmative manner, with a strong injunction against forbidding tongues. In line with these words in 1 Corinthians 14 it seems quite likely that “Do not quench the Spirit” is another way of saying, “Do not forbid speaking in tongues” (even as “Do not despise prophesying” and “Earnestly desire to prophesy” are related). Moreover, the continuing conjunction of prophecy and tongues through 1 Corinthians 14 further suggests that tongues and prophecy are alluded to in 1 Thessalonians 5. In any event, to forbid speaking in tongues is surely a serious way of quenching the Spirit.[49]

From the New Testament references cited it is apparent that speaking in tongues continued into the New Testament church. What is recorded as happening in Acts several times and referred to in Mark 16 is an aspect of the life of the early church. As we have seen, this was the case not only in Corinth but also in other New Testament communities of faith.[50] Although there are possible differing interpretations of some of the Scriptures adduced, the overall picture comes through clearly: speaking in tongues was a common experience in New Testament times.

In regard to the Book of Acts we have observed that speaking in tongues was closely connected with the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Epistles make no such direct connection. Since, as earlier noted, many of the Epistles refer to the giving

and receiving of the Holy Spirit, it seems likely that this is the general background for speaking in tongues.[51]

Before leaving this section I will make a few additional remarks about speaking in tongues, for, as is well known, speaking in tongues occupies a place of importance in the contemporary spiritual renewal. Furthermore, there is the testimony of countless numbers of people that their speaking in tongues was closely related to an original experience of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now with the biblical background in mind, I will make some comments.

1. The Holy Spirit provides the language

The human apparatus—mouth, tongue, vocal cords—is in full operation when tongues are spoken, but the words are not from the speaker; they are from and by the Holy Spirit. Human existence has been so penetrated by the Holy Spirit that words come forth in a new vein. A transposition thereby occurs so that human language becomes in an extraordinary way the vehicle of the Holy Spirit."[52]

One speaks as the Holy Spirit gives him or her the ability to speak out.[53] There is no sense of compulsion or coercion. The Holy Spirit does not assume control, thereby forcing this speech to occur. There is no divine seizure. Rather, the person freely does the speaking, and the Holy Spirit graciously provides the language. Personal integrity is fully maintained even as individuals are able to speak forth in a way transcending anything they have ever before experienced.

The uniqueness of this speech is also related to the fact that the Holy Spirit is speaking through the human spirit. For the Spirit of God pervades the depths of the spirit of a person, and speech flows from that. The level is deeper or higher than the level of mind where speech is that of human conceptualization and articulation. The level is also more profound than that of human feelings where speech has largely an emotional content.[54] It is that level of the human spirit where the Spirit of God, speaking in and through the spirit of the human person, communicates with the transcendent God. To speak in tongues is to go beyond one's native speech into the realm of spiritual utterance.

2. Speaking in tongues has intelligible content

One of the most striking features about glossolalia is the fact that a new language is being spoken. It is a language totally unknown to the speaker, or it may be a variety of languages. Paul refers to one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit as "various kinds of tongues"[55] (1 Cor. 12:10); hence, any of these may be expressed as the Spirit wills. Whatever is spoken is the language of the Spirit.

Speaking in tongues, accordingly, is not irrational or nonsensical utterance, even though the mind is "unfruitful"[56] (1 Cor. 14:14) and there is no mental comprehension of what is being said. The very fact that interpretation may follow—or should follow in the church assembly[57] —is further evidence of intelligibility. When interpretation occurs[58] and people hear and understand, this affirms that the original utterance contained meaning.

Speaking in tongues is suprarational utterance. It is totally beyond the capacity of a human to articulate. In 1 Corinthians 13:1 Paul may have been referring to this when he spoke of "the tongues of men and of angels," the latter possibly signifying glossolalia.[59] In any event speaking in tongues, while fully intelligible to God, is language beyond human capacity to speak or understand.

This is a far different picture from that of glossolalia as a kind of nonsensical speech or incoherent babbling.[60] Speaking in tongues is wholly the opposite: since the Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of truth," when He gives utterance through a person or persons, truth is being spoken. Such speech is far removed from nonsense and incoherence. Indeed, to speak "as the Spirit gives utterance" is the ultimate in intelligible expression.

3. Glossolalia is a new and peculiar sign

It is important to recognize the sign character of speaking in tongues. When the disciples of Jesus spoke in tongues on the Day of Pentecost, it was a *new* occurrence in biblical history. Although there may be intimations of glossolalia in the Old Testament[61] and although there is a prophecy of Isaiah that Paul connected with speaking in tongues,[62] when speaking in tongues first occurred on the Day of Pentecost, there was not a fully adequate way of relating it to the past.[63] Peter did draw on the words of Joel about prophesying—"Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy … my menservants and my maidservants … shall prophesy"—to seek to explain the disciples' speaking in tongues. Although Peter's words from Joel well bespoke this broad outpouring of the Spirit, it is obvious that the word "prophesy" cannot fully express the new phenomenon of glossolalia.

The point, then, is this: Pentecost was a new event in the history of God's mighty deeds. It was the event of the coming of the Holy Spirit, and as a new event it was accompanied by a *new* sign.[64] The new sign was not the sound from heaven ("like the rush of a mighty wind"), a thing that happened only once, but it was the sound of tongues that drew the huge crowd ("at this sound the multitude came together"). Speaking in tongues was *the* sign of a new and mighty act of God, both at Pentecost and later.[65]

Obviously, speaking in tongues was also a *peculiar* sign. When tongues were spoken on the Day of Pentecost, some observers mocked, saying, "They are filled with new wine" (Acts 2:13). For here were presumably normal men and women sounding forth like drunken people. Paul, underscoring the peculiarity of tongues, warned the Corinthians: "If, therefore, the whole church assembles and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?" (1 Cor. 14:23). Whether viewed as drunken babble or the antics of mad people, speaking in tongues obviously was to many observers a strange and peculiar activity.

The situation has remained much the same to this day. Glossolalia, to put it mildly, is not high on the list of proper and desirable activities. In popular perception, speaking in tongues is viewed as belonging to certain far-out sects given to emotion and frenzy; for some psychologists glossolalia represents emotional disturbance and dependent behavior;[66] and for some churchmen it is

still a taboo practice.[67] There have been, however, some changing attitudes, especially following the emergence of the neo-Pentecostal and Catholic charismatic movements in the 1960s.[68] However, speaking in tongues, even where officially recognized, is still largely viewed as undesirable behavior.

For those who speak in tongues the attitude is quite different. It may also be for them a peculiar activity (it is indeed strange to speak in tongues never learned or understood!), but it is also a special sign of something new and extraordinary in their lives. Those who have spoken in tongues bear in their own speech evidence of a miracle. They had never before so spoken, although there may have been many other spiritual experiences. Furthermore, they did not manufacture this speech;[69] rather, in all its peculiarity such speaking remains testimony to a special visitation of God and to His continuing presence and power. Tongues are—and continue to be—a special sign.[70]

IV. CONTENT

The content of speaking in tongues, according to Acts, was the *praise of God.* Here we draw basically on the Jerusalem and Caesarean accounts.

When the disciples spoke in tongues at Pentecost, they were praising God. This is apparent from Acts 2:11, which records the multitude's saying, "We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works[71] of God" (KJV). We are not told for what "wonderful works" the disciples praised God. It is not hard, however, to imagine that since they had so recently lived through the events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, they were praising God for, among other things, having performed the great work of redemption. Also Christ had just now fulfilled the promise of the Father to pour forth the Holy Spirit.[72] They had much to praise God for.

It is important to add that when the disciples spoke in tongues, it was not for the purpose of communicating the gospel. Peter thereafter preached the gospel to the thousands assembled (Acts 2:14ff.). But prior to this, he and all the other disciples were praising God. The tongues therefore were not "missionary tongues" (as sometimes they have been designated),[73] equipping the disciples to go forth with a language given each to witness to a particular nation or people. Rather, their tongues were tongues praising God for all His wondrous deeds. Further, it is obvious from the comments of some who, "mocking, said, 'They are filled with new wine,'" that this was joyful, exuberant praise. Although this was deliberate mockery, the charge pointed to a certain rapturous joy[74] that has its counterpart in alcoholic inebriation. The point, however, was that the disciples were not filled with the wine of the grape but with the wine of the Spirit. They were praising God—*exceedingly.*

We may observe a parallel to this in Paul's words to the Ephesians in speaking against the drunkenness of wine and urging them instead to be filled with the Holy Spirit. "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit" (5:18). The result (as at Pentecost) will be joyful praise; for Paul continues, "addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the

Father'" (vv. 19–20). The exuberant praise of God with all one's heart flows out of being filled with God's Spirit.

Returning to Acts, we move on again to the situation of the centurion and his friends in Caesarea who were "speaking in tongues and extolling God" (10:46). Earlier I mentioned these two activities as if they were distinct. They may have been (the conjunction "and" suggests such);[75] however, it is more likely that the Caesareans were extolling God *through* speaking in tongues.[76] As we have observed, this was precisely what happened in the Jerusalem Pentecost: the disciples, while speaking in tongues, were declaring God's "wonderful works," in other words, extolling God.[77] Moreover, since Peter afterward spoke of the Caesareans as "people who have received the Holy Spirit *just* as we have" (v. 47), it seems altogether likely that just as on the Day of Pentecost the centurion and company through their speaking in tongues were extolling God.

The Book of Acts does not specify the content of the Caesareans' praise. However, since this was the original proclamation of the gospel to the Gentile world, it seems likely that the people in Caesarea were praising God for His great mercy in bringing them salvation. Peter, accompanied by his Jewish fellow believers, had preached the good news to the Gentile Cornelius and his Gentile family and friends. The Gentiles, who prior to this had "no hope and [were] without God in the world,"[78] had now heard the gospel, believed, and entered into salvation. Surely they had much to praise God for—a praise that came forth in the transcendent language of tongues.

Based on these accounts in Acts, speaking in tongues may be described as *transcendent praise:* praise that goes beyond ordinary capacity and experience. God had acted through Jesus Christ to bring about salvation and had poured out His Holy Spirit. So marvelous was this occurrence that nothing else could capture it but the transcendent praise of God. Such praise was not in an earthly language because no language of earth could begin to express the extraordinary depths and heights of the occasion. *Only* language uttered by the Holy Spirit on the lips of persons involved could be adequate. So they all praised God in the self-transcending language of other tongues.

Let us reflect for a moment on the praise of God in the worship of the church. In all true worship there is a desire to offer up worthy praise and adoration to Almighty God. And, according to the intensity of the sense of the Lord's presence, there is a yearning to find further ways of showing forth this praise. Ordinary language may seem to be inadequate, and perhaps some language of the past (Greek or Latin, for example) will be used in the desire for more worthy expression. There may be the use of praise language such as "Hallelujah!" or

“Hosanna!” often repeated to voice an intensity of adoration. Or in the sensing of the wonder of God’s grace, there may even be yearning for multiple tongues[79] as a means of declaring what is being deeply experienced. Such ways are examples that bespeak a growing concern to get beyond ordinary speech into another higher mode of worshiping God.

Here, of course, is where music occupies an important role. By moving into lyrical modes of expression, by adding melody to words, there may well be more satisfying worship of heart and soul. Thus human utterance is caught up to higher levels by the singing forth of God’s praises. Yet music, even as ordinary speech, is ever seeking among ardent worshipers of God to find ways to reach still more sublime heights.

This brings us back to the praise of God in tongues. For ordinary language, even music, may be inadequate to declare the wonders of God, His deeds, and His presence. This is not to discount the various modes of human expression with all their possibilities to rise to greater heights. However, there may be a speech or language more suitable to the experience of the richness of God’s dynamic presence. Humanly speaking, this is impossible, but, and herein is the marvel, God through His Spirit may go beyond what has been uttered or sung before and bring forth a new language![80]

Many of the things said above are reflected in the contemporary spiritual renewal. People have begun to praise God in tongues when under the impact of God’s presence and activity in the Spirit they felt the intense desire to go beyond ordinary speech and offer Him worthy thanksgiving and praise. It was then that the Holy Spirit took over, and the praise of God in a new language broke forth.[81] Jerusalem, Caesarea, and now in the twentieth century, people extolled the wonderful works of God!

Here I would add a further word about “singing in the spirit.” The ardent worshiper often goes beyond speech into a lyrical expression seeking to convey true worship and adoration of Almighty God. When tongues are given, this opens up in a fresh way the whole realm of spiritual singing. Such singing may not be in conjunction with the initial gift of the Spirit; indeed it often takes place later. However, it is an aspect of tongues, a singing in tongues,[82] but with the added factor of the melody also being provided by the Holy Spirit. This often happens in group worship and may be the climactic moment in the total experience of praise.[83]

Now a brief historical note: it is quite possible that out of the early praise of God in tongues has come some of the great music of the church. It has been suggested that Gregorian chant (plain-song) and certain musical parts of the

liturgy emerged from the ancient practice of glossolalia.[84]

Another similar and fascinating activity in the history of the church has been *jubilation.* This may also be in some sense a continuation of glossolalia. To jubilate has been viewed as going beyond ordinary speech into a praise of God that even the most expressive words cannot convey. Thomas Aquinas (a thirteenth-century theologian) wrote, "Jubilation is an unspeakable joy, which one cannot keep silent; yet neither can it be expressed (in words) … it is beyond comprehension."[85] Jubilation represents various wordless outcries of joy and exaltation; hence, though it may not be identified as such with tongues (the emphasis being on wordless praise rather than praise in a new language), the connection is quite close. Each is motivated by the same intense yearning: to express the inexpressible and thus go beyond ordinary speech into the realm of transcendent praise.[86]

We move on to Paul's description of speaking in tongues as uttering *mysteries*: "One who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit" (1 Cor. 14:2).[87] This is an extraordinary statement about the content of speaking in tongues.

Now this could also be understood as praise, since in praise one "speaks not to men but to God." However, the emphasis here is not so much on tongues as an act of praise and worship that follows the primary experience of the visitation of the Holy Spirit, but on tongues in the continuing life of prayer. Speaking in tongues, or praying in the Spirit, has such a depth of communication between the person and God that what is said goes beyond ordinary speech into the utterance of divine mysteries. The profound reason: the Holy Spirit Himself pervades the human spirit and thereby communicates with God. Since this is an operation that transcends the human level, what is spoken likewise goes beyond the realm of ordinary knowledge and communication. This is the Spirit speaking through the human spirit the things of God.

The word "mysteries," as used by Paul, usually refers to those secret and hidden truths of God made known by special revelation. For example, Paul speaks of the mystery now made known to God's apostles and prophets that the Gentiles and Jews are "fellow heirs" in Christ (Eph. 3:4–6).[88] However, in the Corinthian context Paul is obviously not referring to those mysteries of God relating to decisive revelatory events in His dealing with mankind that are disclosed through the prophets and apostles. Rather Paul is here referring to the fact that speaking in tongues, by its very nature as spiritual utterance of the Holy Spirit, is transcendent speech, the content of which must be more than the mind can achieve.

Now we must quickly add, although the mysteries spoken in tongues are not ultimate mysteries, they are nonetheless "hidden things." One who speaks in tongues is involved in the extraordinary activity of communicating through the Holy Spirit things not achieved by the understanding. They are hidden from the highest reaches of human wisdom and knowledge.

First of all, these utterances carry the speaker into the divine realm. The Holy Spirit, as Paul earlier said to the Corinthians, "searches all things, even the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:10 NIV). Since this is true, the speaker in tongues is primarily in communication about matters of transhuman profundity that the Holy Spirit searches out.[89] It is truly speaking "mysteries in the Spirit" concerning "the deep things of God."

Second, since the mysteries are hidden things, this may include things that relate to this life. Paul also says that "we have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us" (1 Cor. 2:12 NIV). Hence, one who speaks "by the Spirit who is from God" may also be opening up a deeper understanding of God's blessings. In that sense, though the speech is directed to God, it is not only about God (the "deep things of God") but about what He would have us to know about any given matter. Again, this is not knowledge derived from human reflection; rather, it originates in God's disclosure through the Holy Spirit. It is a mystery until God makes it known by the same Spirit.[90]

To utter mysteries in the Spirit lies at the heart of speaking in tongues.

Finally, speaking in tongues may also be the offering up of *prayers of supplication* to God. Herein the Holy Spirit enables the one who prays to reach a deeper and fuller level of praying.

Let us first note the words of Paul to the Ephesians about praying in the Spirit.[91] He writes, "Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints" (6:18). According to Paul, prayer in the Spirit is a powerful vehicle of supplication:[92] it can occur "at all times";[93] it is comprehensive—"all prayer"; and it is farreaching—"for all the saints." For when prayer is *in* the Spirit, it is *by* the Spirit; through Him the one who prays is offering up the Spirit's own prayers and supplications to God. There could be no richer and fuller praying than this.

Moreover, in doing this the Holy Spirit is actually helping us at a point of real difficulty, namely, not knowing what to pray for. There are always many subjects, many persons, and many needs for which we could pray. How do we

know? What are we to do? Let us recall Paul's words in Romans 8:26: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what[94] we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (NIV).[95] Now let us add Paul's next words: "And he [God] who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will" (8:27 NIV).[96] Paul is saying that the Spirit we have received[97] makes intercession for us; the word "groans"[98] expresses the depth, even the burden, of His concern for all the world.[99] Moreover, His supplications through us are invariably in accordance with God's will, hence they cover everything for which we ought to pray.

Let me further elaborate the significance of these passages in Ephesians and Romans. All Christians have the responsibility of offering prayers and supplications, and surely this means to be as specific and comprehensive as possible. God calls upon us to pray for many persons with the mind and understanding. Paul wrote Timothy, "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions" (1 Tim. 2:1–2). Hence, a primary place is to be given to intercession, and in that prayer we are to exercise diligence and perseverance. We need also to pray for other believers, for people who have not yet heard the gospel, and for the world and its needs: prevailing prayer is commanded of us. But still, no matter how long or inclusive are our prayers, we may ask, have we really done what we should? Moreover, how can such prayer be for "all the saints" and "for all men" when our prayers at best are so finite and so limited? This is precisely where praying in the Spirit comes in, because the Holy Spirit, and only the Holy Spirit, knows what to pray for, for whom to pray, and how to reach out to all the world. "The mind of the Spirit" is an infinite mind.

Many believers are discovering this great help of the Holy Spirit in their prayers and supplications. Often after praying at length in one's own native tongue for many needs and many persons, it is a tremendous joy, indeed a relief, to be able to move into prayer in the Spirit. Praying with the mind is surely important; God expects it of us. But through the Holy Spirit He would like to bring our prayers to completion.

One further thought: in accordance with Paul's words, "I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also" (1 Cor. 14:15), a believer may want to begin prayers of supplication by praying first in tongues and thereafter with the mind. In so doing, the outreach of praying in the Spirit will by no means eliminate the need for praying with the understanding. Rather, it will enable a person to pray with greater specificity and assurance that God will hear his

prayers because they originate in the mind of the Holy Spirit.

V. IMPORTANCE

The importance of speaking in tongues is doubtless apparent from what has already been said. However, I would like to make a few additional comments.

First, speaking in tongues is supremely *communication with God*. We have observed how the Jewish disciples in Jerusalem magnified God through tongues and how later in Caesarea the Gentiles similarly extolled God. The words of Paul that begin, "be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," continue with "singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart" (Eph. 5:18–19). "Spiritual songs" (or "singing with the spirit"; recall again 1 Cor. 14:15) refer in a special way to melodic communication with God. Speaking in tongues is a way of transcending human resources and declaring in the Spirit the very mysteries of God. In all of this (and in other Scriptures mentioned) the very heart of speaking in tongues is communication with God.[100]

The importance of tongues in this connection can hardly be denied. There is surely a place for prayer and praise in one's own language (indeed, we often sorely lack here); however, since glossolalia is the language of the Holy Spirit, the communication with God through the Spirit takes on a note of extraordinary immediacy and directness.

Moreover, this is communication that the heart of the believer longs to express. Charles Wesley's words "O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise"[101] is the yearning of the believer who has been deeply moved by what Christ has done. But earthly languages, even ten thousand of them, are not adequate to communicate this praise. Earthly tongues are far too limited—indeed far too soiled[102] —to express the deeds of the all-powerful, all-holy, and all-loving God. Someday, in the world to come, there will be language sufficient to express our joy and thanksgiving. But until then—or between now and then—God delights to bridge the gap between heaven and earth by granting us speech as the Spirit gives utterance. Thus He opens up in the depths of our spirits a line of communication that can more fully glorify Him. Then we can say and sing in a new way, "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and *all* that is within me, bless his holy name!" (Ps. 103:1).[103]

Again, speaking in tongues is important for *self-edification.* It is a valuable source for upbuilding the believer in his faith. Earlier we discussed how, according to Paul, "one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit" (1 Cor. 14:2). Shortly after, Paul adds that "he who speaks in a tongue edifies himself' (v. 4). While one is speaking through this new avenue of communication with God, a reflexive action simultaneously occurs: the person is being edified spiritually.[104] Closely connected are the previously quoted words of Jude 20: "Pray in the Holy Spirit," which are preceded by the statement "Build yourselves up on your most holy faith." There is an upbuilding, an edification of the person through his or her praying in the Spirit.

We need to bear in mind that the spirit of a person is his deepest nature.[105] Although the mind is "unfruitful"[106] when praying in tongues, there is much inner edification.[107] The human spirit is being built up and, as a result, the whole of human nature is also being built up.

According to a well-known statement, "man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever."[108] This means simply that the more a person glorifies and enjoys God, the more he fulfills his true end. To glorify and enjoy God is the true end of human existence and the ultimate means of self-edification. Nothing else in all the world so edifies a person or so fulfills the purpose for which he was made as the glorification and enjoyment of God.

Now this can be done in many ways: for example, through worship, fellowship, service—indeed throughout a person's lifestyle. So we should not exaggerate the importance of speaking in tongues. Many people have glorified and enjoyed God—and will do so throughout eternity—who have never spoken in tongues. However, the relevant point here is simply that speaking or singing in tongues is the expression of highest praise and joy in the Lord, and in such expression there is great edification. The Day of Pentecost with its praise and exuberance in tongues is the paradigm of those fulfilling the "chief end" of human existence. In this glorifying of God and rejoicing in Him there was the rich edification of all. Such edification continues to this present day.

In our reflection upon speaking in tongues as speaking mysteries in the Spirit and as a profound way of intercessory prayer,[109] it is apparent that in this activity there is much self-edification. Through tongues as an avenue of uttering divine mysteries and receiving "hidden things" from God through His Spirit, one is continuously built up in faith and experience. And the ability through the supplications of the Holy Spirit to reach far beyond one's own capacities and knowledge to the needs of many likewise results in much personal edification.

Self-edification is by no means the primary concern; however, the more the focus of prayer is on God and others, the more there is personal blessing to the one who prays.[110]

To pray in the Spirit, to paraphrase Jude, is to be built up in our holy faith. Surely all believers need such edification.

Finally, speaking in tongues is an *eschatological sign.* We have earlier observed that speaking in tongues on the Day of Pentecost was both a new and a peculiar sign of the coming of the Holy Spirit. But now, and climactically, we may view this further as an eschatological sign—a sign of last things. Let us note this carefully.

Peter focused on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and declared that this was an event signaling the end times: "In the last days[111] it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh" (Acts 2:17). Peter also saw this outpouring as an event accompanied by certain signs of the end, for just after words about the outpouring of the Spirit, Peter added, "And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs[112] on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke." The "wonders" and "signs" probably refer both to the Day of Pentecost—the sound from heaven like a rushing wind and speaking in tongues—and to certain final events yet to come: "the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes."[113] If "signs" includes speaking in tongues, which seems likely,[114] then it is quite possible that this was not only a sign of the Spirit's coming on the Day of Pentecost but also a sign to signal the final days.

Whatever the full understanding of Peter's words, it is clear that the whole event of Pentecost is seen as an occurrence in "the last days." Since the peculiar sign of Pentecost was the speaking in tongues, then such speaking, along with other signs, could well point to the final "day of the Lord."

We have previously noted reference to the Pentecostal/charismatic renewal of the twentieth century as a latter-day outpouring of the Holy Spirit.[115] If that is the case—and I believe it is—the particular sign of this renewal from 1901 forward has been generally recognized as speaking in tongues.[116] Despite almost unremitting opposition from without and occasional differences within,[117] tongues and Pentecostalism are almost inseparable in the public mind. At this juncture I regard this as a good thing because of the strong possibility of vital eschatological significance. Let me probe a bit.

Could it be that in this secular age God is sovereignly preparing His people through charismatic renewal for the consummation of history?[118] Is it possible

that speaking in tongues is a sign of God's radical invasion of countless lives in preparation for the final outreach of the gospel?[119] Could speaking in tongues, despite all its strangeness, be preparation for uttering the word of God with new power?[120] If speaking in tongues signalizes the deep opening up of a line of communication through the Holy Spirit between God and man, could this not result in better preparation to war against the powers of darkness that increasingly are pressing in upon us?[121]

I will not proceed further with such questions. However before closing this discussion of tongues as an eschatological sign, I would like to suggest that speaking in tongues is a harbinger of the coming kingdom. It has even been suggested that tongues represent "the approaching might of the kingdom of God."[122] In any event speaking in tongues, which is the sign of a divine-human immediacy, could represent the transitional phase into the future world where this immediacy will be wholly and completely realized. Now—that is, in our present flesh—there can be no more direct communication than through tongues: speaking to God as the Holy Spirit gives utterance. But even this will some day be transcended by the reality of seeing God face to face.[123] In the meantime we may rejoice that we are on the way to this final realization!

[1]The Greek phrase for "to speak in other tongues" is lalein heterais glossais. From lalein glossais the word "glossolalia" is derived.

[2]The Greek phrase is lalounton glossais.

[3]The Greek phrase is elaloun te glossais.

[4]Literally, "seeing," a participle. The Greek word is idon.

[5]Regarding word structure in this passage, A. T. Robertson states that the "participle [idon] shows plainly that those who received the gift of the Holy Spirit spoke with tongues" (Word Pictures in the New Testament, 3:107). Concerning context, F. F. Bruce states that "the context leaves us in no doubt that their reception of the Spirit was attended by external manifestations such as had marked His descent on the earliest disciples at Pentecost" (The Book of the Acts, NICNT, 181). Johannes Munck writes that "Simon, who by virtue of his earlier life closely observed all wondrous faculties and powers, was struck by the apostles' ability to make the baptized prophesy and to speak in tongues by the laying on of hands" (The Acts of the Apostles, AB, 75). William Neil speaks of "an outburst of glossolalia" occurring among the Samaritans: "Simon sees the power of the Apostles to bring about an outburst of glossolalia" (The

Acts of the Apostles, 123). There can be little doubt that the Samaritans spoke in tongues.

[6]The Greek phrase is glossais lalo.

[7]Ananias was commanded by the Lord to lay his hands on Saul so that he might regain his sight (9:11 -12). When Ananias laid his hands on Saul, it was for a twofold purpose: that Saul might regain his sight and that he might be filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 17). Luke states that Saul regained his sight (v. 18), and the reader is left to supply the fact that he was also filled with the Holy Spirit. Quite possibly, then, tongues-speaking is also implied. We have just observed the clear-cut statement in Acts 8 that the Samaritans did receive the Holy Spirit, with the strong implication that they spoke in tongues. Acts 9 strongly implies the reception of the Spirit by Saul and is silent about tongues-but Luke may be asking the reader to supply both. If both the reception of the Spirit and tongues were common knowledge and experience to Luke's readers (as I believe they were), he scarcely needs to say so each time. Incidentally, this same point may be made about belief in Christ and baptism in water. Often Luke specifically mentions water baptism in connection with faith in Jesus Christ (see Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12-13, 35-38; 9:18; 10:48; 16:14-15, 31-33; 18:8; 19:5); on other occasions he describes people coming to faith without reference to water baptism (see Acts 9:42; 11:21; 13:12, 48; 14:1; 17:12, 34). However, it is very likely that Luke would have the reader assume the occurrence of water baptism when it is not mentioned. Such baptism was doubtless common experience and practice in the early church.

[8]Ernst Haenchen puts it more directly: "The Spirit makes itself known in Acts by the gift of speaking in tongues" (The Acts of the Apostles, 304).

[9]There is no suggestion that, in addition to the twelve who spoke in tongues, there were others who did not so speak. The figure of twelve refers to the whole group (as the context shows).

[10]Sometimes the statement is made that the apostle Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians presents a different picture. In chapter 12 Paul describes tongues as one of several apportionments of the Holy Spirit-"to another [person] various kinds of tongues" (v. 10)-and later asks, "Do all speak with tongues?" (v. 30). The implied answer is "No, not all do." Does this contradict the accounts in Acts? Not at all, when one understands that Paul is dealing in the Corinthian letters with ministry in the church and how the Holy Spirit uses a diversity of gifts for building up the body. That all at Corinth were capable of speaking in tongues is evident from

later words of Paul: “I want you all to speak in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:5). But when it is a matter of the edification of the body, if all so speak, it only causes confusion and disorder. The Holy Spirit therefore manifests Himself variously (see 1 Cor. 12:7): prophecy, tongues, healings, etc. Incidentally, prophecy is also listed as one of the several gifts apportioned; yet Paul makes it clear that prophecy is not limited to a few: “You can all prophesy one by one” (1 Cor. 14:31).

[11]The sound (phone) here refers to speaking in tongues and not to the earlier sound (échos), like “the rush of a mighty wind” (v. 2). The former sound (or “noise” [NASB, NEB]) preceded the disciples’ being filled with the Holy Spirit and happened quickly. After this, they began to speak in tongues. Accordingly, it was this continued speaking that brought the crowd together. (So write Cadbury and Lake: “The sound mentioned here is φωνή, the voice of the inspired speakers rather than the φωνή, of the second verse” [The Acts of the Apostles, 4:18].)

[12]I will discuss the nature of the speaking later.

[13]Reviewing the evidence in Acts, Alan Richardson writes, “St Luke [the author of Acts] regards ‘speaking with tongues’ (glossolalia) as an unmistakable sign of the gift of the Spirit” (An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament, 119). This, I believe, is a true statement.

[14]J. D. G. Dunn writes that if the Samaritan situation was marked by speaking in tongues (which he affirms to be “a fair assumption”), “then the fact is that in every case where Luke describes the giving of the Spirit it is accompanied and ‘evidenced’ by glossolalia…. Luke intended to portray ‘speaking in tongues’ as ‘the initial physical evidence’ of the outpouring of the Spirit [italics his]” (Jesus and the Spirit, 189-90). (Incidentally, Dunn used quotation marks for “evidenced” and “the initial physical evidence” as part of a quotation from a Pentecostal writer, J. R. Flower.) The Pentecostal movement from its historic beginning in 1901 has viewed speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of the gift of the Holy Spirit. In the previous chapter (n.57) I quoted the words of Agnes Ozman: “The Holy Spirit fell upon me and I began to speak in tongues.” Rev. Charles Parham, head of the Bethel Bible college in Topeka, Kansas, had given his students, including Agnes, an assignment of “studying out diligently what was the Bible evidence of the baptism of the Holy Ghost” (The Life of Charles F. Parham, 52). To his surprise they all later reported that the evidence was speaking in other tongues. Hence when Parham laid hands on Agnes and prayed for her, it was with her

expectation of receiving the Holy Spirit and giving evidence of it by speaking in tongues. According to Klaude Kendrick, “Although Agnes Ozman was not the first person in modern times to speak in ‘tongues,’ she was the first known person to have received such an experience as a result of specifically seeking a baptism in the Holy Spirit with the expectation of speaking in tongues…. For this reason the experience of Agnes Ozman is designated as the beginning of the Modern Pentecostal Revival” (The Promise Fulfilled, 52- 53). Since that time, the term “initial evidence” is often used as official parlance in many Pentecostal bodies. It is contained in the statement of faith of the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America (an association of twenty-two large Pentecostal denominations): “We believe that the full gospel includes … baptism in the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance.”

[15]Recall Acts 11:17.

[16]Recall footnotes 1-3. Philip Schaff in his History of the Christian Church puts it well: “The Pentecostal glossolalia was the same as that in the household of Cornelius in Caesarea after his conversion, which may be called a Gentile Pentecost, as that of the twelve disciples of John the Baptist at Ephesus, where it appears in connection with prophesying, and as that in the Christian congregation at Corinth” (1:230-31).

[17]The word translated “utterance” is apophthengesthai, literally “to speak out.” Apophthengesthai is a term used of “the speech of the wise man [in Greek literature] … but also of the oracle-giver, diviner, prophet, exorcist, and other ‘inspired’ persons” (BAGD). This inspired speech is given by the Holy Spirit through the lips of men.

[18]Richard N. Longenecker refers to the speaking at Pentecost as “languages then current”; the tongues in Caesarea as “probably … ecstatic utterances” (Acts of the Apostles, EBC, 9:271, 394). Paton J. Gloag writes, “We are not… constrained to suppose that these Gentile converts spoke in foreign languages, as the converts on the day of Pentecost did; but the meaning may only be that they gave vent to inspired utterances, holy ejaculations” (Acts of the Apostles, 1:385). One may detect some hesitancy in both statements. The reason, I submit, is that both are out of accord with the biblical testimony.

[19]Tongues as presumably foreign languages is sometimes called xenoglossolalia (from xeno = foreign + glossolalia) and thus viewed differently from the later glossolalia. Xenoglossolalia is not a biblical

term but an interpretation of what occurred at Pentecost.

[20]The NEB translates speaking in tongues at Caesarea and Ephesus as "tongues of ecstasy" (19:6). Since the NEB translates the tongues spoken in Jerusalem as "other tongues," there is the implication of foreign languages at Pentecost but ecstatic utterance after that.

[21]Kirsopp Lake writes that "this kind of glossolalia [i.e., at Pentecost] is very common in history, and is merely the removal of inhibitions under the stress of great emotion." Again, "it was a deeply moving psychological experience" (The Acts of the Apostles, 5:117, 120).

[22]See below for further discussion of this matter.

[23]R. C. H. Lenski writes in his commentary The Acts of the Apostles that at Pentecost "the disciples spoke in foreign languages that were hitherto unknown to them" (61); in Caesarea "the miracle is the same, a sudden speaking in languages the speakers had never learned" (432); in Ephesus it was "the same speaking in foreign languages that occurred at the time of Pentecost" (784).

[24]F. F. Bruce describes tongues at Pentecost as "words spoken by the apostles in their divine ecstasy" *(The Book of the Acts*, NICNT, 17). EGT refers to the speaking at Caesarea as "jubilant ecstatic praise" (Acts 10:46 in loco). William Neil speaks of people in Jerusalem as "in the grip of … spiritual ecstasy"; at Caesarea there were "ecstatic cries of praise"; and the event at Ephesus was a "special manifestation of ecstatic utterance" *(The Acts of the Apostles*, NCBC, 73, 140, 203). I hesitate to use the word "ecstasy" because of the possible connotation of frenzied and uncontrolled behavior, speech that is an irrational, emotional utterance without intellectual content. For example, in the statement of Mark 3:21 "He is beside himself," the Greek word is *ex esté*, a form of the verb *existëmi* and the noun *ekstasis.* Thus, though "ecstasy" may describe transport, joy, etc., it also tends to suggest unbalance, lack of control, and even madness. *Ekstasis* can also mean amazement, astonishment, or a state of confusion and bafflement. For example, the multitude, each person hearing speech in his own language, "were amazed *[existanto]* and wondered ["marveled" NASB], saying, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?'" (Acts 2:7). Accordingly, it was the crowd hearing the tongues who were "ecstatic," not the disciples speaking them! On this point see also Larry Christenson, Speaking in Tongues, 24. Christenson is a Lutheran pastor and a leader in the contemporary renewal.

[25]The Greek word for “other” in Acts 2:4 is heterais. According to Thayer, heteros can refer to either number or quality. Number signifies additional, hence more than one; quality means difference in kind-“not of the same nature, form, class, kind.” If heteros in this verse means number, then this would be the speaking of additional languages (Arabic, Greek, Chaldean, etc.); if quality, it would mean other languages of a different “nature, form, class, kind.” The latter meaning seems correct in the context of Acts 2. A scripture that illustrates this sense is Mark 16:12: “After this he [Jesus] appeared in another (hetera) form to two of them.” Christ’s other form-His resurrection body-was certainly different from His physical body in form. It was now a spiritual body.

[26]Hence there is both a miracle of speech-other, different, spiritual tongues-and a miracle of understanding: each made possible by the Holy Spirit.

[27]Of course, Paul is depicting three parties involved: the one who speaks in tongues, the interpreter, and the one(s) to whom the interpretation is given. However, I am suggesting that in this first outburst of tongues the Holy Spirit provided His own interpretation. No interpretation is mentioned in the other Acts accounts.

[28]There is, however, the other viewpoint discussed earlier that speaking in tongues is the miraculous speaking of foreign languages (xenoglossolalia). For example, it was said of Saint Francis Xavier (1506-52), who went as a missionary to the Far East, that “God restored to St. Francis the gift of tongues; for he preached often to the Chinese merchants … in their mother-tongues, which he had never learned” (Alban Butler, The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and Other Principal Saints, 4:444). In the beginning of the twentieth-century Pentecostal movement there was a strong conviction that tongues were “missionary tongues”-i.e., languages given for the preaching of the gospel in the native tongues of people everywhere. The Apostolic Faith, published by the Azusa Street Mission, stated in two early articles in 1906: “The gift of languages is given with the commission, ‘Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.’ The Lord has given languages to the unlearned, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, French, German, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Zulu and the languages of Africa, Hindu and Bengali and dialects of India, Chippewa and other languages of the Indians, Esquimaux, the deaf mute language and, in fact, the Holy Ghost speaks in all the languages of the world through His children…. God is solving the missionary problem, sending out new-tongued missionaries”

(Apostolic Faith [Sept. 1906], 1; [Nov. 1906], p. 2, quoted in Azusa Street and Beyond, L. Grant McClung, ed., 33-34). It was not long, however, before the missionary use of tongues was seriously questioned and the need for language study began to be stressed. This is good because there is no suggestion in Acts 2 that the tongues spoken were "missionary tongues." The tongues were addressed to God-declaring His "wonderful works" (v. 11)-and not to people. It was not until after tongues were spoken and explained (vv. 1-21) that Peter preached to the assembled multitude. Many Pentecostals, however, have continued to affirm that there are still occasions when foreign languages are spoken. See, e.g., Stanley H. Frodsham, With Signs Following (1946), chapter 12, and Ralph W. Harris, Spoken by the Spirit: Documented Accounts of "Other Tongues" from Arabic to Zulu (1973). Such accounts do indeed point to the occurrence of a miracle. However, with the account of Pentecost as our guide, the best way to describe such a happening is that it is not a foreign language that is being spoken but an "other" tongue, which through the Holy Spirit people hear in their own language. (Incidentally, in regard to documentation, tongues spoken have on occasion been recorded and later checked for language content. Evidence that they are a particular human language is totally lacking. This does not deny the miraculous character of tongues; indeed, quite the opposite, for by such documentation of questionable earthly content the way is left open that tongues may be spiritual utterance!) I might add that when tongues are understood in their basic content (see next section), the idea of tongues as human languages becomes wholly irrelevant.

[29]I recognize that Mark 16:17 is part of the "long ending" in Mark, viewed by many scholars as an interpolation added some time later in the second century. Whether this is true or not, the relevant matter is that "new tongues" are mentioned, which indicates an ongoing place in the early church. Dunn writes, "The significance of the reference is then that, with the Christian mission probably already a century old, speaking in tongues was regarded as a typical sign of the gospel's expression in the first century and perhaps also in the second" (Jesus and the Spirit, 246).

[30]The Greek word is kainos. According to Thayer, kainos "denotes the new primarily in reference to quality" (in comparison with neos, which denotes the new primarily in reference to time). Kainos, accordingly, is similar to he teros in the latter V qualitative meaning.

[31]It is interesting that the same word "began" in Acts 2:4 (erxanto) is also

used in Acts 1:1-“In the first book [the Gospel of Luke], O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began [ërxato] to do and teach.” What Jesus began, He continued to do; indeed the Book of Acts is a continuation beyond His lifetime on earth. Luke may have intended us to understand likewise that what began at Pentecost continued thereafter. Robert E. Tourville writes, “They ‘began’ … denotes a historical fact that they started, with a continuation but not stating the point at which it stopped.” Then Tourville adds regarding Jesus, “What He began to do and teach we know continued through the disciples…. Then it is logical to think they continued to speak in other tongues” (The Acts of the Apostles, 27-28).

[32]The Greek word is laleo, a present indicative that signifies continuing action.

[33]It also suggests that Paul himself spoke much in tongues. To use the vernacular: Paul was the “champ” in this area-“more than you all”!

[34]Paul is by no means approving such church wide utterance in tongues, for (as the verse continues) “if … outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say you are mad?” The relevant point here, however, is that the Corinthians could all speak in tongues.

[35]An earlier statement by Paul, “I want you all to speak in tongues” (v. 5), might suggest that some, but not all, spoke in tongues and that Paul wanted all others to do likewise. However, in light of what is said in verses 18 and 23 (as quoted above), it seems more likely that Paul is expressing approval of everyone’s speaking in tongues. Paul does add (in v. 5), “but even more to prophesy.” Evidently the Corinthians were so caught up with glossolalia that they were neglecting prophecy. (I will discuss the relative merits of tongues and prophecy in chapter 14.) However, at this juncture my only concern is to point out the universal practice of glossolalia in the church at Corinth.

[36]Paul later adds, “If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn” (v. 27). Evidently the Corinthians were so enthusiastic about their ability to speak in tongues that they needed some order. Paul sought to provide this.

[37]One final footnote about Corinth: Paul also speaks of glossolalia as a manifestation or gift of the Holy Spirit that not all possess. In describing the manifestations of the Spirit (12:8-10) Paul says, “to another various kinds of tongues” (v. 10). Toward the end of this chapter (vv. 28-30), Paul describes various appointments in the church, listing among them “speakers in various kinds of tongues” (v. 28), and adds rhetorically, “Do

all speak with tongues?" (v. 30). To understand how these individualizing statements in chapter 12 relate to the generalizing ones quoted above in chapter 14, there is need to recognize that Paul first refers to diverse gifts for body ministry and later to the fact that the whole congregation could and did speak in tongues. It was the interplay between the individual gift of tongues for body ministry and the congregation-wide ability to speak in tongues that created some of the tensions in the Corinthian church. In 1 Corinthians 12-14 Paul is often dealing with the relationship between the particular gift (or manifestation) and the general practice. I will discuss this further in chapter 14, "The Ninefold Manifestation."

[38]For a discussion of interpretation see also chapter 14.

[39]The KJV translates, "I will sing with the understanding also."

[40]The Greek phrase for "spiritual songs" is odais pneumatikais.The same expression occurs in Colossians 3:16.

[41]So F. F. Bruce translates odais pneumatikais (Ephesians, NICNT, 380).

[42]Dunn says that "the word 'spiritual' … characterizes the song so described as one prompted by the Spirit and manifesting the Spirit" and refers to "spontaneous singing in tongues" (Jesus and the Spirit, 238-39). It is interesting that the Jerusalem Bible says in a note on Colossians 3:16 that "these 'inspired songs' could be charismatic improvisations suggested by the Holy Spirit during liturgical assembly."

[43]Also note the possible parallel between singing with the understanding and singing "psalms and hymns."

[44]Dunn, commenting on the verse, says, "In every specific situation hold yourself open to the prayer of the Spirit" (Jesus and the Spirit, 239). Prayer of the Spirit, I believe, is glossolalic prayer. Although Dunn immediately adds, "Cf. Eph. 5:18ff.," where, as noted, he speaks of "spontaneous singing in tongues," Dunn hesitates to draw quite the same conclusion about Ephesians 6:18. However, he includes Ephesians 6:18 among other "possible allusions to glossolalia" (245).

[45]Richard J. Bauckham, in commenting on Jude 20, states that the language "indicates charismatic prayer in which the words are given by the Spirit" (2 Peter and Jude, WBC, 113). Dunn writes, "A reference to charismatic prayer, including glossolalic prayer, may … be presumed for Jude 20" (Jesus and the Spirit, 246).

[46]"Sighs" (RSV). The Greek word is from stenagmos-"sigh, groan, groaning" (BAGD).

[47]The Greek word is alaletois. The RSV and NASB read “too deep for words.” The words are unutterable in ordinary speech.

[48]Hermann Gunkel in his classic work of 1888 entitled Die Wirkungen des Heilige Geist, now issued under the title The Influence of the Holy Spirit, writes, “There can be no doubt as to what Paul means by the Spirit’s sighs that are too deep for words. They are uttered by the Christian in a condition in which he is no longer able clearly to express the feelings which powerfully seize him but pours these out in sighs, ‘whose meaning words cannot express.’ Now these sighs are conceived [by Paul] … as the sighs of the Spirit himself. They are therefore glossolalic-ecstatic outbursts” [italics mine] (80-81). F. F. Bruce says that “speaking to God in the Spirit with ‘tongues’ … may be included in this expression, but it covers those longings and aspirations which well up from the spiritual depths and cannot be confined within the confines of everyday words” (The Epistle of Paul to the Romans, TNTC, 175). I believe Bruce’s statement is too weak; however, at least he recognizes the possible glossolalic connection in Paul’s words. Gunkel, rightly, I think, saw much more. J. Behm writes that “the Spirit comes to aid him [the believer] in his weakness and represents him before God by the babbling [sic!] of glossolalia” (TDNT 5:813).

[49]Dunn refers to 1 Thessalonians 5:19 as one of several “possible allusions to glossolalia” *(Jesus and the Spirit*, 245). Incidentally, Dunn in this place also mentions Romans 8:26; Ephesians 5:19; 6:18; Colossians 3:16; “and possibly 1 Cor. 5:4.” Leon Morris says that “the use of the Greek negative *me* [in “do *not* quench the Spirit”] with the present imperative here denotes a command *to cease from doing something already in process”* (italics mine). Then Morris adds, “Most commentators take the injunction as referring to ecstatic gifts of the Spirit, such as speaking with tongues…. It is possible that this is what is in Paul’s mind, for the injunction to cease from quenching the Spirit is unusual.” Morris, however, later expresses his doubt, for “the evidence cited cannot be said to be strong, and the words are very general” (The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians, TNTC, 104). I believe that the “most commentators” Morris mentioned are right and that Paul is referring to speaking in tongues. (Indeed, Morris’s own statements seem to point to this direction until he finally states a contrary position.)

[50]To summarize the data thus far given, references directly stated or implied include Mark 16:17; Romans 8:26; 1 Corinthians 12-14 (many references

in these three chapters); Ephesians 5:18-19; 6:18; Colossians 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:19; and Jude 20. Others could be added. For example, Gunkel also mentions the cry of "Abba! Father!" by us (Rom. 8:15) and by the Spirit (Gal. 4:6): "In Rom. 8:15 and Gal. 4:6 as well, glossolalic utterances are cited [by Paul] as words of the Holy Spirit" {The Influence of the Holy Spirit, 66).

[51]It may be significant that speaking in tongues is mentioned or implied, as we have noted, in Corinth, Rome, Ephesus, and Thessalonica. All those churches were said to have received the gift of the Spirit (recall section I, introduction). The letter of Jude, which also refers to (or implies) glossolalia, is the only exception. However, prior to his injunction "Pray in the Holy Spirit" Jude does make a cryptic reference to "worldly people, devoid of [literally, "not having"] the Spirit" (v. 19). This implies that those to whom Jude wrote were people "of the Spirit" and thus could "pray in the Holy Spirit."

[52]C. S. Lewis in his address entitled "Transposition" (in *Transposition and Other Addresses*) describes how a transposition occurs whenever a higher medium reproduces itself in a lower. If viewed merely from the perspective of the lower, the higher may be completely missed. Concerning glossolalia, "all non-Christian opinion would regard it as a kind of hysteria, an involuntary discharge of nervous excitement" (p. 9). However, "… the very same phenomenon which is sometimes not only natural but even pathological is at other times … the organ of the Holy Ghost." (p. 10). "Those who spoke with tongues, as St. Paul did, can well understand how that holy phenomenon differed from the hysterical phenomenon—although … they were in a sense exactly the same phenomenon" (p. 17). Lewis later speaks about "the inevitableness of the error made about every transposition by one who approaches it from the lower medium only" (p. 19). "Transposition," accordingly, is an excellent term to express what happens when the Holy Spirit, the higher medium, is expressed in the lower, the human spirit. For the vehicle of expression, human language, becomes transposed into a new dimension of utterance.

[53]Recall footnote 17.

[54]The Greek phrase is gene glosson, literally, "kinds of tongues."

[55]The Greek word is akarpos.

[56]See 1 Corinthians 14:12-13.

[57]Interpretation does not mean that the interpreter, any more than the glossolalist, understands what he is saying, for interpretation is also a

suprarational utterance (see discussion in chapter 14, “The Ninefold Manifestation”). However, interpretation is in the known language.

[58]Gordon Fee says that “the Corinthians at least, and probably Paul, thought of tongues as the language(s) of angels” (The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 630). Dunn writes that “Paul thought of glossolalia as speaking the language(s) of heaven” (Jesus and the Spirit, 244). It is possible that Paul was referring to the same thing when he wrote later in 2 Corinthians 12 about a man who “was caught up into Paradise, and heard inexpressible words [arreta rhemata]” (V. 4 NASB). He heard words beyond human expression, “something that cannot be expressed, since it is beyond human powers” (BAGD).

[59]I like the words of Peter Brunner on this: “This speech of tongues is not the babbling of babes, but it is a mode in which the inexpressible verbal form of the heavenly world [1 Cor. 12:3; 1 Cor. 13:1] breaks into this human world of ours” (Worship in the Name of Jesus, 270).

[60]E.g., in regard to Moses’ seventy elders prophesying when the Spirit came upon them (recall my discussion in chap. 7, I.E.). Keil and Delitzsch speak of this prophesying “not as the foretelling of future things, but as speaking in an ecstatic and elevated state of mind, under the impulse and inspiration of the Spirit of God, just like the ‘speaking in tongues,’ which frequently followed the gift of the Holy Ghost in the days of the apostles” (The Fourth Book of Moses, Commentary on the Old Testament, 1:70). “Just like,” I believe, is a good way of putting it, for though the elders’ prophesying can hardly be called speaking in tongues, there is surely some kinship. George T. Montague speaks of this as “probably … prophetic ecstasy, as in I Sam. 10:5ff. and 19:20ff. [Saul and the band of prophets]” (The Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition, 111). Although, as previously stated, I have some difficulty with the use of the word “ecstasy,” I believe that Keil and Delitzsch and Montague are pointing in the right direction.

[61]In one place Paul says, “In the law it is written, With men of other tongues [“heteroglossois”] and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:21 KJV). Paul applies this free quotation from Isaiah 28:11-12 (referring to invading foreigners by whose “other tongues” God would speak to an unhealing Israel) to speaking in tongues (see the context in 1 Corinthians). Incidentally, the expression “other tongues,” heteroglossois, is quite similar to the “other tongues,” heterais glossais, in Acts 2:4.

[62]It is sometimes suggested that Jesus spoke in tongues. This is usually based on Mark 7:34: “Looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him [a deaf mute], ‘Ephphatha,’ that is, ‘Be opened.’ “ The Greek word for “sighed” is estenaxen similar to Romans 8:26 “stenagmois alaletois,” “sighs [or groans] unutterable,” which could refer to glossolalia (see n. 48). However, I agree with Dunn who says: “Although Rom. 8:26 can be understood in terms of glossolalia with some justification … this is because the groans are described as ‘unutterable, inarticulate, too deep for words’ and ascribed to the Spirit; the use of στενάζειν by itself does not suggest glossolalia … [moreover] parallels break down, since in Mark 7:34 Jesus’ word of healing was spoken in Aramaic, his native tongue” (.Jesus and the Spirit, 86).

[63]Recall Mark 16:17: “They will speak in new tongues.”

[64]A sign, however, is not identical with the reality to which it points. The gift of the Holy Spirit is the primary reality, and speaking in tongues is the sign that the gift has been received. So tongues are not constitutive of the gift of the Holy Spirit, that is, comprising the gift, but declarative, namely, that the gift has been received.

[65]On this point it is a serious error to equate speaking in tongues with the gift (dorea) of the Holy Spirit (although it surely is a gift (charisma) of the Spirit [1 Cor. 12:10]) or, even worse, to say that speaking in tongues is required for the Holy Spirit to be received. A sign is neither identical with nor prerequisite to the reality.

[66]John P. Kildahl states that glossolalia is a sign of “hypnotizability.” “It is our thesis that hypnotizability constitutes the sine qua non of the glossolalia experience. If one can be hypnotized one can learn [s/c/] to speak in tongues” (The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues, 54-55).

[67]The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, according to a report in Christianity Today (Sept. 18, 1987), has developed a policy that “disqualifies missionary candidates who actively participate in, or promote the practice of speaking in tongues.” Further, “any missions personnel already appointed, approved, or endorsed by the mission board who become involved in glossolalia will be counseled by a mission board representative. Continued participation in speaking in tongues would result in their dismissal.” I may add, though it hardly needs saying, that the apostle Paul would be totally disqualified and rapidly dismissed! (“I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all”!)

[68]Kilian McDonnell in his book Charismatic Renewal and the Churches

shows some of the significant and positive changes in attitudes that have occurred in the social and behavioral sciences, particularly psychology, and in the official attitude of many of the historic churches. See especially chapter 3, “Enthusiasm and Institution: The Response of the Churches,” and chapter 5, “The Move Toward Normality.” For official statements of the churches worldwide, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, see McDonnell’s edited work in three volumes: Presence, Power, Praise: Documents on the Charismatic Renewal. These volumes include 104 documents published between 1960 and 1980. On the whole, with some exceptions here and there, these documents show an increasingly open, though cautious, attitude officially toward glossolalia. Incidentally, the Southern Baptist negative attitude (previous footnote) was also evidenced in 1975 when certain Baptist churches in Dallas, Baton Rouge, and Cincinnati were “disfellowshiped” by the local association of Baptist churches for glossolalia and faith-healing practices. However, it is also important to observe that in June 1978 the Southern Baptist national convention voted down a motion to expel charismatic churches (see McDonnell’s book, 73-75, and Documents, 2:114-16).

[69] I should add that in neither McDonnell’s book nor the edited volumes is tongues the main issue. The focus, as both titles suggest, is on the charismatic renewal. In his book McDonnell writes, “Any serious student of the Pentecostal-charismatic movement [whether the focus is on the classical, neo-Pentecostal, or Catholic charismatic expression], will immediately recognize that the issue is not tongues. The issue is, rather, totality of the gospel, life in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit…. This is not to deny that tongues play a role, indeed is highly esteemed. But speaking in tongues is not what the Pentecostal-charismatic renewal is all about” (p. 11). I agree with McDonnell but have included reference to his books while discussing speaking in tongues because they contain valuable material that relates to glossolalia.

[70] William Samarin says, “Anybody can produce glossolalia if he is uninhibited and if he discovers what the ‘trick’ is” (Tongues of Men and Angels, 227-28), namely, the uninhibited expression of nonsense syllables. In reply I can confidently and emphatically say that anyone who has truly spoken in tongues knows that there is no possible comparison of it with human gibberish. As Simon Tugwell, a Dominican priest, succinctly says, “You cannot engineer tongues” (Did You Receive the Spirit? 63). This is not to say that within the parameters of the

charismatic renewal there have been no counterfeit tongues-no mimicking of true glossolalia-in order to gain acceptance by others in the community.

[71]Larry Christenson writes this about the objectivity of this sign: "To consummate one's experiences of the baptism with the Holy Spirit by speaking in tongues gives it an objectivity … regardless of feelings, that sign of the "new tongue" is there" (Speaking in Tongues, 55-56). Don Basham, describing his baptism in the Spirit and tongues, writes similarly, "This was God moving in my life more powerfully than ever before…. I had made entrance into a new and deeper spiritual dimension, clearly marked by praying in a language utterly unknown to me" (Face Up With a Miracle, 60). "Clearly marked" points up the significance of tongues as an objective and unforgettable sign.

[72]The Greek word is megaleia, meaning "magnificent, splendid, grand" (BAGD); "magnificent, excellent, splendid, wonderful" (Thayer). The RSV and NASB translations, respectively, as "mighty works" and "mighty deeds," do not fully capture the note of the magnificent and the wonderful. The NIV finely translates megaleia as "wonders."

[73]EGT, referring to megaleia, in loco, says that the word is "used here not only of the Resurrection of the Lord … but of all that the prophets had foretold, of all that Christ had done and the Holy Ghost had conferred."

[74]Recall note 28.

[75]G. C. Morgan writes, "These people were not preaching, they were praising; they were not indulging in set discourse, they were pouring out the rapture that filled their souls" (Acts of the Apostles, 38). Incidentally it would be a mistake to view the many languages spoken by the disciples as speech similar in unintelligibility to that of the gibberish of drunk persons. No, even the mockers understood what was being said ("each one heard them speaking in his own language" [v. 6]). The mockery, therefore, points rather to the disciples' joyous spiritual inspiration.

[76]See earlier discussion in section II.

[77]Gunkel speaks of this praise as "pneumatic in character … not the usual praise any Christian may give at any time but an ecstatic praise connected with glossolalia" (The Influence of the Holy Spirit, 18). EGT, in loco, calls this "jubilant ecstatic praise."

[78]Cadbury and Lake note "the Lucan tendency to vary the phrase while repeating the substance." Luke "changes λαλούντων ["speaking … in

tongues the wonderful words of God”] into λαλούντων των γλώσσαις καιμεγαλυνόντων τὸν θεόν [“speaking in tongues and extolling God”]” (The Acts of the Apostles, 4:122). The substance, I agree, remains the same. The same Greek root is found in both Acts 2:11 and 10:46-megal, which connotes magnification. In both Jerusalem and Caesarea they “magnified” the “magnificent” works of God.

[79]This is Paul’s language about the Gentiles in Ephesians 2:12.

[80]For example, the hymn of Charles Wesley beginning 4? for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer’s praise” exhibits this intense yearning.

[81]This indeed is the answer to Wesley’s yearning. Far better and greater than “a thousand tongues” is one tongue that can give full expression of praise.

[82]’Larry Tomczak, a former Roman Catholic layman, writes, “As thanksgiving and praise erupted from within, a profound sense of God’s presence began to well up in me. I felt the rapturous and exultant joy of the Lord surging through me, and the more profuse my praise, the more intense became my desire to magnify the name of my Savior. I grew impatient with the inadequacy of the English language to fully express all that I was feeling, how much I loved God. Then, just at the right moment, new words began to flow from my heart…. I could not restrain my tongue, and my lips began to stammer, as a new language hopped, skipped and somersaulted from my mouth. The language was foreign to my ears, a heavenly language only God would understand. It was praise that had surged through my whole being to seek expression through the Holy Spirit in a new transcendence” (Clap Your Hands!, 112-13). Harald Bredesen, a Reformed pastor, succinctly states, “I tried to say, ‘Thank You, Jesus, thank You, Jesus,’ but I couldn’t express the inexpressible. Then, to my great relief, the Holy Spirit did it for me. It was just as if a bottle was uncorked, and out of me poured a torrent of words in a language I had never studied before. Now everything I had ever wanted to say to God, I could say” (Yes, Lord, 59).

[83]Recall Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 14:14-15.

[84]“We were lifted out of ourselves in the worship of the Lord. There was a period of singing in tongues, and the variety in the sound was matched only by its harmony and the unanimity with which it began and ended, almost as if at the signal of a conductor; but there was no conductor-at

least, not a human one." So writes Michael Green, an Anglican rector, about his visit to a church "full of the Holy Spirit" (I Believe in the Holy Spirit, 158-59). In an earlier book I described the experience of "singing in the Spirit" thus: "There may be long periods of joyful, lilting music, quite unplanned, moving back and forth through psalms, hymns, choruses, and the like-as the Spirit guides the meeting. But the climax is the moment when not only is the melody given by the Spirit but also the language, as words and music sung by the assembled worshipers blend into an unimaginable, humanly impossible, chorus of praise. Here is 'singing in the Spirit' at its zenith-the sublime utterance of the Holy Spirit through the human spirit to the glory of Almighty God" (The Era of the Spirit, 33).

[85]"The glossolalia of the early Eastern Church, as the original musical event, represents the germ cell or the original form of sung liturgical prayer…. In the sublime lévitation and interweaving of the old Church tones, and even in Gregorian chant to some extent, we are greeted by an element that has its profound roots in glossolalia." (Words of Werner Meyer in Der erste Korintherbrief: Prophezei, 1945, II, 122 et seq., trans. Arnold Bittlinger; see also Sounds of Wonder by Eddie Ensley, 117.)

[86]Commentary on Psalm 46, as quoted in Sounds of Wonder, 53. Ensley gives many instances of jubilation in the history of the church and states that "indications are that jubilation is a continuation of the glossolalia of the New Testament" (115).

[87]Tongues are described as "a special language of jubilation" by Gerhard Delling in his book *Worship in the New Testament.* "The working of the Spirit brings about … an enthusiasm which expresses itself in a special language of jubilation, in a *praising of God which rises above the normal manner of speaking*" (italics his, 38). Incidentally, Delling's evaluation of glossolalia is also worth quoting: "It is an intimation [certainly an imperfect and, in Paul's opinion at least, an inadequate one] of the praise and worship of God in the heavenly service; and thus at the same time an anticipation of the future glory. Men knew that they stood in the midst of the irruption of the coming age; they knew that in the gift of the Spirit they had received an earnest [ἀρραβών] of the consummation; furthermore the Spirit when bestowed did not remain simply a gift in the hidden chambers of the heart; it pressed for expression in special intimations in worship" (35).

[88]The KJV, NIV, and NASB have "spirit" (lowercase). Although this form

is grammatically possible, it is hard to see how anyone could utter mysteries (as will be discussed above) with his own spirit. So Gordon Fee writes, “It does not seem remotely possible that in this context Paul would suddenly refer to speaking ‘with one’s own spirit,’ rather than by the Holy Spirit” (The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 656). I might add, however, that since Paul later speaks of praying in a tongue as praying with the spirit (here lowercase s because Paul compares such praying with the praying with the mind), such praying would also be praying in the Spirit.

[89]Paul uses the Greek word mysterion twenty-one times. He refers to a number of particular mysteries now revealed, such as the future of Israel (Rom. 11:25-26), what happens to believers at the Parousia (1 Cor. 15:51-52), the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32), Christ in the believer (Col. 1:27), and the basic tenets of “our religion” (1 Tim. 3:16). Indeed, whatever is set forth in “the prophetic writings” (hence, Scripture in general) is “the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages” (Rom. 16:25).

[90]Dunn writes that “Paul … characterizes the glossolalist as holding a secret conversation with God (he speaks to God-14.2); the subject matter is the eschatological secrets known only in heaven” (Jesus and the Spirit, 244).

[91]This calls for interpretation by the Holy Spirit. In chapter 14 I will discuss this important matter of interpretation as a gift of the Holy Spirit. At this juncture it would take us too far afield.

[92]Recall my discussion of such prayer as praying in tongues. See the previous section.

[93]The KJV puts this the clearest: “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.” The close connection between praying in the Spirit and supplication is underscored.

[94]I will say more about “all times” in the next section.

[95]“What” is probably more accurate than “how” (as in RSV and NASB). On this matter see Everett F. Harrison, “Romans,” EBC, 10:94.

[96]Recall our discussion of this in the preceding section (III) as glossolalic utterance.

[97]Literally, “in accordance with God” (kata theon).

[98]Recalling verse 15: “Ye have received the Spirit of adoption” (KJV).

[99]In Romans 8:22-27 Paul speaks of three groanings: (1) the creation “groaning in travail together” (v. 22), a reference to the bondage of

creation to decay and corruption; (2) “We ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for … the redemption of our bodies” (v. 23); and (3) the groaning of the Holy Spirit. On the latter as glossolalic utterance see n. 48.

[100]“According to R. W. Dale, “the whole passage illustrates in even a startling manner the truth and reality of the ‘coming’ of the Holy Ghost-the extent to which, if I may venture to say it, He has separated Himself-as Christ did at His Incarnation-from His eternal glory and blessedness, and entered into the life of man…. His intercession for us-so intimately does He share all the evils of our condition-is a kind of agony “ (Christian Doctrine, 140f.).

[101]I like Dunn’s words about “effective communication”: “He who experiences glossolalia … experiences it as effective communication with God” (italics his) (Jesus and the Spirit, 245).

[102]Earlier quoted in footnotes 79 and 80.

[103]According to the Book of James, “the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity…. But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men” (3:6, 8-9 KJV). James includes believers in his words (those who bless God the Father). How much we need another tongue that can purely and wholly bless God! As is sometimes said, in addition to our “mother tongue” we need a “Father tongue” that will only bless the Father and never do hurt to any other person.

[104]I inject here a personal word. It was shortly after saying these words of the psalmist a number of times with an intensity of desire to bless God with all my being that I first began to speak in tongues. I had already prayed to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and immediately thereafter God’s presence became so real that I yearned to go beyond ordinary speech in blessing Him and giving thanks. To my amazement, but even more to my soul’s joy and delight, God granted me this new language of the Spirit.

[105]Paui’s statement about edifying oneself is sometimes assumed to be a negative evaluation of tongues, i.e., that speaking in tongues is a selfish concern. E.g., John F. MacArthur, Jr., comments on this passage about speaking in tongues as “selfish ego building” (The Charismatics, 161). This negative viewpoint is thought to be reinforced by Paul’s next words: “But he who prophesies edifies the church.” However, to reply, Paul can hardly be negative here since he has just described tongues as address to God and the utterance of divine mysteries. Paul’s concern in writing the

Corinthians is primarily the upbuilding of the church, and tongues, unless they are interpreted (see v. 5), will not do that. Prophecy, needing no interpretation, can immediately edify. In this same verse Paul makes it clear that when the interpretation of tongues does occur, speaking in tongues and prophecy are equal in value.

[106]See vol. 1, chapter 9, "Man," II.B.

[107]Recall Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 14:14.

[108]Gordon Fee makes the perceptive comment that "contrary to the opinion of many, spiritual edification can take place in ways other than through the cortex of the brain" (The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 657).

[109]"These are the words of the answer in the Westminster Shorter Catechism to Question 1, "What is the chief end of man?" The answer given above is, I think, thoroughly in accord with Scripture. E.g., Paul writes: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31); and "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, 'Rejoice' " (Phil. 4:4).

[110]See the preceding section (IV) regarding both.

[111]I will not discuss here the edification of the church that can also occur through speaking in tongues. I made brief mention of this in a previous note but will go into greater detail in chapter 14 on "The Ninefold Manifestation."

[112]In the prophecy of Joel, which Peter was quoting, the language was "It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh" (Joel 2:28). The "afterward" looks back to God's blessings received (vv. 18-27) and immediately forward to events of the last days (vv. 29-32). Hence Peter's words, though not a direct quotation, surely conveyed Joel's sense of this outpouring as an eschatological event.

[113]It is significant that Peter adds to Joel's words "signs." Joel simply reads "wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke" (2:30 NIV).

[114]According to EGT, in loco, "Peter had already received a sign from heaven in the ἠχοςἐκ τοῦ ουρανοῦ ovpavov ["a sound from heaven"], and a sign on the earth below in the λαλεῖνἑτέραις γλῶσσαις ["speaking other tongues"]," but also Peter's thoughts "passed from the day of Pentecost to a period of grace and warning which should precede the Parousia."

[115]I. H. Marshall writes that “the signs are probably the gift of tongues and the various healing miracles which are shortly to be recorded” (The Acts of the Apostles, TNTC, 74).

[116]See the preceding chapter.

[117]In the words of Donald Gee, “It was the linking together of speaking with tongues and the baptism in the Holy Spirit that started off the Pentecost Revival” (quoted in Frederick D. Bruner, A Theology of the Holy Spirit, 48, n. 34).

[118]A few Pentecostal bodies view speaking in tongues as one of the evidences of the Holy Spirit rather than the particular sign. (See Bruner, 77, n.30.)

[119]G. Ernest Wright, an Old Testament scholar, writes, “In prophetic eschatology the consummation of the Kingdom of God is to be marked by a great revival of charismatic happenings. Both leaders and people will be Spirit-filled and Spirit-empowered on a scale hitherto unknown” (The Rule of God, 104). Is that what is happening now?

[120]I have often pondered the following extraordinary statement of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “The day will come when men will be called again to utter the word of God with such power as will change and renew the world. It will be a new language, which will horrify men, and yet overwhelm them by its power. It will be the language of a new righteousness and truth, a language which proclaims the peace of God with men and the advent of his Kingdom” (Prisoner for God: Letters and Papers from Prison, 140-41). Bonhoeffer, I feel sure, did not view this “new language” as the language of tongues; however, his very wording-a language that “will horrify men, and yet overwhelm them by its power”-may well apply to the language of the Holy Spirit on the lips of people.

[121]Paul’s reference to praying in the Spirit in Ephesians 6:18 is in the context of the believer’s contending “against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness …” (v. 12). Along with “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (v. 17), praying in the Spirit is the way of withstanding the assaults of the evil one.

[122]These are Peter Brunner’s words. I earlier quoted him as saying that the “speech of tongues is not the babbling of babes” (n. 60). In the same connection Brunner writes, “The New Testament shows that the verbal vessel of our language may disintegrate under the impact of the rushing new eon. This takes place in the language of tongues…. This rupture of

speech into the speech of tongues shows us that the word will not remain unaffected by the approaching might of the kingdom of God. It, too, will be drawn symbolically into the future eschatological transformation of all things" (Worship in the Name of Jesus, 270).

[123]Paul tells the Corinthians that some day tongues will cease: "As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away" (1 Cor. 13:8). This will happen when we see God "face to face" (v. 12). In this present life we may be extremely grateful for what He has given us.

10
The Mission of the Holy Spirit

God the Father sends the Holy Spirit through Christ His Son. For what purpose does the Holy Spirit come? To answer this question, we will view the mission of the Spirit from several perspectives.

I. GUIDE INTO TRUTH

The Holy Spirit comes, first, to guide His disciples into all the truth. According to the Gospel of John Jesus declared, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (16:13). It is noteworthy that the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of truth,[1] for truth marks His character.[2] Hence when He comes, He will give knowledge of all the truth.

This truth is the truth that is found in Jesus Christ. Jesus had said earlier, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Thus the Holy Spirit, who is Christ’s representative[3] will speak only of the truth in Christ. Jesus explained in John 16, “He [the Spirit of truth] will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (v. 14). Accordingly, “all the truth” refers not to truth in general but to the totality of truth that Christ embodies.

Thus when the Holy Spirit comes, He will be the guide to all the truth that is in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit will operate both from within and without. In Jesus’ first statement about “the Spirit of truth,” He said to His disciples, “I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete,[4] to be with[5] you for ever, even the Spirit of truth…. You know him, for he dwells with[6] you, and will be[7] in you” (John 14:16–17). During Jesus’ ministry the Spirit of truth was present “with” (or “beside”) the disciples; later, on the day of Jesus’ resurrection, He breathed “in” them the same Spirit (John 20:22); still later at Pentecost the Spirit of truth came to be “with” them forever. Regarding these last two stages, it is apparent that Christ’s breathing into the disciples new life in the Spirit[8] was background for the Spirit’s coming at Pentecost to guide them into all the truth.

It is significant that between these two events the disciples did not know the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The picture in John 21 (after Jesus breathed into them the Holy Spirit) is that of Peter and six other disciples going fishing (not for people, but for fish!), hence being very uncertain of themselves.[9] In Acts 1, although Jesus had spoken to the disciples for forty days about the kingdom of God (v. 3), they nonetheless asked, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (v. 6).[10] After Pentecost, however, with the Spirit guiding them into all the truth, the disciples never again referred to the kingdom as a restored Israel; the kingdom was invariably seen as a spiritual realm that may be

entered by all.[11] Hence, this is further evidence that the Spirit of truth had come.

From chapter 2 onward the Book of Acts depicts persons moving in the Spirit of truth. Peter, a man filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaimed the gospel in its true and full dimensions on many occasions. Stephen, described as a person "full of the Spirit and of wisdom," showed this by his comprehensive declaration of biblical and gospel truth (Acts 7:2–53). Moreover, large numbers of believers who were forced to leave Jerusalem because of persecution "went about preaching the word" (8:4). In such accounts, which continue through Acts, the believers are clearly witnessing to the truth of the gospel.[12] The Spirit of truth was guiding them into all the truth.

Therefore, when the Holy Spirit came to various people, they now had the Guide "with"[13] them so that, following their Guide, they were able to lead others. Jesus had also said, "The Holy Spirit … will teach you all things" (John 14:26). Hence it was not simply a matter of immediate knowledge but also of continuing instruction. Nonetheless, from the moment the Spirit of truth came, the sure and certain knowledge of truth was essentially given to them and what they did not know would be progressively revealed to them.

It is important to recognize that the guidance of the Holy Spirit into all truth was not limited to the apostles[14] and other leaders in the early church. In the First Epistle of John (written probably toward the end of the first century), the author says, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things" (2:20 KJV).[15] The unction, or anointing,[16] refers to the Holy Spirit, and the Holy One refers to Christ.[17] This special anointing had been received by those to whom the epistle was addressed, and they clearly were not apostles or other church leaders but ordinary believers. They too had received "the Spirit of truth"[18] and knew "all things." To reinforce this point John adds, a few statements later, "The anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for any one to teach you…. His anointing teaches you about all things" (v. 27 NASB). This extraordinary statement does not rule out the need for teachers in the church,[19] but it does emphasize that the anointing of the Holy Spirit gives essential guidance and knowledge about all things relating to the Christian faith.[20]

A striking feature found elsewhere in the New Testament is the way in which this "all" knowledge among believers is often recognized as a given fact. Paul, near the end of his strong doctrinal letter to the Romans, wrote, "I myself am satisfied about you, my brethren, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another" (15:14). What Paul himself

had written, he added, was written as a reminder: “But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles” (vv. 15–16). Paul therefore, despite all that he had written, did not claim to be imparting things unknown, for they were already “filled with all knowledge.” His office as a minister of Jesus Christ was that of bold reminder. Consequently, Paul’s declared role was to follow up on what the Romans already knew!

Peter also states in his second Epistle that his writing is by way of reminder. After detailing a number of things, Peter adds: “Therefore I intend always to remind you of these things, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to arouse you by way of reminder” (1:12–13). As with Paul, so Peter assumes a knowledge of the truth and writes to arouse his readers to remember. Nothing is said about the Holy Spirit in either of these passages; however, there is an obvious similarity between the way Paul and Peter speak of their readers being “filled” and “established” in knowledge and John’s words about his readers’ knowing “all things” through the anointing of the Spirit.

It is significant that in these several cases the New Testament strikingly emphasizes the full complement of knowledge that believers possessed. I should add that this was also true in Corinth, despite the manifold sins in the congregation, for Paul wrote the church there, “I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything[21] you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge” (1 Cor. 1:4–5 NASB). Could this have been due to anything less than the dynamic activity of the Holy Spirit?[22] It seems clear that “the Spirit of truth,” whether mentioned directly or not, was actively guiding the early church to the full knowledge of truth.[23]

None of this means, however, that the believers had spiritually arrived. The apostolic writings of John, Paul, and Peter were, and are, highly important for clarification, reminder, and exhortation. Indeed, since the apostles had known Christ directly[24] and stood in the circle of His immediate revelation, what they said and wrote is not only full knowledge but also the touchstone and norm for all other Christian experience of the truth. Moreover, most persons, though they know the truth, are quite immature in expressing it. Thus Paul wrote the Ephesians about the various Christ-given offices in the church, including those of pastor and teacher, to help believers grow up to “mature manhood … no longer … children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine (4:13–14). *But*, as important and necessary as such teaching was, and is,

its purpose is not to impart truth but to elicit and articulate the truth already received through the Spirit's activity. Earlier in his letter Paul spoke of the Ephesians as having "heard the word of truth" and being "sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" (1:13). Likewise (in the language of the Fourth Gospel) they had received "the Spirit of truth" and thus knew the essence of any future teaching.

We can also affirm that the coming of the Holy Spirit was to lead believers into a knowledge and understanding of God's manifold gifts. Paul declared, "We have received … the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God" (1 Cor. 2:12 NASB). Paul was speaking both for himself and the Corinthians—"we"; hence, the Spirit has been given to all of us. Thus to achieve full knowledge, all believers need the Guide. Then Paul continued with this significant statement: "And we impart[25] this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit (v. 13 RSV)."[26] Those who "possess the Spirit," literally "pneumatics," are those filled with the Spirit.[27] They are capable of apprehending what Paul is saying because they are *already* Spirit-possessed people. To them the Spirit of truth has come; they only need an interpretation of what they have received.

EXCURSUS: ON BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

It follows that true biblical interpretation calls for pneumatic understanding. The proper exegesis of Scripture is far more than linguistic analysis; it is most profoundly a matter of spiritual apprehension. Since Paul and the other biblical writers wrote words "taught by the Spirit," true understanding can occur only when one is existentially in accord with that same Spirit. When a person stands within the same pneumatic experience as the biblical writers did, he then has the spiritual capacity to receive what the Scripture teaches.[28]

Without such standing, biblical exegesis and interpretation fall far short of truth.

This is not to deny the need for a careful study of Scripture. We must hear what Peter, Paul, John, and the other writers are saying, which requires, at best, a knowledge of the language in which they wrote, the variations among manuscripts (since we do not have the original autographs), the purpose each had in writing, the historical and cultural setting, and so on. Each writer must also be heard for himself and then in conjunction with others, hence in both the unity and diversity of the Scriptures. All of this is quite important lest even the fullest spiritual understanding be confused and distorted by the failure to give adequate hearing to what the writers of Scripture say.

It is in the conjunction of pneumatic understanding and authentic hearing that the truth of Scripture breaks forth. How greatly we need this to take place!

Now we will quickly move to the spiritual renewal in our day. Insofar as people have received "the Spirit of truth," they are deeply grounded in spiritual truth. The Holy Spirit has come to bear witness of Christ and to guide believers into all the truth. In the experience of many there has come an intense awareness of the things of God. This does not mean a detailed knowledge of all aspects of Christian truth; indeed, there is often confusion and error in the attempts at expression and articulation. But a *deep resonance* with the truth exists whether, for example, it is the truth about God and the world, Christ and salvation, or the Holy Spirit and the gifts. They feel fully "at home" within the essential framework of Christian truth.[29]

Moreover, the Bible is gladly and fully accepted as God's word, not only because of its own claim to be true (e.g., 2 Tim. 3:16) but also because of its

profoundly spiritual impact. As a result of the intense activity of the Holy Spirit in their lives—the same Holy Spirit who inspired Holy Scripture—many have found the Scriptures to take on new life and meaning. The Bible as an external norm for faith and as a historical witness to God's mighty deeds is unhesitatingly accepted. But the Bible has also become a fuller testimony to God's present activity. It is as if a door has been opened, and walking through the door they see spread out before them the extraordinary biblical world with its dimensions of angelic heights and demonic depths, of miracles and wonders, a world in which they now sense their own participation. The Bible has taken on new authority, not merely the authority of outward acceptance. It is the authority of inward confirmation, the Holy Spirit vividly confirming the words and deeds of Holy Scripture in contemporary experience.[30]

When the "Spirit of truth" comes, He indeed guides into all the truth!

II. POWER FOR MINISTRY

Second, the Holy Spirit comes to give power for ministry. The opening verse in the Book of Acts sets the stage: "In the first book [the Gospel of Luke], O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus *began* to do and teach." The implication is clear that Luke plans in his second book, Acts, to deal with what Jesus *continued* to do and teach. However, the exalted Lord will carry on this ministry through His disciples. For this they will need the power of the Holy Spirit.

The close connection between the coming of the Holy Spirit and power for ministry was earlier shown in Jesus Himself. All the Gospels record that at the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan the Holy Spirit "descended upon" (Luke 3:22)[31] Him; thereby He received the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Afterward, "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan" (4:1). Following His wilderness temptation, He "returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee" (v. 14) and there began His ministry.[32]

It is apparent from Acts that Jesus intended for the same Spirit of power that rested on Him to rest also on His disciples. Thus He declared, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8). Thereby His disciples would be able to move in the power of the Spirit for the ministry that lay ahead. It would not be in the energy that the Holy Spirit provided but in the power of the Spirit Himself.[33] The Holy Spirit would personally empower Jesus' disciples for the mission ahead.

Such an empowerment for ministry is described later in Acts when Saul of Tarsus was filled with the Holy Spirit. Ananias, the disciple who ministered to Saul, was told by the Lord, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name" (9:15–16). After Saul (Paul) was filled with the Spirit, he "grew more and more powerful" (v. 22 NIV). Much later, in writing to Timothy, Paul spoke about "the glorious gospel … with which I have been entrusted," adding, "I thank him who has given me strength[34] for this [ministry]" (1 Tim. 1:11–12). Paul, through the Holy Spirit who came from Christ, was given power to fulfill the ministry to which he had been called.

Hence when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost and thereafter, He gave power that enabled the ministry of Christ to be carried forward. It was not power in a general sense, that is, an increment of supernatural strength that could have many uses, but power for ministry that flowed from the Father through the Son.

Power for ministry, then, is the central purpose for the Spirit's coming in the New Testament.[35] It must also remain the concern of the church in all ages, for without such power there can be no fully effective ministry.

Let us proceed to examine this power for ministry in terms of *effective witness* and *mighty works*,[36] or word and deeds.

A. Effective Witness

The ministry carried forward by Jesus' disciples was primarily *that of witness.* The power of the Holy Spirit enabled them to witness to Christ. Jesus said, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" and added: "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Thus when the Holy Spirit came, the disciples were empowered to bear witness to people of many lands and nations.

Let us review for a moment. When the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples in Jerusalem, they first praised God in other tongues (Acts 2:1–13). At that juncture the disciples' words were directed upward to God and not outward to people. The great crowd that assembled listened in on what was being said, but they were not yet the audience. It was only after the time of exuberant praise that the disciples addressed the assembled crowd.

Peter, "standing with the eleven,[37] lifted up his voice and addressed[38] them, 'Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words'" (v. 14). Here Peter, an uneducated, common man[39] —a rough fisherman—spoke as he had never spoken before. He spoke to an assembly of devout Jews,[40] doing so with the authority, forcefulness, and penetration that could only come from the anointing of the Holy Spirit. No longer was it a matter of speaking in other tongues (as amazing as that was) but of speaking in the Jewish common language[41] with supernatural power and wisdom.

Peter's message that followed was twofold: first an explanation of the bewildering matter of tongues[42] (2:14–21), and second, the proclamation of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, ending with the words "this Jesus whom you crucified" (vv. 22–36). Peter's words were simple and direct, but, of most importance, they were words set on fire by the Holy Spirit.[43] The fact that at the conclusion of Peter's message the assembled throng was pierced to the heart and cried out to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" (v. 37 NASB), showed that the message had brought deep conviction of sin. The way was thereby prepared for Peter to proclaim the good news of salvation: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (v. 38). The final result was that "those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls" (v. 41).

In summary: the coming of the Holy Spirit made possible a powerful and

effective witness. Moreover, this witness occurred in an extremely difficult situation. Peter brought his message to an audience that came rushing together not to hear a sermon but because of the sound of some one hundred and twenty people speaking in tongues. Further, despite the amazing fact that everyone heard what the disciples were saying in his own language, many began to mock and accuse the disciples of drunkenness. Again Peter, who, so far as we know, had never before addressed even a small number of people, now confronted several thousand[44] and spoke in a Galilean accent(!).[45] Also the throng was not a multitude of woebegone sinners readily open to a message of salvation, but a crowd of devout Jews assembled for one of the great Jewish feast days in accordance with the Old Testament commandment. To cap it all, Peter was bold enough to say to them that *they* had crucified Jesus. His listeners might have responded by saying that they had not even been in Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion,[46] or if they had been there, that they were not in the mob that cried, "Crucify Him," or that the responsibility was not theirs but Pilate's, who gave the order, and so on. However, as the record reads, no excuses were given, no attempts at self-justification—only a cry, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Unquestionably, Peter's message was fully anointed by the Holy Spirit.

Surely what has just been recounted is indeed extraordinary. God enabled an ordinary human being in a humanly impossible situation to become a channel for the *radical transformation* of human existence! "Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5) suddenly realized and accepted their awful guilt for the crucifixion of the Messiah God had sent. They were then baptized in that very name and through Him entered into a wholly new life by His grace. This almost incredible transformation could only have happened through the tremendous power of the Holy Spirit's anointing and making effective a human witness.

Let us look next at Philip the evangelist.[47] Philip was one of the seven men "full of the Spirit and of wisdom" (Acts 6:3), appointed by the apostles "to serve tables" (v. 2).[48] However, when persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, all the believers except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Philip therefore was among them and went to a city of Samaria where he "proclaimed to them the Christ" (Acts 8:5).

The situation was again an extraordinary one. The original commission of Jesus to be His witnesses "in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" was given only to the apostles.[49] But here was Philip, a table server, initially bringing the gospel to the very Samaria Jesus had commanded the *apostles* to evangelize! In many ways it was an even more difficult situation

than Peter had confronted in Jerusalem at Pentecost. Jews generally viewed Samaritans as half-breeds and sought altogether to avoid them, considering them to be totally outside God's promises.[50] The Samaritans were equally antagonistic against the Jews, especially those from Jerusalem.[51] Hence Philip had to reach across a wide cultural barrier to preach the gospel in Samaria. In addition, the problem was compounded because these Samaritans were devotees of the magician Simon and viewed him as the very power of Almighty God: "They all gave heed to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, 'This man is that power of God which is called Great'" (Acts 8:10). What a situation: Philip the table server from Jerusalem preaching the gospel to hostile Samaritans who were also caught up in rampant idolatry! Humanly speaking, there was utterly no chance of success. Yet "they believed Philip as he preached good news" (v. 12). Truly he was Philip *the* evangelist!

But how could it have happened in Samaria? The answer again is that Philip bore witness to Jesus—he "proclaimed to them the Christ"—and did so in the power of the Holy Spirit, for he was a man "full of the Spirit and of wisdom." Through the anointing from "on high" (Luke 24:49) the miraculous salvation of the Samaritans took place. It was indeed an effective witness.

I have spent considerable time reviewing the accounts of the proclamation of the gospel in Jerusalem and Samaria because of their timeliness for today. The barriers to the task of bearing witness to Christ in our time are hardly less than what confronted Peter in Jerusalem and Philip in Samaria. Indeed, although the outreach of the gospel has in some sense now gone "to the end of the earth" so that believers are found around the world, the task that remains is extremely difficult. The rising tide of secularism in the West, the virulence of atheistic communism in Eastern Europe and in China, and the strong surge of Muslim extremism in the Middle East—just to mention a few things—stand rigorously opposed to the proclamation of the gospel. We have many valuable missionary organizations and strategies; yet one critical factor must not be ignored: the evangelistic witness must be in the power of the Holy Spirit.[52] Hear these words: "If twentieth-century Christians could again know the Spirit that possessed the Christians in Acts, and add that to our present knowledge of organization, we could reach the world immediately."[53] This may be an overstatement—"reach the world immediately"—but the basic need is unmistakable: to "again know the Spirit that possessed the Christians in Acts."

Ultimately this is the concern of the Pentecostal/charismatic movement: to know the Holy Spirit and to move in His power in order to complete the task of worldwide evangelization. From the earliest twentieth-century beginnings,

Pentecostals were fired with tremendous zeal to carry the gospel everywhere. There was at the outset "a veritable explosion of worldwide evangelistic activity"[54] as men and women went far and wide presenting the gospel. As a result Pentecostals in less than a century have evangelized over a hundred nations and have become the major form of Christianity in many Third World countries. With the vitalization of the charismatic renewal in many historic Protestant and Roman Catholic churches, there is fresh zeal for advancing with the task. One evidence of this was the North American Congress on World Evangelization held in New Orleans in the summer of 1987. Some 35,000 Pentecostals and charismatics committed themselves to the goal of bringing the majority of the human race to Jesus Christ by the end of the century.[55] It is not that Pentecostals and charismatics are alone in their concern for world evangelization; indeed it is estimated that there are some thirty to forty world-evangelization plans in force for this last decade. However, none of these affirms as emphatically as the Pentecostals and the charismatics the need of the power of the Spirit to accomplish the task.[56]

Let us return to the New Testament and observe next how Saul of Tarsus was also given the Holy Spirit for the purpose of witness. I earlier quoted the words of the Lord to Ananias concerning Saul: "He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel" (Acts 9:15). "To carry my name" refers to witness, a witness that would indeed be far-reaching. Many years later Paul recalled Ananias' words to him: "The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear an utterance from His mouth. For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard" (Acts 22:14–15 NASB). Not only would Paul's witness be far-reaching, but it would also spring from the Lord's own revelation to Paul: "what you have seen and heard." Once more in Acts Paul recounted his conversion experience, recalling Jesus' words to him on the road to Damascus: "Arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you" (26:16 NASB). Again "witness" is used, but to what Paul would witness is even wider: "also to the things in which I will appear to you."

Unlike the witness of Peter and Philip, the witness of Paul was at first received negatively. After his conversion and filling with the Holy Spirit, "in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, 'He is the Son of God'" (Acts 9:20). Paul's witness in the power of the Spirit was so able that he "confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the

Christ" (v. 22). Hence Paul's message got through to them; however, the result was not their turning to the Lord, for after several days "the Jews plotted to kill him" (v. 23). Paul escaped, to be sure, but without having had any outward success in his witness.[57]

The point, accordingly, is that witness in the power of the Spirit does not always lead to positive results. Nonetheless, it *is* effective, even if only to arouse opposition! People do not remain the same once a powerful witness has been made. The task of the Christian therefore is to witness—regardless. Further, there is no biblical promise that the witness "to the end of the earth" will bring all people to salvation. Indeed, there will be increasing resistance to the gospel; hence, despite the power of the witness, many will not receive it. The commission, however, is to proclaim the gospel in the power of the Spirit so that all may have an opportunity to hear and believe. Then the task will be done.[58]

I will not here pursue the accounts of Peter's successful witness in Caesarea and Paul's in Ephesus but rather remark on the purpose of receiving the Holy Spirit in the several situations. The point is simply this: since the central purpose of the gift of the Holy Spirit to the disciples at Pentecost and to Saul in Damascus was unmistakably for witness, it follows that the same thing was true in the other accounts. Nothing is directly said in the instances of the Samaritans, Caesareans, and Ephesians; however, this purpose is doubtless implied.[59]

For example, when Peter and John came down from Jerusalem to minister in the Holy Spirit, it was probably so that the Samaritans could also become a part of the witnessing community. Because of the long-standing schism between Jews and Samaritans, it was fitting that the Samaritans receive further ministry directly from Jerusalem and the chief apostles there. The result was that the people not only entered into salvation through Philip's ministry, but they also became a witnessing community through the ministry of Peter and John. Since Jesus had said to His disciples, "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth," His reference to Samaria could well signify not only a people *to* whom witness is to be made but also *by* whom it is to be continued.

A principle logically follows that may now be enunciated vigorously: the Holy Spirit is a "missionary Spirit."[60] Wherever He comes upon people, they are charged with power to move beyond themselves and become a witness for Christ; they thereby become participants in the continuing outreach of the gospel to the end of the earth. Even as the Holy Spirit is a "proceeding" Spirit,[61] so those who are anointed by Him cannot possibly remain silent and confined in their faith but must "proceed" to tell the Good News everywhere.

In moving to the contemporary charismatic scene one finds a renewed emphasis on the gift of the Spirit and power for witness[62] and on the Spirit as a "missionary Spirit." Persons who have received this gift thereby become Christ's witnesses in a fresh way; often their very being and manner is so filled with God's presence and power that others are profoundly affected. Also their words and actions are laden with new potency so that there is both wisdom and incisiveness in testifying to the gospel. In some cases people may have borne witness to Christ for years with varying degrees of success, but now there is a further breakthrough that brings about deep and abiding results.[63]

The "missionary spirit" is present—as many demonstrate in their daily work or as others carry the Good News both far and wide.

B. Mighty Works

Next let us note how the gift of the Holy Spirit enables believers to perform *mighty works.* The ministry of the gospel is not only that of word but also of deed wherein mighty works in the name of Christ are also performed.

It is apparent that not only did the early apostles speak about Jesus, but they also did extraordinary things. Such deeds are first mentioned soon after Pentecost: “And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles” (Acts 2:43). Note first the multiplicity of extraordinary things (“many”); second, their description as “wonders and signs” suggests their character as miracles;[64] and third, these many wonders and signs were done “through” the apostles, the apostles being channels, not agents, of their occurrence. The whole atmosphere was charged with awe—“fear … upon every soul”—as the exalted Lord did His work through them.

Signs and wonders, I should quickly add, were done not only through the apostles but also through other disciples. On a later occasion Peter and John, after being warned to speak no more about Jesus, returned to the company of believers who then prayed for a common courage: “Grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, while thou stretchest out thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant Jesus” (Acts 4:29–30). The immediate result was that “the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness” (v. 31). Doubtless, the implication is not only that the prayer of the company for boldness of speech was answered, but also that they were all granted the ability to perform signs and wonders through the name of Jesus.

To further examine the above matter: though it is said more than once that the apostles did wonders and signs,[65] it is apparent that others such as Stephen the martyr and Philip the evangelist did likewise. “And Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people” (Acts 6:8). “And the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs which he did” (8:6). “Even Simon [the magician] himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed” (v. 13). In addition, according to Mark 16:17–18, Jesus said, “And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new

tongues; they will pick up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." Similarly, "they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it" (v. 20).[66] Signs and wonders—extraordinary, miraculous deeds—were the practice of the whole Christian community.

It is abundantly clear that the performance of mighty works—signs, wonders, and miracles—belongs with the gospel proclamation. The early Christians testified *and* performed signs and wonders. The proclamation, therefore, is powerful word *and* miraculous deed (both by the Holy Spirit), which bear witness to the gospel. The deed is the confirmation of the word, the visible assurance of the message of salvation. Although the greatest wonder is new life, a new birth wrought by the word, such is invisible. Hence when a visible sign accompanies the word, there is undeniable attestation to the actuality of what has been inwardly wrought by the message of salvation.

Thus it is a serious error indeed to relegate miracles to the past.[67] It is sad to hear among some who vigorously affirm the message of salvation and the necessity of regeneration that miracles are not to be expected any longer. If through the proclamation of the word in the power of the Spirit the miracle of rebirth can and does occur, will not that same Spirit also work other "signs and wonders"? For surely other miracles, no matter how extraordinary,[68] are less significant than the miracle of new life and salvation.

Let me say further that it makes little practical difference whether one affirms that the miracles in Acts (and elsewhere) are simply legendary accretions to the record (and thus really did not happen) or that they did happen then but no longer occur in our time. Both views deny the reality of the living God, who is always free and able *in any time* to perform His extraordinary works through men. The "Bible believer" who affirms that miracles were for then but not for now is actually farther removed from a living faith than the "liberal" who has not locked the power of God into past history. Both persons, however, need to hear these words of Jesus: "Is not this why you are wrong, that you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God?" (Mark 12:25).

Fortunately the spiritual renewal of the twentieth century has recaptured the early church's belief in and practice of mighty works. Miracles are no longer believed to be past history or merely legendary additions to the biblical witness; they belong to the life of the believing community and to the proclamation of the gospel.[69] "Expect a miracle" is a commonly heard expression. Those who expect God to perform mighty works are not disappointed.

1. Healing

The performance of mighty works, made possible by the coming of the Holy Spirit, includes a wide range of extraordinary phenomena. We shall note two of these in particular, beginning with *healing*.[70]

In the ministry of Jesus next in importance to His preaching and teaching was His ministry of healing. For example, "He went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people" (Matt. 4:23). Another text reads, "The power *[dynamis]* of the Lord was with him to heal" (Luke 5:17); and thereupon he healed a bedridden paralytic. This *dynamis* of God is precisely what Jesus promised His disciples through the gift of the Holy Spirit. And so it was—and is.

As we look again at the record in Acts, it is relevant that the first mighty work mentioned is healing. Following the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the formation of the Christian community (Acts 2), there is the account of the healing of the lame beggar at the gate of the temple (3:1–10). Peter said to the man, "I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk" (v. 6). Thus it was the combination of the power of the Spirit ("what I have") and the name of Jesus Christ that led to the miraculous healing.

What followed is quite significant. Peter addressed the assembled crowd, who were amazed at the healing of one they had seen many times begging at the gate, and told them that "the faith which is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all" (v. 16). These words then led to the proclamation of the gospel to the crowd: "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (v. 19). Later they were taken into custody by the temple authorities, who inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Peter, "filled with the Holy Spirit," replied, "Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well" (4:7–8, 10). Peter concluded with the message of salvation: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (v. 12).

What is particularly important in this narrative of miraculous healing is the way in which it became the occasion for the proclamation of the gospel. As a result "many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of men

came to about five thousand" (4:4). Thus it was similar to the Day of Pentecost, when miraculous speaking in tongues became the occasion for drawing a crowd together and the subsequent preaching of the gospel led to the salvation of some three thousand people (2:41). Miracles are shown again not only to be confirmations *of* the word (as we have seen) but also as occasions *for* the word. They set forth visibly, tangibly, and undeniably that an inexplicable power was present and at work, thereby making way for the message of salvation. Healing, therefore, as well as other miracles, is not just supplemental, it is instrumental. It can become the avenue for the proclamation of salvation in Jesus Christ.[71]

The result is that people take notice when the church, the believing community, becomes the arena of God's supernatural activity. Wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the context of "signs and wonders"—whether they precede, accompany, or follow—it is obvious that something extraordinary is going on. In Jerusalem, at the speaking in tongues "all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?'" (Acts 2:12); at the healing of the lame man "they were filled with wonder and amazement" (3:10). Such amazement, perplexity, and wonderment betokens a startling sense of supernatural presence and prepares the way for the powerful ministry of the word of God.

It is significant to recall the prayer of the community of disciples following the prohibition of the council to testify about Jesus: "And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, while thou stretchest out thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant Jesus" (Acts 4:29–30). The prayer of the disciples was that they might speak the word with the accompaniment of healing signs and wonders.

Such visible demonstration of the supernatural activity of God would confirm the message and make many come to a living faith. Whether preceding, accompanying, or following, the occurrence of miracles underscores the reality of the proclaimed word as the power of God unto salvation.

The power of God to heal continued to be manifest in the early Christian community. The sick of Jerusalem were brought in great numbers to the disciples, many hoping for at least the shadow of Peter to fall on them (Acts 5:15). Also people began to come to Jerusalem from surrounding towns and villages, "bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed" (v. 16). Likewise in the ministry of Philip at Samaria "the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs which he did. For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralyzed or

lame were healed" (8:6–7). At Lydda Peter later spoke to a man who was bedridden and paralyzed: "'Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.' And immediately he rose. And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord" (9:34–35). In the case of Paul who spent two years in Ephesus proclaiming the word, the Scripture adds, "And God did extraordinary miracles[72] by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them" (19:11–12). Paul ministered later at Malta to Publius' father, who "lay sick with fever and dysentery; and Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him healed him" (28:8). After this "the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured" (v. 9). Such incidents demonstrate over and over that the power of the Spirit brought about manifold healings.

These instances of healing suggest a number of matters to reflect on. First, there is again the close connection between the proclamation of the word and healing. In one case (in Samaria), it was hearing the gospel in conjunction with seeing healings that led to the multitude heeding what was said; in another case (in Lydda), it was the peoples' seeing the healing that was itself the direct cause of their coming to faith. Second, in another situation (in Jerusalem), healing refers to curing the sick and delivering from "unclean spirits," thus both physical ailments and spiritual bondage. Third, there is evidently no limitation to the kinds of sicknesses of which people were healed, as if perhaps healing occurred to the psychosomatic but not the organic. The sick, whatever their infirmities, were healed. This calls to mind the fact that Jesus healed "every disease and every infirmity" (Matt. 4:23). The same was true for His Spirit-filled followers, who ministered in His name. Fourth, in two of the cases (in Jerusalem and in Malta) all were healed; in another (in Samaria) many[73] who were paralyzed and lame were healed.

On this last point let us consider further the totality of healing in two of the above situations and the partiality of healing in another. A significant and exciting aspect of the coming of the Spirit is that healing is now available to all. The statement "They were all healed"—the sick, the afflicted, the tormented—is a striking testimony to what the Holy Spirit can do through one like Peter who was an open channel and a willing instrument. It remains a testimony to this day that the power of God to heal is still present wherever His Spirit abounds. Even as salvation—the forgiveness of sins—is available to all, so also is the healing of all forms of physical, mental, and emotional ailments. There needs only to be, as in New Testament times, persons filled with God's Spirit, those who not only

proclaim the gospel of new life in Christ but also minister healing in Jesus' name. Believing that God desires both salvation and health for all people, the Christian witness of our day needs to engage boldly in this total ministry. However, as we have observed, not all in Acts were healed in every situation—many, but not everyone. Why this was the case in Samaria is not specified;[74] however, the people "with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip" (8:6), and of these many were healed. Earlier they "gave heed" (vv. 10–11) to Simon, and now they "believed Philip …" (v. 12). Healing, while available for the Samaritans, was not received by all.

Recall that in most situations Jesus healed all who were present. "He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick" (Matt. 8:16); "many followed him, and he healed them all" (Matt. 12:15). Scriptures like these may be multiplied.[75] However, there were other times when Jesus did not heal everyone. On one occasion when Jesus came to His own home town, "he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them." It is clear that healing was restricted by the lack of receptivity and the unbelief of His townsfolk: "They took offense at him…. And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief' (Mark 6:3, 5–6). On still another occasion, at the sheep gate pool where "lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, paralyzed" (John 5:3), He healed only one, a man who had been ill for some thirty-eight years. An atmosphere of unbelief does not here seem to be the reason that there was only one healing (although there is little suggestion that the sick multitude were expecting very much); rather, it was Jesus' own decision to help the one on whom He took special pity.

In sum, based on the record in Acts and in the Gospels, we may say that healing, while intended or available for everyone, may not be received by all. Such factors as a lack of receptivity or unbelief may be operative on the human side; on the divine side God may sovereignly decide to heal only one or a few. Thus it is quite erroneous and misleading to claim that all will be healed in every situation.

However, to conclude this discussion of healing affirmatively, it is highly important to recognize that the power of God's Spirit does make possible the healing of every kind of disease. Thus wherever people become channels of the divine power, extraordinary healings may be expected to occur.

In the spiritual renewal of our time, healing stands out as one of the most significant features.[76] The power of God to heal, resident within the gift of the Holy Spirit,[77] is being manifested on every hand. Since Jesus performed many

healings and promised that His disciples would do even "greater works" (John 14:12) than He, and since He has sent the Spirit to carry forward His ministry, works of healing are to be expected. If they do not occur, therefore, it may be a negative sign, namely, that the gift of the Holy Spirit has not been received, or possibly that the Spirit has come, but people are failing to move out in faith and expectancy. However, the fact that healings of every kind are occurring so widely in the renewal of today[78] is one of the clearest evidences of the presence and power of the Lord in the Holy Spirit.

2. Deliverance

In the preceding paragraphs several references have been made to casting out demons or evil spirits. I earlier called attention to one case (at Jerusalem) where healing referred to both the curing of the sick and deliverance from evil spirits; however, in the other two instances (at Samaria and Ephesus) a distinction is made between healing the sick and the expulsion of demons. This distinction is also apparent in the aforementioned scripture,[79] which states that Jesus both cast out demons and healed the sick. It may also be pointed out that in Mark 16:17–18 a differentiation is made: "And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons…. They will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." Thus we may say that one of the mighty works made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit is *deliverance.*

Let us view this matter in more detail. We begin in the Book of Acts with one particular example of what casting out of evil spirits (deliverance) entails. As they went to the place of prayer in Philippi, Paul and his companions were followed daily by a slave girl who "had a spirit of divination."[80] She cried out for many days, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." Paul became increasingly annoyed and finally took action; he "turned and said to the spirit, 'I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!'" The result was that "it came out at that very moment" (16:17–18 NASB).

This account is similar to various incidents recorded in the Gospels where people with demons frequently cried out in recognition of Jesus, and they were subsequently delivered. At the beginning of Jesus' ministry a man with an "unclean spirit" exclaimed: "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." Jesus thereupon "rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!' And the

unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him" (Mark 1:24–26). This incident made a profound impression on those who observed it: "What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits" (v. 27).

It is significant that in the accounts of both Paul and Jesus, the spirit[81] in the person recognized the truth at hand ("these men … proclaim to you the way of salvation"; "you are the Holy One of God"). But occupying the human person was actually a foreign spirit, from which one needed deliverance. This foreign spirit was obviously supernatural, having instant recognition of the divine presence; in that sense it was a "spirit of divination." It was also an evil spirit, making the maiden a slave girl. The man with an "unclean spirit" was so bound that it convulsed him as it was cast out. In both instances the spirit could not withstand the person of Jesus or the name of Jesus (which Paul invoked) and immediately came out.[82]

The same spirits referred to elsewhere are frequently shown to both torment and disrupt. Hence they may be the deepest cause of physical or mental disability, even to the point of self-destruction.[83] Thus more is called for than healing, which is a matter of mending what is broken or diseased whether of body or mind. Demonic possession affects a still deeper area: it is a matter of the human spirit being taken into bondage by an alien power. Thus there is a pernicious force at work, often affecting mind and body[84] so disruptively that the only way to healing is through deliverance. Moreover, the only way deliverance from such evil can come is through the presence or name of the Holy One who has the power and authority to deliver from even the most vicious tormenting spirit.

Let me summarize a few points. First, such demonic possession comes to light in the presence of Jesus Christ. Whatever may or may not be the outward expression, the evil power that lurks deep within the human personality is aroused at the coming of the Holy One. Hence when one anointed with Christ's Spirit ministers in His name, there are occasions when this very ministry precipitates a crisis in one who is demon-possessed. Although such a person may have long turned away from truth and his inner spirit taken over by this alien spirit, now there is sudden, even startling recognition. For the dimension of perception has now become totally a spiritual one—spirit knowing Spirit—the evil spirit in the one possessed crying out in recognition of the Spirit of holiness. This may not be a verbal recognition—"I know who you are"—but usually some kind of an outcry or startled attitude betokening recognition of a divine presence. For the inward spirit of evil knows when the Holy Spirit is at hand. Momentarily

all the veils are dropped in the presence of the holy God.

Second, not only is there inward recognition but at the same time there may also be inward torment. The demonic spirit, now exposed, feels the awful impact of the Holy Spirit. No longer hidden within the human personality but exposed, it finds the divine presence almost unbearable. It seems as if the Spirit of holiness is bent on torturing the possessed person, thus eliciting some such response as mentioned earlier: "Have you come to destroy us?"[85] Of course, there is no intentional torment; it is simply that the Holy Spirit, like a hot flame of purity, burns into all that is evil.

Third, deliverance may now follow. The alien spirit that has long dominated a person is exposed; it feels the torment of the holy presence and is ready to be cast out. The evil spirit is now overcome by another spirit, the Holy Spirit, and is totally subject to the word that casts it out: "Come out of him, in the name of Jesus Christ." The departing spirit may so convulse a person that the person seems to be at death's door;[86] however, it is in truth the moment when that person experiences the marvel of deliverance into a new life.

This leads us back to the earlier point that this mighty work of deliverance continues through those who truly minister in Jesus' name[87] by the power of His Holy Spirit. During Jesus' lifetime when He was personally present with His disciples, He gave them power and authority over the evil spirits,[88] so that in His name they did exercise deliverance. Jesus Himself cast out demons by the power of the Holy Spirit,[89] and since He has completed His earthly ministry, this same power and authority devolves upon those who receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. They too are enabled to perform the mighty work of liberating people from demonic possession.[90]

It would be hard to overemphasize the value of this ministry of deliverance. For there are countless numbers of persons who desperately need such help. Their condition is not to be identified as sin (which needs forgiveness)[91] or disease (which calls for healing), but with possession, which cries out for deliverance. Their inner spirit—the inmost centers of their personhood—have been claimed by an alien force; they are so demonized that they can scarcely hear the word concerning repentance and forgiveness. Their spirits are more than dead to the things of God; they have been *taken over* by another spirit. They may or may not give outward evidence of such possession. There may be an outward semblance of serenity or, contrariwise, that of distortion and violence,[92] but the only hope is the exposure of the deep inward condition and deliverance from it. If such a condition is not recognized and properly handled, there is much resulting confusion. Even the most faithful witness concerning the things of God

or on the other hand attempts at healing (viewing such cases as emotional disorders) may leave that person still locked up in spiritual bondage and worse off than before. But when a situation bears the marks of demonic possession,[93] the only possible relief is deliverance by the power of the Holy Spirit.[94]

A further word may be added about the relationship between demonic possession and emotional disorders. Reference was just made to the misdiagnosis that can occur when possession is viewed as a treatable disorder. In such a case attempted healing, whether it be spiritual (through prayers, laying on of hands, etc.) or medical (through therapy and various other kinds of treatments), will fail because the situation is not understood *in depth.* If the situation involves possession, anything short of deliverance is inadequate and only further compounds the problem.

On the other hand, I must also emphasize that there are serious dangers in viewing what are actually emotional disorders as demonic possession. To seek to exorcise a person whose situation calls for other treatment—psychotherapy, medicine, or otherwise—can be a critical mistake and leave a person worse off than before.[95]

In all of this, there is need for much spiritual discernment, that is, discernment by the Holy Spirit, so that the one who ministers may know how to proceed.[96] If there is not clear evidence of possession, it is better to proceed along other lines or leave the situation to those better qualified to help. On the other hand, if there is evidence of demon-possession, it is imperative that deliverance be ministered to those who are enduring the inward torments of such possession.

Finally, the ministry of deliverance is especially needed in these latter days because of the increase of diabolical activity. First, apostasy in the church causes the increase in such activity. Paul writes, "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon[97] the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons" (1 Tim. 4:1 NIV). He refers here to believers who forsake the true faith and become captive to demons. Such persons may be beyond restoration; but if there is any hope of return, this will occur only through ministering deliverance.[98] Second, there is a vast increase outside the church in people participating in de-monic activities: the occult, witchcraft, even the practice of Satanism.[99] Many have gone so far that a call to faith cannot be heard; they must first be delivered from demonic possession. Third, in many places today where the gospel is preached, there is such captivity to animism and spiritism that without a ministry of deliverance there can be only limited success. Missionaries who venture forth without the power of the Holy Spirit cannot hope to deliver these captives from demonic spirits. All in all, as the time of the end

draws near and Satan “knows that his time is short” (Rev. 12:12), there will be an intensified struggle for the souls of people. Surely all who minister the gospel will need every possible resource so that (in the words of Christ to Paul) “they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in [Christ]” (Acts 26:18).

In conclusion, it is evident that deliverance from demonic spirits (like healing) is one of the attestations of the gospel of salvation. When people are delivered, it is an extraordinary sign of God’s power confirming the message of new life in Christ. Recall again the words of Mark 16: “These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons …” with the result: “the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it” (vv. 17 and 20). Hence, casting out demons is one of the signs that shows forth the Good News about Christ. For when people behold the supernatural power of God to deliver the demon-possessed, they are vividly assured that the gospel must also be the power of God unto salvation.

III. CERTIFICATION–ATTESTATION, SEALING

Third, the Holy Spirit comes for the purpose of certification. By the coming of the Holy Spirit there is testimony to God's acceptance and approval of His people.

Let us begin with Jesus Himself. We have already mentioned the descent of the Holy Spirit from heaven upon Jesus and how this power enabled Him to begin His ministry. Now we observe that following Jesus' baptism when the Spirit descended as a dove, "a voice came from heaven, 'Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased'" (Luke 3:22). The coming of the Spirit from heaven pointed to God's approval—"my beloved Son … well pleased." This was demonstrative testimony that Jesus was indeed God's Son, approved and pleasing in His sight.[100] In the Fourth Gospel are found these words about Jesus: "On him has God the Father set his seal" (6:27). The seal was undoubtedly the seal of the Father's approval given at the descent of the Holy Spirit.

We turn next to the account of the Caesareans and observe likewise that the coming of the Holy Spirit was certification of their acceptance and approval by God. When the Holy Spirit fell upon the centurion and his company, Peter himself was convinced that the Gentiles had been accepted by God, for he declared, "Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (Acts 10:47). Peter had no hesitation in proceeding to baptize these Gentiles because God had attested their salvation through the gift of the Spirit.[101] Some time later Peter rehearsed these events to the apostles and brethren in Jerusalem and described how the Holy Spirit fell on the Caesareans "just as on us at the beginning" (11:15). As a result, those in Jerusalem "glorified God, saying, 'Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life'" (v. 18). The fact that God had given the Holy Spirit to the Caesareans was certification to the apostles and brethren that the Gentiles had indeed received salvation.

But not only was the coming of the Holy Spirit certification to others of their salvation and acceptance; it was also God's witness to the Caesareans themselves. On a still later occasion Peter spoke to the apostles and elders how "God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles [at Caesarea] should hear the word of the gospel and believe" (Acts 15:7). Peter immediately

added, “And God who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us” (v. 8). God “bore witness to them” means “showed that he accepted them.”[102] It was the Gentiles’ own inner certification that they had truly heard and believed, and that God had “cleansed their hearts by faith” (v. 9)[103] They were now sons of God, attested by the Holy Spirit.[104]

To summarize the two accounts about the Caesareans: the coming of the Holy Spirit was both an external certification to others that they had indeed entered into salvation and a certification to themselves (hence internal) of their acceptance by God.

It is also likely that the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Samaritans and the Ephesians had the same dual certification. In addition to the fact that the Holy Spirit was given for enabling believers to witness to the world, His very coming at Samaria and Ephesus was also God’s own attestation both to others and themselves that they had been accepted as His children. The Samaritans, particularly because the Jews viewed them as beyond the pale of God’s concern, needed this certification. The far-distant Ephesians likewise by the gift of God’s Spirit were shown to be fully accepted into God’s family.

To move briefly to the contemporary scene: one of the striking features of the present spiritual renewal is the way in which people in many churches and denominations that have been long separated from and even antagonistic to one another have changed their attitude. For example, many Protestants who became involved in the renewal were ill-prepared to accept Roman Catholics because they (the Protestants) were not at all sure whether Catholics had experienced salvation. Then the Holy Spirit began to move among Catholics with the resulting dynamic presence of God, transcendent praise, and powerful witness to the gospel. All the Protestants could do (like the apostles and brethren in Jerusalem about the Caesareans) was to say, “Then to the Roman Catholics also God has granted repentance unto life!”

We return now to the New Testament and look further into this matter of inner certification by examining, first, some of Paul’s words to the Romans. We have earlier noted this statement of his: “You have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (8:15–16). Thus through the reception of the Holy Spirit there is an inner testimony or certification that we are now God’s children. Our very cry with great force and meaning[105] of “Abba! Father” [106] is the result of the Holy Spirit’s inner testimony.

In regard to inner certification we should also note Paul’s parallel language in Galatians: “To prove that[107] you are sons, God has sent into our hearts the Spirit

of his Son, crying 'Abba! Father!'" (Gal. 4:6 NEB). This again is not a matter of external certification or proof, but a profoundly internal one, for the Spirit cries from within the heart.[108]

This inner certification may also be described as *assurance*. The fact that we are able to cry, "Abba! Father!" makes for a deep assurance of being God's children, hence heirs of salvation. In both Romans and Galatians the witness of the Spirit is not only to our sonship but also to our being heirs. Romans 8:17 says, "… if children, then heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" and Galatians 4:7, "… if a son then an heir." The Holy Spirit whom we have received is the assurance of our inheritance.

Let us pause a moment to reflect on the significance of this certification and assurance. Paul is *not* talking about the activity of the Holy Spirit in effecting sonship (salvation), *but* in certifying (bearing witness) to it. Without the work of the Holy Spirit there is, of course, no salvation;[109] however, this is *another* action of the Holy Spirit that, presupposing salvation, demonstrates God's certification and deepens our assurance. The significance of this for the Christian life is great because of the peace and joy it brings.

We may now look more closely into assurance. There is a sense in which every believer has an assurance of being a child of God. According to Hebrews 11:1, "faith is the assurance[110] of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." However, there is also a "*full assurance*"[111] that may lie ahead. Paul speaks of the full assurance of *understanding*; for he writes the Colossians of his concern for their "attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself' (2:2 NASB). In Hebrews there is concern expressed for the full assurance of *hope:* "We desire each one of you to show the same earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end" (6:11). Later in Hebrews there is an encouraging statement about full assurance of *faith:* "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (10:22). Based on the three passages just quoted, there is the possibility of a full assurance of understanding, of hope, and of faith. This very possibility suggests that not all believers have such full assurance, but it is much to be desired and can be realized. From what has been previously said, it is apparent that the realization of this full assurance of understanding, hope, and faith is basically from and by the Holy Spirit.

In this connection it is interesting to note that the Westminster Confession of Faith (chapter XVIII, "Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation") contains a statement about "an infallible assurance of faith." It speaks first about "true believers" who may "be certainly assured that they are in a state of grace." Then

the Confession adds, This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion, grounded upon a fallible hope; but *an infallible assurance of faith*, founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made, *the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God*… . This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that *a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be partaker* of it …" (italics added).[112]

This statement adds to "full assurance" the concept of "infallible assurance." However, I believe the Confession is basically in accord with Scripture: not all believers have this assurance of faith and salvation, but it may come at a later time particularly through the inner witness or testimony of the Holy Spirit.

This full assurance means a great deal. For the individual there are many fruits —inner peace and calm, a continuing thanksgiving, and an increasing confidence in God.[113] This assurance also provides additional strength for Christian testimony, for there is nothing quite so convincing as the witness that stems out of complete certainty. Yet it is not one's own certainty but that which the Holy Spirit constantly reinforces! This is the importance of full assurance in Christian faith and practice.[114]

In the contemporary spiritual renewal one of the striking notes is the inward assurance that is again and again attested. Many people are finding through the inward action of the Holy Spirit a deeper assurance of faith than they had ever known before. It is the same Holy Spirit who brought them to salvation, but the difference is quite marked.[115] "Full assurance" seems qualitatively beyond all previous experience. "Now I *know*" is the witness of many persons.

We will next consider a number of scriptures in First John that deal with *knowledge*. The purpose of this Epistle is stated near the conclusion: "I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life" (5:13).[116] John is concerned that faith become knowledge, assurance, certainty. How does such knowledge come about? I previously noted the words of 1 John 2:20, "You have been anointed by the Holy One, and you know all things," and then commented on the relevance of this statement for the knowledge of truth.[117] At this juncture we move on to observe that this same anointing of the Spirit gives sure knowledge of our position in Christ. John focuses on abiding and declares two things: "We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us" (3:24 NASB) and "By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit" (4:13 NASB). In sum, by the gift—the anointing—of the Holy Spirit we know that

Christ abides in us and we in Him, and that (in accordance with 5:13) we have eternal life.

At issue here is not the reality itself but the knowledge of the reality. It is not, for example, that by the anointing of the Holy Spirit Christ abides in us, but that through this gift we *know* He abides in us and we in Him. It is not by the gift of the Holy Spirit that we have eternal life, but that we *know* we have it. The Spirit brings inward certainty to all such spiritual matters.

Let us look at other Scriptures that speak of this inward certification as a *pledge* or *guarantee*. Two passages in 2 Corinthians contain this. First, "He [God] has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee" (1:22). This guarantee refers back to "all the promises of God" (v. 20), doubtless including eternal life.[118] Second, "He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee" (5:5). "This very thing" refers to the life to come—"a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (v. 1). The guarantee, or pledge, of that future life is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul writes about this guarantee in a similar passage: "You … were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:13–14). By the reception of the promised gift of the Spirit there is a sealing, which results in the guarantee of the future eternal inheritance.

Again, it is important to observe that the relevant matter is not the promises of God, the life to come, or the future inheritance, but the *guarantee* of these things. It is not by the gift of the Spirit that we have eternal life, but that we have the guarantee of it. The Spirit, who is given, guarantees the full possession of what is yet to come.[119]

One further thing needs to be added. The gift of the Spirit is by no means simply an outward pledge or guarantee of the future possession; it is profoundly an inward operation. The dynamic presence and power of the Holy Spirit makes for such spiritual intensity that the future in some sense is already present. This action of God's Spirit accordingly is a vital earnest,[120] or down payment, of the future inheritance.

To return to the present scene: one of the highlights of the contemporary movement of the Holy Spirit is a strong eschatological awareness. There is, first, the sense of the presence of the future. The coming of the Spirit brings about a deepened knowledge that one has already passed from death into life and that while on the earth, one already has citizenship in heaven. This world seems less like a preparation for the next than an anticipation of what is to come. One of the common expressions is "Glory!"[121] —a word that conveys with extraordinary

effectiveness the ineffable sense of the presence of the future consummation. Second, there is a heightened sense of expectation about the coming of the Lord. On almost every hand there is the renewed cry of “Maranatha”—“Our Lord, come” (1 Cor. 16:22). The cry does not come from a sense of His absence or distance, but from a sense of His powerful presence. It is the Lord, vividly known through the Holy Spirit, hence in His spiritual reality, whom His people yearn to behold in His glorious coming. It is the intense desire in the Spirit to see the Lord face to face.[122]

EXCURSUS: SANCTIFICATION

In this chapter we have dealt with the mission of the Holy Spirit in terms of guiding into truth, granting power for ministry, and certifying faith; however, nothing has been said about sanctification. This question may be put: Since it is the *Holy* Spirit who comes, would not another, perhaps even primary purpose be sanctification? Would not His mission above all be to bring about holiness?

In answer, it is apparent from the many scriptures quoted in the previous pages related to the mission of the Spirit that nothing is said in them about sanctification. This, however, is not because the Holy Spirit has no relation to sanctification (an impossible idea!) but because His coming, His mission, is *for a different purpose.* It is an action that presupposes the Spirit's sanctifying work that occurs in salvation. Recall the words of Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, where he speaks of salvation "through sanctification by the Spirit." Hence, every believer has received this sanctification by the Holy Spirit.[123] Since the coming of the Holy Spirit presupposes salvation (as we have seen),[124] it presupposes the Spirit's fundamental and preparatory work in the operation of sanctification. Paul recalls, at one point, the words of Jesus to him about being "sanctified by faith in [Him]" (Acts 26:18).[125] This means that whenever people come to saving faith, they are essentially sanctified. Their hearts are "cleansed … by faith" (to use Peter's words in Acts 15:9), and cleansing is basically the work of the Holy Spirit.

Now we may add, it is because this sanctification has occurred that a person is prepared for the coming of the

Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes only to those whose hearts and lives have been made ready. The Holy Spirit, accordingly, is given to those already sanctified by faith, hence to believers, for the purpose of mission.

At this juncture two misunderstandings must be guarded against. First, based on what has just been said, it is a mistake to identify the coming of the Holy Spirit (baptism in the Spirit, the gift of the Spirit, etc.) with sanctification. This confuses *the soteriological work of the Holy Spirit with His missiological work.* Clearly the first must precede the second but also *must not* be identified with it. Practically speaking, this mistake readily leads to the unfortunate assumption that every believer already—in his regeneration/sanctification—has experienced

the coming of the Holy Spirit. Thus there is nothing further needed to equip him for the mission ahead. Such a view, often held in evangelical circles, effectively eliminates the entire dimension of the coming of the Holy Spirit with all that it brings about.

A second misunderstanding identifies *the coming of the Holy Spirit with "entire sanctification."*[126] This viewpoint recognizes that sanctification in salvation occurs, but that entire, or complete, sanctification is also possible through baptism in the Holy Spirit. Thus the Pentecostal experience, much to be desired, results in entire sanctification.[127] Here a double mistake occurs: first, that there is the possibility of entire sanctification in this life (this is neither biblically sound nor experientially valid) and, second, that such is to be identified with baptism in the Spirit. I might add, however, that the merit of this viewpoint is that there is the anticipation of a further work of the Holy Spirit beyond initial sanctification. Nonetheless, in addition to the double mistakes just mentioned, this viewpoint undermines (similar to some evangelical views) the great and challenging purpose in the coming of the Holy Spirit by misidentifying it with "entire sanctification."[128]

[1]*Also in John 14:17 and 15:26. See the earlier discussion of this in chapter 6, "The Holy Spirit," II.A.l.

[2]In vol. 1, chapter 3, "God," I spoke of the character of God as holiness, love, and truth. The Holy Spirit as God accordingly has the character of truth.

[3]Jesus speaks of Him as the Holy Spirit, whom the Father would send in Jesus' name (John 14:26).

[4]For the translation of the Greek word paraklëtos as "Paraclete," see chapter 7, III.A. Parakletos literally means "called to one's side."

[5]The Greek word is meth' from meta.

[6]The Greek word is par' from para. "Beside" or "alongside" may be a more accurate translation than "with."

[7]Some early manuscripts have "is" (estin) rather than "will be" (estai). The weight of evidence points to the future tense.

[8]"Recall the discussion of this in chapter 7, III.A.

[9]This uncertainty is also evidenced in what follows in John 21: the disciples' failure to recognize Jesus (v. 4); Peter's confusion in his conversation with Jesus (vv. 15-17); and Peter's question about John, a

question for which Jesus rebuked him (vv. 20-22).

[10]According to F. F. Bruce, "the question in v. 6 appears to have been the last flicker of their former burning expectation of an imminent political theocracy with themselves as its chief executives" *(The Book of the Acts*, NICNT, 38). A. T. Robertson puts it well: "Surely here is proof that the eleven apostles needed the promise of the Father [the Holy Spirit] before they began to spread the message of the Risen Christ. They still yearn for a political kingdom for Israel…. They needed the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit (John 14–16) and the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts l:4f.)" *(Word Pictures in the New Testament*, III, *Acts*, 9–10).

[11]"See Acts 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31. The only other use of the word "restore" in Acts is found in Peter's words about Christ: "He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets" (Acts 3:21 NIV). This restoration obviously will go far beyond any idea of restoring the kingdom to Israel. According to F. F. Bruce, "the apokatastasis [restoration] here appears to be identical with the palingenesia [regeneration] of Matt. 19:28" (The Book of the Acts, NICNT, 91, n. 36).

[12]Philip the evangelist was able to open up the Old Testament Scriptures to the Ethiopian eunuch: "Beginning with this scripture [Isa. 53], he told him the good news about Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:35). Paul at the very beginning of his ministry "confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ" (Acts 9:22).

[13]Recalling Jesus' words in John 14:17 supra.

[14]The Johannine passages quoted thus far are sometimes assumed to be related only to Jesus' apostles, hence guidance into all truth is applicable only to them. In a primary sense this is the case because of their close relationship to Jesus, and thus such words as "the Holy Spirit … [will] bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26). Therefore, whatever they say and teach has a foundational significance for believers after them. However, this does not mean that the words of Jesus in John 14-17 apply only to the apostles. (Would anyone think, for example, to limit Jesus' words in John 15 about His being the vine and His disciples the branches only to the apostles!) In a secondary sense they apply to all believers who receive the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

[15]"You all know" is the RSV and NASB translation (similarly NIV and NEB). The Greek manuscripts vary between oidate panta, "You know all things" and oidate pantes "You all know." However, in light of the later

statement in 1 John 2:27, “His anointing teaches you about all things” (NASB, NIV), the translation of verse 20 as “you know all (things)” seems the more likely. This also better corresponds with John 14:26 and 16:23.

[16]The Greek word is chrisma. Jesus Himself was said to have been “anointed” by the Holy Spirit: “God anointed [echrisen] Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power” (Acts 10:38; cf. Luke 4:18).

[17]Cf. John 6:69, Peter’s words to Christ: “You are the Holy One of God.” However, “the Holy One” could also mean God the Father (as in Acts 10:38, cf. n. 16). Ultimately it is God the Father through Christ; so either “God” or “Christ” may be “the Holy One.”

[18]F. F. Bruce refers to the Gospel of John, saying, “They [those addressed in 1 John] have received ‘the Spirit of truth’ (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13)” (The Epistles of John, 72).

[19]If that were the case, even John’s letter would be ruled out, for it contains much teaching! John is particularly concerned with the false teachings of “many antichrists” (v. 18) and “those who would deceive you” (v. 26). Believers anointed by the Holy Spirit do not need such teachers.

[20]This is true regardless of false teachings that may circulate. The basic point is that the Spirit’s anointing leads into all the truth.

[21]The Greek phrase is en panti, “in all things.” Observe the similarity to John’s oidate panta, “you know all things.”

[22]Recall that 1 Clement spoke of a “full outpouring of the Holy Spirit” upon the Corinthians (chap. 8, III.A. supra). Also note Paul’s own words in 1 Corinthians 2:12: “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God.”

[23]This does not mean that there can be no increase in knowledge. Indeed, quite the contrary, the New Testament also emphasizes growing “in the grace and knowledge …” (so 2 Peter 3:18). Paul prays that God might give the Ephesians “a spirit… of revelation in the knowledge of him [Christ]” (1:17). However, this further knowledge, for all its importance, is within the sphere of a knowledge already given. Since this further knowledge is an aspect of the Christian walk, I will defer discussion of it until the last chapter, “Christian Living.”

[24]John and Peter, of course, had been with Jesus through His ministry and had heard Him speak about “the Spirit of truth.” Paul at his conversion

was granted a direct, personal revelation of Christ.

[25]Literally, “speak”; the Greek word is laloumen.

[26]The latter part of the statement above reads similarly in the NEB: “We are interpreting spiritual truths to those who have the Spirit.” The Greek phrase is pneumatikois pneumatika synkrinontes. The NIV reads, “expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.” The NASB reads similarly, “combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.” The KJV has “comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” I believe that the RSV (above) and NEB better express Paul’s meaning (so likewise the NIV alternate reading: “interpreting spiritual truths to spiritual men”) in light of the verses following about “the unspiritual man” (v. 14) and “the spiritual man,” ho pneumatikos (v. 15). On this point see I Corinthians, ICC, in loco.

[27]Thayer, under πνευματικός, says “in reference to persons; one who is filled with and governed by the Spirit of God”; BAGD-“the one who possesses the Spirit … πνευματικοί (the) spirit-filled people.”

[28][28]Howard M. Ervin speaks of a “pneumatic hermeneutic.” He writes: “When one encounters the Holy Spirit in the same apostolic experience, with the same charismatic phenomenology accompanying it, one is then in a better position to come to terms with the apostolic witness in a truly existential manner…. One then stands in ‘pneumatic’ continuity with the faith community that birthed the Scriptures” (“Hermeneutics: A Pentecostal Option,” in Essays on Apostolic Themes, Paul Elbert, ed., 33). I fully agree.

[29]Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes in his book Joy Unspeakable: Power and Renewal in the Holy Spirit that “when a man is baptized with the Spirit he knows the truth as he has never known it before” (110-11). Then Lloyd-Jones asks, “Would you know the Christian truth, would you know the Christian doctrine? Would you have a firm grasp and understanding of God’s great and glorious purpose? The highway to that is the baptism with the Holy Spirit” (111). This fine book consists of sermons preached at Westminster Chapel, London, in 1964-65.

[30]I append here a word about biblical authority in light of some criticisms today that the charismatic renewal is based more on experience than on Scripture. To the contrary, I submit that people in the renewal often have a higher regard for the authority of God’s written word than many of their critics do. Because of the activity of the Holy Spirit moving so forcefully in people’s lives-the same Holy Spirit who inspired Holy

Scripture-they have found the Scriptures (as I remarked above) to take on new life and meaning. The Bible then is fully authoritative, not only as an accepted external norm but as a self-vindicating reality.

Actually, there are many critics of the renewal who, for all their talk, do not really accept the full authority of Scripture. For example, I have often observed that when some of them come to passages dealing with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit, they subtly deny the force of what is said by relegating the passages to past history and in various other ways downplay their significance. Thus by their lack of experience they settle for a limited view of the Bible's full authority and normativity.

[31]See also Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; John 1:32. The Greek verb translated above as "descended upon" is katabenai, from katabaino-"come down," "go down" (BAGD). Thus it parallels expressions previously noted: "come on" and "fall on."

[32]Recall my fuller discussion of the beginning of Jesus' ministry in chapter 7, U.C.2.

[33]Everett F. Harrison writes, "The power lay in the person of the Spirit rather than in some sort of spiritual energy He might release to them" (Acts: The Expanding Church, 39).

[34]The Greek word is endynamosanti, literally, "strengthening, empowering." Thayer on the verb endynamoo reads: "to make strong," "endue with strength," "strengthen."

[35]I have earlier spoken of the coming of the Holy Spirit largely in terms of power for ministry (chap. 7, III, "The Spirit to Come"). However, in this chapter I am giving a more comprehensive picture of the mission of the Spirit (sections I, II, and III). Nevertheless, power for ministry is central and to this I now turn.

[36]"Dynamis [power] is expressed in, proclamation on the one side … and miracles on the other" (W. Grundmann, article on δυναμις in TDNT, 2:311).

[37]Mention of "the eleven" other apostles standing with Peter signifies that through Peter as spokesman they were all bearing witness.

[38]Literally, "spoke out"; the Greek word is apephthenxato, the same verb as in Acts 2:4 used there in connection with speaking in tongues: "They … began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance [literally, 'to speak out,' apophthengesthai]." Hence, even as they spoke out in tongues to God under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so Peter

spoke out to the people under the anointing of the same Spirit. I. H. Marshall writes that Peter's message "is regarded [by Luke] as being the work of a man filled with the Spirit" (The Acts of the Apostles, TNTC, 72-73).

[39]Peter and John are described as "uneducated, common men [or 'untrained laymen' (NEB); Gr. agrammatoi … idiotai]" in Acts 4:13.

[40]"Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). This was Peter's audience, enough to overwhelm almost any speaker!

[41]Since these were Jews whom Peter addressed, they all spoke, in addition to the languages of their own countries, the same Semitic language, Aramaic. Incidentally, "dwelling in Jerusalem" probably does not mean in this context permanent residents. Devout Jews from many countries came annually to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost and dwelt temporarily there.

[42]"They [the multitude] were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language" (2:6).

[43]The "tongues as of fire" that earlier rested on the disciples probably symbolized the powerful, penetrating witness possible from then on through the Holy Spirit. Calvin writes about the tongues of fire: "The Lord doth show that their voice shall be fiery, that it may inflame the hearts of men; that the vanity of the world being burnt and consumed, it may purge and renew all things" (The Acts of the Apostles, 1:76).

[44]The three thousand who were baptized were not the whole crowd; they were "those who received his word."

[45]Recall at the time of Peter's denial of Jesus what some of the bystanders in Jerusalem said to him: "Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away" (Matt. 26:73 NIV). His accent was Galilean (Bethsaida in Galilee was his home), an accent that was often derided by Jews in Judea and Jerusalem. R. T. France comments that the Galilean accent was "a matter of some ridicule in Judaean society" (Matthew, TNTC, 83). Doubtless at Pentecost, despite the power of the Holy Spirit, the accent was still there.

[46]This, of course, had occurred over fifty days earlier at the Feast of Passover.

[47]He is called "Philip the evangelist" in Acts 21:8. This Philip is not to be confused with Philip the apostle (mentioned in Acts 1:13). Nothing is

said about the activities of Philip the apostle in the Book of Acts.

[48]These seven men are often viewed as the first deacons. “To serve tables” in the Greek is diakonein tropezáis, literally, “to deacon tables.” The purpose of this “deaconing” was to see that the widows of the Grecian Jewish believers (“the Hellenists”) were not neglected in the daily distribution of food.

[49]Note Acts 1:2 in relation to Acts 1:8. It was only after the commission given by Jesus and after His ascension that the group was enlarged (see Acts 1:14 and 15).

[50]As John 4:9 puts it, “Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.” Of course, the beauty of this passage in John’s Gospel is that Jesus was ministering to a Samaritan (and a woman at that!).

[51]This Samaritan antagonism was especially shown on one occasion when Jesus sought to enter a village of Samaria, “but the people would not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem” (Luke 9:53). In turn, the antipathy of two of Jesus’ apostles was vividly demonstrated in that their response was the question to Jesus, “Lord, do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume them?” (v. 54). There was no love lost between Samaritans and Jews.

[52]John Wimber in his book Power Evangelism, after speaking of the increase of workers in domestic and foreign missions over the past fifteen years, adds, “Most evangelism practiced in the West lacks the power seen in New Testament evangelism” (38-39). Wimber holds that “programmatic evangelism” practiced by many evangelical bodies needs the reinforcement of “power evangelism” if we are to accomplish the job (see especially chap. 3, entitled “Power Evangelism”).

[53]The words of C. E. Autry (Evangelism in Acts, 80).

[54]Words of L. Grant McClung, Jr., ed., Azusa Street and Beyond, 3. McClung also writes, “Early Pentecostal missionaries were a breed of men and women unlike any before them. They carried a burden for lost souls and were marked by the sacrificial self-giving of their predecessors. But they were also the recipients of a new move of God in their time. They saw their Pentecostal baptism with its resulting supernatural signs as evidence that the last days had come upon them and that God’s hour of reaping was at hand” (p. 32, italics added).

[55]Sponsored by the North American Renewal Service Committee, the Congress was chaired by Vinson Synan. Looking back on the Congress, Synan wrote, “The body of Christ is about to arise and lead an

evangelistic charge in the last decade of this century which will surpass any similar period in the history of the Church" (AD 2000, 1.6 [1987]: 5.

[56]A Southern Baptist missions researcher, speaking to a gathering of charismatic leaders in May 1987, said, "If the Great Commission is to be completed by A.D. 2000, you Charismatics must play a principal role. As I travel the world, I see Charismatics everywhere. You have a ready-made network of people with faith and vision, who operate in the supernatural. You are the missing link to completing all the A.D. 2000 plans" (italics added). These are the words of Rev. Jimmy Maloney as reported by Howard Foltz, "Moving Toward a Charismatic Theology of Missions," Probing Pentecostalism, the report of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, 17th Annual Meeting, 1987, CBN University, 73.

[57]In this, Paul was not unlike his Master. Shortly after Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit, He returned to His own synagogue in Nazareth and there declared, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me …" (Luke 4:18). At first the hearers "all spoke well of him" (v. 22) (as possibly the Jews first did of Paul), but soon they were seeking to put Jesus to death: to "throw him down headlong" (v. 29) from a cliff.

[58]Cf. the words of Matthew 24:14: "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come" (NASB).

[59]According to R. R. Williams, "throughout Acts, the Holy Spirit is thought of as the means whereby Christians receive power to witness to Christ and His resurrection" (The Acts of the Apostles, 36).

[60]For a forceful presentation of this theme see Roland Allen, The Ministry of the Spirit, especially chapter 1, Section II, "The Spirit Revealed as the Inspirer of Missionary Work." Also note Michael Green, I Believe in the Holy Spirit, chapter 5, "The Spirit in Mission."

[61]Recall the earlier discussion in chapter 8, II.B., regarding Jesus' reference in the Fourth Gospel to the Holy Spirit as He "who proceeds from the Father." This eternal procession becomes temporal in the gift of the Holy Spirit, and He continues to proceed from the lives of those to whom He is given.

[62]See, for example, the chapter entitled "Power to Witness" in As the Spirit Leads Us by Kevin and Dorothy Ranaghan. Here two spiritually renewed Roman Catholics describe how "it seems to be universally true that those who have come into this experience [i.e., baptism in the Holy Spirit] are taught not so much by one another but by the direct power of God, that

every tongue (including theirs) is meant to proclaim that Jesus is Lord…. 4We cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard' " (103). Thus there is power for witness they never knew before.

[63]Dwight L. Moody, a nineteenth-century evangelist, after many years of preaching, related how two women would say to him regularly, "You need the power of the Holy Spirit." Moody reflected thereafter: "I need the power! Why, I thought I had power [because] I had the largest congregation in Chicago and there were many conversions. I was in a sense satisfied." Soon though, the two godly women were praying with Moody, and "they poured out their hearts in prayer that I might receive the filling of the Holy Spirit. There came a great hunger into my soul…. I began to cry out as I never did before. I really felt that I did not want to live if I could not have this power for service." Some time later Moody related this: "One day, in the city of New York-oh, what a day!-I cannot describe it, I seldom refer to it; it is almost too sacred an experience to name. Paul had an experience of which he never spoke for fourteen years. I can only say that God revealed Himself to me, and I had such an experience of His love that I had to ask Him to stay His hand. I went to preaching again. The sermons were not different; I did not present any new truths, and yet hundreds were converted. I would not now be placed back before that blessed experience if you should give me all the world" (W. R. Moody, The Life of D. L. Moody, 146-47, 149). Moody had witnessed to the gospel for many years and with some obvious effectiveness, but after being filled with the Spirit, there came an anointing he had never before experienced. Moody, while of course not a participant in the current spiritual renewal, is surely a precursor of those who likewise in our time are being filled with the Spirit and thereby finding a fresh power for witness.

I add here a word about Reuben A. Torrey, Moody's successor, and the first head of Moody Bible Institute (opening in 1899). Even more strongly than Moody he stressed the need to be filled, or baptized, with the Holy Spirit. For example, he wrote in his book The Baptism with the Holy Spirit (c. 1895 and 1897): "If a man has experienced the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit he is a saved man, but he is not fitted for service until in addition to this he has received the baptism with the Holy Spirit…. Any man who is in Christian work who has not received the baptism with the Holy Spirit ought to stop his work right where he is and not go on with it until he has been 'clothed with power from on high' " (pp. 17 and 31).

Neither Moody nor Torrey stood in the Holiness tradition with its stress on "entire sanctification." They both viewed baptism with the Holy Spirit as following upon regeneration and as empowerment for ministry. Torrey especially has had significant influence on the charismatic renewal.

[64]For a fuller discussion see vol. 1, chapter 7, "Miracles," III. Some of the things said in that section will be touched on here.

[65]In addition to Acts 2:43, supra, see 5:12: "Now many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles"; 14:3 regarding Paul and Barnabas: "So they remained for a long time [at Iconium], speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands"; 15:12: "Barnabas and Paul … related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles." Compare also Romans 15:18-19 where Paul says, "For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit." Paul also says, "The signs of a true apostle [literally, "truly the signs of the apostle"-ta men semeia tou apostolou] were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works [or 'powerful deeds'-dynamesin]" (2 Cor. 12:12). This latter statement, incidentally, while again affirming that through Paul miracles took place, does not speak of them as solely apostolic certifications (hence, limited to apostles). The "signs of a true apostle," which Paul does not describe in this text, were performed with "all patience"; such "signs" (even certifications) were accompanied by "signs and wonders and mighty works."

[66]It is true that many ancient manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark do not include verses 9- 20 in chapter 16. However, even if these verses are a later addition, the very fact that signs are ascribed to believers in general-"those who believed"-shows an early recognition that miracles are not limited to apostles or to deacons such as Stephen and Philip. (On Mark 16:17 see also my previous chapter, n. 29.)

[67]See vol. 1, chapter 7, Epilogue: "On the Cessation of Miracles."

[68]Even the raising of the physically dead (to which reference is made several times in the Scriptures) is less a "wonder" than the raising of the spiritually dead by the proclamation of the Good News. For the raising of the physically dead in Acts, see the accounts of Peter's raising of Tabitha

(9:36-42) and Paul's restoring Eutychus to life (20:9-12).

[69]E.g., see *Nine O'Clock in the Morning* by Dennis Bennett, chapter 6, "More to the Package." Shortly after Bennett's baptism in the Spirit, he found miracles of many kinds beginning to happen. At the fellowship meeting he said, "Sometimes nearly everyone in the room had some kind of a report to give: not what God did years ago, or even last year, but what He did last week, yesterday, today!" (47). A further beautiful statement by Dorothy Ranaghan in *As the Spirit Leads Us* might be added: "The victorious life of Christ becomes known in the now. Healing, discernment, miracles, prophecy—all these signs, manifestations or demonstrations of the Spirit cry out to men as they did in the New Testament times: 'Jesus is alive! Jesus works wonders! Jesus is the Lord!'" (14).

[70]I will discuss healing also in chapter 14, "The Ninefold Manifestation." However, the focus there will be on healing gifts within the Christian community.

[71]A vivid illustration of this is cited in the book by J. Herbert Kane, *Understanding Christian Missions*, about the preaching of French evangelist Jacques Girard in an Ivory Coast soccer stadium: "Morning and evening for six weeks thirty to thirty-five thousand people crowded into the stadium. During the first part of the crusade the evangelist emphasized the power of Christ to heal. Hundreds were healed, including some high government officials and their relatives…. During the second part of the crusade Mr. Girard emphasized the power of Christ to save. Having already witnessed the healing of the body, the people responded in droves" (424). Howard Foltz declares that "resistant groups, held in the clutches of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and animism can only be liberated by the signs and wonders that confirm the true preaching of the word" ("Mobilization Necessary for World Evangelization, "AD *2000*, 1.5 [1987]: 1). The proclamation of the gospel when *shown to work miracles* can break through the most resistant of forces and thus bring about salvation.

[72]Literally, "powers not the ordinary"; the Greek is dynameis te ou tas tychousas." Dynameis ("powers") is often best translated "miracles."

[73]"Many" can mean multiplicity rather than some out of all. However, it is apparent that in the Samaritan situation "many" refers to a large number but not all. In regard to the statement "unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed," the Greek reads literally, "many of the ones having

unclean spirits… .” According to EGT, in loco, “πολλοὶ with the genitive, τῶν ἐχόντων (not πολλοὶ ἔχοντες), shows that not all the possessed were healed.” The same follows for the paralyzed and lame.

[74]Before Philip healed the sick, “unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed” (v. 7). In verse 9 the activities of Simon the magician are mentioned. The bondage of sorcery and occultism no doubt prevented complete deliverance and healing among the Samaritans.

[75]E.g., Matthew 14:14; Luke 4:40; 6:19 (“… power came forth from him and healed them all”).

[76]Since the beginning of the Pentecostal movement in the early twentieth century, healing has been viewed as a constituent part of the gospel message. Charles Parham wrote in 1902 (the year after Agnes Ozman’s experience; see chap. 8, n. 57): “The healing of the sick is as much a part of the gospel as telling them of Heaven…. This is the great salvation that so many thousands are neglecting today, a salvation that heals the body as well as the soul” (The Sermons of Charles F. Parham, 46). Aimee Semple McPherson, Pentecostal founder of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (1927), summarized her basic “foursquare” message thus: “Jesus saves us according to John 3:16. He baptizes us with the Holy Spirit according to Acts 2:4. He heals our bodies according to James 5:14-15. And Jesus is coming again to receive us unto Himself according to 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17” (The Foursquare Gospel, 9). Stanley M. Horton, a contemporary theologian in the Assemblies of God (the largest Pentecostal denomination), similarly speaks of “four fundamental teachings-salvation, healing, the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and the second coming of Christ” (Into All Truth, 13). This is the “full gospel” (an expression common in Pentecostal circles), and healing is definitely a part of it. Independent Pentecostal evangelists such as Kathryn Kuhlman (see, e.g., her I Believe in Miracles) and Oral Roberts (see, e.g., his book The Call: An Autobiography) have in recent years focused on the ministry of healing. Contemporary leaders with international ministries of healing include charismatic Catholic Francis MacNutt (see his Healing and The Power to Heal) and Vineyard Christian Fellowship pastor John Wimber (see his Power Healing).

The emphasis on healing among Pentecostals and charismatics has its origins in the late nineteenth century. Healing was especially stressed in the Holiness movement, and this emphasis was carried over into the Pentecostal revival. (For a helpful study see Donald W. Dayton,

Theological Roots of Pentecostalism, chap. 5, “The Rise of the Divine Healing Movement,” especially 122-37.) However, the Holiness movement laid its main emphasis on holiness, or sanctification, as the basic source for healing; the Pentecostals (most of them from a Holiness background) came to stress the immediate source as the power of the Holy Spirit.

[77]Within the Pentecostal tradition there is occasional reference to healing as basically resident within the Atonement. Parham early affirmed this: “Healing is as certainly purchased in the atonement of Jesus Christ as salvation” (Sermons, 48). The Assemblies of God “Statement of Fundamental Truths” declares: “Deliverance from sickness is provided in the atonement, and is the privilege of all believers (Isa. 53.4-5; Matt. 8.16-17).” The Declaration of Faith of the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) states: “Divine healing is provided for all in the atonement.” Other examples could be given. It is significant to note that this viewpoint (as with the Holiness) also goes back to the nineteenth century, with such advocates as A. J. Gordon, Baptist founder of Gordon College and Seminary, and A. B. Simpson, Presbyterian founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. See Gordon’s The Ministry of Healing (1882) and Simpson’s The Gospel of Healing (1885). E.g., in Simpson’s book there is this statement: “If sickness be the result of the Fall, it must be included in the Atonement of Christ” (rev. ed. 1915, p. 34). Pentecostals, despite official statements as quoted, seldom stress this viewpoint because their stronger emphasis is on healing through God’s special providence and the ministry of Christ in the Holy Spirit. (For my critique of healing in the Atonement see vol. 1, chapter 14, n. 36).

[78]For a description of the occurrence of such healings in many places see John Wimber, Power Evangelism, “Appendix B, Signs and Wonders in the Twentieth Century.”

[79]Matthew 8:16. See above.

[80]Literally, “a spirit of a python” or a “python spirit” {pneuma pythona). “Python” was the name of the Pythian serpent or dragon who was said to guard the Delphic oracle. Thus “a spirit of divination” has nothing to do with the Holy Spirit but stems from evil.

[81]The terms vary: “spirit,” “unclean spirits” “evil spirit,” “demon,” and “spirit of an unclean demon” (Luke 4:33). A person with such a spirit is frequently described as “demon- possessed” (Mark 1:32 NASB), or as a “demoniac” (Mark 5:15). The Greek verb daimonizomai literally means

"demonized," that is to say, "under the power of a demon."

[82]We should note that there was no protracted struggle with the spirit in either case. It came out immediately when commanded by Jesus Himself or by Paul in the name of Jesus. There is no example of a lengthy deliverance session in the New Testament.

[83]For example, there is the case of the Gerasene demoniac who could not be bound with chains; he constantly committed acts of self-violence: "Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out, and bruising himself with stones" (Mark 5:5). Incidentally, though the "unclean spirit" gave his name to Jesus: "My name is Legion; for we are many" (v. 9), Jesus had already commanded, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" (v. 8). The important thing was to address the spirit, not the man, directly and command it to come out. Moreover, Jesus did not cast out one spirit after another, though they were "Legion … many." One command was sufficient for all.

[84]There are several instances in Jesus' ministry when such bodily infirmities as blindness (Matt. 12:22), deafness (Mark 9:25), and dumbness (Matt. 9:32; 12:22; Mark 9:25) were cured when the demon-possessed person was delivered. In one case the evil spirit was addressed by Jesus thus: "You dumb and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again" (Mark 9:25). The spirit had caused violent seizures and convulsions (vv. 18, 20); so the problem in origin was deeper than deafness and dumbness. Clearly the physical disabilities were of demonic origin.

[85]Mark 1:24. See the comparable words of the Gerasene demoniac to Jesus in Mark 5:7: "I adjure you by God, do not torment me."

[86]In the deliverance recorded in Mark 9, after Jesus commanded, "Come out of him, and never enter him again," the text continues: "And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse; so that most of them said, 4He is dead.' " However, "Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose" (vv. 25- 27).

[87]The name of Jesus, however, is not some magical power that may be conjured up by anyone to bring about a deliverance. The later account in Acts 19:13-16 of the "itinerant Jewish exorcists" who "undertook to pronounce the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits" is a vivid case in point. They tried to do this by saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." The evil spirit, unaffected, answered, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" Rather than being exorcised,

"the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, mastered all of them, and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded." Conjuring up Jesus' name is ineffective, even dangerous, if not done by one who is truly ministering in Jesus' name.

[88]E.g., Luke 9:1-2: "And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority [dynamin kai exousian] over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal." (Note, incidentally, the threefold ministry of preaching, delivering, and healing.) But it was not just the Twelve who had such authority, for later Jesus sent out an additional seventy who "returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!' " (Luke 10:17). It is important therefore to recognize that such authority in Jesus' day was not limited to the circles of apostles, nor is it limited to any particular "official" persons since that time. Recall Mark 16:17: "And these signs will accompany those who believe [hence, all believers]: in my name they will cast out demons… ." Incidentally, there is no special gift of deliverance; thus to say, as people sometimes do, that such and such a person has a "deliverance ministry" is in error. Truly there is the special gift of "discerning of spirits" (1 Cor. 12:10 KJV), but all believers are able in the name of Jesus through the power of His Spirit to cast out demons.

[89]On one occasion Jesus said, "If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28). This was not a conditional "if" but a factual one. Even as Jesus healed by the power of God (recall Luke 5:17 supra), so likewise He cast out demons by the same spiritual power.

[90]The importance of prayer should also be noted. Just after the deliverance of the violent demon described in Mark 9, Jesus' disciples asked, "Why could we not cast it out?" Jesus replied, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer" (vv. 28-29). Shortly before Jesus had performed this exorcism, He had been in prayer on the mountain (vv. 2-4; also see Luke 9:28-36). Coming from the extended time of prayer, Jesus delivered this terrifyingly possessed man. To conclude, although the power of the Spirit is basic, much prayer is also needed for God to perform such a mighty work.

[91]Of course, the condition of every person outside of Christ is one of sin and guilt; thus forgiveness is always needed. The point here, however, is that a person may be so inwardly dominated by evil that unless this is

broken he was in no condition to hear the word of forgiveness (and reconciliation). It is by Christ that both occur: deliverance from the domination of Satan and forgiveness of sins. The commission that the risen Christ gave to Paul was that he go to Jew and Gentile alike. Jesus said, “I send you to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:18). Turning from the power of Satan to God, therefore, may be essential background for receiving forgiveness of sins.

[92]For example, compare the slave girl, who exhibited no obvious disturbance, with the Gerasene demoniac, who was patently in a condition of continual misery.

[93]From what has been said, the most evident marks are the sensitivity of a possessed person to the presence of holiness and at the same time a feeling of being tormented by that presence.

[94]See, for example, Michael Harper’s Spiritual Warfare, Don Basham’s Deliver Us From Evil, and Deliverance From Evil Spirits by Michael Scanlan and Randall J. Cirner. There has been extremism in certain sectors of the present renewal, with mass deliverance sessions held for Christians and non-Christians alike and with an exaggerated view that almost every vice is demonic and therefore needs deliverance. (For an effective counterbalance, see The Dilemma: Deliverance or Discipline? by W. Robert McAlister.) However, the importance, even urgency, of deliverance in many situations has come to be acutely recognized and is being responded to.

[95]In line with the previous footnote, it is a critical mistake also to seek to exorcise the sins of a believer. For the true believer, i.e., one in whose spirit the Holy Spirit dwells, the inner problem is not demonic possession but “the desires of the flesh.” Paul writes that “the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit … these are opposed to each other” (Gal. 5:17). Hence what is called for is *not* casting out (deliverance, exorcism) but crucifixion (mortification, putting to death). For example, the first of “the desires of the flesh” that Paul mentions is (sexual) immorality (v. 20). It would be a serious mistake to seek to cast out a supposed “demon of immorality,” since the situation calls rather for internal crucifixion by the power of the Spirit. Paul makes this clear in Colossians 3:5, saying, “Put to death [“mortify” KJV] therefore what is earthly in you: immorality… .” (Recall chap. 4, “Sanctification.”) Immorality is to be put to death; it

cannot be cast out. Indeed, let it be emphasized: You cannot cast out the flesh. Such an attempt (calling the sin "a demon" and then seeking to exorcise it) may even be a cop-out from the arduous and often extended task involved in crucifixion. (Incidentally, the other side of the coin is also true: One cannot crucify a demon; it can only be cast out.)

An additional word about the believer: it is important to add that though he cannot be internally possessed by a demon, he nonetheless will be externally attacked again and again by the devil. The first thing that happened to Jesus after being filled with the Holy Spirit was His temptation by the devil: "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil" (Luke 4:1-2). Such assaults did not end there, for "when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him [Jesus] until an opportune time" (v. 13). If Satan thus attacked Jesus, how much more is this the case for a believer "full of the Holy Spirit." However, we have the assurance in 1 John 4:4 (NASB): "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." How much we may thank God for this!

[96]Paul's response at Philippi to the slave girl's words, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation," is a good illustration of spiritual discernment. Outwardly such words might have seemed to be a confession of faith that would have pleased Paul; however, he recognized in them a "spirit of divination" that was not of God but evil. Rather than being deluded by her words or even proclaiming to her the word of salvation, Paul cast out the demonic spirit. Later that day Paul, along with Silas, was thrown into jail and after that told the Philippian jailer the good news of salvation, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). Paul did not in this case cast out an evil spirit, for he discerned there was none present. Rather, he led the jailer directly to faith in Christ. Thus through spiritual discernment Paul acted differently in the two situations. For a further discussion of spiritual discernment see chapter 14, "The Ninefold Manifestation."

[97]Literally, "apostasize from"; the Greek word is apostësontai and is also translated "fall away from" (NASB), "depart from" (KJV, RSV), and "desert from" (NEB).

[98]A believer, as was said earlier, cannot be demon-possessed; however, if he departs from the faith, the Holy Spirit may also depart from him. Then an evil spirit can take over.

[99]Michael Green writes in his book I Believe in Satan's Downfall: "Satan worship, fascination with the occult, black and white magic, astrology and horoscopes, seances and tarot cards have become the rage…. Despite our professed sophistication, there is today in the West a greater interest in the practice than for three centuries" (9, italics added).

[100]N. Geldenhuys writes, "This opening of the heaven, the descent of the Holy Ghost in a visible shape, and the voice from heaven, were to Jesus the final assurance from God that He was indeed the Son and the anointed Messiah, and that God wholly approved of His assumption of the work of redemption" (The Gospel of Luke, NICNT, 147).

[101]As previously noted, the immediate evidence was the Caesareans' speaking in tongues and praising God, but, of course, this pointed back to the reason for these phenomena: they had received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[102]The NIV translation.

[103]This suggests that the receipt of the earlier gift of the Holy Spirit promised at Pentecost likewise served as certification of salvation. J. H. E. Hull asks rhetorically, "When Peter told his congregation on the day of Pentecost that the gift of the Spirit could be theirs, did he not mean … that the receipt of the Spirit would, amongst other things, be proof of their salvation?" (The Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles, 165-66).

[104]Obviously there is a great difference between the approval given to Jesus, who needed no salvation, and the Gentiles who had received it. However, the Gentiles had been accepted through faith in Jesus and by this faith had become sons of God. Hence, it was as if God were saying to them because of their salvation through Christ: "You are my beloved sons; with you I am well pleased."

[105]The word for "cry," krazo, means to "cry out loudly." In Romans 8:15 krazomen ("we cry") "denotes the loud, irrepressible cry with which the consciousness of sonship breaks from the Christian heart" (EGT, in loco). Incidentally, it is possible that Paul is referring indirectly to glossolalic utterance in Romans 8:15 (see chap. 9, n. 50). "They … began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4) is quite similar to Paul's words "When we cry 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness" (RSV). They (we) do the speaking, but it is the Spirit who gives the utterance (bears witness). Speaking with tongues and crying, "Abba! Father!" both signify a tremendous outbreak from deep within; both are cries that come from the activity of the Holy Spirit

who has been given; both are addressed not to men but to God (recall 1 Cor. 14:2).

[106]The biblical expression is “abba ho patër.” Abba is an Aramaic word that expresses an intimate family relationship of child to father; pater is the customary Greek term for father. Hence “abba” particularly displays this new relationship as God’s child and through the Holy Spirit the cry breaks out with great power and heightened meaning. “Abba!” may, accordingly, be a borderline term between ordinary, yet intimate, speech and the transcendent speech of tongues. In that case Paul could be referring indirectly to glossolalia through the word “Abba” (see previous footnote). I will again interject a personal note. My first experience of speaking in tongues came at the very moment, when in the midst of God’s visitation, I was saying “Ab-ba.” Hardly had the second syllable been pronounced when I began speaking a new language! Truly the Father was being praised in language transcending even “Abba! Father!” Thereafter it has become a pattern of prayer to move from the transcendent language of the Spirit to the common language but with a heightened sense of God’s intimate presence.

[107]The NEB translation of hoti. This translation, I believe, is preferable to “because” (in RSV, KJV, NIV, and NASB). Paul is speaking demonstratively-“to demonstrate that,” as “proof of that,” rather than causally. The Cambridge Greek Testament, in loco, reads, “oti is demonstrative ‘But as a proof that,’ rather than strictly causal.”

[108]It is noteworthy that Romans 8:15-16 says that “we” cry out, whereas in Galatians 4:6 it is “the Spirit of his Son.” Both, of course, are true: it is the one outcry in which we verbalize the speech and the Spirit provides the content.

[109]As I have described in prior chapters, especially “Calling,” “Regeneration,” and “Sanctification.”

[110]The Greek word is hypostasis. The KJV and NEB translate it “substance.”

[111]The Greek word is *plerophoria* and is used in the three cases that follow.

[112]Sections I-III.

[113]The Westminster Confession speaks of “the proper fruits of this assurance” namely, that the “heart may be in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience …” (Sect. IV).

[114]Lest there be some confusion, let me add that I am not talking about "eternal security" (see chap. 5, "Perseverance") in the above paragraphs. Even the Westminster Confession, which does affirm eternal security (see the previous chap. XVII in the Confession entitled "Of the Perseverance of the Saints"), does not, as we noted, hold to a view of infallible assurance for all true believers. Whether one affirms or disaffirms eternal security, there is still the need for, and possibility of, "full assurance."

[115]In my first book related to the charismatic renewal, The Era of the Spirit, I wrote: "How different it is now! There is an assurance wrought by the Holy Spirit laden with surprising meaning and vitality … the fact is that the reality of grace and salvation has been fully confirmed by the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit. It is even possible to sing such a hymn as 'Blessed Assurance'-and to do so from the heart!" (p. 46).

[116]This may be compared with the Gospel of John where another purpose is likewise stated near the end: "These [things] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (20:31). The purpose of the Gospel is that people may have faith and salvation; the purpose of the Epistle, written to those who have already experienced such, is that they may have knowledge and assurance.

[117]See section I.

[118]Philip E. Hughes speaks of this as "the authentic guarantee of the full inheritance of the glory yet to be revealed" (The Second Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 43).

[119]According to Johannes Behm in TDNT (article on ἀρραβών), "the Spirit whom God has given them is for Christians the guarantee of their full future possession of salvation" (1:475).

[120]The word arrabon ("pledge" or "guarantee") can also be translated "earnest" with the meaning found in the expression "earnest money."

[121]Peter speaks about being "a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed" (1 Peter 5:1).

[122]Emil Brunner, writing about the church, says it well: "The more powerfully life in the Spirit of God is present in it, the more urgent is its expectation of the Coming of Jesus Christ; so that the fullness of the possession of the Spirit and the urgency of expectation are always found together as they were in the primitive community" (The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith, and the Consummation: Dogmatics 3:400)

(italics added).

[123]See chapter 4, “Sanctification,” for a fuller discussion of this subject. The sanctification referred to above is initial sanctification. There is also continuing, or progressive, sanctification.

[124]Recall chapter 8, “Concluding Remarks,” no. 3.

[125]See also Acts 20:32. These are the only direct references to sanctification in the Book of Acts; both relate to salvation. Obviously neither of these references occurs in connection with earlier passages about the coming of the Holy Spirit.

[126]See chapter 4 “Sanctification,” U.C., especially n. 37.

[127]In the Holiness movement of the late nineteenth century there was the frequent identification of “entire sanctification” with baptism in the Holy Spirit or Pentecost. For example, just one year prior to the Pentecostal outpouring in 1901, Charles J. Fowler, the president of the National Association for the Promotion of Holiness, wrote that he meant “by Pentecost what the New Testament means by it-what Methodism has always meant by it-we mean that work of grace one needs after his regeneration, and may have, and what is known in theology as ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION” (quoted by Donald W. Dayton in Theological Roots of Pentecostalism, 92). Incidentally, though John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, did teach “entire sanctification,” he never identified this with the Pentecostal baptism in the Spirit. The Holiness movement, growing out of Methodism, widely made this identification (see further, Vinson Synan, The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement, 63).

[128]In the next chapter, “The Reception of the Holy Spirit,” I will make reference to the view of complete sanctification held by some Pentecostal bodies. However, as will be noted, this sanctification is not identified with baptism in the Holy Spirit.

11
The Reception of the Holy Spirit

Let us now consider the reception of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given, but a gift must be received. Here our concern will be with the basis of this reception, the matter of outward means, and the context in which the Holy Spirit is given and received. We will discuss these in turn.

I. THE BASIS: FAITH

The Holy Spirit comes to those who believe in Jesus Christ. From all that has been said about the Holy Spirit's being the Spirit of the exalted Lord, whose central purpose is to bear witness to Him, it is apparent that the gift of the Spirit is available only to those who believe in Him. Faith in Christ is the sole basis for the reception of the Holy Spirit.

A. The Essentiality of Faith

Thus we begin by emphasizing the *essentiality* of faith in Jesus Christ. This faith is personally oriented. It is directed to Him as the One who lived, died, and rose again from the dead. Through a person's believing in Him forgiveness of sins becomes a glorious reality, and the way is prepared for the reception of the Holy Spirit. In the words of Peter on the Day of Pentecost: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you …" (Acts 2:38–39). The promise of the Spirit is to those who have come to faith in Jesus Christ, and it is by that same faith that the Holy Spirit is received.[1]

In all the Acts narratives related to the coming of the Holy Spirit, faith in Christ is shown to be essential. Those who believe in Him receive the Holy Spirit. This is demonstrated most clearly in the accounts of the Caesareans, Samaritans, and Ephesians. Let us observe each.

Peter proclaimed Jesus Christ and His life, death, and resurrection to the Caesareans—the Roman centurion and his household—and climaxed his message with these words: "To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43). Then follows this statement: "While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word" (v. 44). It was to those who believed in Christ, who "heard the word," setting forth Christ and calling for faith in Him, that the Holy Spirit was given.

Philip at Samaria "proclaimed to them the Christ" (Acts 8:5). As a result, the Samaritans came to faith and were baptized. "When they believed Philip as he preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (v. 12). Later Peter and John came down from Jerusalem and ministered to them the Holy Spirit (vv. 14–17). Again, the Holy Spirit came to those who believed in Jesus Christ.

Paul proclaimed Christ to the Ephesians before they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. He reminded them that "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus" (Acts 19:4). "On hearing this" the Ephesians "were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (v. 5).

Later Paul laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit (v. 6). Once again, to those who believed in Christ the Holy Spirit came.

We may also call to mind two relevant passages in Paul's epistles. In Galatians 3 Paul asks, "Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?" (v. 2). Since the implied answer is the latter, this further reinforces the point of the essentiality of faith. In Ephesians 1 Paul writes, "In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" (v. 13). Hearing and believing, similar to "hearing with faith," is the basis for receiving the Holy Spirit.

It is apparent from both Acts and the Epistles that the Holy Spirit was received by those who believed in Christ. It was not a belief directed to the Holy Spirit[2] but to Jesus Christ, and in that same faith[3] the Holy Spirit was given.

B. The Dynamics of Faith

We now consider the dynamics of that faith in Christ wherein the Holy Spirit is received. At the outset it is important to recognize that faith is a dynamic, moving reality. Although its object, Jesus Christ, is the fixed focal point, faith may well be in process. It is not a static, once-for-all thing but may develop or increase under the impact of Jesus Christ. Indeed, all who believe are called on to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18); thus faith may be strengthened.[4]

This does not mean that the first moment of faith lacks genuineness or significance. Quite the contrary, for initial faith directed to Jesus is the moment of realizing the marvel of forgiveness of sins and new life in His name. Hence, entrance on the way of faith is far more important than anything that may happen afterward. This cannot be overemphasized.

Now we may proceed to speak of faith in movement, faith in process. This may be a matter of a deepening of faith through further repentance and commitment wherein God's resources of grace are all the more experienced. This may also lead to a point of spiritual breakthrough into fuller Christian life and witness.

Such an understanding of the dynamics of faith is essential to a proper consideration of the reception of the Holy Spirit. *There is a certain moment in faith, whether at the outset or somewhere along the way, when the Holy Spirit may be received.* This moment may or may not coincide with the moment of receiving forgiveness of sins. It may happen shortly after, or days, months, even years later. Whatever the case, faith in Jesus Christ is and remains the essential matter whenever the Holy Spirit is given.

Before going further, let us turn again to the record in the Book of Acts, for there is delineated in a vivid way the gift of the Holy Spirit in relation to faith.

Let us first reflect on the experience of Jesus' disciples. The coming of the Spirit to them on the Day of Pentecost was not at the commencement of their faith in Jesus. Some one hundred and twenty of them are described as "brethren" (note the language of Acts 1:15–16), brethren of one another through a relationship with Jesus Christ. It is they who awaited the promised gift of the Spirit. Of the one hundred and twenty, many had been with Jesus since the beginning of His ministry, the apostles as well as others, and had passed through a variety of experiences. There was the original call to discipleship, months and

years of fellowship with Jesus, then a forsaking of Him at the time of His crucifixion and death, and after that a turning again ("conversion")[5] to Jesus in His risen presence. At that time according to the Fourth Gospel, the Holy Spirit was breathed into them (John 20:22). Some fifty days later at Pentecost (Acts 2:1 ff.) the Holy Spirit was poured out. Thus there was a period of some three or more years from the disciples' initial encounter with Jesus to the day of the coming of the Spirit.

How long had the first disciples been believers? This is not an easy question to answer. In one sense they had been believers for some time. They had long before given up everything to follow Jesus and had done mighty works in His name, including healing and the casting out of demons. Seventy of them were told by Jesus, "Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). This statement of Jesus suggests that their faith already was of eternal significance. According to John's Gospel, Jesus told His disciples shortly before His death, "You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you" (John 15:3). This also suggests that Jesus' presence and word had awakened such a response in the disciples that they had truly been made clean. Yet when Jesus spoke about His coming resurrection, there seemed to be little faith; it was only His risen presence that made their faith return. Their belief then took on a deeper and more living quality, and this kind of faith began with the Resurrection.[6]

Thus we may say that when the Pentecostal event occurred, it was to many who had long known Jesus. Despite numerous ups and downs, their faith had continued to grow. However we may evaluate the quality of their faith, it is an obvious fact that the gift of the Spirit occurred to those who were already believers. Indeed, Peter's later question to the apostles and brethren in Jerusalem concerning the gift of the Holy Spirit given to the Caesareans clearly implies this: "If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us believing[7] in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" (Acts 11:17). On the way of faith, believing, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The experience of the first disciples points in the direction of what has been happening among many people in our day: the gift of the Spirit is being received by those who for some time have been walking the way of faith. Many who have long known Jesus and come to faith in Him are now receiving the Holy Spirit in fullness.[8] Thus in a striking manner this early Christian experience is recurring.[9]

As we survey various other narratives that refer to the reception of the Spirit, it is apparent that there are other parallels to the experience of receiving the Holy Spirit along the way of faith. In the first post-Pentecost account of the Holy

Spirit being given—namely, to the Samaritans—this occurred some days after they first came to faith in Christ. We have already noted how Philip proclaimed the gospel and many believed. However, despite their newfound faith, they had not yet received the Holy Spirit. Several days later (at least four or five[10]) the apostles Peter and John came down from Jerusalem and "prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit…. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:15, 17). So it was along the way of faith that the Samaritans experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The Samaritan story likewise has numerous parallels with the contemporary scene. Many, after coming to faith in Jesus Christ, have later had hands laid on them and have experienced the fullness of the Holy Spirit. As with the Samaritans, earnest prayer has often been the immediate background. Frequently, too, one person has been the evangelist (like Philip) to bring people to a commitment to Christ, and others have been used by the Lord in ministering the Holy Spirit.[11] Thus the two experiences have occurred over a period of time —from initial faith to the reception of the Holy Spirit.

We turn next to the account of Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9:1–19. There was likewise a delay of several days (in this case, three) between the time Saul first encountered Jesus and the moment he was filled with the Holy Spirit. As the narrative discloses, a voice from heaven said, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (v. 4). Saul thereupon inquired, "Who are you, Lord?" and the voice replied, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (v. 5). After this encounter and the beginning of faith,[12] Saul fasted and prayed for three days in Damascus, after which Ananias came to him, and, "laying his hands on him, he said, 'Brother Saul,[13] the Lord Jesus … has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit'" (v. 17). Thus there was a period of time, though shorter than that of the Samaritans, between the inception of faith and the reception of the Holy Spirit.

What is important to recognize is that for the Samaritans and Saul there were two critical moments in their experience, although there is some diversity in details,[14] and that it was the second moment in which they received the Holy Spirit. This sequence of events is not unlike that experienced by many today who have "believed" (Samaritans), have called Jesus "Lord" (Saul), but who do not receive the fullness of the Spirit until later. Also, various persons may perform different functions in relation to the total experience. There may be someone who is especially the channel for initial faith (such as Philip, or the Lord Jesus Himself) and another—or others—becomes the channel for the reception of the Spirit (such as Peter and John, or Ananias). There is much diversity in the way

these moments on the way of faith occur.[15]

One further illustration of the reception of the Spirit occurring along the way of faith is that of the Ephesians in Acts 19:1–7. Paul encountered "some disciples" (v. 1) in Ephesus. He then asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit, believing?" (v. 2).[16] After the Ephesians expressed their ignorance concerning the Holy Spirit, Paul led them step-by-step from "John's baptism," which they had experienced, into a faith in Christ accompanied by water baptism: "On hearing this [the word about Christ], they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (v. 5). The final step followed: "And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied" (v. 6). Here is a sequence of events, or moments, in which persons moved from a very limited faith to specific faith affirmed in water baptism, then to laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Spirit. The temporal span between the first two may have covered many years; the span between the second and third was quite brief. However viewed, there is a process of faith involved, a series of nonidentical events, with once again this basic fact: the gift of the Holy Spirit did not occur at the moment of initial faith.[17]

In regard to the events of Ephesus, it might be instructive to turn now to Ephesians 1:13, where the apostle is quite possibly rehearsing in similar language the event of their reception of the Holy Spirit:[18] "In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believing[19] in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit." Unmistakably the Spirit promised is the same as that in Acts 2:39: "The promise is to you and to your children …" and the same received by the Ephesians in Acts 19:6. Further, the word "seal," while not used in Acts, is contained in the idea of consecration, dedication, and empowering[20] that operates all through the book. Accordingly, Acts 19 and Ephesians 1 seem to be parallel accounts, and—the point of particular relevance here—each portrays a reception of the Spirit after faith has begun. The Ephesians in both accounts received the promised Holy Spirit on the way of faith.

On the contemporary scene there are numerous parallels to the Ephesian narrative in Acts 19. Many persons today have long lived in a situation of quite limited faith. Their faith may have had a little more focus on Jesus than that of the Ephesians (maybe not); there may have been a little more knowledge about the Holy Spirit (maybe not), and they may have been viewed as disciples, or Christians, in some sense. But it was all rather nebulous. Many, in looking back, freely recognize how limited and inadequate their earlier faith had been. Then, much like Paul with the Ephesians, someone (or perhaps more than one) came

along and led them into a faith focused clearly on Jesus, perhaps also into water baptism, and then through additional ministry into the reception of the Holy Spirit.[21] Now that we have noted a number of accounts in Acts that depict the gift of the Spirit as occurring along the way of faith, another stands out particularly, because it describes the Holy Spirit's being given at the moment of initial faith. I make reference to the account of the Gentiles at Caesarea (Acts 10; 11:1—18). The apostle Peter came to the house of the God-fearing centurion Cornelius and preached the good news of Jesus Christ, that "every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." And "while Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word" (10:43–44). The Spirit was given coincidentally with (cf. "while") the preaching of faith in Jesus Christ. The first moment of faith in Christ was also the very moment they received the Holy Spirit.

The parallel to contemporary experience is unmistakable. Many persons attest that there was no separation whatever in time between their initial faith in Jesus Christ and their reception of the Holy Spirit. Unlike others whose basic Christian experience occurred over a period of time, they simply came into it all at once.[22] This does not mean there has not been growth and development since that first moment, for there has been, but the basis for all to occur later took place at the beginning.

In reflecting on what has been said, one thing may be vigorously affirmed: it is impossible to press the operation of the Holy Spirit into a mold; accordingly, it is the same with the shaping of basic Christian experience. Moreover, contemporary Christians can testify to the variety of ways the Holy Spirit has been given, clearly echoing the witness of the church in its early formation. So it is that we find in the biblical record ample original testimony to what is again occurring in our time.[23]

II. OUTWARD MEANS

We turn now to a consideration of the reception of the Holy Spirit in relation to water baptism and the laying on of hands. Our concern at this point is the connection between these outward rites and the bestowal of the Spirit. How essential—or dispensable—are they? Is one or the other more closely associated with the gift of the Spirit?

It hardly needs saying that this has been an area of significant differences in the history of the church. This is evidenced by the fact, first, that both water baptism and the laying on (or imposition) of hands have been viewed as channels for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Some traditions have held the position that water baptism is sufficient: it is the means whereby the Holy Spirit is given. Accordingly, there is no need for the laying on of hands. Others have held that the laying on of hands is the critical matter; without it water baptism is incomplete, and there is no gift of the Holy Spirit. How are we to adjudicate between such critical differences?

That this is no small matter seems undeniable. If the gift of the Holy Spirit is what we have been describing—a veritable outpouring of God's presence and power—and if this gift is vitally related to an outward rite, then the identity of that rite and its proper execution are critical questions. If, on the other hand, there is no vital connection between the gift of the Holy Spirit and an outward rite, this ought also to be clarified so that we are not burdened by unnecessary concerns. That there needs to be serious reflection in this area is apparent; we can scarcely afford to be uncertain or confused in so important a matter.

Once again we look to the Book of Acts as the basic historical narrative that depicts the coming of the Holy Spirit and now consider its relationship to water baptism and the laying on of hands. There will be some reference also to the Gospels and the Epistles; however, as has been the case in previous chapters, Acts must be primary because it is the only New Testament book that shows the interrelationship between the gift of the Spirit, the occurrence of water baptism, and the laying on of hands.

A. Water Baptism

Let us begin with the relation of water baptism to the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are concerned, of course, with water baptism as a Christian rite and only incidentally with "the baptism of John" (which is transitional in Acts to Christian baptism).[24] How does the rite of Christian baptism relate to the gift of the Spirit? By way of reply, I will set forth a number of declaratory statements and seek to demonstrate these in the five basic narratives that describe the reception of the Holy Spirit.

Before proceeding further, we find that water baptism, wherever described in Acts, is performed in the name of Jesus only. There are four passages that mention His name in relation to baptism: Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; and 19:5 with the slight variation between "the name of Jesus Christ" (2:38 and 10:48) and "the name of the Lord Jesus" (8:16 and 19:5).[25] What is important is that water baptism is done in the name of Jesus[26] (not the variation in the name) and how this Christian baptism relates to the gift of the Holy Spirit.

1. Water Baptism[27] May Precede the Gift of the Holy Spirit

We begin by observing that Peter, following his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, asserted, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Water baptism is obviously depicted as preceding the gift of the Spirit. It is not altogether clear from these words, however, whether a logical or a chronological priority is envisioned. Peter's words "and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" could mean either that the gift of the Spirit follows logically and therefore immediately upon water baptism, or that it may happen at some future time. Shortly after Peter's sermon, "those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls" (v. 41). Nothing is directly said about their receiving the Holy Spirit; however, that such followed water baptism seems evident in light of the ensuing account (vv. 42–47).[28]

Let us turn next to the Samaritan account, in which water baptism is definitely shown to precede the gift of the Spirit. In this instance it is clear that there was

an intervening period of several days. The Samaritans “were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12). Later Peter and John “came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (vv. 15–16). So prayer was offered and the laying on of hands was administered, with the result that the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit. Hence, there was an unmistakable separation in time between water baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit.

This passage is quite important in demonstrating that the reception of the Holy Spirit is not bound to the moment of water baptism. The Samaritans clearly did not receive the Holy Spirit when they were baptized, thus leaving open the possibility that this could happen in other instances.[29]

That there may be such a delay is found in the experience of large numbers in the contemporary movement of the Spirit. There is abundant testimony to a reception of the Holy Spirit that frequently takes place later than baptism in water; rather than an exception, it is evident that this quite often occurs.[30] The Samaritan happening is a continuing reality.

One other account in Acts likewise specifically shows water baptism preceding the gift of the Holy Spirit, namely, the account of Paul and the Ephesian Christians. We have noted that the Ephesians had earlier been baptized “into John’s baptism,” but they had not received Christian baptism. After Paul’s presentation of the gospel, the Ephesians “were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them” (Acts 19:5–6). Unlike the situation in Samaria, there was not a delay of several days between the Ephesians’ Christian baptism and their receiving the Holy Spirit. Still there was some chronological separation, however brief, between the rite of water baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit. Once again, as in the case of Peter’s message to the Jerusalem multitude with baptism following and as in the case of the Samaritans, the administration of baptism preceded the gift of the Holy Spirit.[31]

2. Water Baptism May Follow the Gift of the Holy Spirit

This may seem surprising in light of the aforementioned incidents and especially in view of Peter’s words at Pentecost, which show an order of repentance, baptism in the name of Christ, and the reception of the Holy Spirit. However, it is apparent that the previous instances were by no means definitive, nor are Peter’s words a prescription of the way things must always happen. We

will observe this in two other accounts.

The first is the narrative of Peter's ministry at Caesarea. As we have seen earlier, while Peter was still delivering his message, the Holy Spirit suddenly fell on the centurion and those gathered together with him (Acts 10:44). Obviously no water baptism of any kind had occurred. However, it was not disregarded, for shortly after that Peter declared, "Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" Acting on his own declaration, Peter "commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (vv. 47–48). Thus water baptism in this case unmistakably followed the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The other incident concerns Ananias' ministry to Saul of Tarsus. Ananias laid hands on Saul that he might be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17). The next verse reads, "And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized." Hence subsequent to Saul's receiving the Holy Spirit he was baptized in water by Ananias.

What has been described about water baptism following the gift of the Holy Spirit is not unusual in our time. Many persons who have come to a living faith in Christ and received the Holy Spirit have afterward been baptized in water.[32] Often this stems from an intense desire to "go all the way with Christ," to participate corporally in His death and resurrection, to be wholly united to Him. Moreover, such baptism is seldom viewed as optional. Christ instituted it,[33] and Peter commanded it; thus it belongs to Christian initiation and discipleship. So when command is added to desire, if such persons have not been baptized in water before, it is quite likely to follow.[34]

We may properly raise a question about the one hundred twenty who were filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. What about their water baptism? This is not an easy question to answer. Though doubtless many[35] (like the later Ephesians) had/participated in John's baptism, it is obvious they had not been baptized in Jesus' name before the event of Pentecost. Hence, the one hundred twenty appear to fall into the same category as Saul of Tarsus and the Caesareans, who without Christian baptism, received the Holy Spirit. Unlike the narratives of Saul and the Caesareans, however, that of the one hundred twenty does not specify that after they had been filled with the Spirit they were baptized in the name of the Christ. Quite possibly they were so baptized along with the three thousand later that day, but there is no clear-cut statement to that effect. It may have been, on the other hand, that because of their unique position as original disciples, who existentially were participants in Christ's death and resurrection (living through Good Friday and Easter) and recipients of His life-

bestowing forgiveness, they needed no further tangible rite. For in a certain sense, even more intensely than others after them, they had been baptized into Jesus' reality. In any event, whether or not the original one hundred twenty later received water baptism in Jesus' name, they were similar to Saul of Tarsus and the Caesareans in that they received the Holy Spirit prior to any possible Christian water baptism.

3. Water Baptism Is Neither a Precondition nor a Channel for the Gift of the Holy Spirit

It is surely clear by now that water baptism is not a precondition. The very fact that Saul of Tarsus and the Caesareans received the Holy Spirit before they were water baptized rules out the idea of any precondition. Hence Peter's words "Repent, and be baptized … and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" cannot be viewed as a rule that water baptism must occur before the reception of the Spirit. His statement, while pointing to what may have been the usual pattern, did not establish water baptism as a precondition. Furthermore, if Peter's words were the rule, the rule had just been broken in his case! For as one of the one hundred twenty he had received the Holy Spirit with no prior water baptism in Jesus' name.

Many people in the spiritual renewal of our day bear testimony to receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit without a prior Christian baptism. This is especially the case for those who, like the Caesareans, received the Holy Spirit at the very inception of faith. Everything happened so quickly and powerfully that there was no opportunity for any ritual action! The one precondition (as we have earlier noted) for receiving the Holy Spirit is faith. Baptism, for all its importance, cannot function as a precondition or prerequisite for the reception of the Holy Spirit.[36]

Next we observe that neither is water baptism a channel for the gift of the Holy Spirit. None of the narratives in Acts represent the Holy Spirit as being given through water baptism. Though there may have been a close approximation of water baptism to the gift of the Spirit, there is no suggestion that such baptism is the medium or channel. Even less is water baptism portrayed as conferring the gift of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes from the exalted Lord who Himself confers the gift and surely does not relegate such to a rite conducted by man.

Accordingly, there is no essential connection between water baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit. It might be supposed, however, that, although water baptism is not a precondition for the gift of the Holy Spirit, whenever such baptism occurs, it is the outward form for the occurrence of the inward spiritual reality. From such a perspective it is not that water baptism conveys or confers the gift of the Spirit but that the two are related—the outward to the inward. Thus water baptism and the gift of the Spirit, or Spirit baptism, make one united whole. According to this view, wherever there is water baptism, there is also Spirit baptism: the visible action and the spiritual grace are essentially one.[37] However, in answer I must emphasize strongly that there is *no essential connection* between water baptism and Spirit baptism,[38] no relation of one to the other as outward to inward. The reason is that they deal with two closely related but nonetheless different spiritual realities. Water baptism is for a purpose other than the reception of the Holy Spirit, and unless that is clearly seen there will be continuing confusion.[39] We now turn to this matter.

4. Water Baptism Is Connected With the Forgiveness of Sins

Here we arrive at the important point that water baptism is related primarily to the forgiveness of sins. To use the language of Peter at Pentecost: it is "for" the forgiveness of sins. "Repent, and be baptized … in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." The climactic spiritual reality Peter attests to is the gift of the Spirit, but there is also the reality of forgiveness of sins, which is first mentioned. It is with this spiritual reality that water baptism is directly connected.

What then is the connection? We turn again to the statement of Peter in Acts 2:38 that baptism in Jesus' name is "for the forgiveness of your sins." The Greek word *eis*, here translated "for," could suggest "for the purpose of," "in order to obtain," thus a requirement for forgiveness to be received. However, *eis* may also be translated "concerning," "with respect to," "with reference to," "with regard to,"[40] and thus designates baptism as related to forgiveness but not necessarily for the purpose of obtaining it. Either translation is possible, although the latter seems most likely because there is no suggestion elsewhere in Acts that water baptism of itself obtains forgiveness. The point then of Acts 2:38 is not to specify water baptism as a requirement for forgiveness of sins; because forgiveness of sins comes by faith, not by baptism. But when baptism does occur, it is specifically related to that forgiveness.

What then is the nature of the relationship? I would answer that while water baptism does not of itself obtain forgiveness—hence is not required for that purpose—it does serve as a *means.* Forgiveness comes from faith in the exalted Lord; thus it is He who grants forgiveness; it can be obtained in no other way. Nonetheless, the ordinary channel or means for this forgiveness to be received is water baptism. This doubtless was the case for the three thousand who responded affirmatively to Peter's message: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you for the forgiveness of your sins." Baptism for each one of them was a visible, tangible expression of faith and repentance, an outward cleansing through which forgiveness was mediated. Thus water baptism was the means of receiving the grace of forgiveness and new life.

It would be a mistake, however, to view this as baptismal regeneration in the sense that the water itself, or the act of baptism, brought about forgiveness and new birth. On a later occasion Peter said, "God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31). Although Peter again referred to repentance and forgiveness here, no mention was made of water baptism but only of the exalted Lord who gives repentance, forgiveness, and therefore new birth. Hence, when (as in Acts 2:38) water baptism is specified, it is obvious that such a rite does not, and cannot, bring about forgiveness and regeneration. But—and this is important—whenever water baptism is administered in the context of genuine faith and repentance, it does serve as the medium for forgiveness to be received.

A second answer to the relationship of water baptism to forgiveness is that it serves as a *sign* and *seal.* On the one hand, water baptism is a vivid portrayal of the cleansing that forgiveness brings about and thus signifies becoming a new creation. It is a public demonstration of the totality of the divine forgiveness[41] and the complete cleansing and renewal that Christ accomplishes. Such baptism, since it is in Christ's name, testifies that in and with Him there is death and burial of the self and resurrection into newness of life.[42] Forgiveness is the remission of sins, and remission is nothing less than a total release from the past and the beginning of the wholly new. Water baptism thus is peculiarly the sign of the forgiveness of sins.

On the other hand, water baptism functions as a seal of faith and forgiveness. It is a tangible impression and certification of the reality of the remission of sins. In the waters of baptism there is "brought home" to a person the wonder of God's total cleansing: the spiritual reality of complete forgiveness being mediated and confirmed in the totality of the baptismal experience. In the combination of the divine gift and the corporal action the two are sealed: what is

received in faith is confirmed in the waters of baptism. One who is so baptized in faith is a marked person—cleansed, forgiven, made new in Jesus Christ.[43]

Now we return to our original point, namely, that water baptism is directly connected with the forgiveness of sins. The specific nature of that relationship (which we have just been discussing) is less important for our concern than the fact of the connection. The reason for emphasizing this point is that frequently this connection is not seen and water baptism is mistakenly viewed as directly related to the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is quite important to define this matter, or there will be continuing confusion in a vital area.

Before leaving the subject of water baptism, it is important to add that baptism, though not directly connected with the gift of the Holy Spirit, is still related. For where there is faith and forgiveness mediated through water baptism, the Holy Spirit is undoubtedly at work. It is the Holy Spirit who empowers the word of witness, convicts of sin, and thus brings about repentance. By the Holy Spirit is the origin of faith that leads to the forgiveness of sins and baptism in the name of Christ. All of this is apparent, for example, in Acts 2:22–38 where the outpoured Spirit is the agent in each of these matters. Thus the Holy Spirit is very much involved in the entire process of salvation. Since this process may include water baptism, it is the Holy Spirit who gives spiritual significance to the act of baptism; otherwise it is nothing but an empty rite. It is clear then that water baptism is closely connected with the activity of the Holy Spirit.

However—and here is the critical matter—this just-described activity of the Holy Spirit is by no means the gift of the Holy Spirit. The gift ordinarily follows upon forgiveness and baptism, like a promise attached to it: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him” (Acts 2:38–39). The gift does not have to do with forgiveness, but with what is promised to those who repent and are baptized for forgiveness.[44] It is a promise to all whom God calls to Himself (such calling implemented through the working of the Holy Spirit) that they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Another matter that calls for some discussion relates to the difference in formulas for water baptism as set forth in Matthew 28:19 and in the Book of Acts. We earlier observed that water baptism is invariably depicted in Acts as being in the name of Jesus only, but we did not actually deal with the fact that in Matthew the formula is a triune one:[45] “Go therefore and make disciples of all

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”

Although there is no simple solution to the difference, a few comments relevant to our concerns may be made. First, the longer Matthean statement suggests that water baptism represents entrance into[46] a new relationship to God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Second, the shorter Lukan formula (in Acts) specifies that at the heart of this relationship is the forgiveness of sins that comes in the name of Jesus Christ (the Son). Third, since Jesus is “the fullness of the Godhead,”[47] baptism in His name only (as in Acts) is actually in relation to the fullness of the divine reality: it is also, by implication, in the name of the Father and Holy Spirit. Thus there is no essential difference between the Matthean and Lukan formulas: the former highlights the fullness of the relationship into which one enters at baptism, the latter specifies the purpose of the baptism.[48]

I would also suggest that the reference to the Holy Spirit in Matthew’s baptismal formula—“in the name … of the Holy Spirit”—emphasizes that Christian initiation is also entrance into the sphere of the Holy Spirit’s reality and activity. At the heart of such initiation is the forgiveness of sins (to which baptism in the name of Jesus, or the Son, points), but at the same time it is the beginning of a new relationship to the Holy Spirit (to which baptism in the name of the Holy Spirit points).[49] By this is meant not only that the Holy Spirit is active in bringing about forgiveness, as we have noted, but that henceforward life is to be lived in the sphere of the dynamism of the Holy Spirit.[50]

B. The Laying on of Hands

Let us now consider the relationship between the laying on of hands and the gift of the Holy Spirit. We will again be reflecting primarily on the five basic passages in Acts. What part does the laying on (or imposition) of hands play in the reception of the Holy Spirit?[51]

1. The Holy Spirit May Be Given Without the Laying on of Hands

In two of five cases, namely those regarding the gift of the Spirit in Jerusalem and at the centurion's household in Caesarea, there was no laying on of hands.

Concerning the Jerusalem narrative two observations may be made: First, it is obvious that there could have been no laying on of hands on the one hundred twenty. As the first disciples they had to receive the Holy Spirit before ministering to anyone else. Second, although the three thousand later that day were baptized, there is no reference to the laying on of hands. Peter said, "Repent, and be baptized … and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38); but there was no mention of imposition of hands for this gift to be received. Indeed, it is quite probable that Peter, having just experienced the bestowal of the Spirit as a sovereign, unmediated action by the exalted Lord, expected all to receive the gift the same way the one hundred twenty had. Whatever his expectation, it seems that the three thousand also received the Holy Spirit without the laying on of hands.

In the Caesarean situation things happened so fast—"While Peter was still saying this [i.e., still preaching his message], the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word" (Acts 10:44)—that there was no time to lay on hands if anybody had been so minded! Incidentally, Peter might have expected this time to lay hands on the new believers because of the intervening incident when he and John had placed hands on the Samaritans for the reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14–17). However, as in Jerusalem, God sovereignly moved and poured out His Holy Spirit on all who heard.

What we have been describing is by no means an uncommon occurrence in the contemporary spiritual renewal. The Holy Spirit is frequently received with no human mediation of any kind. This may happen at the end of a period of time, as at Jerusalem, or with the suddenness of a Caesarea, but in neither case has

there been the imposition of hands. This extraordinary, unmediated event is for many a source of continuing amazement and wonder.[52]

It is apparent from the biblical record and contemporary experience that the laying on of hands is not essential for the Holy Spirit to be received. Moreover, there is no suggestion in Acts that following such a reception hands were later placed on believers as a kind of confirmation of what has already happened. Any idea of hands as being necessary or confirmatory is ruled out by the evidence.

These things are most important to emphasize in relation to church traditions that variously seek to canalize the gift of the Holy Spirit. There are those who hold that the Holy Spirit may be received *only* through the laying on of hands;[53] thus without personal ministry the Holy Spirit may not be given. Over against such a binding of the Holy Spirit to an outward action we need to stress the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit to move as He wills.

2. The Holy Spirit May Be Given With the Laying on of Hands

Returning to the Acts record, we observe that in three of the five accounts of the Holy Spirit's being received, this occurred in connection with the laying on of hands. Peter and John, ministering to the Samaritans, "laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit"[54] (Acts 8:17). At Damascus, Ananias, "laying his hands on him he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit'" (9:17). And Paul when he "had laid his hands upon them [the Ephesians], the Holy Spirit came on them …" (19:6). There is obviously a close connection between the laying on of hands and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

It is apparent once again that water baptism is not placed in an immediate conjunction with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Water baptism, as earlier mentioned, is related to forgiveness of sins, whereas the laying on of hands is connected with the gift of the Holy Spirit. The symbolism is unmistakable: water baptism vividly portrays the cleansing from sin in forgiveness; the laying on of hands, the external bestowal of the Spirit. Each of the outward acts is congruent with the spiritual reality to be received.

Looking more closely in the Acts narrative at this conjunction of the Holy Spirit and the imposition of hands, we observe that the Holy Spirit may be given *through* the laying on of hands. Thus it is not only a temporal conjunction, so that the gift of the Holy Spirit coincides with, or follows immediately upon, the

laying on of hands. It is also an instrumental conjunction; that is, the imposition of hands may serve as the channel or means for the gift of the Spirit. Following the words quoted above about the Samaritans, the text reads, “Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands …” (Acts 8:18).[55] The word “through” *(dia)* specifies the instrumentality of hands in the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit. The laying on of hands is thus the means of grace whereby the Holy Spirit may be received.

The laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Spirit has continued variously in the history of the church. The practice belongs particularly to the Western tradition of Christianity,[56] but with diverse understanding of what is conveyed in the gift. Sometimes it is assumed that through the laying on of hands there is the completing or perfecting of what was given earlier in water baptism;[57] or again, it is held that water baptism needs no completion or perfection, so that what happens through the imposition of hands is rather a confirming or strengthening of the person for the Christian walk.[58] However, there is seldom in the traditional churches any expectation that through the laying on of hands an extraordinary spiritual event will take place, namely, the veritable outpouring of God’s presence and power.

Here again is where the contemporary spiritual renewal is recapturing the biblical witness. Through the laying on of hands, people are receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, not in the sense of completion or strengthening (though the gift may include elements of both), but in the sense of a divine visitation so overwhelming as to release extraordinary praise and channels of powerful ministry. There is the exciting expectation that when hands are laid on a person, the Holy Spirit Himself will be received.[59]

Here two points need emphasis: First, as we have already observed, there is no necessity for hands to be laid on persons for them to receive the Holy Spirit. The exalted Lord may dispense with ordinary means and sovereignly pour forth the Holy Spirit. Second, although the Holy Spirit may also be given through the laying on of hands, it would be a mistake to assume that this happens invariably, i.e., by virtue of the objective action.[60] We have earlier commented that faith (believing) is the essential element in the reception of the Holy Spirit; thus in all the biblical incidents of the laying on of hands it is on believers that hands are laid. For only those who believe in Jesus Christ may receive from Him the blessed gift of the Holy Spirit.

What then is the importance of the laying on of hands? If, on the one side, there is no necessity, and if, on the other, there is no guarantee, why not dispense with it? The answer seems clear: The laying on of hands is a divinely instituted

means of *enabling* persons to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Hands signify contact, community, sharing—a human channel for the divine gift; the laying on of hands represents, as seen earlier, the coming of the Holy Spirit upon someone.[61] Although a person may receive the gift of the Holy Spirit without human mediation, the imposition of hands may greatly facilitate this reception.[62]

3. The Laying on of Hands for the Gift of the Holy Spirit Is Not Limited to the Apostles As we have noted, the apostles Peter and John did minister the Spirit to the Samaritans and the apostle Paul did the same for the Ephesians. However, it was a Christian brother, Ananias, with no claim to apostolic authority,[63] who was the minister of the Holy Spirit to Saul of Tarsus. Thus it would be a mistake to interpret the words of Acts 8:18 "… the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' [Peter and John's] hands …" as the only way it could happen. Since Ananias, a lay brother, could minister the Holy Spirit to Saul, there is no inherent reason why Philip, the deacon-evangelist, could not have done the same for the Samaritans.[64]

Although little is said about Ananias in his ministry to Saul, a few things stand out. First, he was a man of faith and prayer. "The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' And he said, "Here I am, Lord'" (Acts 9:10). Second, he was a man of obedience, for although he hesitated at the command of Christ to "rise and go" (9:11) because of Saul's evil reputation, he nonetheless went. Third, Ananias, as later described by Paul, was "a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all …" (22:12). Hence he was a man of strong character and perhaps peculiarly prepared through his devotion to the law to minister to Saul the Pharisee. Such a combination of factors thus made Ananias an effective minister of the Holy Spirit, particularly suited to exercise the role of ministering to Saul's need.

It seems apparent that the basic qualification for the laying on of hands is not apostolic office but other more important matters. And so it continues into our own day and generation. Countless numbers of people are receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit through the ministry of laypeople. To be sure, many "official" clergy are likewise ministering the Holy Spirit with great effectiveness.[65] However, what really counts is not office (not even "apostolic succession") but attributes such as faithfulness, prayer, readiness, obedience, devoutness, and boldness. The ministering of the Spirit, which includes the laying on of hands, is happening through many such Christian people everywhere. Indeed, this ministry belongs to the whole people of God.

APPENDIX: HEBREWS 6:1–2

Related to the discussion about water baptism and the laying on of hands is an additional Scripture, Hebrews 6:1–2, which reads: "Let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms,[66] the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment" (NIV). Here the text speaks of six "elementary" areas, at the center of which are baptisms and the laying on of hands.

The first two of these, repentance and faith, are obviously the most basic because it is by repentance and faith that one comes to salvation. The last two are climactic—the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. In between are instruction about baptisms and the laying on of hands. Let us examine these two, especially their connection with the foundations of repentance and faith.

"Instructions about baptisms" could refer to (1) the difference between various Jewish lustrations and Christian baptism, (2) the difference between John's baptism and Christian baptism,[67] or (3) the difference between baptism in water and baptism in the Spirit. The laying on of hands very likely refers to the impartation of the gift of the Spirit through the imposition of hands.[68] If (2) above is the best understanding,[69] it is quite interesting that the sequence of faith in Christ (which includes repentance), baptisms (both John's and Christian), and the laying on of hands is the same as that in Acts 19:1–6.[70] Faith and repentance are followed by baptisms, but these are not the only rites; there is also the laying on of hands for the reception of the Spirit. This clearly implies both salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit.[71]

In regard to these "elementary teachings" in Hebrews, we should note that the word "instruction" precedes baptisms and the laying on of hands (this is not the case in relation to repentance and faith). Is it too much to suggest that this is the area where instruction is particularly needed in our time? Of repentance and faith much is said, especially in evangelical ranks, but what of baptisms (in the plural)[72] and the laying on of hands?

What was so elementary to the writer of Hebrews and presumably to his readers, that he could say at the outset, "Let us leave the elementary teachings

about Christ and go on to maturity," calls for serious reflection today. We must, almost as school children, go back to the ABCs and relearn some very elementary things. By no means are we ready to "go on to maturity" if we have not mastered and put into practice the rudimentary matters. "Repentance" and "faith" perhaps we understand (the first grade level), but "baptisms" and "hands" (second grade, shall we say) many of us have hardly mastered at all. How then are we ready for the mature, the headier stuff of doctrine and practice when we have not gotten beyond the most elementary?

We may be grateful that the spiritual renewal in our time has helped to recover some of this long-overlooked heritage.

III. CONTEXT

I have already emphasized that the Holy Spirit comes to those who believe in Jesus Christ; thus faith is essential. Now let us note the context, the situation or atmosphere, in which the Holy Spirit is given.

A. God's Sovereign Disposition

The divine context of God's will and intention is altogether basic. From within the pattern of God's purpose, by which He works all things according to the counsel of His sovereign will, God gives His Holy Spirit. Thus whatever may be and must be said on the human side about the situation, context, and atmosphere is altogether secondary to God's sovereign action. In this sense, God gives when He wills, not according to the human condition, but according to His overall design and purpose. Therefore, there is a continuing mystery and, humanly speaking, an unpredictability about the giving of the Holy Spirit.

This was surely true of the first Pentecost in Jerusalem. God had long purposed (and promised) the outpouring of His Spirit; and when the divinely planned time had arrived, the Holy Spirit was given. The opening words of Acts 2:1 suggest this: "When the day of Pentecost had come …" or better, "had been fulfilled … ."[73] So when the day was fulfilled, the Holy Spirit was given. This was God's timetable, not man's. It dealt with God's overarching plan in history. It was an event of "the last days" (v. 17) according to the divine promise.

Likewise, it is important to emphasize that the movements of the Holy Spirit throughout history to the present day are grounded in the sovereign purpose of God.[74] The fact that in our present century there has been a crescendo of the Spirit's outpouring and that the movement has now become worldwide points basically to the divine intention. God is doing it again—and with such a universality ("upon all flesh") that we may surmise that "the last days" are being fulfilled and that history is reaching its consummation. However that may be, the critical point to underscore is the fact of divine sovereignty.

This divine context needs first to be emphasized, lest we too quickly come to the human situation. *Primarily* it is not a matter of human concern but God's concern. Like the original disciples who participated in the coming of God's Spirit because it was God's time, so do we participate in our own day. We are privileged to be alive in what may be the climactic outpouring of the Spirit at the end of the age. Our concern is not unimportant, neither is our readiness to participate in what God is doing, but the basic matter again is God's sovereign purpose.

Further, since it is a matter of the *gift* of the Holy Spirit, there is nothing anyone can do to earn it. By definition a gift is freely bestowed; it cannot be worked for or bought. It would be a serious mistake to think that while

forgiveness is by grace, the gift of the Holy Spirit is by works. Here some of Paul's rhetorical questions are most apropos: "Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? … Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?" (Gal. 3:2, 5). On the matter of being bought, the words of Peter to Simon the magician, who offered money for the power to confer the Holy Spirit, are vividly relevant: "Your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!" (Acts 8:20). The gift of the Holy Spirit cannot be earned, no matter how great the effort, nor can it be purchased no matter how large the amount.

Having said these various things about divine sovereignty and the Holy Spirit as a gift, we are ready to consider further the human context or situation. As we have earlier noted, on the human side, it is through faith that the Holy Spirit is received. Hence, however true it is that God sovereignly grants His Holy Spirit, it is to those believing in Jesus Christ, those who are on the way of faith.[75] Thus as we move on to observe the context in which the Spirit is given, we continue to stand within the sphere of faith. We do not add one iota to faith, as if it were faith plus something else. Rather, are we now dealing with various expressions *within* faith—constituents of faith, in a sense—so that the context[76] is not extraneous to faith but is its vital demonstration.

B. Prayer

Prayer is, of course, an essential element in the totality of Christian living—in its many aspects of praise, thanksgiving, confession, supplication, and dedication. But in a special way it is the context or atmosphere in which the Holy Spirit is given.

This may be seen first in Jesus' own experience and teaching. We are told that following His baptism in water by John, the Holy Spirit came upon Him. In that sense Jesus is the precursor of those whose water baptism is followed by the gift of the Holy Spirit.[77] It is quite relevant that Luke records that prayer was the context of the Spirit's coming upon Jesus: "Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove …" (3:21—22).[78] We should note here that, though the coming of the Spirit followed directly upon Jesus' baptism, the statement about prayer links the two events together. Although water baptism prepared the way[79] for the gift of the Spirit, it occurred to Him when He was in an attitude of prayer.

The importance of prayer in connection with the gift of the Holy Spirit is further underscored in Luke's Gospel by these words of Jesus: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (11:13).[80]

This asking is earlier set forth in the story of a man who, having no bread to share with a visitor, goes to a friend's house at midnight. Although the friend is in bed with his children, the man continues to call out, knocking again and again. Jesus adds: "… though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity[81] he will rise and give him whatever he needs. And I tell you, Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (11:8–9). Hence importunate, persistent, unrelenting prayer is the context for the gift of the Holy Spirit. It would be pushing the story too far to suggest that God only grudgingly gives His Spirit; for the climax describes how God goes far beyond earthly fathers in His generosity. The point, however, is that God is pleased to give to those who earnestly desire something, otherwise the gift may mean very little. But where there is intense desire, the fulfillment of the prayer is all the more full of joy and thanksgiving.[82] Prayer to the heavenly Father is the channel for God's blessed

gift of the Holy Spirit.

But now let us move on to the Book of Acts, where again the atmosphere of prayer is shown in several instances to surround the coming of the Holy Spirit. First, this is especially apparent in the account of Acts 1, which leads up to Pentecost. Jesus had charged the apostles to stay in Jerusalem and to await the promised Holy Spirit. Thus after Jesus' ascension the apostles returned to the city. Joined by various women who had been with Jesus, including Mary and Jesus' brothers, they gave themselves to prayer: "All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14).[83] Thus it was not simply an idle waiting, but a waiting in prayer; and it was not simply occasional prayer, but that to which they devoted themselves. Later the number of those waiting grew to about 120 persons (v. 15). On one occasion the company selected an apostle to succeed Judas (vv. 16–26), but the atmosphere continued to be that of prayer. On the Day of Pentecost it was to a group gathered in an attitude of prayer that the Holy Spirit was given.[84]

It should be pointed out that the disciples did not know exactly when the Holy Spirit would be poured out. They were not told by Jesus to wait for a given number of days, nor did they set aside a certain number of days for prayer after which they would turn to something else. No, they simply gave themselves to unlimited prayer, prayer doubtless in connection with the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, and God at the proper time[85] sent forth His Spirit.

Thus if one brings together Luke 11 and Acts 1 (both written by Luke), it is apparent that much stress is laid on the need for prayer in the reception of the Holy Spirit. Even though the promise of the gift is clearly present in both cases, there is a call for continuing, persisting prayer. Just as this was true for the disciples prior to Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 1), so it is for God's other children who know their need (Luke 11). God delights to give His Spirit to those who earnestly ask Him.[86]

The importance of prayer in the reception of the Holy Spirit is, second, to be found in the account of Saul's being filled with the Holy Spirit. After his encounter with the risen Lord, Saul was led by the hand into Damascus and "for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank" (Acts 9:9). This time of fasting was also a time of praying. When Ananias was told in a vision to go and help Saul, the Lord said of Saul, "Behold, he is praying" (v. 11). This expression connotes a continuing in prayer, a waiting on the Lord, during which time, as the Scripture records, Saul likewise had a vision of Ananias coming to lay hands on him. Both men had visions: Paul prayed, fasted, and waited. In that context God gave the Holy Spirit.

Third, much prayer was the environment and background for the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles at Caesarea. At the outset, Cornelius is described as "a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms liberally to the people, and prayed constantly to God" (Acts 10:2). In that atmosphere Cornelius had a vision in which he was told that his prayers and alms had "ascended as a memorial before God" (v. 4). He was instructed to send for Simon Peter in the town of Joppa. After that Peter was also in prayer (he "went up on the housetop to pray" [v. 9]) and likewise had a vision that resulted in his willingness to go to a Gentile home and proclaim the gospel. Then the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and his household. The whole situation, much like that at Damascus, was one of continuing prayer, visions, and waiting on the Lord.

Finally, in the narratives concerning the Samaritans and Ephesians there is no indication (unlike the previous instances) that those who received the Holy Spirit had been in prayer. However, the Scripture does record that prior to the Samaritans' reception of the Holy Spirit, Peter and John prayed for them: They "came down [from Jerusalem] and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:15). After such intercession, the apostles laid their hands on the Samaritans for the reception of the Spirit.[87] While it may be surmised that the Samaritans were in an attitude of prayer also, the emphasis rests on the prayers of Peter and John. In any event, it was against the background and in the context of believing prayer that the Holy Spirit was received.

Looking back at these several accounts, it is apparent that prayer lies close to the gift of the Holy Spirit. Such prayer was shown variously to be earnest, even importunate (Luke 11), a matter of steadfastness and devotion (Acts 2), of day-by-day continuation (Act 9), of intercession (Acts 8), and of constancy (Acts 10). There is no suggestion that prayer was a condition for securing the Holy Spirit, but over and over prayer is shown to be the background, the context, the atmosphere wherein God delights to grant His Holy Spirit to those who believe.[88]

In the contemporary situation this proves to be the case wherever spiritual renewal is occurring. The testimonies vary—some had been praying for some time, some only for a short period, some were prayed for by others, some had expressed little overt prayer—but it was in a prayerful atmosphere of waiting before God that the Holy Spirit was poured out.[89]

C. Obedience

The Holy Spirit is given within the context of obedience to those who obey God's command. In this regard one verse in the Book of Acts stands out: "And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him" (5:32).[90] This is obedience occurring within the area of faith, the obedience that suffuses the atmosphere surrounding those who become recipients of the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is indeed the obedience of faith.[91] God grants His Spirit to those who in faith obey His command.

The above quotation from Acts 5:32 is taken from Peter's words before the Jewish council. He spoke for all the apostles (as the passage shows) and accordingly refers to their obedience as the context wherein the Holy Spirit was given. This then leads us back to the situation prior to Pentecost and to the important matter of the nature of their obedience. The Book of Acts begins with the words "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commandments][92] through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen" (1:1–2). Thus as men of faith they were under obedience to Christ's commands as transmitted through the Holy Spirit.[93] The apostles, accordingly, gave themselves to obedience as men under orders. After that came the specific commandment "not to depart from Jerusalem,[94] but to wait for the promise of the Father [the gift of the Holy Spirit]" (v. 4). What followed over a period of ten days was the obedient act of waiting for the fulfillment of the promise. As men under orders, with others joining them until the number came to be about one hundred twenty (v. 15), they awaited the promised gift of the Holy Spirit.

A like obedience of faith was demonstrated in the case of Saul of Tarsus who, following his encounter with the risen Christ, was commanded by Him: "Rise and enter the city [of Damascus], and you will be told what you are to do" (Acts 9:6). Saul obeyed and after three days was visited by Ananias, who likewise acted in obedience to a vision and a command of Christ (vv. 10–11). Saul thereafter was filled with the Holy Spirit. The atmosphere, the context, for the gift of the Holy Spirit was obedience by both parties: Ananias who ministered and Saul who received.

Quite similar is the story of the Roman centurion Cornelius at Caesarea, who, along with his kinsfolk and friends, received the outpoured gift of the Holy

Spirit. Cornelius was commanded by the Lord in a vision: “And now send men to Joppa, and bring one Simon who is called Peter” (Acts 10:5). Peter, who likewise had a vision, was sent for by Cornelius, for Peter had been told by the Spirit: “Rise and go down, and accompany them [the servants of Cornelius] without hesitation …” (10:20). Then, in an atmosphere of the obedience of faith,[95] they received the Holy Spirit.

These were all acts of specific obedience[96] that relate directly to the gift of the Holy Spirit. They call to mind again the words of Jesus, earlier quoted: “Ask … seek … knock” (Luke 11:9). These words, I now emphasize, are a strong, threefold command that relates altogether to the gift of the Holy Spirit. There may or may not be a direct word from Christ (as with the apostles, Saul, and the Roman centurion), but that is not necessary. The words of Christ are inscribed for all to read and obey: Ask, seek, and knock.[97] For the Holy Spirit, as Peter said, is given “to those who obey him.”

Lest this be viewed only as a matter of obedience to a particular command “to wait,” “to ask,” etc., we should also recall the words of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor …” (John 14:15–16). The Holy Spirit—the “Counselor” (Paraclete)—will be given to those who obey Christ’s commandments. Before Jesus gave the specific command to the apostles to wait in Jerusalem, He gave “commandments through the Holy Spirit” (supra). Thus, willing obedience to *whatever* Christ commands and has commanded (as set forth for us in the gospels) is background and context for the Holy Spirit to be given.

This suggests that those who seek faithfully to walk in the way of Christ are living in an atmosphere conducive to the reception of the Holy Spirit. Such a walk in obedience, not done grudgingly or seeking a reward, is an expression of a heart right before God. There may and will be failures, but the essential intention and direction is that of obedience to the word of the Lord. Already in some sense walking in the way of obedience, such persons are in a position for further implementation of obedient living by the Holy Spirit. The way of obedience wherein God’s word is gladly honored and heeded is the context for receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit.[98]

This means, on the other hand, that one of the barriers to the reception of the Holy Spirit may be disobedience. If a person is not walking in the way of faithful obedience to Christ’s commandments—for example, the injunctions of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7); if he is harboring anger, lust, or bitterness in his heart; if his love has grown cold and holiness is aggrieved, such a person is

hardly in a position to receive God's *Holy* Spirit."[99] This does not mean that one must be without sin to receive the Holy Spirit. If that were the case, no one would be a recipient of Him. What is important is not the attainment of perfection, but ever seeking (regardless of many a failure) to walk in the way of obedience. For obedience lies at the heart of faith, and it is by faith alone that the Holy Spirit is received.

So to conclude this section: Obedience in general to the command of Christ, His word, His teaching, His direction, and specifically to the directive to "wait for the promise" is one aspect of the context for receiving the Holy Spirit. There may be no waiting, as in the case of the centurion whose prior obedience[100] was caught up into the obedience of faith. Immediately the Spirit was poured out at the commencement of his faith. But in every instance the Holy Spirit is given in the context of obedient faith.

D. Yielding

In an atmosphere of surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit is given. When persons are ready to give up everything for the sake of Christ and the gospel and lay themselves completely at His disposal, God vouchsafes the abundance of His Spirit. One may also speak of emptiness before the Lord, and to this comes the answer of His divine fullness. When self is broken of all prideful claim, a new power is released—the power and anointing of God's Holy Spirit.

In the New Testament accounts concerning the original disciples of Jesus, Pentecost stands forth as the climax of a movement toward the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ. Peter himself is a vivid illustration of this. Responding to the word of Jesus that the Twelve would deny Him, he had boastfully replied, "Even though they all fall away, I will not" (Mark 14:29). It was a quite different Peter after Pentecost. No longer did he look to himself but wholly to Christ, for he said to a cripple: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk" (Acts 3:6), and then to the spectators astounded at what had happened he asked, "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?" (v. 12). Something had happened to Peter between the time of his self-affirmation and ensuing denial of Jesus and the time of his total Christ-affirmation. A transformation had occurred. The groundwork was the postresurrection encounters by which Jesus ministered new faith, new life, and a new commission,[101] but it actually occurred only after a period of waiting that culminated in Pentecost. This was the final time of preparation and of transition from self-dependency to complete dependence on Christ. The ten days in the Upper Room were surely days of yielding more and more of self until the final barrier was breached, the self was emptied of all vain striving, and the Holy Spirit rushed in to fill the vacuum with the presence and power of God. Thereafter for Peter and the other disciples it was to be life lived in the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Essentially the same thing must have happened with Saul of Tarsus over a three-day period. Although Saul had been set on a new course by the risen Jesus —180 degrees opposite from his former direction—and now believed in the One he formerly persecuted, doubtless there was much still needed by way of yielding and surrender to his new Lord before he would be able to receive the commission from Ananias to preach Christ. Saul of Tarsus had been extremely

self-reliant, proud, and defiant;[102] and although he had now received new life and direction, it would take these days of blindness and prayer and fasting for the full surrender to occur, so that all his strength henceforward would be from the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit. The words of Paul to the Romans at a later time are quite apropos: “Yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life” (Rom. 6:13). There is a new life after death, and then a yielding of the total self to God!

Yielding makes for total availability; by this one becomes an instrument wholly devoted to the Master’s service. It is not only to know Jesus as Savior but also to be “sold out” to Him. Yielding is not sanctification but servanthood[103] wherein the whole of life is placed at the disposal of Christ. Thereby the Spirit of the Lord possesses a person in totality—body, mind, and spirit—and all of life becomes a “living sacrifice”[104] to God.

Such yielding means no longer doing one’s own will but the will of God: “not my will, but thine be done.” It is to have “the mind of Christ,” which means to humble oneself and become obedient unto death.[105] It means to surrender the tongue—“an unrighteous world among our members, staining the whole body … set on fire by hell…. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men… .”[106] Thus it becomes attuned only to the praise of God. *All* is to be yielded to Him.[107]

Yielding may also signify not only submission to God but also submission to other persons. In four of the Acts accounts relating to the gift of the Holy Spirit the persons receiving the gift did so through the ministry of others. It was through the ministry of Peter and John that the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit, through the ministry of Ananias that Saul of Tarsus was filled with the Spirit, through the ministry of Peter that the Caesareans were blessed, and through the ministry of Paul that the Ephesians received the gift. In three of these instances the Holy Spirit was given through the imposition of hands of a fellow Christian. The very willingness to have hands laid on the head signifies an act of submission and a readiness to receive from other brethren what God has to give. This submission to the ministry of others, it should be added, is frequently the best antidote to a kind of religious pride that desires to deal only with God directly (as in private prayer). However, the Lord often makes use of human (and sometimes quite humble) vessels for His blessing. It is not always easy for a prominent Saul to submit to an unknown Ananias, but this may be the Lord’s way of working.

One of the things that has been learned in the contemporary movement of the Holy Spirit is the importance of this ministry of fellow Christians. Although in

many cases God sovereignly pours out His Spirit without human mediation, most often people receive God's gift through the laying on of hands. And the hands may be those of a cleric or a layman (as in the Book of Acts), whomever God chooses. This calls for submission and a degree of yielding that may not have been experienced before.[108]

It would be difficult to overemphasize this whole matter of yielding. Yielding is at the heart of receiving the gift of God's Holy Spirit. For it is only when a person lays himself totally at the disposal of God and holds back nothing that the Spirit moves in to take full possession. There are no shortcuts, no simplistic formulas, no outward manifestations that can bring this about. The Spirit is given only to those who let everything go, who are empty before the Lord, who thereby may be filled with His fullness. This yielding may mean the willingness to give up earthly reputation, security, and ambition so that God may be glorified. It is absolute and irrevocable surrender.[109]

Yielding is an act of faith. It is not something beyond faith, but it is faith in its profoundest expression. Whether such yielding occurs at the inception of faith or somewhere along the way of faith, it represents that total surrender wherein the Spirit of the living God comes to have complete sway.

E. Expectancy

Finally, expectancy is a context for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Although the word is not used in any of the Acts accounts, there is unquestionably an atmosphere of expectancy throughout. People who look for something to happen are particularly candidates for the reception of the Holy Spirit.

This was obviously true of the disciples waiting before Pentecost. I have remarked on their steadfastness in prayer, obedience, and total yielding; now we note the further important matter that they were all expecting something to happen. They had not only received a command to wait; they had also received a promise that the Spirit would be given. Thus their praying was expectant praying, a looking toward the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The atmosphere of expectancy may be sensed in other accounts. Peter and John prayed for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit. Doubtless by praying with them, they built up expectation before the laying on of hands occurred. Ananias, as he was laying hands on Saul, spoke about his being filled with the Holy Spirit and thus created anticipation. Paul's question to the Ephesians "Did you receive the Holy Spirit, believing?" may well have brought about an expectation for what later was to happen.

Surely of significance in creating expectation were the words of Peter to the multitude in Jerusalem: "You shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you …" (Acts 2:38–39).

Earlier the crowd had participated in the extraordinary event of everyone's hearing in his own language what the disciples were saying. Then they were told by Peter that this had happened through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Now he added that (following repentance and baptism in the name of Christ) they would also receive the same gift. Against the background of their own participation in an amazing event and now Peter's promise of their likewise receiving the gift, their expectation must have been very great.[110] Thus the atmosphere wherein the gift was received was laden with intense expectation.

Now to carry the role of expectancy forward, even to the present day, Peter said the promise of the gift of the Spirit was not only to his immediate audience but, he added, also "to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him" (Acts 2:39). "Far off"[111] suggests distance in both space and time, thus people of all places and ages, and particularly Gentiles (cf. Acts 22:21), for Peter had already included later Jewish generations in the

expression “to your children.” Hence the promise of the Spirit continues to our day. For those who truly hear the promise, desire it, and believe it, expectancy is once again the atmosphere for its fulfillment.

So it has been with countless people around the world in our time—people who, upon hearing about the gift of the Holy Spirit, have demonstrated a growing expectancy, even excitement, that the promise may be fulfilled on their behalf. Nor have they found this expectation to be a delusion, for God has generously poured out his Spirit.[112] Contrariwise, when people have expected little and expressed satisfaction with their present spiritual situation, they have received little, if anything.

But those who wait to receive everything God has to give, those who desire great things from God, those who stand on tiptoes of expectation—it is they whom God delights to bless. Expect a miracle, and miracles begin to happen!

[1]Michael Harper writes that “the benefits of the New Covenant include the gift of the Holy Spirit as well as the forgiveness of sins. From Pentecost onwards the Church faithfully proclaimed that Christ forgives and baptizes in the Holy Spirit. They taught that all who repent and believe are justified by faith, and that all who are justified by faith may receive the Holy Spirit by faith” (Walk in the Spirit, 13). It is faith-nothing else-faith in Christ, that is essential to receiving the Holy Spirit.

[2]It would be a mistake to say that faith has a second focus beyond Christ, namely, the Holy Spirit. Christian faith remains centered on Jesus Christ throughout. In Him is “every spiritual blessing” (Eph. 1:3), whether it be forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, or anything else. However, while Christian faith must always keep the focus on Christ, it does also expect from Him the gift of the Holy Spirit. A failure to expect this is less than a Christ- centered faith.

[3]This whole matter of faith as the essential condition for receiving the Holy Spirit and also for the quality of life that follows is set forth well by Kevin and Dorothy Ranaghan: “If there is any one thing which most strikingly characterizes Catholic pentecostals it is not tongues or singing or prayer groups; it is that they came to seek a renewal in the Spirit in simple faith, and having received the answer to their prayer they begin to walk in a newness of faith. The people involved in the charismatic renewal are basically men and women of new, richer faith” (italics added) (Catholic Pentecostals, 144).

[4]Some of the Scriptures that depict faith as growing or increasing include Luke 17:5; 2 Corinthians 10:15; Philippians 1:25; and 2 Thessalonians 1:3.

[5]One thinks of the words of Jesus to Peter just prior to the Crucifixion: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren” (Luke 22:31-32).

[6]Recall our previous brief discussion of this as the disciples’ day of regeneration (chap. 7, III.A. “The Paraclete”).

[7]Here I do not follow the RSV, which has “when we believed.” The RSV reading would suggest that it was only when the disciples came to faith that they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. However, the Greek word is pis te us as in, an aorist participle, which usually expresses action antecedent to the main verb, or, less frequently, simultaneous with it. If antecedent, the translation would be “having believed” or “after believing” (NASB); if simultaneous or coincident, the translation “when we believed” (RSV) would be more satisfactory. However, the participle could contain both ideas, and therefore the most adequate translation would be neither the RSV “when we believed” nor the NASB “after believing” but simply “believing.” (The KJV and NIV reading as “who believed” does not sufficiently reflect the continuing quality of faith.) This would suggest that belief had been there for some time (antecedent aorist); but rather than being simply a past fact, it was also a continuing reality (simultaneous aorist). In other words, on the way of faith the Holy Spirit was poured out. F. D. Bruner in his Theology of the Holy Spirit quotes the RSV and adds, “The apostles considered Pentecost to be … the date of their conversion” (196). Unfortunately, Bruner does not go into the Greek text, which makes for other possible, and more likely, interpretations.

[8]It is sometimes said that it is improper to draw any parallel between the first disciples’ experience of the Holy Spirit and Christian experience thereafter. For, unlike believers after them, they could not have received the Holy Spirit until a later time because the Spirit was not given until Jesus left them. In answer to this, I submit that while it is true that their experience was necessarily spread over a period of time, a rather extended way of faith, this should not rule out the possibility that many after them would follow a like pattern. Unlike the original disciples, we may receive the Holy Spirit at the initiation of faith; like the first

disciples, we may and often do have to wait for an extended period.

[9]E.g., see the story of Russell Bixler in *It Can Happen to Anybody*, especially chapter 4, “The New Creation,” and chapter 9, “The Power Flows.” Several years of walking the way of faith as a Church of the Brethren pastor separate the two experiences. Incidentally, Dwight L. Moody’s experience of being “filled with the Holy Spirit” (supra, chap. 10, n. 63) occurred fifteen years after his conversion.

[10]Samaria was about a two days’ journey from Jerusalem. By the time word about the Samaritans’ faith had reached Jerusalem, and Peter and John had traveled to Samaria for minstry, at least four days, possibly even a week, would have elapsed. The exact number of days, of course, is not important; clearly there was an intervening time, however.

[11]An illustration of this is the case of Dr. Charles Meisgeier, a university professor, who heard the evangelist Billy Graham at a Madison Square Garden meeting. Speaking afterward of his conversion, Meisgeier said, “Christ became my Lord and Saviour in a real and existential way.” Years later, through the ministry of Dennis Bennett, an Episcopal priest, Meisgeier received the gift of the Holy Spirit. He describes the result: “It has been a new life for us all. There is a tremendous fulfillment in being baptized in the Holy Spirit; the Christian life goes on from there and gets better and better.” See The Acts of the Holy Spirit Among the Presbyterians Today, 56-61.

[12]This was likewise the time of Saul’s conversion (see previous discussion in chap. 8, U.C.). In a later parallel account (Acts 22:1-16), where Paul rehearsed this event, he stated that after Jesus had identified Himself (“I am Jesus …” [v. 8]), Saul asked, “What shall I do, Lord?” (v. 10). This suggests Saul had entered on the way of faith, acknowledging Jesus as Lord. I realize it can be argued that Saul is simply saying “Lord” (kyrie) in the sense of “Sir” or “Master,” hence expressing little or no faith. However, the context, including the words from heaven, “I am Jesus,” would seem to suggest more. Christian faith begins in a personal encounter with the living Christ; Saul’s experience was hardly less than that!

[13]Ananias’ greeting of Saul as “Brother” is another indication that Saul is already on the way of faith before his filling with the Holy Spirit. Brother in the singular vocative in Acts (9:17; 21:20; 22:13) signifies “Christian brother.”

[14]Such as the fact that the Samaritans were baptized in water at the

inception of faith (8:12) and only received the Holy Spirit several days later (v. 17) whereas Saul's water baptism did not occur until after he was filled with the Holy Spirit (9:17-18).

[15]For a variety of testimonies in the early stages of the Roman Catholic renewal (in the late sixties), see Catholic Pentecostals, "Bearing Witness," 58-106; also Catholics and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. For Protestant testimonies, see similar publications of the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International on Episcopalians (or Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, etc.) and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

[16]Again (see n. 7), this is an instance of the aorist participle (as in Acts 11:17). The Greek word here is pisteusantes, translated in the KJV as "since ye believed" (antecedent aorist) while in the RSV and NASB as "when you believed" (coincident aorist). My preference again is simply "believing," which catches up both antecedence and coincidence as a continuing reality. What is important, however, is that regardless of the way the aorist participle is translated, there is the obvious implication that one believing may not yet have received the Holy Spirit. Initial faith is not necessarily accompanied by the gift of the Spirit. Even if it be argued that these "disciples" were not yet believers in a fully Christian sense because it turned out they were only disciples of John (see v. 3), the question still points up the possibility of believing without yet receiving. (E. Schweizer says, "In 19:1-7, Luke is telling about Christians who have not yet experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit" [TDNT, 6:413]. I think this overstates the situation, but at least Schweizer recognizes that, according to Luke, one may be a believer and not yet have experienced the Spirit's outpouring.)

[17]Whether one identifies the initial faith with the first or second moment, the reception of the Spirit occurred later (whether years later or in immediate succession). Schweizer, in looking back over the record in Acts, writes, "Days, and in exceptional cases, even weeks and years may pass before endowment with the Spirit follows faith" (TDNT, 6:412). Although I prefer to say "follows initial faith," I believe Schweizer is basically correct.

[18]Of course, I am not suggesting that Paul is simply addressing the original Ephesian disciples. My point is that Paul shows a similar pattern in Ephesians 1:13 to what happened in Acts 19:1-7.

[19]As in Acts 19:2, the same aorist participle pisteusantes is used. The RSV

has “have believed” while the KJV translates it “after that ye believed” (similarly NIV and NASB). Again, I translate it simply as “believing.” See previous footnotes 7 and 16.

[20]One of the uses of “seal” in the New Testament. (“Seal” sometimes means “endue with power from heaven” (BAGD, σφραγίζω, 2.b.).

[21]Again, see the testimonies in the books mentioned in footnote 15 supra. Many examples may be found. From the nebulous and limited to the clear and full is a transition that many are making in our time.

[22]This is often the case for persons who have long been searching for reality-the “God- seekers” of the world, who, upon clearly hearing for the first time the call to a personal faith in Jesus Christ, not only receive forgiveness of sins but also the empowering of the Holy Spirit. I think, for example, of the recent “Jesus people,” many of whom had been involved with drugs (representing an illusory search for reality) and were actually bearing witness to illusion. Many of these young people had a total experience of turning to Christ and at the same time of receiving the Holy Spirit. (As an example of this see Pat King, The Jesus People Are Coming, the testimony of Michael Mates, “Now I’m Free,” 73-92.) It was estimated that at the peak of the “Jesus movement” over 90 percent of the persons involved were charismatic, not usually by virtue of a later charismatic experience, but because they became such in the initial breakthrough of Christian faith. At the very moment of their conversion they also became “turned on” witnesses for Jesus in the power of the Spirit.

[23]One sometimes hears it said that the Book of Acts presents so much confusing, even inconsistent, data about the reception of the Holy Spirit that the record is of dubious value for our contemporary situation. The truth of the matter, however, is that the varied descriptions give firm basis and example for what is happening in our time.

[24]This will be noted later, especially in connection with Acts 19.

[25]Three prepositions are used: epi (Acts 2:38), eis (8:16 and 19:5), and en (10:48). They could be translated “upon,” “into,” and “in.” For all three, “in the name” is the usual English translation. This seems proper, since the Greek words do not, I believe, connote a difference.

[26]The formula in Acts, therefore, is obviously divergent from the triune emphasis of Matthew 28:19. I will return to this later.

[27]As I use the term “water baptism” from now on, I will ordinarily be referring to baptism in the name of Jesus Christ.

[28]These verses, depicting a community of people devoted to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, sharing, and, climactically, "praising God and having favor with all the people" (v. 47), strongly suggest participation in the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[29]F. D. Bruner has this peculiar statement: "The Spirit is temporarily suspended from baptism here 'only' and precisely to teach the Church at its most prejudiced juncture, and in its strategic initial missionary move beyond Jerusalem, that suspension cannot occur" (italics his) (A Theology of Holy Spirit, 178). I should think that the passage teaches exactly the opposite: that suspension may occur. Burner's interpretation is not actually based on the text but on a prior view (shown many times in his book) of the inseparability of water baptism and the gift of the Spirit.

[30]Of course, that is also true in many cases of conversion, particularly of those who received water baptism as infants. Years later they came to a life-changing experience with the Lord.

[31]We may also refer to the account of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:28–39). The eunuch came to faith, was baptized by Philip, and "when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught up Philip" (v. 39). According to some early manuscripts, the text reads, "And when they came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit fell upon the eunuch and an angel of the Lord caught up Philip." The point of this reading is undoubtedly to emphasize that, as with the Samaritans, the eunuch's baptism was followed by the gift of the Holy Spirit. (See F. F. Bruce's statement to this effect in his commentary, The Acts of the Apostles, 195.) Thus, in addition to the accounts in Acts that specify the gift of the Spirit as following water baptism, this may be implied in Acts 8:39.

[32]Donald L. Gelpi, S.J., suggests the case of a "Robert Z." who "a week before his sacramental baptism, while attending a prayer meeting … , receives Spirit-baptism and immediately begins praying in tongues" (Pentecostalism: A Theological Viewpoint, 178). Probably Father Gelpi had witnessed this, for he refers to this as "concretely possible." The problem, I might add, for Catholic theology is how does one relate such an experience to the traditional view that the Holy Spirit is received in baptism or confirmation? (See below for further discussion.)

[33]According to Matthew 28:19.

[34]There are many instances in the contemporary spiritual renewal of persons who had received baptism as infants and were baptized again as

adults. In some cases such adult baptism is sought because of a growing conviction of the invalidity of infant baptism; in other cases adult baptism is viewed as not denying the validity of infant baptism, but as its fulfillment through personal, believing participation. I am referring, however, in the text above to those who have had no prior experience of baptism now becoming participants.

[35]Possibly all, the Scriptures give no certain information.

[36]Faith alone prepares the way. So E. Schweizer writes (in specific response to the Caesarean account as interpreted by Peter in Acts 15:8-9): “Faith, not baptism, purifies for reception of the Spirit. . (TDNT, 6:414).

[37]So F. D. Bruner writes, “Baptism and the reception of the Spirit are so synonymous as to be identical. Christian baptism is spiritual baptism” (A Theology of the Holy Spirit, 190). Bruner’s sacramentalism, i.e., identifying the rite of water baptism with spiritual baptism, is not uncommon in sacramental church traditions. This is even true for charismatic Lutheran Arnold Bittlinger, who states that “Christian baptism is always a baptism with water and with Spirit” (The Baptism in the Holy Spirit as an Ecumenical Problem, 6). Similarly Kilian McDonnell, a Roman Catholic scholar, says, “By the sacrament of baptism one becomes a member of the body of Christ because in baptism one receives the Spirit” (Statement of the Theological Basis of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, 4). I believe, on the contrary, that Dunn is correct in saying that “Spirit-baptism and water baptism remain distinct and even antithetical” (Baptism in the Holy Spirit, 227).

[38]Schweizer in his analysis of the Spirit in Acts writes: “The Spirit is not tied to baptism. Once He comes on men before baptism (10:44), once without it (2:1-4), once on a disciple who knew only John’s baptism (18:25)” (TDNT, 6:414).

[39]Before moving on, I should add that positive interpreters of the charismatic renewal within a sacramental context, such as Bittlinger and McDonnell, go beyond the claimed reception of the Spirit in baptism. Bittlinger, for example, later adds: “What God has given in baptism must be ACTUALIZED in the life of the individual” (op. cit., 11). It is this actualization that lies at the heart of the charismatic experience of Spirit baptism. McDonnell makes use of such an expression as “manifestation of baptism whereby the hidden grace given in baptism breaks through the conscious experience” to describe “what is happening in the charismatic renewal” (Baptism in the Holy Spirit, 8). However, such attempts by

Bittlinger and McDonnell, who intend respectively to maintain a Lutheran and Roman Catholic framework, unfortunately result both in binding the gift of the Holy Spirit to a particular sacramental action (What if the Spirit is not given in water baptism?) and to reducing the extraordinary charismatic experience to a secondary level of "actualization" and "manifestation" (or some other similar expression). Incidentally, McDonnell does not always associate the gift of the Spirit with water baptism; he also speaks more broadly of "the rites of initiation," which, in addition to baptism, include confirmation (see below on confirmation). From that perspective the charismatic experience could be described more broadly, for example as "reviviscence of the sacraments of initiation" (ibid.). I would still say that even such broader language likewise falls far short of the truly biblical and experiential meaning of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[40]For example, note the earlier use of eis in the same chapter, verse 25, where Peter prefaces a quotation from a Davidic psalm thus: "For David says concerning him [the Christ]… ." The word translated "concerning" (RSV and KJV) is eis. Eis here clearly means "regarding," "in reference to," etc. For other similar translations of eis cf. Romans 4:20 ("concerning" [RSV], "with respect to" [NASB]); Ephesians 5:32 ("concerning" KJV], "with reference to" [NASB]); and 1 Thessalonians 5:18 ("concerning" [KJV).

[41]Water baptism as immersion (the whole body covered) best symbolizes this. However, the pouring of water over the person may likewise represent this totality. Sprinkling (in accordance with Ezek. 36:25, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses") is a third possibility.

[42]E.g., see Romans 6:4: "We are buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead … we too might walk in newness of life" (cf. Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12). Water baptism by immersion most vividly demonstrates burial and resurrection.

[43]This matter of baptism as a sign and seal relates to what Paul says concerning how Abraham "received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised" (Rom. 4:11 NIV). Water baptism is clearly the New Testament parallel, and thus, like circumcision, does not bring about righteousness or forgiveness, but is a sign and seal of it.

[44]As earlier noted, water baptism is not so integral a part of forgiveness that

it may not occur later. Particularly recall the account of the Caesareans in Acts 10:43-48. However, ordinarily the sequence is that of Acts 2:38-39.

[45]Mention was made of this formula in n. 26 above, but there was no elaboration of its significance.

[46]The Greek word for “in” (“baptizing them in”) is eis, which though it may simply mean “in” (see n. 25), may also be translated “into.” As I have earlier noted, eis may also signify “with reference to,” hence “in relation to.”

[47]“For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily [Gr. to pleroma tes theoetos]” (Col. 2:9 KJV).

[48]Hence either formula is suitable for use in water baptism. Within classical Pentecostal- ism the “Jesus only” churches (a minority group) insist that water baptism must be only in the name of Jesus. This is as equally one-sided as the insistence of some historic denominations that the formula of baptism must be in the Triune name. (For a description of the “Jesus only” movement see Vinson Synan, The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement, 153- 54; also see the chapter by David Reed entitled “Aspects of the Origins of Oneness Pentecostalism” in Aspects of Pentecostal-Charismatic Origins, ed. Vinson Synan).

[49]The same thing is true about the Father-a new relationship to Him: by adoption one becomes a son of God and is able to address God as “Father” (cf. Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5-6).

[50]In my book The Pentecostal Reality (chap. 6, “The Holy Trinity”) I wrote: “The purpose of that part of the Great Commission, ‘Go therefore … baptizing’ is not to make learners out of people in regard to God, but to introduce them into life lived in the reality of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (p. 102). On the matter of the Holy Spirit, my later words are “This means life claimed by God through Jesus Christ in a total kind of way, the Spirit of the living God probing the depths of the conscious and the unconscious, releasing … new powers to praise God, to witness compellingly in His name, to do mighty works that only He can do. Do we know this?” (p. 107).

[51]There are other instances in Acts of the imposition of hands that are not directly concerned with the gift of the Holy Spirit: 6:5-6-the dedication of seven “deacons”; 13:3-the commissioning of Barnabas and Saul; and 28:8-the healing of Publius’ father. While such instances of the laying on of hands are not for the gift of the Spirit, they obviously represent Spirit-inspired activities.

[52]The earliest testimonies in *Catholic Pentecostals* ("Bearing Witness," 24–37) of students who were baptized in the Holy Spirit at the "Duquesne weekend" especially depict an unmediated happening. One participant testifies, "There were three other students with me when all of a sudden I became filled with the Holy Spirit and realized that 'God is real.'… The professors then laid hands on some of the students, but most of us received the 'baptism in the Spirit' while kneeling before the blessed sacrament in prayer" (34-35). The Acts of the Holy Spirit among the Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, etc. contains many testimonies of the Holy Spirit being given without the laying on of hands.

[53]Or, as we have noted, through water baptism. Sometimes people entertain the view that there may be two gifts of the Holy Spirit: one at water baptism and the other with the imposition of hands.

[54]Literally, they "were laying [epetithesan-imperfect tense] the hands on them and they were receiving [elambanon-also imperfect] the Holy Spirit." The Greek tense suggests an action over a period of time, possibly indicating that the Samaritans one by one received the Holy Spirit.

[55]The text continues with the recitation of Simon the magician's vain and sordid attempt to buy the power to confer the gift of the Spirit through his own hands. However, despite his perfidy, there is no question in the text that Simon correctly perceived it to be through the laying on of Peter's and John's hands that the Holy Spirit was given.

[56]The Apostolic Tradition, compiled by Hippolytus (2nd century A.D.) in regard to the Roman liturgy of initiation prescribes that following the candidates' baptism and anointing with oil, "the Bishop shall lay his hands upon them invoking and saying: 'O Lord God who hast counted these thy servants worthy of deserving the forgiveness of sins and the laver of regeneration, make them worthy to be filled with thy Holy Spirit…' " (chap. 22). Even though only the bishop was allowed to do this, it is important to note that the practice begun in Acts of laying on hands for the infilling of the Spirit continued in the early church.

[57]Cyprian (3rd century A.D. bishop of Carthage) wrote of how "they who are baptized in the Church are brought to the prelates of the Church, and by our prayers and the imposition of hands obtain the Holy Spirit, and are perfected with the Lord's seal" (The Epistles of Cyprian, 72:9; Ante-Nicene Fathers 5:381). The Council of Elvira (A.D. 306) spoke of the role of the Bishop "to lay hands on the newly baptized, to perfect

[complete] him" (canon 38).

[58]The word "confirmation" appeared for the first time in the canons of the Council of Orange (A.D. 441). This was later (by the twelfth century) to become a sacrament in the Roman Catholic Church, the sacrament of strengthening the believer, usually totally separated in time from earlier baptism. The purpose of the sacrament of confirmation has been recently reaffirmed by Pope Paul VI in the Apostolic Constitution on the Sacrament of Confirmation: "Through the sacrament of confirmation, those who have been born anew in baptism receive the inexpressible Gift, the Holy Spirit himself, by which they are endowed … with special strength." In churches growing out of the Reformation, confirmation, where retained, usually signifies a believer's confirmation of earlier baptismal vows taken on his behalf. It is viewed, not as a sacrament, but as a kind of "rite of passage" to full church membership. There is no thought of this rite as conferring the Holy Spirit. (The Episcopal/Anglican Church has retained more of the sacramental idea.)

[59]Recall that in the beginning of the twentieth-century Pentecostal renewal hands were laid on Agnes Ozman at her request by Rev. Charles Parham. She explains the result: "It was as his hands were laid upon my head that the Holy Spirit fell upon me and I began to speak in tongues glorifying God" (quotation in K. Kendrick, The Promise Fulfilled, 52-53). Also see the second set of testimonies in Catholic Pentecostals, "Bearing Witness," 58- 106, having to do with events later at Notre Dame. Most cases of baptism in the Spirit occurred through the laying on of hands. (It might be suggested that the Duquesne experience was more like the first unmediated biblical outpourings on Jews and Gentiles at Jerusalem and Caesarea, Notre Dame more like the secondary outpourings on Samaria and Ephesus.)

[60]E.g., the traditional Roman Catholic view of the sacraments (baptism, confirmation) is that they are efficacious "ex opere operato"-"by the work performed." McDonnell, while holding that "the fullness of the Spirit is given during the celebration of initiation," speaks of "the scholastic doctrine of ex opere operands [wherein] we receive in the measure of our openness." Thus, though there is an objective, and in that sense invariable, gift of the Spirit in "the celebration of initiation," there is no receiving without subjective appropriation (One in Christ, 10.2 [1974]: 117-18). McDonnell's view approximates my comments regarding the need for faith (see above) in the reception of the Holy

Spirit. Some words of Calvin are quite relevant: “But what is a sacrament received apart from faith but the most certain ruin of the church?” (Institutes 4.14.14. Battles trans.).

[61]Edward O’Connor writes, “The gesture [of laying on of hands] does symbolize graphically the fact that God’s grace is often mediated to a person through others, and especially through the community. God seems to bless the faith from which this prayerful gesture proceeds: again and again people find that they have been helped in a powerful and manifest way by it … the baptism in the Spirit is usually received thus” (The Pentecostal Movement in the Catholic Church, 117).

[62]A further word on the sacramental question: I believe it is far better to dissociate the charismatic experience from any sacramental action. Donald Gelpi, as I see it, is on the right track in saying that “Spirit-baptism is not a sacrament,” but is the result of “full docility to the Spirit of Christ” (italics his) (Pentecostalism: A Theological Viewpoint, 182-83). Francis A. Sullivan, S. J., in his book Charisms and Charismatic Renewal, while affirming the traditional Catholic view of the objectivity of the sacraments, does not locate Spirit baptism within that framework. Rather, “ ‘baptism in the Spirit’ means coming into some new experience of the power of the Spirit in one’s life” (74).

[63]Ananias is simply described in Acts 9:10 as “a disciple at Damascus.”

[64]It is interesting that when Philip later proclaimed the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch and baptized him (Acts 8:38), the next words according to the Western text (see footnote 31) are “And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord fell upon the eunuch… .” Although this is likely a later textual addition, it does reflect some early church understanding that Philip was by no means dependent on apostolic help for the Holy Spirit to be given.

[65]In my book, The Era of the Spirit, I summarized the laying on of hands thus: “Wherever this laying on of hands occurs, it is not, as such, a sacramental action. It is rather the simple ministry by one or more persons who themselves are channels of the Holy Spirit to others not yet so blessed. The ‘ministers’ may be clergy or laity; it makes no difference…. Obviously God is doing a mighty work today bound neither by office nor by rank” (64).

[66]The Greek word is *baptismön.* It is also translated as “baptisms” in KJV. The RSV has “ablutions”; NASB, “washings”; NEB, “cleansing rites.” According to Oepke, “Βαπτισμῶν διδαχή denotes instruction on the

difference between Jewish (and pagan?) 'washings' (including John's baptism?) and Christian baptism" (TDNT, 1:545). Similarly Beasley-Murray states, "In Heb. 6:2 'instruction about washings' … appears to concern the contrast between Christian baptism and all other religious washings" (NIDNTT, 1:149). F. F. Bruce, contrariwise, says, "It is very doubtful whether Christian baptism is directly in view here at all" (The Epistle to the Hebrews, NICNT, 114). I agree with Oepke and Beasley-Murray that the connection is here. Why would Hebrews speak of this matter as foundational if the reference is only, for example, to "Jewish ceremonial washings" (Bruce's words)?

[67]See previous footnote in relation to (1) and (2).

[68]Here I agree with F. F. Bruce, who relates this statement in Hebrews to "an early Christian practice, associated especially with the impartation of the Holy Spirit," adding that "it is most probably its significance here" (ibid., 116). Leon Morris writes similarly: "It is Christian beginnings, perhaps with the thought of God's gift of the Spirit, that is in mind here" (EBC, 12:53).

[69]The third suggestion is also quite possible, especially since the laying on of hands correlative to baptism in the Spirit is next mentioned. The sequence as described above remains the same.

[70]It is also similar to the Samaritan account in Acts 8: repentance (turning from previous domination by Simon the magician) and faith in Christ, baptism (not baptisms, though the Samaritans may have received instruction about multiple baptisms), and the laying on of hands to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[71]Hebrews 6:4 also suggests salvation and the reception of the Spirit. Reference is made in this verse to those who have "once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers [or "sharers"] of the Holy Spirit." "Once been enlightened" doubtless refers to salvation (cf. Heb. 10:32; also 2 Cor. 4:6), "tasted the heavenly gift" probably refers to enjoying the graciousness of the Lord (cf. 1 Peter 2:3, esp. KJV), and "partakers of the Holy Spirit" definitely implies participating in the Spirit's presence and power. Note that one step follows on another.

[72]Of course, John's baptism is no longer a relevant issue. However, instruction about baptisms might legitimately include both baptism in water and in the Spirit (see [3] above), especially the relationship of the latter to the laying on of hands. Also the matter of "one Lord, one faith,

one baptism" (Eph. 4:5) could call for consideration. F. F. Bruce makes the comment regarding "one baptism" that "it is beside the point to ask whether it is baptism in water or baptism of the Holy Spirit: it is Christian baptism-baptism 'into the name of the Lord Jesus' … which indeed involved the application of water, as John's baptism had done, but … was closely associated with the gift of the Spirit" (The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians, NICNT, 336-37).

[73]The verb is symplërousthai, "to be fulfilled." According to TDNT, this means "fulfilled according to God's plan…. The verb itself points to the fulfillment of God's saving will in the event which takes place" (6:308). The KJV is closer to the Greek text than RSV (and many other versions) in translating symplërousthai as "was fully come."

[74]I have sought to delineate some of these movements in my book The Pentecostal Reality, chapter 3, "A New Era in History."

[75]Refer to Section I.B for an elaboration of this matter.

[76]I speak of context rather than conditions for receiving the Holy Spirit. Charles W. Conn writes that "there are definite, stated conditions to be met; conditions that had to be met by the disciples, conditions that must be met by all who receive the Holy Ghost today" (Pillars of Pentecost y 96). The word "conditions" may however suggest something beyond faith, a kind of faith plus works; hence it should be avoided. F. D. Bruner expresses strong opposition to Pentecostalism because of what he calls their "doctrine of the conditions for the baptism in the Holy Spirit" (A Theology of the Holy Spirit, 87-111). Although Bruneis criticisms are exaggerated, his point concerning the use of the word, or idea, of conditions is well taken.

[77]See again Acts 2:38; 8:12-17; 19:5-6.

[78]That this was Jesus' own baptism in the Spirit is apparent in many ways: (1) Although the imagery of the dove differs, e.g., from the wind and fire of Pentecost, the picture is clearly of a coming of the Spirit from without; (2) Immediately after, that Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit' " (Luke 4:1), thus a parallel to the disciples being "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4); (3) the Holy Spirit came at the Jordan to inaugurate Jesus' ministry even as at Pentecost to initiate the disciples'; (4) the Spirit who came is the Spirit of power: afterward it was said that Jesus moved "in the power [dynamis] of the Spirit" (Luke 4:14); likewise the promise was given to the disciples that they would receive power (dynamis) (Acts 1:8) when the Holy Spirit came upon them; (5) in the parallel passage in

John's Gospel the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus is tied to Jesus' baptism of others in the Holy Spirit: "I myself [John the Baptist] did not know him; but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes in the Holy Spirit'" (John 1:33).

[79]The water baptism in Jesus' case, unlike that of others, was not "for the forgiveness of sins" (cf. Acts 2:38). When John the Baptist remonstrated against baptizing Jesus ("I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"), Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matt. 3:14-15). Although Jesus was not a sinner needing baptism and forgiveness, baptism did represent identification with God's righteous purpose signified therein. Thus-and of relevance to our concerns-Jesus' water baptism, which fulfilled God's righteousness before the Spirit was given, illustrates the faith- righteousness that precedes the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[80]In the parallel Matthean account (7:11), instead of "the Holy Spirit" the expression is "good things" (agatha). Of all "good things," the gift of the Holy Spirit cannot be excelled. So EGT comments on Luke 11:13: "The Holy Spirit is mentioned here as the summum bonum, and the supreme object of desire for all true disciples." EGT also notes that "in some forms of the Lord's Prayer (Marcion, Greg[ory of] Nys[sa]) a petition for the gift of the Holy Spirit took the place of the first or second petition." Since Luke 11 begins with the Lord's Prayer and is the background for all that follows about prayer, climaxing with prayer for the gift of the Spirit, it is at least conceivable that the whole passage (vv. 1-13) is an elaboration of the petition for the Holy Spirit and what is involved in such petition. (For a previous discussion of the passage in Luke, see chapter 7, III.B., "The Gift of the Holy Spirit.")

[81]The Greek word is anaideian, literally, "shamelessness," hence a persistence or importunity that is almost indecent!

[82]Here I would like to testify personally how true this is. After I had spent some three days of continual prayer specifically for the gift of the Holy Spirit, God marvelously granted my request. It seemed many times that God (like the man in bed at midnight) would never answer, but because of my deep desire, importunate praying continued. At last when the answer came, it was all the more a thing of wonder and praise.

[83]Or "were continuing steadfastly in prayer" (ësan proskarterountes … tè proseuchë). This more literal Greek reading points to the fact of their

continuous devotion.

[84]The account in Acts 2:1-4 of the coming of the Spirit does not directly say that the disciples were praying when this happened. However, it is clearly implied both from the words of 1:14 (suggesting a continuing devotion to prayer) and the setting of 2:1-4 where they were “all together in one place” (v. 1) (suggesting a unity in prayer) and their “sitting” (v. 2) (suggesting an attitude of prayerful waiting) when the Holy Spirit came.

[85]We have already spoken of God’s sovereign purpose-His own timetable-being fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. However, this is not to be understood as making irrelevant the human context of prayer. God fulfills His purpose through those who prayerfully await His action.

[86]The point is sometimes made that the account of the disciples waiting and praying prior to Pentecost cannot afford an example for others, since the Holy Spirit had not yet been given. For in the words of John, “the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (7:39). Hence, there could be no reception of the Spirit prior to Jesus’ glorification. However, Jesus had been glorified (i.e., returned to the Father’s presence as Acts 1:9-11 records) before Pentecost, and yet they waited some ten days. When this fact is realized, and such a scripture as Luke 11:1-13, which seems clearly applicable to God’s children at any time, is also considered, it is apparent that earnest prayer continues to be the context for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[87]It is important to emphasize that there was no automatic reception of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands by Peter and John. Although hands were the medium, the gift came only to those who believed in Jesus. We now are noting a further point, namely, that it was not simply a matter of laying hands (apostolic or otherwise) on believers. Rather, prior to hands, and still more basic (as an expression of faith in operation), was prayer.

[88]One of the questions in the Heidelberg Catechism (Q. 116) is, “Why is prayer necessary for Christians?” Then follows the striking answer: “Because it is the chief part of the gratitude which God requires of us, and because God will give his grace and Holy Spirit only to those who sincerely beseech him in prayer without ceasing, and who thank him for these gifts” (italics added).

[89]Prayer as the context for the outpouring of the Spirit has been evidenced since the early twentieth century. The usual date for the beginning of the Pentecostal/charismatic renewal is New Year’s Day, 1901, in Topeka,

Kansas. At Charles Parham's Bible School, a devout prayer service had been held on New Year's Eve, and all New Year's Day God's presence was felt "stilling hearts to wait upon greater things to come" (Klaude Kendrick, The Promise Fulfilled, 52). About 11:00 P.M. Agnes Ozman, one of the students, was prayed for to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit "fell" (recall chapter 8, n. 57). The second outburst occurred in Los Angeles on April 9, 1906, among a group of people, whites and blacks, who had prayed and fasted for ten days, asking God to send His Spirit. On the tenth day a young black man spoke in tongues, followed shortly by six others. Such early twentieth-century beginnings are repeated variously in our time. For example, it was at a prayer meeting that Dennis Bennett had his experience, and it was in prayer that the gift of the Spirit came. A friend prayed over him, and then Bennett "prayed out loud for about twenty minutes" before he began "to speak in a new language" (Nine O'clock in the Morning, 20). Examples could be multiplied.

[90]Literally, "the Holy Spirit whom God gave to the ones obeying him" (Gr. to pneuma to hagion ho edoken ho theos tois peitharchousin auto). F. D. Bruner errs in saying that "the obedience spoken of in Acts 5:32 rather than being a condition is the result of the gift of the Holy Spirit" (A Theology of the Holy Spirit, 172). There is no suggestion here of obedience as a result; it is rather that God gives the Spirit to those obeying. E. Schweizer is correct in writing that "obedience must also precede the reception of the Spirit according to [Acts] 5:32" (TDNT, 6: 412). Also see John Rea, Layman's Commentary on the Holy Spirit, 74-78, entitled "Acts 5:32-Obedience and the Gift of the Holy Spirit."

[91]The expression "the obedience of faith" is used by Paul in Romans 1:5: "Through whom [Christ] we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith [eis hypakoen písteos] for the sake of his name among all the nations… ." Also see Romans 16:26 for the same expression. BAGD (under ὑπακοή) suggests that eis hypakoen pisteos be translated "with a view to (promoting) obedience that springs from faith." Obedience that springs from faith is an excellent way of describing the obedience that is the context for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[92]The RSV has the singular: "commandment"; however, the Greek word enteilamenos is plural.

[93]Although the Holy Spirit Himself had not yet been given, He was already present as the medium for Jesus' words. This prior presence of the Holy

Spirit illustrates a point earlier made, namely, that the gift of the Holy Spirit by no means rules out the previous presence and activity of the Holy Spirit among people of faith.

[94]According to the Gospel of Luke (the "first book" referred to in Acts 1:1), the words are "stay [Gr. kathisate, literally, 'sit'; 'tarry' KJV] in the city" (24:49).

[95]At the moment of the Lord's command to the centurion, Cornelius was not yet a believer. However, he did become a believer, at which moment the Holy Spirit was poured out (10:43-44). Hence his obedience was caught up in faith. To such a one the Spirit is given.

[96]This has been noted in three instances, involving the original disciples in Jerusalem, Saul of Tarsus, and the Caesareans. As far as the Samaritans are concerned, the situation is less clear. It may be that one of the reasons for the delay of several days in their receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit was their need for more time after the beginning of faith for obedience to develop. The Samaritans had long been caught up in idolatrous adulation of Simon the magician-"They all gave heed to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is that power of God which is called Great' " (Acts 8:10)-and were "amazed" by his magical practices (v. 11). Although the Samaritans had entered the way of faith, they may have needed more time for commitment-and obedience-to Christ to replace their deep-seated idolatry in regard to Simon. In the case of the Ephesians, we read nothing directly about obedience. However, the atmosphere is that of readiness to do what John the Baptist had commanded, and after that to follow Paul's injunctions (see Acts 19:4-6).

[97]This does not necessarily mean a long "tarrying" period for the Holy Spirit to be given. But, however short or long, the words do call for a determination to obey-to keep on asking, seeking, and knocking-until the answer comes. For many people, I would add, there was never such a time of overt seeking and asking; however, their hearts and lives were set on obedience (see next paragraph in the text), and to them God gave His Holy Spirit.

[98]Here I make reference to a nineteenth-century book by Andrew Murray, The Spirit of Christ, in the section subtitled, "The Spirit Given to the Obedient," 69-77. Murray writes, "The obedient must and may look for the fullness of the Spirit" (italics his). He speaks of this as "the promise of the conscious, active indwelling of the Spirit" and adds, "A living obedience is indispensable to the full experience of the indwelling…. Let

each of us even now say to our Lord that we do love Him and keep His commandments. In however much feebleness and failure it be, still let us speak it out to Him… .” Murray, a Dutch Reformed pastor in South Africa, was one of the predecessors of the twentieth-century spiritual renewal. On the contemporary scene John Rea puts it well: “Christian obedience is a product of the inner heart, not of outward duty. It springs from gratitude for grace already received (Rom. 12:1–8) not from desire to gain merit” (*Layman's Commentary on the Holy Spirit*, 77). It is *this* obedience, which is not a work, that is context for the gift of the Spirit to be received.

99 “Many Pentecostals, accordingly, affirm the necessity of complete holiness or entire sanctification for the reception of the Holy Spirit. They do not identify complete sanctification with baptism in the Spirit (as did the late-nineteenth-century Wesleyan-Holiness movement; recall chap. 10, Excursus, n. 127), but they do retain the Holiness emphasis on entire sanctification as necessary to baptism in the Spirit. For example, the Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.), one of the earliest Pentecostal denominations, declares, “We believe … in sanctification subsequent to the new birth … and in the baptism of the Holy Ghost subsequent to a clean heart.” A similar view is held by such major Pentecostal bodies as the Pentecostal Holiness Church and the Church of God in Christ. Many other Pentecostal denominations such as the Assemblies of God, the Elim Pentecostal Church, and the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel do not affirm entire sanctification as “a second work of grace” (a common expression for “entire sanctification”) prior to Spirit baptism. The charismatic movement has generally held this latter viewpoint. With its adherents largely in non-Wesleyan churches (e.g., Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic), there has been little, if any, recognition of an intervening stage of complete sanctification between regeneration and the reception of the Holy Spirit.

My comment is that although holiness is surely important, it is difficult to deduce from the Book of Acts (or elsewhere in the New Testament) a second stage of entire sanctification between salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, it is really asking the impossible—“entire sanctification”—and places too great a burden on people seeking the gift of the Holy Spirit. What rather needs to be said is that sanctification (not “entire sanctification”) is essential to receiving the Holy Spirit, and that either at the time of initial sanctification or during its progress (see chap. 4, II.A.B, on the beginning and continuation of sanctification) the Holy

Spirit may be given. To use my language in the text above, the gift of the Spirit is received on the way of obedience.

[100]As mentioned before, the centurion is described as a God-fearing man: “a devout man who feared God with all his household” (Acts 10:2); he was also a man who “does what is right” (v. 35). Thus against a broad background of devoutness of life and righteous concerns, Cornelius’ obedience to the command of the Lord stands out vividly.

[101]In the Gospel of John the resurrected Jesus appeared to the disciples in a closed room and said, “‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (20:21–22). Further evidence of this ministration of new life and new commission is found later in the Gospel of John where Jesus fed several of the disciples bread and fish and then three times commissioned Peter to feed His sheep and lambs (21:15–17). Likewise, in the Gospel of Luke there was the ministry of faith and life through Jesus’ unmistakable resurrection presence (Luke 24:36–43) and the declaration of a new commission (24:46–48). This was prior to Pentecost, as Luke specifies in the Book of Acts, and thus it points to a further period of instruction, waiting, and yielding to the Lord.

[102]A Roman citizen, of the tribe of Benjamin, graduate of the school at Tarsus, Pharisee of the Pharisees, master of legal righteousness, fierce foe of the church (see, e.g., Phil. 3:4- 7): This was the Saul whom Jesus encountered on the road to Damascus.

[103]According to Paul in Romans 6, the “fruit” of such yielding is “unto holiness,” but the yielding itself is that by which one becomes a servant, or slave, of God. “But now being made free from sin, and become servants [or “slaves”] to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life” (v. 22 KJV).

[104]This is the language of Romans 12:1 where again Paul calls for a life of total commitment. All of life is to be poured out on the altar of complete self-giving.

[105]See Philippians 2:5-8.

[106]See James 3:6-10. The importance of surrender of the tongue-the “unrighteous world among our members”-can scarcely be exaggerated. It desperately needs control and direction by the Holy Spirit. As I have earlier noted, when the disciples at Pentecost-and many others later-were filled with the Holy Spirit, they “began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). In their total yielding, which

included the tongue, the Spirit gave them this new utterance, which was to the praise and magnifying of God. So it continues to be in the contemporary movement of the Holy Spirit where speaking in tongues, among other things, is a sign of complete yielding to God. The tongue no longer "set on fire by hell" is aflame with the glory of God!

[107]Frank Bartleman, a leader in the Azusa Street revival of 1906, wrote tellingly of his own experience of yielding. He said, "My mind, the last fortress of man to yield, was taken possession of by the Holy Spirit. The waters that had been gradually accumulating went over my head. I was possessed of Him fully. The utterance in 'tongues' was without human mixture, as 'the Spirit gave utterance.'… Oh, the thrill of being fully yielded to Him! … In the experience of 'speaking in tongues' I had reached the climax in abandonment. This opened the channel for a new ministry of the Spirit in service. From that time the Spirit began to flow through me in a new way…. The Pentecostal baptism spells complete abandonment, possession by the Holy Ghost, of the whole man, with a spirit of instant obedience. I had much of the power of God for service for many years before this, but I now realized a sensitiveness for the Spirit, a yieldedness, that made it possible for God to possess and work in new ways and channels, with far more powerful direct results" (Azusa Street, 72-73). A few words further he wrote about his experience: "There was no strain or contortions. No struggle in an effort to get the 'baptism.' With me it was simply a matter of yielding…. I wanted to be fully yielded to God … I wanted more of Him, that was all" (ibid., 74).

[108]In my own case it was not easy to be prayed for by an ordained minister from another denomination. It seemed a bit humiliating to one also ordained (and a theologian at that!). But God blessed this act of submission, and the gift of the Spirit was thereafter received.

[109]John Rea writes this about yielding: "The individual seeking to be baptized and filled with the Spirit must be willing to yield control of every part of his being to the Holy Spirit. You should yield yourself completely unto Jesus, as one who is alive from the dead, and also every member and faculty of your body as an instrument of righteousness…. Yield your will so that your motives are pure…. Yield your members, especially your tongues as the organ of expression of the Holy Spirit through you" (Layman's Commentary on the Holy Spirit, 65). Donald Gelpi (as was earlier noted) speaks of praying for "full docility to the Spirit of Christ." He adds, "[This] is in effect to express one's willingness

to do whatever God may be calling one to do, no matter what the personal sacrifice or suffering that call might entail. The person who cannot pray such a prayer and mean it is not yet ready for 'Spirit-baptism' " (Pentecostalism: A Theological Viewpoint, 183). Yielding, "full docility"-indeed total surrender-is essential for the reception of the fullness of God's Spirit. What Rea and Gelpi speak about is illustrated countless times in the contemporary renewal.

[110]In the words of Peter: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). The multitude was promised two things: forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit. Thus one could speak of a twofold expectation. It is important to emphasize again, however, that the latter is based on the former, for without the forgiveness of sins expectation of the gift of the Spirit is in vain.

[111]The Greek phrase is eis makran.

[112]"The presupposition of the charismatic renewal today … is an expectant faith, a faith that expects God to do what he said." So writes Stephen B. Clark in an article "Charismatic Renewal in the Church" (As the Spirit Leads Us, 22). Jim Cavnar spoke about his own experience thus: "I knew that the baptism in the Spirit was received in faith by asking the Father for the outpouring of the Spirit promised by his Son. I felt that the most important thing was to ask in faith, with confidence in God and full of expectation …" (Catholic Pentecostals, 63). This note of expectant faith is found throughout the contemporary renewal.

12
The Effects of the Coming of the Spirit

Let us now briefly consider the effects or results of the coming of the Holy Spirit. Our concern is with both the immediate and extended effects of the giving of the Spirit. A number of these effects may be noted.

I. THE REALITY OF GOD'S PRESENCE

The coming of the Holy Spirit is the coming of God Himself. He comes to those whose sins have been forgiven and whose lives have been made new. He comes from the exalted Christ to be dynamically present in and among His people. Those to whom He comes are thereby more deeply aware of the presence and reality of God.

It is apparent that in the Book of Acts a strong sense of God's presence was the paramount fact in everything that occurred. When the Spirit was given at Pentecost, the company immediately began to declare the marvelous works of God. It did not matter that thousands were gathered around them, for so full were they of God's Spirit that they went right on praising Him. The reality of God's presence had gripped them both as a community and as individuals, and in such fashion that in all that followed they sensed God moving in their midst.

In the case of Peter's ministry the reality of God's presence pervaded everything. In his message to the large Jewish audience in Jerusalem (Acts 2:14–39) he spoke of God with authority, of Jesus Christ with the assurance of personal knowledge, and of the Holy Spirit with the certainty of profound experience. He later pronounced healing in the name of Jesus Christ as one who was powerfully and personally present (3:6–7), and, "filled with the Holy Spirit," he did not hesitate to proclaim salvation even to the rulers, elders, and high priests (4:8–12). So real was the presence of God in the community of believers that Peter declared that to lie about a certain matter was to lie against God: "You have not lied to men but to God" (5:4). Further, the witness of Peter and the other apostles about Jesus was known by them to be a co-witness with the Holy Spirit: "We are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given …" (5:32). Also the Holy Spirit, prior to Peter's trip to Caesarea, spoke directly and personally to him: "The Spirit said to him, 'Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down, and accompany them without hesitation; for I have sent them'" (10:19–20).

Likewise, from the outset of Paul's ministry there was a compelling sense of God's reality. The personal self-disclosure of the risen and exalted Lord to Saul of Tarsus—"I am Jesus …" (Acts 9:5)—and the ensuing experience of being "filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 17) made Saul a man whose life and activity

thereafter were dominated by the reality of God's living presence. "Immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, 'He is the Son of God'" (v. 20); this proclamation, like all else Paul did after this, stemmed from the certainty of God's pervading presence and action. One telling illustration of the dynamic presence of God in Paul's missionary activity is that in which the apostle, with Timothy, was led by the Holy Spirit to cross over from Asia Minor into Europe. First, Paul was "forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia," and, second, when he purposed to go in another direction, "the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them" (16:6–7). This is unmistakable testimony to the reality of the divine presence and direction in whatever Paul did. Throughout Paul's ministry there is a continuing sense of the activity of the Holy Spirit.[1]

The Book of Acts is the record of a church intensely aware of the presence of God. When the prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch met together, the Holy Spirit was markedly present: "While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13:2). When the apostles and elders of the church in Jerusalem convened to make a decision about the matter of Gentile circumcision, they sent a letter that included these words: "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (15:28). Whether in Jerusalem, Antioch, or Macedonia, the church was moving and acting in the reality of God's spiritual presence.

The Book of Acts, accordingly, is far more than the acts of men or the "Acts of the Apostles."[2] For though people were everywhere involved, it was basically the acts of God, of Jesus Christ, of the Holy Spirit that stood forth. God was present in a compelling manner and the sense of His presence and action was strikingly known and experienced. All that happened found its source and direction from Him. That God is real was the basic fact in the life of the early Christian community.[3]

What has been said about the experienced presence of God in the early church is again being confirmed in the contemporary movement of the Holy Spirit. A spiritual breakthrough is occurring whereby people are being made vividly aware of the divine presence. Through the outpoured gift of the Holy Spirit, God in His divine reality is manifesting Himself. That God is *real* is being affirmed by countless thousands, not as simply an affirmation of distant faith, but of vivid, undeniable experience.

In a day of the "absence" of God, the "eclipse" of God, even the "death" of God,[4] this spiritual breakthrough is a tremendous fact.[5] For the unreality of God has become the actual situation for vast numbers of people. This is the case not

only for the secular world but quite often for people inside the church. It is a matter of the Real Absence rather than the Real Presence. Often, even when the gospel is preached, the Bible fully accepted as the Word of God, and the sacraments regularly shared in, there is little spiritual vitality. This may be the case also for churches that lay much stress on evangelistic and missionary activity; there is little excitement about the presence of the living God in the midst of His people. But now through the outpouring of God's Spirit, this is changing for many persons: There is spiritual rejuvenation, renewal, and a profound sense of the divine presence.[6] It is as if, after many years of occasionally sensing His presence (but usually only in a fleeting fashion), the full reality has broken through.

The fellowship of believers, accordingly, becomes the recognized arena of God's living presence. People do not just assemble to hear what God said and did thousands of years ago. They also gather, based on what did occur long ago, to experience His presence, to hear His contemporary word, and to witness His continuing deeds, such as acts of healing and miracles. For in the Spirit the present fellowship is the continuing arena of God's vital presence and activity.

That God is real and present is the primary testimony of the contemporary spiritual renewal.

II. FULLNESS OF JOY

Wherever the Holy Spirit is received, there is a great upsurge of joy. Sometimes the joy is so great as to be almost uncontainable. There is a holy exuberance in the Lord.

It is apparent that on the Day of Pentecost there was great rejoicing in the Lord. As we have noted, the Spirit-filled disciples immediately began to speak forth the "wonderful works of God." They did so in such fashion that many mockingly declared them to be "filled with new wine." However, it was not fruit of the vine but fruit of the Spirit, not an artificial joy soon to fade but a genuine joy that was thenceforth to penetrate their whole existence.

Indeed, this deep joy is again demonstrated in entirely different circumstances. The apostles were jailed for their witness, and after being beaten they were charged by the Jewish high council not to speak further in the name of Jesus. "Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" (Acts 5:41). Hence, the joy that they along with many others had experienced on the Day of Pentecost was not only a joy related to favorable circumstances, but also one that continued in the midst of persecution and disrepute. It was the joy that Jesus spoke about when He told His disciples, "Blessed are you when men hate you … and revile you … on account of the Son of man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy" (Luke 6:22–23). Truly this is fullness of joy!

This fullness of joy, promised to His disciples, was mentioned by Jesus in the Gospel of John several times on the night of His betrayal. The words are found first in 15:11: "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."[7] Note that the joy comes from Jesus ("my joy")[8] and that the promise is twofold: the joy is to be "in" His disciples and their joy is to be "full." Hence it is not only a promise of indwelling joy but also a promise of being filled with joy. Looking ahead, we can say that the Resurrection was the coming of joy, even great joy,[9] but only at Pentecost and thereafter did the disciples know the fullness of that joy.[10]

In the Book of Acts, again, there are several other accounts in which joy, or rejoicing, is mentioned. First, after the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch by Philip, the Scripture declares, "When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of

the Lord caught up Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing" (8:39). Second, at Iconium "the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (13:52). Third, the Philippian jailer, who had come to faith in the Lord Jesus and was then baptized, "rejoiced greatly,[11] having believed in God with his whole household" (16:34 NASB). In all of these accounts, joy is closely connected with the Holy Spirit, quite possibly as an immediate effect of the gift of the Holy Spirit.[12]

Beyond Acts we may also observe, first, how Paul writes to the Thessalonians that they "received the word in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 1:6). That the Thessalonians had received the gift of the Holy Spirit is apparent from Paul's prior words: "Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" (v. 5). Hence, the "joy inspired by the Holy Spirit" came out of the fullness of their experience of the Holy Spirit, a joy that broke forth even amid "much affliction." The result, Paul adds, is "that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia" (v. 7). Second, Paul writes the Romans, praying, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (Rom. 15:13). "All joy" comes out of God's "filling," out of "the power of the Holy Spirit."

The fullness of joy expressed by these various scriptures is being exemplified across the world in the contemporary outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Many who have received the gift of the Spirit attest that one of the immediate effects is an intensity of joy. Often the experience is that of an inner movement of the Holy Spirit wherein the whole being is flooded with joy.[13] Something about this joy is quite different from ordinary joy or happiness; it is the joy of the Lord. In one popular chorus, based on 1 Peter 1:8, the wording goes: "It is joy unspeakable and full of glory, and the half has never yet been told!"

This joy, regardless of the ups and downs in the life of faith, continues as a wellspring ever bubbling up and overflowing. Jesus said about this joy that He promised His disciples: "No one will take your joy from you" (John 16:22). Since this joy is fulfilled through the gift of the Holy Spirit and this joy is the Lord's own joy, nothing can take it away. It is joy everlasting. Surely the words of Isaiah are appropriate: "And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads" (Isa. 51:11).

III. BOLDNESS IN SPEECH AND ACTION

We have earlier noted that the central purpose of the giving of the Spirit is for that enabling power by which the witness to Jesus can be carried forward in both word and deed. The gift of this power brings about extraordinary boldness and courage.

It is apparent in the Book of Acts that an immediate effect of the coming of the Holy Spirit was decisiveness and confidence of speech, courage in the face of all opposition, and readiness to lay down one's life for the sake of Christ. We may start with Peter's sermon at Pentecost, shortly after the disciples had been "filled with the Holy Spirit," and observe the confidence and directness of his words: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words" (2:14). Thus Peter began, and the note of confidence[14] is apparent throughout. Nor in the climax did he mince words, proclaiming, "God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus *whom you crucified*" (v. 36). A like confidence and boldness was demonstrated even more on a later day when Peter and John, after the healing of a cripple, were brought before the Jewish council (the same one that had called for Jesus' death) and were asked, "'By what power or by what name did you do this?' Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them … 'Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified … this man is standing before you well'" (Acts 4:7–8, 10). Then Peter added that "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (v. 12). The next verse begins: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John… ." Here were boldness and courage indeed!

On another occasion, despite threats against them, the company of disciples prayed, "And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness" (Acts 4:29). The result was that "when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness" (v. 31).

The close connection between being "filled with the Holy Spirit" and boldness is evident in each of three preceding accounts. The immediate effect was a boldness, a confidence, and a courage of extraordinary character.

We note next the example of Stephen. Stephen, like the other men chosen to serve tables, was “full of the Spirit” (Acts 6:3).[15] After Stephen had performed signs among the people, a number of Jews began to oppose him, but they “could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke” (6:10). However, through secret instigation and false witnesses, Stephen was brought before the Jewish council. When asked by the high priest to answer the charges, Stephen proceeded with total courage and boldness, not hesitating at the climax of his testimony to say to the council: “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit,” and “the Righteous One … you have now betrayed and murdered” (7:51–52). The result was that members of the council were enraged and gnashed their teeth against him; but he did not stop. Rather, Stephen “full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and … said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God” (vv. 55–56).

Such was the boldness of Stephen to speak against the evil of his audience and to proclaim to them the glorified Lord. He had a boldness and courage that withheld nothing. Thereupon they stoned him to death, but he never flinched to the very end.

This account of the extraordinary and indomitable courage of Stephen’s witness is set in the context of the fullness of the Spirit. Laden with the presence and power of God, Stephen spoke with total fearlessness, even to his martyrdom.

In the narrative about Saul of Tarsus we observe once more the connection between the gift of the Spirit and boldness of witness. Saul was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:17) and immediately was boldly proclaiming in the synagogues that Jesus was the Son of God. When the Jews tried to kill him, Saul managed to escape their plots and went to Jerusalem. There Barnabas, bringing him to the apostles, spoke of Saul’s conversion and how at Damascus he (Saul) had “preached boldly in the name of Jesus” (v. 27). Soon Saul “went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord” (vv. 28–29). Because of Saul’s zeal, his life was soon again at stake. To save him the brethren in Jerusalem took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to his home city of Tarsus.

From then on in all of Paul’s missionary travels the same boldness marked everything he did. Journeying with Barnabas, Paul encountered a magician at Cyprus who tried to block the Roman proconsul from hearing the gospel message. Then “Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him [the magician] and said, ‘You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?’” (Acts 13:9–10). Then Paul boldly pronounced that the magician would

become temporarily blind, and it happened. The result of Paul's bold word and action was that "the proconsul believed" (13:12). Other examples of such boldness are shown upon his visit to Antioch of Pisidia where, despite much Jewish reviling and opposition, "Paul and Barnabas[16] spoke out boldly, saying, 'Since you … judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles'" (13:46). And immediately thereafter, despite persecution and expulsion, Paul and Barnabas went on to Iconium, where "they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord" (14:3). Other examples could be added, but these should suffice to demonstrate again the marked connection between being filled with the Holy Spirit and being bold of speech and action.

Once again, to leave the scriptural record and to turn to the contemporary scene, we find much the same thing being exemplified. People who have received the gift of the Holy Spirit often demonstrate extraordinary boldness in the Lord. Particularly is this true immediately after the experience of being filled with the Spirit, when little hesitation is shown in proclaiming the word about Jesus anywhere and everywhere, and despite all opposition.[17] Sometimes this bold witness fades, but wherever there is earnest prayer for its renewal at whatever cost, there is a fresh filling with the Spirit and a new boldness in speaking the word.[18] This contemporary boldness is often not only of word but also of deed, as people do not hesitate to minister healing, deliverance, and other blessings in the name of the Lord.

We might do well also to mention the words of Paul to young Timothy, his son in the faith: "Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God[19] that is within you through the laying on of my hands, for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control" (2 Tim. 1:6–7). Boldness is the opposite of timidity, and boldness—along with power, love, and self-control—is given by God for witness to the gospel.

The boldness brought about by the Holy Spirit is a boldness unto death. It is a boldness and a courage that, removing all shame and hesitation, can cause a person to say with the apostle Paul: "It is my eager expectation and hope that I shall not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage[20] now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death" (Phil. 1:20). It is a boldness that does not exclude martyrdom as a very real possibility.

IV. DEEPENING OF FELLOWSHIP

When the Spirit is given, the individual is so filled and the group is so profoundly united as to create a fellowship of great love, sharing, and community. There is a remarkable deepening of fellowship.

In reviewing the account of the events in the early church, there is an unmistakable stress on community. Before the Day of Pentecost, as we have noted, the disciples were "with one accord" (Acts 1:14) in prayer, and when the day arrived, they were "all together in one place" (2:1). The sense of unity was obviously intensified with the coming of the Holy Spirit, as "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 4). Later when Peter delivered his sermon, it was not simply as an individual spokesman, but "standing with the eleven" (v. 14), he addressed the crowd. A new and transcending unity had been brought about by the Holy Spirit.

Next, after some three thousand persons received Peter's word and were baptized, the text immediately reads: "And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship *[koinonia]*,[21] to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42 NASB). Here was a tremendous sense of togetherness—in study, breaking bread, prayer—which the Holy Spirit had brought about.[22] One of the key terms is "fellowship" or "koinonia"; and the fact that they devoted themselves to koinonia signifies their profound new commitment to one another.

This commitment to one another is shown concretely in what follows: "And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have[23] need" (2:44–45 NASB). This extraordinary spirit of sharing and fellowship is shown also in the next statement: "And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together" (v. 46 NASB). They sold property and possessions wherever there was need; they also opened their homes to one another; thus they held all things in common.[24]

While the number of disciples increased to about five thousand (Acts 4:4), the spirit of unity only deepened. Two examples follow: First, after Peter and John

reported to the company the threats of the Jewish council, the disciples "lifted up their voice to God with one accord" (v. 24 KJV). With one voice[25] and with complete unanimity—one accord[26] —they prayed to God for boldness to continue to witness while the Lord healed and performed signs and wonders. Second, following this prayer in which they were "filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 31), their unity is powerfully described in this way: "Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common" (v. 32). Again the commonality of possessions is expressed, but this time against the background of an intense unity of spirit: one heart and soul. It would be hard to imagine a more graphic or amazing statement of unity, because many thousands of people were involved.

A beautiful expression follows: "Great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4:33). And this great grace was further demonstrated: "There was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of lands or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need" (vv. 34–35 NASB). While the language here does not state that people sold everything they had (only lands and houses are mentioned), it does suggest a readiness to commit their most valuable possessions.[27] Nor was there a profligate selling of properties, as if there were some special virtue in getting rid of earthly things.[28] Rather, the selling was for the purpose of bringing the proceeds to the apostles,[29] that every need might be met.

It is evident, then, that the community of over five thousand was truly a koinonia of the Holy Spirit. It was a community united in prayer, in witness, and in fellowship. When any potential source of disruption entered, such as the dishonesty of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–10) and the complaints of certain Hellenists (6:1–6),[30] the matter was promptly dealt with, and the koinonia maintained. The result was that "the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith" (v. 7).

Now let me try to summarize a few things. Although the disciples were all Jews or converts to Judaism[31] at this stage, they represented the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern world,[32] they were Greek-speaking and Aramaic-speaking, they were men and women, they were laity and priests, and they were apostles and brethren in general from an immense variety of backgrounds and former loyalties, *but* now all were in one accord. They studied together, prayed together, broke bread together. They went to the temple unitedly, and also from house to

house. Their commitment to one another was so intense that they no longer claimed any possessions as their own, but sold them, sharing wherever there was need. They were of one heart and one soul, and great grace was manifest in all they did. In every way it was the koinonia of the Holy Spirit.

But along with this came the growth of opposition from the religious leaders and ever-increasing threats and persecution. Finally, with the killing of Stephen a "great persecution" (Acts 8:1) began, and all the disciples, except the apostles, were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. No longer could they attend the temple together and participate in corporate worship. Still, wherever they went and whatever the opposition, they continued to be one in Christ, the koinonia of the Holy Spirit.

It would be an overstatement to say that there was invariable harmony or unity after that. For with the distance from Jerusalem, the absence of the apostles, and perhaps the dimming of intensity of the Spirit's presence, some disharmony and disunity were sure to appear. Factions and party spirit appeared in churches here and there. However, insofar as this happened, they were no longer really "spiritual people,"[33] no longer flowing in the Spirit of Christ, no longer what the Lord intended. Still, if they could remember who they were and be renewed in Spirit, once more they would be truly the koinonia of the Holy Spirit.

Along this line Paul wrote to the Ephesians that they should be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (4:3). He concluded his second letter to the Corinthians with this prayer: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship [koinonia] of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (13:14). This unity that comes from the Spirit, this koinonia, is to be zealously maintained and earnestly prayed for. These words of Paul agree with the great concern of Jesus expressed in His prayer for believers "that they may all be one … I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one" (John 17:21, 23). It is in the unity of the Spirit that such oneness is a reality.

It is now time to return to the contemporary situation. What we have seen in our own day in the movement of the Holy Spirit is the renewal of deep Christian fellowship. People have found themselves drawn together in a profound unity of worship, community, study, and witness: the koinonia of the Holy Spirit. Such fellowship goes so much deeper than anything they had known before that they marvel at what God has done.

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit there has been a personal renewal of unmistakable quality, but at the same time it has been a community renewal of extraordinary character. People have been brought by the Spirit into such a mutual relationship that they know they belong to one another. It is not as if there was no sense of community before, but this has a richer quality. Now with

a fresh enthusiasm and joy in the Lord they have an intense desire to be together, to enjoy one another's company, to hear what God has to say through a brother or a sister, to minister to one another, or to share whenever there is need. So full of the Lord's presence is the gathering of the community that nothing else is comparable to it, and the time spent with one another seems as no time at all. Frequency of gathering together, often extended hours of meeting, going from house to house for prayer and fellowship: all are a part of the present renewal.

Further, people caught up in the renewal of the Spirit come from a multiplicity of backgrounds. Nations around the world, denominations from across Christendom, people of many races, ages, and cultures—all are represented in the present renewal. While some fellowships are more limited culturally, denominationally, racially, etc., the genius of the movement is clearly the way it essentially transcends all ordinary groupings. It is not unusual to find Protestants of many kinds, Roman Catholics,[34] possibly Eastern Orthodox, and people of no church background all together in the same koinonia of the Holy Spirit. This, however, is not a unity based on the lowest common denominator of religious belief, but on the fact that all have been brought by the Spirit into a profound and transforming relationship with one another.

As a result of this, prayer and praise fellowships, renewal communities, and transdenominational Christian centers have developed in many parts of the world. Some are communities of shared goods and properties, of a daily common life together. Some fellowships exist within more traditional church structures and seek to exercise renewing influence; others exist alongside these structures (para-congregational) or function totally separate from them. But wherever such communities are found, it is essentially in the same spirit of praise, fellowship, witness, and concern.[35]

The reaction from outside observers is often either one of attraction or opposition. Some find themselves strongly moved by the sight of people praising the Lord, meeting together in lively prayer and expectation, and showing great concern for one another. They have yearned for such a deeper fellowship and want to become a part. Many have grown weary with traditional forms and seemingly lifeless patterns of religious activity, and here they sense life, power, vitality. Thus persons in the renewal often find favor (cf. Acts 2:47) with people around, and many are added to their number. But others manifest opposition to the movement. Sometimes this comes from the secular world, which has little use for anything deeply religious and spiritual; but more often it comes from within the established church order. The renewal, in this case, is viewed with suspicion, even as a threat to some, and attitudes vary from cautious tolerance to

strong opposition. These differing reactions, from attraction to repulsion, suggest that something is occurring in the fellowship of the Spirit of unusual significance for the whole church.

It seems quite possible that this renewal in the Spirit is the most profound ecumenical development of the twentieth century. This century, now moving to a climax, has witnessed many attempts to bring churches together, to get beyond the scandal of division, and to recover the oneness that the church at least verbally affirms. And there have been varying degrees of success: formations of councils, mergers of denominations, and surely many prayers for unity. Indeed, there is a growing sense that division is intolerable, that it is a huge obstacle to faith, and that Jesus' prayer that "they may all be one … so that the world may believe" (John 17:21) must somehow find an answer. Such is the growing ecumenical concern, and its solution is to be found only in and through the renewal of the Holy Spirit.[36] As people, as churches, and as individuals are profoundly renewed by the Holy Spirit, the whole situation is transformed from a search after unity to its realization.

Surely hazards mark the way. For example, people renewed in the Spirit may allow a party spirit to set in and thus draw back into denominational enclaves or groups that no longer fellowship with others. They may begin to emphasize minor doctrinal points to such a degree that the unity of the Spirit is increasingly broken. Sometimes spiritually renewed groups set themselves apart from other groups and follow a particular leader or teaching, no longer recognizing the unity the Spirit has brought about. Indeed, there are hazards and situations that need repentance and correction. However, the overarching fact is that through the renewal of the Spirit there is a new and profound gift of unity that alone can bring into fulfillment the genuine oneness of the body of Christ. When this is realized afresh and is acted on accordingly, the prayer of the Lord will find its ultimate fulfillment.

It is appropriate to conclude this section with the words of Paul: "The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom. 5:5 NASB).

When through the gift of the Holy Spirit the love of God is truly shed abroad in the hearts of all, there is then a deep creation of fellowship, sharing, and unity with one another. Through such God-given love we become the koinonia of the Holy Spirit.

V. THE CONTINUING PRAISE OF GOD

Finally, the coming of the Holy Spirit results in the continuing praise of God. Those who are filled with God's Spirit are people of praise.

We have earlier observed that on the Day of Pentecost the immediate effect of the outpouring of the Spirit was the magnifying of God. This they did in tongues, but in this very speech they were declaring "the wonderful works of God" (Acts 2:11). Years later in Caesarea, as we have noted, a similar thing occurred among the Gentiles. The Spirit came on the centurion and his household, resulting in their "speaking in tongues and extolling God" (10:46). Hence from the beginning, the coming of the Spirit has been accompanied by the praise[37] of God.

This follows from the fact that when the reality of God breaks in on people, the only appropriate response is the offering of praise. In the Old Testament precursor of Pentecost the glory of God filled the temple: "When all the children of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the LORD upon the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the earth on the pavement, and worshiped and gave thanks to God" (2 Chron. 7:3).[38] Worship and praise were the immediate response. When the Pentecostal event occurs, the glory, the reality, the presence of God is far more intense—not just a temple but people filled with God's glory. Praise and worship of God is far richer and fuller and, indeed, far more enduring.

In the Book of Acts on the Day of Pentecost it was first the 120 who praised God, but later in the day it was the whole community of more than 3000 people. We have earlier observed how the newly formed fellowship of believers shared with one another. Now we note that their community life was one of constant praise to God; they were "praising God and having favor with all the people" (Acts 2:47). This was being done "in the temple" and "from house to house" (v. 46 KJV). Everywhere the believers went, praise continually erupted from their lips and hearts.

Here I turn to the present spiritual renewal because it is essentially a renewal of praise. There is, to be sure, an extraordinary unity of love of believers for one another, but overarching all else is the constant praise and glorification of God. This overflowing praise happens whether at church (the "temple") or in people's

various homes (“from house to house”). “Praise the Lord,” uttered through many a song and prayer and testimony, is the hallmark of the contemporary renewal.

The continuing praise of God is marked by the *adoration* of God. The adoration of God has always been a part of the church’s worship, so in a sense there is nothing new or different in the renewal. However, there is both an intensity and an intimacy in this adoration that goes beyond usual worship. When people sing such a chorus as “We exalt thee, O God,” it is with mounting zeal and fervor. Hands are often upraised. Frequently after the chorus is finished, there is the further movement of praise into “singing in the Spirit.” The intensity of worship at such a point almost defies description. To illustrate the matter of intimacy, there is a chorus whose stanzas begin, “Father, I adore you,” “Jesus, I adore you,” and “Spirit, I adore you.” This suggests a deeply personal sense of the presence of the Father who has created and provides, of the Son who has redeemed and is alive, and of the Holy Spirit who has sanctified and is dynamically present. Such a personal, intimate, and thankful adoration of God lies at the heart of the contemporary spiritual renewal.

There is also the distinguishing mark of *spontaneity.* We may recall Paul’s words “Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart” (Eph. 5:18–19). Such praise of God finds a rich fulfillment in spiritual fellowship as people freely move back and forth between singing “psalms and hymns” in their own language as well as “spiritual songs” inspired by the Holy Spirit. Through it all there is spontaneity: no set order, no set liturgy. Frequently under the impact of the Spirit, new songs and new choruses are given.

A final mark of this continuing praise is *anticipation.* There is the sense that the more truly and fully praise to God is offered, the more closely one approaches the glories of the world beyond. According to the Book of Revelation, John was “in the Spirit” (4:2) and beheld the throne of God (4:2 ff.) and the Lamb near the throne (5:1 ff.). The scene depicts total praise, climaxing with the words “And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, ‘To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!’ And the four living creatures said, ‘Amen!’ and the elders fell down and worshiped” (5:13–14). When the people of God are moving “in the Spirit,” they sense that their praise is the earthly counterpart to the worship that never ceases in heaven and is a glorious anticipation of the perfect worship that is to be known in the age to come. Truly life can have no higher fulfillment than the continuing praise of God.

[1]E.g., Acts 19:21: “Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem …”; Acts 20:22-23: “I am going to Jerusalem, bound in the Spirit… the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.”

[2]“Acts of the Apostles” is a title frequently given to the book. The title is doubly misleading. First, the Book of Acts, while mostly narratives about apostolic activity, also relates the acts of “deacons” such as Stephen (Acts 6-7) and Philip (Acts 8); of churches such as Antioch and Jerusalem (see above); of teachers such as Apollos, Priscilla, and Aquila (Acts 18:24-28); and of prophets such as Agabus (Acts 11:28; 21:10-11); second, the focus of the title is off center, for the main feature is not the acts of the apostles or any other believers but the acts of the Holy Spirit, or the acts of the exalted Lord through the Hoiy Spirit, the continuation of “all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1) in His earthly life.

[3]J. B. Phillips, in the introduction to his translation of Acts, writes, “We cannot help feeling disturbed as well as moved, for this surely is the Church as it was meant to be…. They were open on the God-ward side in a way that is almost unknown to us today” *(The Young Church in Action*, vii). “Almost unknown to us today”? Perhaps, unless one is aware of what is happening in the contemporary spiritual renewal!

[4]“Death of God” terminology was used by Nietzsche and taken up in the mid-sixties by so-called “death of God” theologians. This says far more about the human than the divine condition. For all practical purposes God is dead when there is no sense of His living presence.

[5]“In an era that cries, ‘God is dead,’ and questions whether ‘Christianity’ has a future, the charismatic renewal comes as a vigorous affirmation that God is indeed a living God, and that Jesus Christ is active in the world with sovereign power.” So begins Pentecost in the Modern World by Edward D. O’Connor, C.S.C.

[6]In his autobiography, Nine O’Clock in the Morning, Dennis Bennett describes the sense of God’s presence that came to him just following his receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit: “The Presence of God that I had so clearly seen in earlier days to be the real reason for living suddenly enveloped me again after the many, many years of dryness. Never had I experienced God’s presence in such reality as now. It might have frightened me, except that I recognized that this was the same Presence of the Lord that I had sensed when I first accepted Jesus … only the intensity and reality of my present experience was far greater than

anything I had believed possible. If those earlier experiences were like flashbulbs, this was as if someone had suddenly turned on the floodlights! The reality of God was something that I felt all the way through …" (24). Here, verily, is the answer to "the death of God"!

[7]Cf. also John 16:24: "Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full," and John 17:13: "These things I speak … that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves."

[8]The joy of Jesus may be observed, for example, upon the return of seventy disciples from a successful missionary journey: "In that same hour he rejoiced ["rejoiced greatly" or "exulted," Gr. egalliasato] in the Holy Spirit" (Luke 10:21). Here is fullness of joy in (or "by") the Holy Spirit that the disciples also were to experience later.

[9]E.g., the women, told that Jesus was risen, "departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy [Gr. charas me gale s]" (Matt. 28:8). Later Jesus appeared to the larger group who experienced "joy and … marveling [Gr. charas kai thaumazonton]" (Luke 24:41 NASB). After the ascension of Jesus the disciples "returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God" (Luke 24:52-53).

[10]The relationship between Resurrection and Pentecost continues for believers ever since then. Through the experience of the Resurrection there is the joy of entering into a new life or regeneration (see chap. 2. V. C., "A New Life"); with the experience of Pentecost there is fullness of joy.

[11]The Greek word is ëgalliasto, the same as in Luke 10:21 (supra).

[12]We may recall (see chap. 11, n. 31) that the Acts 8:39 passage in a number of early manuscripts reads: "And when they came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit fell upon the eunuch and an angel of the Lord caught up Philip." The point of this reading, as we before observed, is to emphasize that the eunuch's believing and baptism were followed by the gift of the Spirit. Accordingly, the rejoicing of the eunuch springs out of his experience of the Holy Spirit. In regard to Acts 16:34, nothing is directly said about the Holy Spirit. However, since once again the rejoicing (or great rejoicing) is closely connected with faith and baptism, the implication of the text is quite likely that the jailer had received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[13]Earlier I quoted the words of Larry Tomczak about his baptism in the Holy Spirit: "I felt the rapturous and exultant joy of the Lord surging through me…. Then, just at the right moment, new words began to flow

from my heart" (chap. 9, n. 81). Then Tomczak adds, "At the same time, like a mountain stream-pure, sparkling, cool, crystal clear-living joy began to flow upward and outward through my entire being." His concluding words are "Jesus Christ touched me that night, and, oh, the joy that filled my soul…. I opened the door and seemed to float through it. Looking up at the cool, crisp, early morning sky, I grinned foolishly, drunk for joy" (Clap Your Hands! 112-13). Also see the moving life story by Sister Mary Bernard, I Leap for Joy.

[14]E.g., "Brethren, I may say to you confidently …" (Acts 2:29). The Greek word translated "confidently" is parrésia (meta parrésias, "with confidence"), the same word that is often translated "boldly" (see below).

[15]Specifically, Stephen is called "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5).

[16]Barnabas, like Paul, was a man filled with the Holy Spirit. Recall the earlier description in Acts 11:24: "He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." Hence, Barnabas' boldness came out of the same fullness of God's presence and power.

[17]One instance I recall among many involved a professor at a secular university who was newly filled with the Holy Spirit. Shortly afterward he witnessed boldly about Jesus on his own campus to students and faculty alike, indeed to all who would hear. Ridicule, opposition, and finally expulsion from his professorship resulted. But like Paul, he continued to carry on. Another example: Spirit-filled students at the university where I teach are often on the streets, in the parks, and on the beaches boldly and publicly testifying of the Lord. Opposition, when it occurs, only seems to make them all the more eager to witness!

[18]This parallels the case of the disciples in Acts 4:29-31 who prayed for boldness and again (as at Pentecost) were "filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately they "spoke the word of God with boldness."

[19]The Greek phrase is to charisma tou the ou. Charisma ordinarily refers to a particular gift (cf. Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:4, and elsewhere), not the gift of the Spirit Himself. "Gift" in that case, as in Acts 2:38, is dorea. (For further discussion of gift as charisma see chap. 13, "The Gifts of the Holy Spirit.")

[20]The Greek for "full courage" is pasé parresia, literally, "all boldness" (as in KJV and NASB).

[21]The Greek word koinonia denotes "fellowship," "participation," and "sharing." Because of the richness of meaning in the Greek word, a

single translation often seems inadequate. Thus many today simply use the Greek term.

[22]For reference to their receiving the Spirit, see chapter 11, n. 28.

[23]The imperfect tense is used for all three verbs (selling, sharing, having); thus they "were selling" and "were sharing" as anyone "was having" need. According to EGT, "this tense may express an action which is done often and continuously without being done universally or extending to a complete accomplishment" (in loco). Thus it would be a mistake to assume that all sold their property and shared. Rather, the point is that selling and sharing were constant, in relation to any who had need.

[24]It would be a mistake to view this as "Christian" communism. No one was forced to give up anything; indeed, there was voluntary sharing as the Spirit led and as there was need. There was no collective ownership of goods but a recognition through the Spirit that what each had was for the good of all.

[25]The Greek word is the singular phonen (hence, not "voices" as in RSV, NASB, and NIV).

[26]The Greek word is homothumadon. "With one accord" is a better translation than "together" (as in RSV and NIV).

[27]Barnabas is also mentioned as one who sold a field and brought the money to the apostles (Acts 4:36-37).

[28]There is no suggestion that ownership of goods is wrong and thus does not belong in the Spirit-filled community. No particular virtue is ascribed here to selling what one has and perhaps entering upon a life of poverty (as is frequently the case in monastic communities). The point rather is that under the impact of the fullness of the Spirit (4:31) there was such "great grace" upon them that they gladly shared everything, giving anything that might help those in need.

[29]Another evidence that the believers were not required to sell their property and bring the money to the apostles is found in the account of Ananias and his wife Sapphira that follows. They sold a piece of property and kept back some of the proceeds but pretended to give the whole amount (Acts 5:1-10). Peter spoke sternly to Ananias, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" (v. 3). Then Peter made clear that the sin was neither in owning the property nor in selling it as Ananias might choose: "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own?" (v. 4). The sin-a great one directed against the Holy Spirit who pervaded the community-was the pretense of giving all. (Incidentally, this

first recorded sin in the koinonia of the Holy Spirit brought sudden physical death to both Ananias and Sapphira [Acts 5:5, 10] even as the first sin in Eden brought spiritual death to Adam and Eve.)

[30]On the matter of Ananias and Sapphira, see the preceding footnote. The Hellenists were Greek-speaking Jews who had become Christians. They complained because their widows were neglected in the daily serving of food. The problem was rectified by the appointment of seven men (including Stephen and Philip) to have charge of this duty.

[31]One of the deacons appointed with Philip and Stephen was Nicolaus, "a proselyte of Antioch" (Acts 6:5).

[32]Recall that the thousands to whom Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost were "from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). Later many nations and languages are mentioned, from Mesopotamia to Libya, from Asia (Minor) to Rome (vv. 9-11).

[33]For example, Paul later wrote to the Christian disciples in Corinth that he was not really able to speak to them as "spiritual men" (pneumatikois), but as "men of the flesh" (sarkinois), because there was "jealousy and strife" among them (1 Cor. 3:1, 3). Party spirit-"I belong to Paul," or "Peter," or "Apollos"-was replacing the unity of the Spirit with which they had first begun (1 Cor. 1:10-13).

[34]"The oneness in the Spirit which the Lord has created among Catholics and Protestants through the baptism in the Spirit is a precious miracle of grace in our day. I do not believe we have begun to grasp the significance of this breakthrough in the unfolding of God's plan for his people. The sharing of a faith common to us all, the growth in mutual trust and understanding in areas of cultural and doctrinal differences, the growing ability to pray and worship together genuinely while maintaining our integrity-all this is creating a new, strong, bold, witness to the reality and saving power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ." So writes Kevin Ranaghan in As the Spirit Leads Us, "Catholics and Pentecostals Meet in the Spirit," 144.

[35]For a good study of Christian community, see Stephen B. Clark, Building Christian Communities: Strategy for Renewing the Church.

[36]John A. Mackay, former president of Princeton Theological Seminary, put it forcefully: "What is known as the charismatic movement-a movement marked by spiritual enthusiasm and special gifts and which crosses all boundaries of culture, race, age, and church tradition-is profoundly significant…. Because 'no heart is pure that is not passionate and no

virtue is safe that is not enthusiastic,' the charismatic movement of today is the chief hope of the ecumenical tomorrow" ("Oneness in the Body-Focus for the Future," World Vision Magazine [April 1970]). James W. Jones, an Episcopal clergyman, analyzes it thus: "Structural ecumenism which does not grow out of a genuine ecumenical life will produce only empty wineskins, just as patterns of renewal that do not grow out of a renewed life will themselves have no vitality. The charismatic movement is the ecumenical movement, not because it is creating structural alignment (it isn't), but because it is bringing into being a new sense of the common life of the people of God" (Filled With New Wine: The Charismatic Renewal of the Church, 135).

[37]I am not now referring only to the praise of God in tongues (which I earlier called "transcendent praise" in chap. 9, IV.) but to the praise of God however offered.

[38]Recall my previous mention of this in chapter 8, "Concluding Remarks," no. 3.

13
The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Now we arrive at the important consideration of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit who is given bestows gifts in turn. It is these gifts of the Spirit that here become the focus of our attention.

I. INTRODUCTION

The primary New Testament delineation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10:

> For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues" (NASB).

A few verses earlier Paul declared, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit" (v. 4). The word for "gifts" in this text is *charismata*[1] hence, we may speak of the *charismata*[2] of the Spirit. Thus we are dealing with Spiritual[3] gifts, spiritual *charismata.* After listing these nine gifts Paul adds, "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing[4] to each one individually just as He wills" (v. 11 NASB). The spiritual gifts, accordingly, are distributions[5] of the Holy Spirit.

Before proceeding further, we should observe that although gifts are referred to elsewhere, they are not described as gifts of the Holy Spirit. In Romans 12:6 Paul wrote about our having "gifts [*charismata*] that differ according to the grace given to us," and then he briefly described seven of these (vv. 6–9). Here the source of the gifts is not directly specified, though God seems to be implied (see v. 3). Further, this list overlaps with 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 at only one point: prophecy. "Gifts" are also described in Ephesians 4; however, there they are not called *charismata* but *domata*. Shortly after quoting Psalm 68:18 "he gave gifts *[domata]* to men" (v. 8), Paul listed five such gifts (v. 11). Here it is clearly stated that the source of the gifts is Christ (see v. 7). Again the only overlap with 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 is in the area of prophecy.[6] In sum, the gifts of the Spirit are specifically dealt with in 1 Corinthians 12 alone.[7] We will now turn our attention to these.[8]

In considering these gifts, we are moving into a critically important area of the contemporary spiritual renewal that is often termed "charismatic." For it is true that these nine gifts, or *charismata*, particularly occupy the attention of "charismatics."[9] However, since the *charismata* represent a wider range than 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 (Romans 12 also, as we have observed),[10] properly speaking the charismatic renewal signifies an embracing of all these gifts. The focal point, nonetheless, is the *charismata* of the Holy Spirit. Since these are spiritual, or pneumatic, gifts, it is peculiarly a "pneumatic renewal."[11]

Looking at 1 Corinthians 12, we note from the outset that Paul is writing about *pneumatika.* The opening verse begins, "Now concerning spiritual gifts … ."[12] Thereafter Paul uses the terminology of *charismata*; hence he will deal peculiarly with those charismatic expressions that are pneumatic, thus of the Spirit. In regard to these *pneumatika* Paul did not want the Corinthians to be "uninformed" (v. 1).[13] If this were the need for those to whom Paul wrote, it is hardly less so in our time. But first let us note the context within which the presentation of the gifts is elaborated.

II. CONTEXT

It is significant that Paul was not writing to the Corinthians about what they had *not* experienced but what they *had* experienced. This is the context of 1 Corinthians 12:8–10. Their being "uninformed" had nothing to do with their being inexperienced. Rather, it was to give instruction in the proper exercise of what they had experienced in abundance. For this we turn back to the opening of Paul's letter where he wrote, "In every way[14] you were enriched in him [Christ] with all speech and all knowledge—even as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you[15] —so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift [*charismati*]" (1:5–7). The Corinthians were abundantly "enriched"; they were not lacking in any of the spiritual *charismata*. Hence, when he wrote about the gifts of the Spirit, Paul addressed a church that already fully exercised them.[16] It was a wholly pneumatic community.

Their full participation in the gifts of the Spirit further implied a dynamic experience of the Spirit Himself. In this connection it is significant that shortly after delineating the spiritual gifts and how the Holy Spirit distributes them, Paul wrote, "For by[17] one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jew or Greeks …—and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13). The latter part of the verse may also be translated "that one Holy Spirit was poured out for all of us to drink" (NEB), or "we were all imbued (or saturated) with[18] that one Spirit." Hence, whatever the translation, there was an abundant outpouring of the Spirit that all had shared.[19] As a result of this, the people were abounding in spiritual gifts.

It is important, then, to emphasize that the context for the gifts of the Spirit was the experience of the Spirit's outpouring. Without this there would not have been vitality and power sufficient for the gifts to be manifested and multiplied. The Corinthians were "not lacking in any spiritual gift" because the testimony to Christ had been "confirmed"[20] among them; they had been "saturated with" the Spirit. Whatever may have been their faults—and they were manifold (as Paul depicts them in chapter after chapter)—they knew the fullness of the Spirit and His multiple gifts.[21]

The charismatic renewal of our day is in basic accord with the Corinthian

situation. The background for the believers' claims to the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is their experience of the outpouring[22] of the Spirit. At some time, in some situation, there has been a distinctive—even "saturating"—experience of the Holy Spirit's presence and power. This has been, it is claimed, the dynamic source of all the spiritual gifts that have followed.

This brings us back to the matter of the spiritual gifts themselves and to participation in them. Against the background of sharing in the Holy Spirit and the consequent gifts of the Holy Spirit,[23] information, instruction, and teaching concerning them becomes relevant. A fundamental thesis may here be set forth: *Any vital information concerning the gifts of the Spirit, the pneumatic charismata, presupposes a participation in them.* Without such participation, whatever is said about the gifts may only result in confusion and error.

A primary example of the latter is the statement sometimes made that the spiritual gifts, either all or in part, are "not for today." Whatever the attempted exegetical and historical interpretations made to justify such a view (and they are numerous), the truth of the matter is that a lack of significant experience of the pneumatic *charismata* results in the efforts of some people to distance themselves from the gifts because of not really knowing how to cope with them. Accordingly, despite the obvious Pauline teaching of their relevance for the church throughout the ages,[24] such people seek to confine the gifts to the New Testament period.[25] The spiritual damage in such subterfuge (whether recognized as such or not) is great, for it is precisely through these spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit manifests Himself in power and vitality.

Here in our own day, as represented by the charismatic renewal, is the reemergence of the early church's dynamism,[26] with the gifts signifying a fresh breaking forth of that primitive power. How tragic, then, that some try to seal the lid over the past when there is such vast need for everything the Holy Spirit has to give! One could hope that those who deny scriptural relevancy of the gifts for the church of today[27] (often while claiming that the Bible is inspired throughout!) and therefore eviscerate the word of God of its power would humble themselves, admit their need, and allow the Lord to do a new work in their lives.

Let it be firmly said that the church cannot be fully or freely the church without the presence and operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. What is depicted therefore in 1 Corinthians—and recurring in our day[28] —is in no sense a peripheral matter but is crucial to the life of the church. For the recurrence of the *charismata* of the Holy Spirit signals the church's recovery of its spiritual roots and its emergence in the twentieth century with fresh power and vitality.

III. BACKGROUND

We now move on to a consideration of the background for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Paul deals with a number of important matters in 1 Corinthians 12:2–7. These background matters relate to the lordship of Christ, the activity of the Triune God, and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

A. The Lordship of Christ

Behind the operation of the spiritual gifts is the lordship of Jesus Christ. Although the *charismata* are pneumatic, hence operations of the Spirit, they are all derived from Jesus the exalted Lord. It is through His lordship, recognized and affirmed, that the spiritual gifts become a reality.

Continuing with Paul in 1 Corinthians 12, we observe in verses 2 and 3 that after reference to the Corinthians' pagan past when they were "led astray to dumb [voiceless] idols," and after words concerning others who proclaim an anathema on Jesus, Paul adds, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by [or "in"][29] the Holy Spirit." It is obvious that this statement about Jesus is far more than a verbal affirmation that anyone could utter. Paul, rather, is emphasizing that Jesus' lordship can be genuinely recognized and affirmed only in the Spirit, hence by those moving in the sphere of the Holy Spirit. It is Jesus the exalted Lord who pours forth the Holy Spirit; thus only in and by that Spirit whom He has given can His lordship be truly acclaimed.[30]

Significantly, in relation to the spiritual *charismata* Paul speaks of the lordship of Jesus prior to the delineation of the gifts. This serves to underscore the important fact that those who affirm and continue to affirm in the Spirit that "Jesus is Lord" are those to whom the Spirit distributes the gifts. The focus of the community is *not* the Spirit but the exalted Lord. A truly charismatic community, therefore, is not Spirit-centered but Christ-centered. It does not look to itself, nor even to the Holy Spirit moving in its midst, but to Jesus, who is exalted above all.

The important point at this juncture is that in the continuing recognition that Jesus *is* Lord (hence *now)* and acclaiming Him as such, He acts in His Spirit to multiply the gifts. Hence, as people come together in the Spirit to worship Jesus as Lord, to acknowledge His total sovereignty over their lives, and to offer themselves in trust and obedience, He moves in their midst. Through the pneumatic gifts He makes known depths of wisdom and knowledge, performs mighty deeds of healing and deliverance, indeed works miracles of many kinds.

A community of people proclaiming "Jesus is Lord" in the Holy Spirit is an extraordinary gathering. There are, to be sure, expressions of Jesus in many other ways than through the spiritual gifts; however, it is in and through them peculiarly that extraordinary, even supernatural, demonstrations of His power are made manifest. When this is realized and the community of people are expectant

and the Lord begins to move, there is no place so full of anticipation and excitement as that in which the Lord Jesus is glorified.

The lordship of Christ, affirmed in the Spirit, is the primary background for the operation of the spiritual gifts.

B. The Triune God

Before coming to a discussion of the spiritual *charismata*, it is important next to recognize the activity of the Triune God. We proceed with Paul: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of ministries,[31] but the same Lord, and there are varieties of operations,[32] but it is the same God who operates[33] them all in every one" (1 Cor. 12:4–6).

Here we note several things: (1) Whatever the diversity of gifts, of ministries, of operations, it is the same Holy Spirit, the same Lord Jesus, the same God at work in each: there is diversity but at the same time unity. Separation, division, factionalism—any playing off of one activity against another—cannot be of God. (2) There is no simple identification of the gifts of the Holy Spirit with the ministries of the Lord Jesus or the operations of God. In a peculiar sense the Spirit is at work in the gifts, Christ in various ministries, and God in a wide range of operations.[34] (3) Whatever are gifts of the Holy Spirit are also ministries of the exalted Lord Jesus and likewise operations of God the Father. Although there is no simple identification of gifts, ministries, and operations,[35] the Triune God is at work in and through all of them. There is no gift that is not a ministry, no ministry that is not an operation or working, and the same God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is in them all. (4) Finally, there seems to be a kind of ascending movement. Paul begins with the gifts of the Spirit within the community, next speaks of ministries of the exalted Lord, then culminates with the overall operations of God.[36] The Spirit, as always, leads us back to the Son, and the Son in turn points us back to the Father. This is the way of the blessed Trinity.

In all of this it is important to bear in mind that behind the spiritual gifts stands the Triune God. Although the gifts are primarily expressions of the Holy Spirit, they have behind them the full weight of the Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

It follows that a truly charismatic community, moving in the pneumatic gifts, is Trinitarian in its fundamental operation and lifestyle. While it is a fact that through the pneumatic *charismata* the Holy Spirit manifests Himself (see next section) and, accordingly, there is a heightened sense of His person and presence, it is not as if the Holy Spirit is alone recognized. Just as the focus is not the Holy Spirit but Christ (previous section), so the total operation is not the Holy Spirit

but the Triune God. To be truly pneumatic is to be both thoroughly Christocentric and Trinitarian.

C. The Manifestation of the Holy Spirit

The final and most immediate background to our discussion of the spiritual gifts is that the gifts are "the manifestation of the Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:7)." It is just after these words that Paul moves into his delineation of the gifts of the Spirit.

Through the pneumatic *charismata* the Holy Spirit shines forth and openly shows Himself. The Spirit who is invisible now manifests Himself visibly[37] and audibly. When the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost, thousands of people were drawn to the place where they beheld and heard the Spirit-filled disciples speaking in "other tongues." Peter in his explanation of the event said, "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he [Jesus] has poured out this which you see and hear" (Acts 2:33). Thus what the crowd saw and heard was the manifestation, or showing forth, of the Holy Spirit. In that sense the disciples' "other" speech was such a manifestation. However, all the spiritual *charismata*, not just glossolalia, are the Spirit's self-manifestation.

It is important, then, to emphasize that whenever and wherever the pneumatic *charismata* occur, the Holy Spirit is thereby manifesting Himself. The nine gifts listed by Paul in the next three verses (8–10), therefore, are various exhibitions of this. To use an analogy, the gifts may be thought of as lights that turn on from a hidden electrical current. The current cannot be seen, but when the lights come on, they are vivid evidence and demonstration of its presence and power. So it is that in and through the spiritual *charismata* the invisible Holy Spirit shines forth.

The gifts of the Spirit, I might add, are clearly to be differentiated from the fruit of the Spirit. Paul elsewhere writes, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22–23). Thus there is both a ninefold manifestation (the gifts) and a ninefold fruit. Although the same in number, the gifts and the fruit are totally different in character. Even the most cursory comparison of 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 and Galatians 5:22 discloses this.[38] Moreover, the gifts of the Spirit are the immediate self-expression of the Spirit occurring through instruments open to His presence and power. The fruit of the Spirit, on the other hand (like fruit in general), takes a length of time to develop and is found only among those who are maturing in their Christian lives. In the case of the gifts even very young and immature believers may manifest them (as did the Corinthians), but with the fruit there must be a lengthy process of growth and maturation. Both gifts and

fruit are valuable for very different reasons. But they are by no means the same.[39]

What is of particular significance about the spiritual gifts is that through their expression there is *dynamic manifestation.* By the gift of the Holy Spirit there is entrance into the dynamic dimension; by the gifts of the Spirit there is the occurrence of dynamic manifestation. Hence, when we are dealing with the spiritual gifts, their importance is neither little nor secondary, but fundamental. For through the gifts the Holy Spirit Himself is "on the scene" in dynamic self-manifestation.

A word again about the charismatic renewal. Criticism is sometimes made that participants are preoccupied with "the sensational." Rather than being satisfied with their salvation and a "normal" Christian walk, they are caught up in such things as tongues, prophecies, healings, and the like. Moreover, the criticism sometimes continues, charismatics exhibit a lot of carnality and therefore would do well to leave the gifts and be more concerned with holiness and righteousness. To reply to the latter: modern-day charismatics may, and sometimes do, show forth carnality and insufficient devotion to holy living. In that sense they are not unlike the Corinthians to whom Paul wrote. There is undoubted need today for many of Paul's admonitions throughout the letter. *But* the answer cannot be to forget the spiritual gifts, for they and they alone are *the* manifestation of the Spirit. In regard to the first charge that charismatics are caught up in the sensational, it may also be true that some do overestimate certain of the gifts and make too much of their exercise. However, what seems like the sensational to one not familiar with the gifts could actually be the mighty power of God in operation. The word "sensational" (or a similar term) may indeed be used in an effort to avoid coming to terms with the Holy Spirit. Incidentally, these very critics may be among the "unlearned"[40] about whom Paul later writes, and consequently need humbly to learn and experience more of the Holy Spirit and His manifestations. Disregard in this matter is sad indeed.

One can only conclude that a people, a church, or believers in general—whatever their salvation and sanctification, their dedication and service—who disregard[41] the spiritual gifts are missing out on the dynamic reality of the Spirit's own self-manifestation. This surely is no minor thing, for it is not simply a matter of gifts (as important as they are) but *God* Himself in the Holy Spirit declaring Himself, of *Christ* the Lord ministering now through the *Spirit.* How desperately does everyone need to be alerted to what is at issue in the gifts and to be open to God's visitation!

It should be finally noted that the manifestation of the Spirit is *through people.*

From Paul’s statement that “to each one is given the manifestion of the Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:7 NASB), it is clear that the Spirit’s self-manifestation is through individuals. This means, accordingly, the extraordinary fact that human beings, finite creatures, become the channel of the Spirit’s manifestation. It happens by virtue of the gifts the Spirit imparts; and, as they operate in and through human beings, the Spirit thereby discloses Himself. To be permitted to have some share in this is beyond comprehension, and in this experience there is great rejoicing and glorifying of God.

IV. PROFILE

Before coming to a specific consideration of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, I will give an overview of their nature and expression. In so doing a number of Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 12–14 will be examined. Let us turn now to a profile of the spiritual gifts.

A. Divine and Human Activity

In all the gifts there is both a divine and a human activity. On the one hand, each gift is a manifestation of the Spirit; on the other hand, the gifts are expressed through human beings. The gifts are primarily distributions of the Holy Spirit—the Spirit "apportions" or "distributes"—but the gifts operate in and through persons: He "apportions to each one" (1 Cor. 12:11). In the operation of the spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit expresses Himself in and through human activity.

It is important to stress, first, the *divine side.* Since we are dealing with a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, thus a spiritual gift, the divine aspect is primary. In that sense all the gifts are supernatural[42] or extraordinary. This is the case for those seemingly ordinary as well as those seemingly extraordinary gifts. For example, a "word of wisdom" is just as much a supernatural manifestation as "working of miracles," a "word of knowledge" as "speaking in tongues." All are extraordinary, all basically supernatural.[43]

Gifts of the Holy Spirit, accordingly, are not latent natural talents or trained abilities brought to heightened expression. The spiritual gifts are by no means more of what is already present, no matter how elevated. They are not simply an added spiritual injection that causes talents and abilities to function with greater effectiveness or transposes them to a higher level. They are gifts of the Spirit, endowments, not enhancements[44] —apportionments of the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, a manifestation of the Spirit may occur with someone regardless of background, experience, or education. Thus a word of wisdom, prophetic utterance, gifts of healing, and so on, may operate through those from whom they are least expected. The highly trained intellectual is not always the one to express the wisdom of God, the talented orator the one to speak prophetically, the physician with much training and experience to exhibit gifts of healing. Quite the contrary: these very attainments may even block the way to an openness to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is free to use—and often does use—the uneducated and unpracticed[45] layman to bring about extraordinary results.

Second, there is also *human activity* involved. The statement that "to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit" signifies that a person, an individual, is the recipient of the Spirit's manifestation. Thus, in the operation of the gift it is

the human person, not the Holy Spirit, who acts. Accordingly, when the Holy Spirit apportions a *charisma* such as a word of wisdom or knowledge, tongue or prophecy, it is a human being who speaks. On the Day of Pentecost "*they* … began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). The Holy Spirit "gave" them to "speak out,"[46] thus the words that they were to say. But He Himself did not do the speaking. Each person present spoke forth in his human integrity; nothing was automatic or forced. Thus in the functioning of any spiritual gift the recipient with the totality of his background, ability, training, and experience is involved. The human element is fully present.[47]

Next, I need to emphasize that the various distributions of the Spirit may also use those who are positively prepared through study, practice, and experiences of many kinds.[48] For example, a word of knowledge,[49] though supernaturally inspired with its origin not of man but of God, may be given to one who is quite knowledgeable and already a well-trained communicator. Indeed, spiritual communication ordinarily calls for the best possible use of all means available so that the message will come through with maximum effectiveness. The same could be true, for example, of another spiritual gift, "distinguishing of spirits."[50] While the gift is wholly of God, thereby enabling one to have profound insight into the spiritual situation of people, that very insight may be further clarified and applied through the knowledge of human nature in its various aspects. What then is *basic* is the gift of the Spirit, but what is *instrumental* is the totality of the human situation.

Since in all charismatic activity there is a human aspect, this is open to analysis and description. Scientific study (physiological, linguistic, psychological) has its proper place and importance. For example, linguistic and psychological analysis of a tongue spoken, empirical investigation of a miracle worked, medical testing of a healing performed—all such can have value.[51] However, the limitation—a critical one—is that no human science is able fully to comprehend or encompass that which is essentially spiritual.[52]

This last statement calls for an emphasis on the limitation of the natural in the realm of things spiritual. The natural man, whether the most capable psychologist, scientist, or linguist, or one who is untrained in any of these areas, is in no way capable of comprehending spiritual realities. Thus Paul writes earlier in 1 Corinthians: "A natural[53] man does not accept the things[54] of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (2:14 NASB). Hence, to say that a spiritual gift has a perfectly natural explanation or that a particular manifestation is nonsense may be a declaration of spiritual blindness. It is the Spirit alone who

gives the eyes and ears and heart that can make for true recognition.

Third, *the nature of the divine and human relationship* in the spiritual gifts needs to be recognized. It is important to affirm now that since all the gifts are the manifestation of the Spirit, He is free to operate "just as He wills" (1 Cor. 12:11 NASB). The spiritual gifts, accordingly, are not so set in place that the Holy Spirit may not operate differently in another situation. The spiritual gifts are not offices[55] or appointments,[56] for even though they are distributed individually and may function on some occasion through a particular person, they are by no means so limited. This may be illustrated by the fact that though prophecy is listed as one of the nine spiritual gifts, Paul later said, "You can all prophesy one by one" (14:31 RSV). Also he wrote, "When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation" (14:26 NASB).

The point then is that the manifestation of the Spirit may vary considerably. Spiritual gifts, therefore, are different from other gifts (such as those of Romans 12 and 1 Peter 4). Since they are not continuing possessions, the Spirit moves freely in and through His manifestations, apportioning variously as He wills. A person may, for example, manifest a word of knowledge on one occasion and prophecy on another (or any other combination). It is also significant to note that the expression "is given"[57] (12:7) clearly refers to the present. Thus it is not a past gift, which one, so to speak, carries with himself; rather, it is to be received and expressed only when people gather in worship and fellowship.[58]

A proper understanding of this makes for a vital sense of the *contemporaneity* of the Spirit's activity. The focus is not on the past but the present; hence when people assemble, there is a lively expectation of fresh, perhaps different, manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Also, since one may not know ahead of time what gift the Spirit will impart, each person may come with keen anticipation, even excitement, about what the Spirit will do through him. All this means that the gathered community becomes the arena of God's mighty and wondrous activity in the Holy Spirit.

B. Ministry in the Community

We next observe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are for ministry in the body of believers: "To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7 NASB). The importance of the spiritual gifts is thus in their role of *common ministry.*

The orientation of the gifts is, first, "for the common good";[59] that is, the good of the community. Thus each of the spiritual gifts named, from "word of wisdom" to "interpretation of tongues," is for the profit of all. Accordingly, when the Holy Spirit manifests Himself in a gift to an individual, it is not for the sake of the individual but for the good or profit of the whole body. The spiritual *charismata*, therefore, have a horizontal reference, for whereas they are given to individuals, they are wholly for "the common good," the community of believers.

To be more specific: the gifts of the Holy Spirit, not unlike the gift, are the means whereby the exalted Lord carries forward His ministry through persons.[60] Through the *gift (dorea)* of the Holy Spirit the Lord invests people with the power to witness mightily in word and deed; through the *gifts (charismata)* He enables them to minister effectively to one another. The ministry may be to one person, to several, or to the whole body, as the Lord knows and meets the needs. As each person exercises a gift, the body is built up for its ministry in the gospel.

The spiritual gifts, accordingly, are for the *upbuilding* of the community. We have earlier noted the statement "When you assemble, each one has a psalm … a teaching … a revelation … a tongue … an interpretation." Paul adds immediately: "Let all things be done for edification" (1 Cor. 14:26 NASB). Whatever the manifestation of the Spirit, its one purpose is the edification, the building up, of the body of believers. It is the intention of the Lord that His people be strengthened as a community. So when a word of wisdom or a prophecy is spoken, a word of knowledge or a tongue expressed, a healing or a miracle wrought, it is for one purpose: edification.

It follows that any exercise of a gift of the Spirit that does not result in edification of the body is inappropriate and out of order. As a prime example, speaking in tongues is later discouraged by Paul if there is not also interpretation. The apostle by no means negates the importance or validity of the gift; indeed, quite the contrary, for he states that through a tongue there is direct address to God and the utterance of "mysteries in the Spirit" (1 Cor. 14:2). How

could there be a higher expression than this? However—and this is the basic point—since “tongues” is speaking “not to men but to God” (v. 2), there can be no group edification unless someone interprets. When that happens, the church is edified (vv. 4–19). If interpretation is not also exercised, the manifestation of tongues is out of order. Paul’s words to the Corinthians, in the context of discussing speaking in tongues, are unmistakable: “Since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church” (v. 12). That is to say, the overriding concern should not be the spiritual gifts themselves (as important as they are and as eager as one may be for their occurrence) but the edification of the body. Any expression of a spiritual gift that does not build up is contrary to the Lord’s intention. In summary, the validity of an exercise of a gift of the Spirit is its aid in the edification, or building up, of the community in Christ.

Now to return to the matter of the overall purpose of the gifts of the Spirit: It is apparent that concern for these gifts is by no means a self-oriented preoccupation. The spiritual gifts are not for private benefit but wholly for the edification of others. Moreover, this is not a matter of upbuilding “in the natural realm” by human words and acts of kindness, but “in the Spirit” through persons open to His ministrations. Thus there is ministry to one another in far greater depth and quality.

In connection with this common ministry, second, *each person has a distinctive role to fulfill.* That is to say, not only are the spiritual gifts for the sake of the community but also each member is a participant: “to each one is given … .” The common good is the orientation of the gifts, and to that end each person is involved.

Now let us focus on the “each one.”[61] Each and every person in the community is given a manifestation of the Spirit. It is not a matter of certain individuals, perhaps leaders or officeholders, who are so gifted. No one is left out. Even as the spiritual gifts are for the whole body, so everyone in the body is equally involved in the ministry of edification.

Accordingly, in a Spirit-gifted community people do not look to one person or a few to minister to the assembly. Rather they look to the Lord, expecting Him to minister by the Spirit through each one present. In this sense pulpit and altar become secondary, for the spiritual ministry is not through preacher or priest, but through each and every individual. Each person is equally a participant in the worship and fellowship by virtue of the Spirit’s anointing. Every person in the assembly is to be actively involved, for the Holy Spirit wishes to manifest Himself not through a few but through all.

This calls for further emphasis in light of the fact that the involvement of each

person as a vehicle for the Spirit's manifestation has been greatly neglected in church tradition.[62] Especially is this true in liturgical churches where worship is ritualistic, and the congregation is little more than spectators. Even when the assembly is expected to join in prayers, singing, and responses, there is rarely the expectation that any individual, much less all, will be the channel for a manifestation of the Spirit.

We may be grateful that this long neglect is finding significant remedy in the contemporary spiritual renewal in which people frequently come together in expectation of the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit. Whenever this occurs, there is an extraordinary sense of community participation and expectation for what the Lord may do through any and all.[63]

Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians concerning individual participation suggests a gathering of believers of such size that this can more readily happen. A larger assembly may surely be in order for a time of preaching, teaching, or public worship, but it is scarcely suitable for the ministry of the spiritual gifts. Clearly, something like the "house church"[64] is needed, not to replace the "temple church"[65] but to supplement it. In such a smaller gathering there is better opportunity and often more freedom for the spiritual gifts to operate.

All of this calls for individual responsibility of a high order. For however true it is that the Spirit gives to each and apportions as He wills, it happens to individuals who are, in turn, responsible for the ensuing expression of the gift. This means, for one thing, to follow closely the leading and prompting of the Holy Spirit, and whenever He imparts a gift not to hold back. It is not that everyone must speak or act,[66] but each person is responsible that what has been given be used in the edification of the community.[67]

This leads to the further recognition of the importance of all the gifts for the proper and full functioning of the body. Since "in[68] one Spirit we were all baptized into[69] one body" (as we noted before), and as Paul proceeds to say, "The body does not consist of one member but of many" (1 Cor. 12:14), then all members are necessary.

Paul uses the imagery of the physical body with its various parts—foot, ear, eye, hand, head, even "unpresentable parts"[70] (1 Cor. 12:15–26)—stating that all equally belong and that all are necessary to the body. It is utter nonsense for one part to speak up and say, "I have no need of you" (v. 21). Hence by implication each member in the spiritual body of Christ expressing his spiritual gift is essential to the whole body. The body cannot function as well without it; all gifts are needed. Moreover, to look down on or despise the manifestation of another

gift is totally unwarranted.

This is particularly relevant to situations where some of the *charismata* of the Spirit may be disregarded or even unwelcomed. I have earlier commented on those who claim that these gifts in whole or in part have no contemporary relevance. What they are really saying is that these spiritual gifts are not needed, or that only certain ones are: word of wisdom, yes; gifts of healing, no; word of knowledge, yes; working of miracles, no; faith, yes; prophecy, no; etc. In other words: foot, yes; ear, no; eye, yes; hand, no; head, yes; "unpresentable parts," no. It is hard to describe a more devastating dismemberment of the body if or when such an attitude prevails.

In this connection let me add a word about the difficulty some people have with one spiritual gift in particular—that of tongues. This manifestation is often not only unwelcome but even despised. Tongues are not only viewed as "unpresentable parts" to be covered, but in some cases forbidden to function at all![71] And yet if it is true, as Paul later says, that when speaking in tongues one "utters mysteries in the Spirit" (1 Cor. 14:2), what could more edify the body than having these mysteries interpreted?

It is urgent that no gift of the Holy Spirit be denigrated, despised,[72] suppressed, or set aside. All gifts have their proper and essential place in the full functioning of the body of Christ. Even if one gift, one member, is missing or not functioning, the body is sorely handicapped. When each performs his Spirit-given part, then verily the body is both able to function normally and to be built up in faith and ministry.

One further word concerning the meaning of "to each one is given." Since each spiritual *charisma* is a gift, any legitimate ground of boasting is nonexistent. Each *charisma* is a gift of grace, and therefore boasting concerning spiritual gifts is ruled out.[73] This does not mean that boasting never occurs, for the sin of pride can slip in and lay claim to the *charismata* as human accomplishments. This evidently happened in the Corinthian church, for Paul earlier wrote, "What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?" (1 Cor. 4:7). Such boasting then or now can only occur by failing to recognize the totally gift nature of the *charismata*. All are manifestations of the Holy Spirit, and God alone is to be glorified.

Actually, in the experience of the contemporary spiritual renewal, the manifestations of spiritual gifts seldom lead to boasting. Most persons, especially those new to charismatic experience, rejoice all the more in the Lord whenever a manifestation occurs. There is usually a joy that it is He who is

moving and acting, that anything truly said or done is from Him, and that every operation is a blessing from God. This may be the case, for example, when those who are wise and knowledgeable by natural ability or training recognize that they have no claim on such gifts as “word of wisdom” and “word of knowledge.” In fact, those “naturally” wise often come to recognize that worldly wisdom is simply *not* the wisdom of God, and that one must “become a fool” to apprehend and express God’s true wisdom. “If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God” (1 Cor. 3:18–19). When there is such a recognition, ministry in the spiritual gifts is totally different from the exercise of natural capacities, and God, not man, receives all the praise and glory.[74]

C. Spiritual Gifts and Love

Because of their great value in building up the body of Christ, the spiritual (pneumatic) *charismata* are much to be desired; however, they need to function in an attitude of love. Here we observe the later words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:1: "Follow the way of love and eagerly desire[75] spiritual gifts[76] …" (NIV).

Let us first consider the matter of *eager desire for the spiritual gifts.* This injunction of Paul may, on first reflection, seem contrary to his earlier words that the Holy Spirit distributes "to each one individually just as He wills" (1 Cor. 12:11 NASB). If the spiritual gifts are His sovereign action, His apportionments, or distributions, what difference does anyone's desire make? The answer, first, is the same as in regard to the gift of the Spirit; for though the gift is God's sovereign bestowal, it is given (according to Luke 11:9–13) to those who ask, seek, and knock—that is, to those who earnestly desire it.[77] God delights to "give good things to those who ask him" (Matt. 7:11), and so it is with the "good things," [78] the "good gifts" of the Holy Spirit. He will not waste His gifts on those who do not desire them. Second, God is still in control. For all our asking and desiring, the Holy Spirit distributes "as He wills." We are to eagerly seek the gifts, but God is still in charge. He knows far better than we the gift that at any time will be the best channel for his ministration through us.

In accordance with Paul's injunction to eagerly desire spiritual gifts, it is proper for the Christian community to be zealous in this regard.[79] There should be an intense desire for all the gifts of the Holy Spirit to be manifest—not just a few, but all of them. Through their variety and totality the body of Christ fully functions, multiple needs are met, and the whole community is thereby edified.

A word of admonition: no Christian fellowship should be satisfied with only a few of the gifts. Unfortunately, even in some groups of "charismatically renewed" believers there seems to be satisfaction if only two or three of the gifts (perhaps prophecy, tongues, and interpretation) are manifest. One may be grateful for the activity of any spiritual gift, especially in light of the dearth in many churches. However, the body cannot be properly built up without the full complement of pneumatic gifts in operation. Hence, the admonition or counsel: pray for, earnestly desire, seek after the gifts; do not be satisfied until all frequently occur. A physical body with only certain members functioning is handicapped; even more so a spiritual body, a body of believers. It is beautiful to

behold a community of Christians that begins to move in all the spiritual gifts. Truly then there is maximum edification, and God is all the more glorified.

Concern for the spiritual gifts—as I earlier emphasized—is in no sense a self-concern; hence, to desire them eagerly is not a self-centered desire. Zeal for the gifts is anything but a preoccupation with "my needs, my wishes, my pleasures," etc. The concern is essentially altruistic, that is, for other persons. Then Christ, the glorified Lord, may in His Spirit minister through the gifts for the blessing of many. To be sure, there is mutual edification—God intended it to be—but the intention of each and every spiritual gift is not one's own blessing but ministry to the body of believers.

Let us now notice that Paul even earlier wrote, "But eagerly desire[80] the greater gifts"[81] (1 Cor. 12:31 NIV). This injunction suggests a hierarchy of gifts, or at least that some of the *charismata* occupy a higher rank than others. This may seem unusual in light of the fact that Paul later (as we have noted) says simply, "Eagerly desire the spiritual gifts" rather than "the greater gifts." How are we to understand this? Also, since all are gifts of the Holy Spirit, how can one gift be "greater" than another? If such is possible, we may also ask, what are those gifts that are "greater" than others? If such is possible, we may also ask, what are the "greater gifts" that the church is exhorted to strive after?

First, in understanding the relationship between desiring "the greater gifts" (12:31) and desiring "the spiritual gifts" (14:1), we may be sure there is no basic difference. The Christian fellowship is to desire *all* the gifts, whether greater or lesser. Paul probably adds the words in 1 Corinthians 14:1 lest there be some misunderstanding about 1 Corinthians 12:31, namely, that we are to eagerly desire only the greater gifts. We need every spiritual gift that God will give.

Second, one spiritual gift may be greater than another because of its capacity to edify. All are equally gifts of the Holy Spirit and thus have intrinsically the same value. But since the gifts are community oriented and "for the common good," whatever gifts most build up the community are most greatly to be desired. Paul states this clearly in 1 Corinthians 14:12: "Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts,[82] try to excel[83] in gifts that build up the church" (NIV). The greater gifts are clearly those that most edify the community of believers.

Third, Paul does not specify in 1 Corinthians 12:31 what "the greater gifts" are; however, in 1 Corinthians 14:1 after "eagerly desire spiritual gifts," he continues, "especially[84] the gift of prophecy"[85] (NIV). Accordingly, it follows that prophecy is one of "the greater gifts." What else a greater gift might be, Paul does not immediately say. However, it is readily apparent that prophecy belongs in this high category. Thus we can proceed to 1 Corinthians 14:12 and fill in the

word “prophecy”: “Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in prophecy.” For truly prophecy excels in building up the church.[86]

To summarize this section: we are called upon to eagerly desire the spiritual gifts—all of them. Among those gifts are certain excelling ones, including prophecy, that we are especially urged to seek after. None of them are for self-aggrandizement. Even if one receives the gift of prophecy, there is no reason to boast, because the gift is wholly from God and is for the edification of the body and must work in harmony with the other gifts. The important thing is to pray for, seek after, and be zealous for the spiritual gifts that the Lord may move mightily in the midst of His people.

Now it is time to turn our attention, second, to the *relationship between love and the spiritual gifts*. Let us hear again the words of Paul: “Follow the way of [or pursue][87] love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts” (1 Cor. 14:1 NIV). Love should be the way of the gifts: they are to function closely together.

To examine this in more detail, let us again return to 1 Corinthians 12. At the conclusion of this chapter are these words: “But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way” (v. 31 NIV). Here as well as later in 1 Corinthians 14:1, the gifts and love are set in close relationship except that “the greater gifts” in 1 Corinthians 12:31 are mentioned before love. Then follows chapter 13, also on the gifts and love, as the connecting link between 1 Corinthians 12:31 and 14:1.

Regarding 1 Corinthians 12:31 it is important to stress, first, that in the following chapter Paul describes the way—“the most excellent way”—wherein all the spiritual gifts are to be exercised. Immediately we must guard against any idea that Paul intends to describe a way better than desiring the *charismata*. Unfortunately, many translations suggest that the way of love is a better way; for example, the Revised Standard Version reads: “I will show you a still more excellent way.”[88] The implication in such a translation is that Paul will show a way far better than the spiritual gifts. Incidentally, if such were the case, then the whole question of what are “the greater gifts” becomes moot in light of there being a “still more excellent way” than zeal for the greater gifts. However, a more precise rendering of the Greek text, if nothing else, points in a quite different direction, for it literally reads, “And I now show you *a way beyond measure*.”[89] Thus Paul is *not* setting forth here an alternative to desiring the gifts; he does not intend to show something better. Rather, Paul is declaring that he will show a super-excellent way—“a way beyond measure”—wherein the gifts, including “the greater,” are to be exercised.[90] With this understanding of Paul’s words, what he has to say in 1 Corinthians 13, the “love” chapter, falls

into proper perspective. Verse after verse, from 1 through 13 (the last), Paul describes the way beyond measure of love. All the gifts—tongues (v. 1); prophecy, knowledge, faith (v. 2)—must be exercised in love; else they are noisy, abrasive, and virtually worthless. Hence, the importance of love cannot be exaggerated. Moreover, "love never ends"[91] (v. 8), whereas the gifts will pass away when "the perfect" has come: "as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge,[92] it will pass away. But when the perfect comes, the partial[93] will pass away" (vv. 8, 10). "The perfect"[94] refers to the perfection of the glory to come, for Paul shortly added, "Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face" (v. 12). When we are "face to face" with the majestic glory, tongues, prophecy, and knowledge—indeed all the charismata[95]—will fall away, for they belong to the present age, and will be utterly transcended in the vision of God. So it is that in the glory to come (as Paul reaches his climax), "faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (v. 13).

But to return to our earlier point, Paul is by no means saying that love is a better way than the charismata, hence to be earnestly desired rather than the gifts. To be sure the gifts will some day be no more. But while they are available in our present life, they are much to be desired. However, they *must* be exercised in love if there is to be genuine edification. Thus, it is not at all proper to say that the concern for gifts should be transcended by the pursuit of love. Indeed, as Paul makes his transition into chapter 14 after saying, "the greatest of these is love," he writes (as we have noted): "Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts" (NIV). It is not either/or but both/and, with love as the way, the way beyond measure, wherein the gifts find their truly meaningful expression.

Again, in regard to chapter 13, we need to mention an additional error sometimes made: that of viewing the greatest of the gifts as love. We have reflected on the mistake of considering love as a way superior to the gifts; but we need also to recognize that love is in no sense the greatest—or "the greater"—of the gifts. Paul does indeed say that "the greatest [literally, "the greater"][96] of these is love"; however, it is apparent that he is not talking about the greatest among the charismata, but the greatest among the triad of faith, hope, and love. Paul is speaking of eternal verities: those realities of faith, hope, and love that "abide" or "remain."[97] He is not referring to gifts that, for all their greatness, pass away in eternity.[98] It should be added that neither here nor elsewhere in the Scriptures is love depicted as a gift, or charism. Rather, it is a *fruit* of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22—the first-mentioned fruit). It is an *effect* of the Holy Spirit's inner presence: "The love of God has been poured out within our hearts

through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom. 5:5 NASB). But love is not a charism. Since love is not a gift, it cannot be one of the "greater gifts" about which Paul wrote.

Incidentally, it is not always recognized that this classic chapter[99] on love is set in the midst of a discussion of the spiritual gifts. Paul writes to those who know the gifts and who are experiencing them. He urges them to earnestly desire the "greater gifts (1 Cor. 12), indeed "spiritual gifts" in general (1 Cor. 14). Chapter 13 is not basically a dissertation by Paul on the Christian life at large, the way of love, and so forth.[100] It is mainly a discourse on the way the gifts are to be exercised. Paul's words, as is apparent from the still larger context, were written to people who did not lack in any spiritual gift but obviously lacked much in love.[101] Hence, the apostle's words are surely applicable to believers today who need to be encouraged to seek after the *charismata* and in their every expression to exhibit the spirit of love.

The message, then, is unmistakable and needs to be heard again and again by those who participate in the spiritual gifts. We can, and should, be grateful that these gifts are reappearing in our time, but with their reappearance there is all the more need to exercise them in love. Otherwise, as with the Corinthians, division, pride, jealousy,[102] and much else can settle in. If—and only if—the Christian community pursues love, in which such ills may be overcome, will the exercise of gifts prove salutary and zeal for the gifts make for the edification of the body.

EXCURSUS ON THE WORD CHARISMA

The word "charismatic" is derived from the Greek word *charisma (πολλοὶ)* meaning "a gift of grace" *(charis—τῶν ἐχόντων)*. The plural form is *charismata (πολλοὶ ἔχοντες)*, "gifts of grace."

The word, in its singular and plural forms, is found seventeen times in the New Testament. It is almost wholly a Pauline term (the one exception being in 1 Peter) and is largely found in Romans (six times) and 1 Corinthians (seven times). In addition *charisma* occurs one time each in 2 Corinthians and 1 and 2 Timothy.

The word *charisma* or *charismata* is used in reference to:[103]

1. The gift of salvation

a. Justification: Romans 5:15–16: "The *gift* is not like the trespass … the *gift* followed many trespasses and brought justification" (NIV).

b. Eternal life: Romans 6:23: "The wages of sin is death, but the *gift* of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (NIV).

2. The gift of particular blessings

a. Israel's special privileges: Romans 11:29: "The *gifts* and the calling of God [to Israel] are irrevocable" (NASB).

b. Marriage and single life: 1 Corinthians 7:7: in discussing the matter of sexual self-control Paul said, "Each man has his own *gift* from God" (NASB).

c. Rescue from mortal danger: 2 Corinthians 1:11: Paul, after speaking of his deliverance by God from physical death, refers to this as a "*gift* bestowed upon us …" (KJV).

3. Gifts in reference to the service of others in the community

a. Romans 12:6–8: "We have different *gifts*, according to the grace given us" (NIV). Paul then lists in sequence prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging (or exhorting), contributing (or liberality), leadership, and showing mercy (NIV and NASB). Also see Romans 1:11.

b. 1 Corinthians 12:4–10: "There are varieties of *gifts*, but the same Spirit" (v. 4). Then Paul lists the gifts of the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, *gifts* of healing, miracles, prophecy, the distinguishing of spirits, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues (vv. 8–10). Also see verses 28, 30–31.

c. 1 Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 1:6: “Do not neglect the *gift* you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you…. I remind you to rekindle the *gift* of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands.”

d. 1 Peter 4:10–11: “As each has received a *gift*, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service … by the strength which God supplies.”

It is obvious from this summary that the word *charisma* is used to refer to a wide range of gifts. However, in all their variety each gift represents God’s gracious bestowal. Thayer defines χάρισμα as “a gift of grace; a favor which one receives without any merit of his own.” The gifts are, and remain, gifts of God’s grace.

[1]The Greek word *charismata (charisma*—sing.) means “gifts of grace.” Thayer states that “in the technical Pauline sense *charismata*. .. denote extraordinary powers, distinguishing certain Christians and enabling them to serve the church of Christ, the reception of which is due to the power of divine grace operating in their souls by the Holy Spirit.” (See excursus, pp. 345–46, for a more detailed study of the word *charisma.)*

[2]Some prefer to speak of “charisms,” hence the “charisms” of the Spirit.

[3]If the capital “S” is reduced to a lowercase “s” as is usually done, it is to be borne in mind that the Holy Spirit is being referred to, not the human (or some other kind of) spirit.

[4]The Greek word is diairoun and is translated “dividing” (KJV), “apportions” (RSV), and “gives” (NIV). The NEB, like NASB, has “distributing.”

[5]In Hebrews there is also reference to “distributions” of the Holy Spirit (2:4). The word there, however, is from *merismos.* The passage is concerned with the message of salvation: “It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will” (vv. 3-4). The latter portion literally reads, “by distributions [merismois] of the Holy Spirit.” Thus there is no direct mention of gifts or charismata, though obviously it is the same Holy Spirit who “distributes.” The word “gifts” is supplied in RSV (also KJV, NIV, NASB, and NEB), for it is clearly implied.

[6]However, in Ephesians 4 the gift of Christ is specified as “prophets.” We will later discuss the distinction between the charisma of prophecy and the doma of prophet (see chap. 14, “The Ninefold Manifestation,” VI).

[7]It is quite common to list all the gifts in Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Corinthians 12 as “gifts of the Spirit.” To be sure, the Holy Spirit is involved in the gifts of God (Rom. 12) and the gifts of Christ (Eph. 4), even as God the Father and Christ are involved in the gifts of the Spirit, for God is one. However, He is also three persons, each operating particular spheres. And as the Holy Spirit He operates the spiritual gifts: “One and the same Spirit works all these things,” namely, the charismata recorded in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10.

[8]The gifts in Romans 12 and Ephesians 4 (also in 1 Peter-mentioned hereafter) are omitted from consideration, not because of any idea of their lesser importance. Far from that! All these gifts are essential to a total picture of the life of the church and call for a study that goes beyond the confines of Renewal Theology, volume 2. Since our focus at this place is on the Holy Spirit and His gifts, I will not go into a broader study of the other gifts.

[9]In a certain sense all Christians are “charismatic,” because all have received the gift or charisma of eternal life. Paul writes in Romans 6:23: “The wages of sin is death, but the gift [charisma] of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (NIV). (Also compare Paul’s words in Romans 5:15-16, where charisma twice occurs in regard to justification.) However, the term has come to be used today for those who participate in the “charismatic renewal” of our time.

[10]See also 1 Peter 4:10, where the singular, charisma, is used: “As each has received a gift [charisma], employ it for one another … .” Peter goes on to describe two expressions of this charisma (v. 11).

[11]“Charismatic renewal” is nonetheless a proper designation, as participants do not intend to exclude the charismata of Romans 12 (or 1 Peter 4), whereas they do include 1 Corinthians (over against many who seek to exclude them all or in part, as will be noted later). However, the word “pneumatic” does highlight the embracing of the spiritual (or pneumatic) gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:8-10.

[12]The Greek phrase is peri de ton pneumatikon, literally, “now concerning spirituals.” This could signify “spiritual matters” or even “spiritual persons” (cf. 1 Cor. 14:37, where pneumatikos refers to a spiritual person). However, almost all translations supply the word “gifts” in light

of what follows in 1 Corinthians 12 (cf. also 1 Cor. 14:1).

[13]After the words “Now concerning spiritual gifts,” Paul adds, “I do not want you to be uninformed” (agnoien). Agnoien is translated “ignorant” in KJV, NIV, and NEB; “unaware” in NASB. I prefer “uninformed.” Gordon Fee writes, “Paul almost certainly does not intend to give new information, but an additional slant, or a corrective, to their understanding of ‘the things of the Spirit’ “ (The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 576). “Ignorant” or “unaware” does not convey that idea as well as “uninformed.”

[14]Or “in every thing” (KJV, NASB); the Greek phrase is en panti.

[15]It is likely that Paul here refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit as the confirmation of the testimony. A parallel to this would be Peter’s words that the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles in Caesarea had been a confirming testimony by God Himself: “God who knows the heart bore witness [or “testimony”] to them, giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us” (Acts 15:8). These words suggest a like “testimony to Christ” (or “of Christ,” tou Chris tou) being confirmed to the Corinthians by the gift of the Spirit. (See also my earlier n. 5 relating to Heb. 2:3-4.)

[16]Indeed it becomes clear, as Paul’s letter unfolds, that their problem was not the need for more gifts but the proper regulation of what they had!

[17]Or “in” (see NASB mg). The Greek preposition is en, which is usually translated “in” or “with,” although “by” is possible. “In” or “with” (NIV mg has both) seems preferable, especially if we understand that it is not the Spirit who baptizes but Christ (see my fuller discussion of this in chap. 8, III.D.)

[18]The relevant Greek word is epotisthemen. Thayer (article on πολίτευμα) suggests “imbued” or “saturated” as the translation of this word (again see chap. 8, III.D).

[19]It is significant (as I mentioned in chap. 8, III.A) that in an early noncanonical letter, written from the church at Rome, Clement addressed the church at Corinth as one that had experienced “a full outpouring of the Holy Spirit” (1 Clement 2:2). Clement had just spoken of the Corinthian church as one long known for its hospitality, humility, and consecration to Christ. Then he added, “Thus a profound and abundant peace was given to you all, and ye had an insatiable desire for doing good, while a full outpouring of the Holy Spirit was upon you all.” Thereafter Clement (like Paul in his letter) chastised the Corinthians for boasting and rivalry. But this did not vitiate the fact that, in Clement’s

eyes, the Corinthians had experienced a rich outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This accords with Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 12:13.

[20]See my earlier note 15 how this confirmation was likely that of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[21]"The strong assurance with which the Corinthians embraced the Gospel was followed by a shower of spiritual energies, of which they had a lively sense…. No church excelled the Corinthians in the variety of its endowments and the satisfaction felt in them" (EGT, 2: 760).

[22]The word "baptism," which suggests immersion or saturation, is commonly used: "baptized in [or "with"] the Holy Spirit." (For a fuller discussion of this term and similar ones, see chap. 8, III.)

[23]Incidentally, note the sequential reference in Hebrews to those who have "shared in the Holy Spirit" and "tasted … the powers of the coming age" (6:4-5 Niv). These "powers" (dynameis) may well refer to manifestations of the Holy Spirit consequent to sharing in that same Spirit.

[24]Surely what Paul says in the preceding verses about the Lord's Supper (11:17-34) is relevant for the whole age of the church. How then can one possibly deny the continuing relevance of the immediately succeeding verses in 1 Corinthians 12 about the gifts?

[25]A prime example of this is the faulty exegesis of some commentators in relation to 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. I will describe this later.

[26]The Corinthian church for all its faults knew that dynamism. In reading the passage in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 one is carried back into primordial spiritual depths, to the church described by one exegete as in its "rudimentary and protoplasmic state" in which its "substratum and vital tissue" are manifest (EGT, 2:733). Without this "substratum and vital tissue" the church cannot truly survive. F. L. Godet writes about 1 Corinthians 12-14 thus: "These chapters are to us like a revelation of the power of that spiritual movement which went forth from Pentecost, and of the wonderful spiritual efflorescence which at the outset signalized the new creation due to the power of the gospel" (Commentary on the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, 600).

[27]Sometimes the attempt is made to divide the spiritual gifts into "permanent" and "temporary" and then to label most of the gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 as temporary, i.e., belonging only to the apostolic age (see, e.g., John Walvoord, The Holy Spirit, chap. 19, "Permanent Spiritual Gifts" and chap. 20, "Temporary Spiritual Gifts"). Such juggling with Scripture has even less to commend it than a forthright

dismissal of all the spiritual gifts. (Walvoord actually comes close to such dismissal; under the heading “Permanent Spiritual Gifts” he admits only one of the nine [faith] and wrongly categorizes two others as “works of the Spirit” rather than “gifts” [“word of knowledge” and “word of wisdom”].)

[28]Of course, this is not admitted by anticharismatic zealots who in confusion categorize contemporary manifestations as “psychological,” “spurious,” or even “demonic.”

[29]The Greek preposition is en. The ASV translates it as “in” (likewise NASB mg). Although “by” is possible (as also in KJV, NASB, NIV), “in” is probably the better translation in this context. The meaning is not, as “by” suggests, that the Holy Spirit makes the declaration, “Jesus is Lord,” but that those “in” the Spirit so declare. The NEB puts it well: “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord!’ except under the influence of the Holy Spirit.”

[30]J. D. G. Dunn writes, “The confession of Jesus’ Lordship … is a charismatic conviction born of inspiration and expressed in words given from beyond. It is thus a direct and immediate manifestation of Spirit” (The Spirit of Jesus, 319). F. W. Grosheide writes, “That confession nobody can make except he be in the Spirit of God…. In this context these words are not to be taken of the ordinary confession of the believer but of the confession in glossolalia” (First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 281).

[31]The RSV has “service” and “working.” Since the Greek text has diakonion and energematon, plurals for words that may more adequately be translated “ministries” (NASB) and “operations” (KJV), I have substituted these words.

[32]The Greek word is energon, hence “operating” or “working.”

[33]Accordingly, there may be some justification for viewing 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 as particularly referring to the gifts of the Spirit; Ephesians 4:7-11 as the ministries of Christ; and Romans 12:3-8 as the operations of God. (See my earlier brief comments on these three passages in the Introduction.)

[34]“What is a χάρισμα in respect of its quality and ground, is a διακονία in view of its usefulness, and an ἐνέργημα in virtue of the power operative therein” (EGT, 2:887).

[35]I like the statement of H. A. W. Meyer: “The divine Trinity is here indicated in an ascending climax, in such a way that we pass from the

Spirit who bestows the gifts to the Lord [Christ] who is served by means of them, and finally to God, who as the absolute first cause and possessor of all Christian powers works the entire sum of charismatic gifts in all who are gifted" (Commentary on the New Testament, First Corinthians, in loco).

[36]The phrase is *phanerösis tou pneumatos.* That this is a subjective genitive, i.e., the Spirit manifesting Himself, seems probable from the larger context. According to TDNT, "the gen. τοῦ πνεύματος is to be taken as a subj. gen., for only in 12:8ff. are the different operations named and v. 11 expressly repeats that the Spirit is the subject at work (in different ways)" (9:6). BAGD, however, says that "the syntax … cannot be determined with certainty," but then adds, "Whether the genitive is subj. or obj. the expr. means the same thing as χάρισμα." I am inclined to the subjective genitive and agree with James Dunn that the important thing is that "*The Spirit reveals Himself in* the charismata" (*Jesus and the Spirit*, 212). The NEB translation points this direction: "the Spirit is manifested."

[37]Arnold Bittlinger writes, "The Spirit is not just given in an 'invisible way.' He wants to manifest Himself visibly" (Gifts and Graces, 24).

[38]I have earlier commented on the overall difference between the charismata of 1 Corinthians 12 and those of Romans 12 (also 1 Peter 4). However, the difference lies in the varieties of gifts. Galatians 5 is totally different in that Paul is not speaking of gifts of any kind.

[39]For further discussion of the fruit of the Spirit see chapter 15, "Christian Living."

[40]See 1 Corinthians 14:16, 23-24. In these verses Paul makes reference to one who is an idiotes (or plural, idiotai), translated in KJV as "unlearned." More specifically this may refer to "him that is without gifts" (RSV mg). The NASB translates the word as "ungifted," suggesting in the margin of 1 Corinthians 14:16 "unversed in spiritual gifts."

[41]This disregard may be deliberate (i.e., by relegating them, wholly or in part, to the past) or in ignorance (not knowing what they are all about). It may also stem from the previously described opposition to the "sensationalism" of charismatics.

[42]I have some hesitancy in using the word supernatural because of a possible connotation of the "otherworldy" or even the "ghostly." Also "supernatural" may suggest something totally beyond the human, or even in contradiction to it. However, on the positive side the word does imply

a dimension more than human and guards against a reduction of the spiritual gifts to the purely natural level.

[43]Hence, any attempted separation of the spiritual gifts into supernatural/natural, extraordinary/ordinary, or even miraculous/nonmiraculous is in error. As an example of the latter, see M. E. Unger, The Baptism and Gifts of the Holy Spirit, 138-40, where the author lists four of the gifts as "temporary, miraculous sign-gifts," thus relegating the other gifts to a nonmiraculous category. (It is noteworthy that the idea of "temporary" goes along with "miraculous," hence not for today.)

[44]Bittlinger writes contrariwise that "a gift is manifested when being set free by the Holy Spirit, natural talents blossom forth glorifying Christ and building up His church" (Gifts and Graces, 72). Bittlinger errs, I believe, in failing to recognize that spiritual gifts are not "natural talents" that "blossom forth" (i.e., enhancements). Rather, they are essentially endowments of the Spirit.

[45]Prime examples of this are Peter and John, used mightily by the Holy Spirit in witness and healing, who were perceived by the Jewish high council as "uneducated and untrained men" (Acts 4:13 NASB).

[46]The Greek word translated "utterance" is apophthengesthai, to "speak out, declare boldly or loudly" (BAGD). Also the word suggests speaking under divine inspiration (see chap. 8, n. 17).

[47]Donald Gee writes that we should "value … the precious quality of divine inspiration in all the gifts of the Spirit, while at the same time we recognize the inescapable human element in them" (Spiritual Gifts in the Work of the Ministry Today, 35). This "inescapable human element" must not be overlooked.

[48]We have earlier observed how God mightily used the uneducated and untrained Peter and John. But also-my present point-He made great use of the highly educated and trained Paul. Paul's "great learning" (Acts 26:24) was placed at the disposal of many operations of the Holy Spirit.

[49]In chapter 14 this gift will be discussed in more detail.

[50]This gift also will be more fully discussed in chapter 14.

[51]E.g., linguistic analysis of a tongue spoken can prove or disprove the validity of the claim that it is a particular known language.

[52]It would, for example, be a grievous error to seek to comprehend a tongue spoken as wholly a natural phenomenon, hence subject totally to the

science of linguistic analysis. William Samarin, a linguist by profession, overreaches his skills when he says, “Glossolalia is fundamentally not language…. Glossolalia is not a supernatural phenomenon” (Tongues of Men and Angels, 225). The linguist can demonstrate that tongues is not a particular language (see preceding note) or even that it does not conform to any language patterns with which he is familiar, but he cannot rule out the possibility that glossolalia has an origin, forms, and meaning completely beyond his competence to analyze.

[53]The Greek word is psychikos; RSV and NEB read “unspiritual”; NIV, “without the Spirit”; KJV, like NASB, “natural.” Psychikos denotes “the life of the natural world and whatever belongs to it, in contrast to the supernatural world, which is characterized by πνεῦμα‘ (BAGD).

[54]RSV translates as “gifts,” which in light of 1 Corinthians 12 may be Paul’s meaning. The Greek word is simply ta, “the things.”

[55]The domata of Ephesians 4 represent offices. They include “prophets” (“He gave some … as prophets” [v. 11 NASB]) who hold a continuing office in the church. Prophecy in 1 Corinthians 12:10 is an activity not limited to the office.

[56]Appointments are mentioned later by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:28: “God has appointed in the church … .” Again prophets are included; but also, in relation to the spiritual gifts, Paul speaks of “miracles,” gifts of healings” (NASB), and “various kinds of tongues.” But in no case are these activities but rather placements. (The word “appointed” might better be translated as “placed” or “set” [as in KJV].) God has, for example, set in the church “miracles”; they occupy a continuing place therein. But it is the Holy Spirit that, so to speak, activates the placement by the gift of “workings of miracles.” The latter is by no means limited to a particular person.

[57]The Greek word is didotai. This may be compared with the edoken (“gave”) of Ephesians 4:11 and the etheto (“placed”) of 1 Corinthians 12:28. The latter two are in the aorist tense and signify completed action whereas the former (a present tense) points to an ongoing activity; “didotai … indicates continuous bestowment” (EGT, 2:287).

[58]This is not to deny that certain persons may more regularly express certain manifestations of the Spirit. Thus, for example, some may be said to have a charisma of prophecy (even called “prophets” in 1 Cor. 14:29-32). Still, whenever the gift occurs, it is a present manifestation of the Spirit.

[59]The Greek phrase is pros to sympheron and means “to the profit” or “advantage” (BAGD), hence “for the profit.” It is apparent from what follows that “the profit” has to do with the community, thus the KJV rendering “to profit withal.” “For the common good” (RSV, NIV) suggests this community ideal.

[60]It will be recalled that after Paul speaks of “varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit,” he adds, “varieties of ministries, but the same Lord.” Hence the spiritual charismata, in all their variety, are also “ministries” of the Lord. (See earlier discussion in III.B.)

[61]The Greek word in 1 Corinthians 12:11 is hekasto; “to each” (RSV), “to every man” (KJV). “To each one” (NASB, NIV) better expresses the individual direction of the manifestation of the Spirit. “Every” suggests the all-inclusiveness of the Spirit’s distribution. Both ideas are contained in the Greek word hekastos.

[62]This is true despite the recovery during the Reformation of the biblical truth of the priesthood of all believers. Unfortunately, the pragmatics of church polity has virtually nullified the outworking of this doctrine in much congregational ministry.

[63]There is always the danger that a church leader, particularly a pastor, will so assume direction of the assembly as to allow little participation on the part of the people. The pastor, to be sure, has a highly important function to fulfill, but it is not to monopolize or dictate the meeting of believers. The manifestation of the gifts does call for order, but orchestration of the gifts is entirely in the hands of the Lord through His Spirit.

[64]Frequent reference is made in the New Testament to the “church in … [someone’s] house.” See Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1:2.

[65]The earliest Christians in Jerusalem are described as “continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house” (Acts 2:46 KJV). There was both temple and house. The latter was also a place of worship; the “breaking bread” suggests the Eucharist and fellowship in the Lord.

[66]On the matter of speaking in tongues and prophesying Paul counsels that there be only “two or three” (1 Cor. 14:27, 29). The implication is that others similarly gifted by the Spirit need not speak.

[67]It is obvious that with basically nine gifts of the Spirit, even a fairly small group (ten or more) must share in a number of the manifestations.

Although each person need not experience more than one gift, he or she is responsible that its expression occur at some time before the assembly concludes.

[68]Translating this time (see note 17) en as “in.”

[69]“Unto” or “in relation to” is also possible. The Greek preposition is eis. For the meaning of “unto” (or “for”) see, e.g., Matthew 10:10; Luke 14:35; Acts 2:38, 11:18; 2 Corinthians 5:5, 9:8. For “in relation to” (or “with respect to,” “concerning”) see, e.g., Acts 2:25; Romans 4:20; Ephesians 5:32; 1 Thessalonians 5:18 in various translations. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 12:13, EGT states: “en defines the element and ruling influence of the baptism [i.e., the Holy Spirit], eis the relationship to which it introduces [i.e., one body]” (2: 890). This would mean that baptism in the Spirit is not into one body (the usual translation) but “unto” or “in relation to,” namely, that there might be oneness or unity in the body. John Rea writes: “In v. 13 he [Paul] is explaining the relation, the unity or common bond, which pertains in the one-and-the-same Spirit for all who are already believers …. The baptism in the Spirit is the great unifying factor in a body of such diverse members” (Layman’s Commentary on the Holy Spirit, 146-47).

[70]Verse 23, “unseemly members” (NASB); the Greek word is aschemona, “the unpresentable, i.e. private, parts” (BAGD). Gordon Fee writes: “Paul is undoubtedly referring to the sexual organs, on which we bestow greater honor, and which therefore have greater decorum, because we cover them” (The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 613-14).

[71]It surely is not without significance that Paul in his discussion of the “unpresentable parts” speaks about the “greater modesty” with which we treat them, but adds that “God has so adjusted the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part” (1 Cor. 12:23, 24). If this is possibly a reference to the sometimes lowly esteemed (even “indecent” to some) gift of tongues, it only shows that God’s evaluation is quite a bit different than ours!

[72]Paul warns against the despising of another gift, namely, prophecy: “Do not despise prophesying” (1 Thess. 5:20). It is apparent that despising spiritual gifts has been around since Paul’s own time.

[73]This obviously is the opposite extreme from despising a gift or gifts.

[74]“Ministry on the line of the natural gifts … often draws attention to the brilliance of the individual and glorifies man. But true ministry of the spiritual gifts leaves man in the background and glorifies God” (Donald

Gee, Concerning Spiritual Gifts, 16).

[75]The Greek word is zeloute; “strive, desire, exert oneself earnestly” (BAGD). RSV and NASB read “earnestly” rather than “eagerly.”

[76]The Greek term is ta pneumatika, “the spirituals.” “Gifts” is supplied in almost every translation (see previous n. 12).

[77]See chapter 7, III.B. “The Gift of the Holy Spirit”; also chapter 11, III.B. “Prayer.”

[78]According to Luke 11:13, God gives “the Holy Spirit to those who ask him”; according to Matthew 7:11, God gives “good things [also described as “good gifts” in the same verse] to those who ask him.” The parallel is unmistakable.

[79]Indeed, the Corinthian church was exactly that, for Paul later said to them, “You are zealous [literally, “zealots,” zelotai] of spiritual gifts” (1 Cor. 14:12 NASB). One might ask: That being the case, why does Paul urge them to be zealous? The answer is that Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:1 sets the injunction to eagerly desire, hence to be zealous, in the context of following love: “Follow the way of love and eagerly desire …” (NIV).

[80]The Greek word again is zeloute. Linguistically this can be either imperative (as above) or indicative: “But you are eagerly desiring” (cf. NIV mg). Bittlinger (Gifts and Graces, 73) holds that the indicative is correct in light of 1 Corinthians 14:12 (q.v.). However, by looking further to 1 Corinthians 14:1 where zeloute is unquestionably imperative, the imperative translation (as found in KJV, RSV, NASB, NIV, and NEB) seems correct. (For further discussion and confirmation of this, see D. A. Carson, Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14, 53-58, and Gordon Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 623-35, 654-55).

[81]RSV and NEB have the “higher gifts”; KJV has the “best gifts.” The Greek expression is ta charismata ta meizona. Meizona is from megas, usually translated as “large” or “great.” Hence I have followed the NIV (also NASB).

[82]The Greek word is pneumaton, literally “spirits.” The word is a bit surprising since Paul up to this point had spoken of pneumatika (1 Cor. 12:1; 14:1). Leon Morris suggests that “ ‘spirits’ stresses a little more the ‘spirit’ character of the gifts” (1 Corinthians, TNTC, 190). The RSV translation, “manifestations of the spirit,” catches this idea.

[83]Or “seek to abound” (NASB). The Greek phrase is zeteite hina

perisseuete. “Try to excel” should not be understood to mean competition with one another for the gifts but rather for all to seek to abound or overflow in edifying gifts.

[84]The Greek expression is mallon de (repeated in v. 5). The KJV translates it “but rather,” which gives an adversative sense. Although mallon de sometimes carries that connotation (e.g., see Eph. 4:28), it may also have an intensive and supplementary force. Thayer says that it “does not do away with that with which it is in opposition, but marks what has the preference: more willingly, more readily, sooner.” Hence, “especially” or “but especially” (NASB). The RSV (like the NIV above) omits the adversative altogether, simply translating it “especially” (“above all” NEB).

[85]Literally, “that you may prophesy” (RSV and NASB).

[86]One further word on Paul’s injunction in 1 Corinthians 12:31 to “eagerly desire the greater gifts”: It is surely a mistake to look back in chapter 12 and try to discover Paul’s meaning. Some persons have tried to identify “the greater gifts” with the first two of the nine charismata listed, i.e., “word of wisdom” and “word of knowledge” (v. 8). To be sure, these are gifts, but prophecy is far down the list in sixth place! Paul is clearly not setting forth a hierarchy of gifts in verses 8-10; rather, it is the “varieties” (v. 4) of gifts that he is describing. Again, others have attempted identification of “the greater gifts” with “apostles” and “prophets,” perhaps also “teachers” (v. 28). This might seem more likely, for, first, Paul had just been talking about apostles, prophets, teachers, etc. (28-30), prior to his statement about desiring the greater gifts (v. 31) and, second, this (unlike vv. 8-10) is definitely a listing according to priorities: “first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles … .” However, Paul cannot be referring to this list for two reasons: first, he speaks of these not as charismata but as appointments: “God has appointed in the church first apostles … ,” and, second, it is quite foreign to Paul’s writing, indeed to the New Testament, to view the offices, or appointments, of apostles, prophets, and teachers as something to be eagerly desired. In the language of Ephesians 4 they are divine domata, not charismata, and the sovereign Lord gives these as He wills. Eager desire has nothing to do with becoming an apostle or prophet or teacher.

[87]The Greek word is diokete; “run after,” “pursue” (BAGD).

[88]Similarly the NASB has 4? show you a still more excellent way”; the KJV reads, “Yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.”

[89]The Greek phrase is kath hyperbolen hodon, “beyond measure [or “comparison”] a way.” See, e.g., Galatians 1:13-“beyond measure” (KJV, NASB); 2 Corinthians 4:17-“beyond all comparison” (also NASB). Thus the translations “a still more excellent way” and “a more excellent way” are quite misleading. According to EGT, “kath hyperbolen is superlative, not comparative; Paul is not pointing out ‘a more excellent way’ than that of seeking and using the charisms of chapter xii … but ‘a super-excellent way’ to win them” (2:896). Although I might differ on the last phrase “to win them,” EGT is surely right to disregard the comparative idea. BAGD, under κατα, translates kath hyperbolen as “beyond measure,” “beyond comparison.”

[90]The NIV translation, earlier quoted, “I will show you the most excellent way,” avoids the comparative idea. However, the more literal rendering, “a way beyond measure,” is preferable.

[91]The Greek word is piptei, literally “falls.” (See chap. 15, n. 122, for a fuller discussion.)

[92]The knowledge that will pass away is the gift of the “word of knowledge.” According to F. F. Bruce, this knowledge is “a manifestation of the Spirit designed for the present requirements of church life” (1 and 2 Corninthians, NCBC, 127). Knowledge in a broad sense will, of course, continue. Paul later adds in reference to the future: “Then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (v. 12 NIV).

[93]“Partial” is the NASB reading. The Greek phrase is ek merous, “in part” (BAGD, under *κατα*).

[94]The Greek phrase is *to teleion.* Incidentally, I hardly need to comment on the attempt of some biblical interpreters to identify to teleion with the completion of the canon of Scripture. Merrill Unger, translating to teleion as “the complete,” writes, “This passage, by strict adherence to the context, necessitates interpreting the complete thing as the New Testament Scriptures” (The Baptism and Gifts of the Spirit, 141-42); Walter Chantry similarly declares, “Tongues will vanish away, knowledge will cease at the time that the New Testament is finished” (Signs of the Apostles, 51). See also Douglas Judisch, An Evaluation of Claims to the Charismatic Gifts, chapter 4, “The Explicit Testimony of Paul.” Such an attempt, which actually is only a device to seek invalidation of any continuation of gifts in the church, is utterly futile. For a good refutation of this view and other related ones, see D. A. Carson, Showing the Spirit, 68-72; also note Gordon Fee, The First

Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 644-45, especially note 23, which includes the words “It is an impossible view, of course, since Paul himself could not have articulated it” [!]).

[95]In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul mentions only prophecies, tongues, and knowledge (i.e., word of knowledge). These are doubtless illustrative of all the spiritual charismata mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10.

[96]The Greek word is meizon.

[97]The NEB translates the clause as follows: “There are three things that last for ever: faith, hope, and love … .”

[98]Faith (pistis) uniquely functions both as a gift of the Spirit (see 1 Cor. 12:9) and as one of the eternal verities. Faith as a charism is a special faith for healing, working of miracles, etc. (see the next chapter). The faith that “abides” is eternal faith and trust in the living God.

[99]Of course, there is no chapter in the original letter. Unfortunately, the chapter division can easily lead to isolation from the overall context.

[100]This is not to say that the chapter has no relevance to the general Christian walk. Quite the contrary, there is much of great edification (note especially vv. 4-7), regardless of the gifts. But the chapter both begins specifically with the gifts (vv. 1-3) and later continues with them (vv. 8-10). Thus it is clear that however much Paul goes beyond the gifts as he speaks of love, the context is the spiritual charismata. Hence, the chapter was written primarily, even directly, to believers who are experiencing the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

[101]See especially 1 Corinthians 1. Whereas Paul expresses his thanksgiving to God that the Corinthians were “not lacking in any gift [charisma]” (v. 7), he also later mentions the “quarreling” (v. 11) and divisions among them.

[102]Love is the counter to all such, according to 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

[103]Each use of the word “gift” or “gifts” below is a form of charisma or charismata.

14
The Ninefold Manifestation

The ninefold manifestation of the Spirit is expressed in nine spiritual gifts. With reference to 1 Corinthians 12:7 (“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good”) and the gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8—10, we will examine each gift in turn.[1] It is noteworthy that the first two, word of wisdom and word of knowledge, and the last two, various kinds of tongues and the interpretation of tongues, are closely connected. The first two are word *(logos)* gifts; the last two deal with tongues. In between are five other gifts. The two-five-two groupings quite likely represent different categories of gifts.[2] We will follow them in sequence.[3]

INTRODUCTION: WORD OF WISDOM AND WORD OF KNOWLEDGE

"For to one is given the word of wisdom [*logos sophias*] through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge [*logos gnoseos*] according to the same Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:8 NASB).

Since the Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of truth" (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13), both "word of wisdom" and "word of knowledge" are expressions of the truth made known through Him.

Word of wisdom and word of knowledge manifested by the Holy Spirit draw on the treasure that is to be found in Jesus Christ, "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3).

Ultimately, both word of wisdom and word of knowledge are from God Himself.[4] They are not the expression of ordinary wisdom and knowledge (as will be shown later), even of the most enlightened kind, but emanate from a higher source. Both are the result of divine illumination;[5] neither is attainable by the human mind. They originate beyond all human capacity.

Word of wisdom and word of knowledge involve the mind. Although both gifts stem from divine illumination, the mind is not bypassed. In word of wisdom and word of knowledge the mind is fully functioning.[6]

The two gifts are gifts of speaking. *Logos* may be translated as "utterance,"[7] hence, utterance of wisdom and utterance of knowledge. The gifts are not wisdom and knowledge, but speaking or uttering wisdom and knowledge. Wisdom and knowledge are the contents of the gift; however, the gift itself is not wisdom or knowledge, but the declaration thereof.[8] In that case, the gift may be called oracular utterance.[9]

Finally, since "word" in both cases is without the definite article, reference is made to a particular disclosure of wisdom or knowledge. It is an utterance of some aspect of divine truth in a given situation.

I. WORD OF WISDOM

"Word of wisdom" is listed first in the two *logos* gifts, for the utterance of wisdom is of fundamental importance to ministry in the body. Wisdom operates on the level of deep understanding; hence, its utterance can bring much edification to others.

Earlier in his letter to the Corinthians Paul has much to say about the utterance of wisdom.[10] For example, he declares that Christ sent him "to preach the gospel —not with words of human wisdom,[11] lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power" (1 Cor. 1:17 NIV). The clear implication is that the words in his preaching were not derived from his own wisdom but came from another source, namely the Holy Spirit. Paul says much the same thing about his proclamation to the Corinthians: "When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words[12] of wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (2:1–2). Hence Paul, in proclaiming the gospel, spoke words of spiritual wisdom without high-flown eloquence.

We may next observe that Paul denies any attempt on his part to use persuasion in his speech: "My message *[logos]* and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power"[13] (1 Cor. 2:4 NASB). They were "words of wisdom" that did not issue from a human attempt to persuade. Rather, they came from the Holy Spirit—His "demonstration" or "making manifest."[14] They were the manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

Thus when Paul elaborates the gifts, or the manifestation of the Spirit, in 1 Corinthians 12, he is declaring that such spiritual utterance is one of the distributions of the Holy Spirit. There is no suggestion that only Paul himself spoke such a word of wisdom; rather, "to *one* [without specification] is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom." A person who so speaks will, like Paul, not depend on human wisdom, eloquence, or persuasiveness but wholly on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Next we note that although the gift itself lies in the utterance of wisdom, it is not to be supposed that such wisdom belongs to the present order of things. Paul

had earlier declared, “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” (1 Cor. 1:20). God’s wisdom, Paul adds, which is folly to the world, is “Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles” (v. 23). Paul later says, “We do impart [or “speak” NIV, NASB] wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age…. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification” (1 Cor. 2:6–7).

Such declarations of Paul underscore the point that the wisdom referred to is not a wisdom of this world/age, but a hidden wisdom that focuses essentially on Jesus Christ, the crucified Lord.

Hence, a word of wisdom is in some way an explication of the mystery of God that centers in Jesus Christ. Paul also speaks of Christ Himself as our wisdom: “… Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom” (1 Cor. 1:30). Accordingly, that which speaks of Christ, particularly the wonder of the cross, is an utterance or word of wisdom. Such a word is spoken out of the mystery of God and glorifies Jesus Christ.

Now we take the next step and observe that the wisdom uttered is itself a result of revelation from the Holy Spirit. Paul proceeds to say: “‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived …’ God has revealed to us through the Spirit” (1 Cor. 2:9–10). Although the “to us” refers primarily to Paul, it may also include other believers.[15] In other words, although the primary and authoritative revelation of God’s mystery was given to the apostle Paul, other believers through the Holy Spirit may likewise receive revelation[16] and out of such revelation declare the truth of God. Such an utterance, accordingly, is a word of wisdom.

It is also of interest and significance that immediately following his statement in 1 Corinthians 2:9–10, Paul adds, “For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God” (v. 10). The Holy Spirit plumbs “the deep things”[17] of God, searches out profound mysteries, and through revelation makes these available to believers.[18] Hence, those who so receive them will be able, as the Holy Spirit wills, to proclaim them to others.

We may now turn to Paul’s letter to the Ephesians where the apostle prays, “… that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him” (1:17).[19]

Paul’s prayer implies that the believer does not automatically receive spiritual wisdom and revelation; such is a gift of God. This additionally suggests that the primary matter in a word of wisdom is not the utterance itself, but openness and receptivity to the wisdom God gives. Out of such revealed wisdom (and only

where there is that wisdom) can there be a true word of wisdom.

Hence, we need to stress that he who speaks a word of wisdom is, first of all, one who is operating under the revelation of the Holy Spirit. This means more than a knowledge of Scripture; more than a knowledge of the facts of Christ's life, death, and resurrection; even more than a personal experience of salvation. It means, in addition to all that has been mentioned, that the Holy Spirit who has now come searches the divine depths and increasingly makes known those depths. Paul, immediately following his words about "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him," adds, "having the eyes of your hearts ["inward eyes" NEB] enlightened" (Eph. 1:18). It is this illumination of the inmost self to the level of depth understanding[20] that the Holy Spirit, the Searcher of the depths of the Godhead, brings about the wisdom of God. It is *this* wisdom, or some aspect of it, that when spoken forth is the charismatic gift of the Holy Spirit.

Such wisdom is primarily and most profoundly Jesus Christ in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, for it is "Christ Jesus whom God made our wisdom." The more that is revealed to us by the Spirit about Christ, especially relating to the central mystery of the cross, the more wisdom we will have to speak to others as the Spirit wills.

Now a further word in regard to the Scriptures: first, since they record the life of Jesus Christ, one who speaks a word of wisdom will be grounded in them. Since the Scriptures testify of Christ,[21] whatever is said in an utterance of wisdom will be in total accord with the written testimony. Second, the one who speaks will do so under the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Since the Scriptures are inspired ("God-breathed")[22] by the Holy Spirit, it is that same Spirit who alone is able to convey proper understanding. Hence a word of wisdom under the Spirit's illumination can bring a true apprehension of the scriptural meaning. Third, a word of wisdom may also go beyond the illumination of scriptural words into a particular revelation of the One to whom Scriptures bear witness. In this case it will be a word from the Holy Spirit that will provide some specific insight into the truth of God, of Christ. It will not add any supposedly new truth beyond Scripture and surely will contradict nothing contained in Scripture, but because of the plenitude of the Spirit's operation it will provide a fuller or deeper apprehension of some truth to which Scripture bears witness. A word of wisdom, accordingly, will be spoken by one who, in Paul's words, has been granted "a spirit of wisdom and revelation." The Holy Spirit illuminates "the eyes of the heart," out of which enlightenment and depth of understanding may break forth in the word of wisdom.

I need also to emphasize that the revelation that stands behind a word of wisdom is altogether secondary to the revelation that Paul, for example, received. Paul as an apostle occupied the position (with other apostles and prophets) of receiving the primary revelation concerning many mysteries of the gospel. Paul spoke of a mystery concerning the hardening of Israel (Rom. 11:25–26); he declared that he and other apostles were "stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4:1); he affirmed vigorously, "Lo! I tell you a mystery!" in regard to the translation and resurrection of believers (1 Cor. 15:51). And he stated that a mystery was made known to him personally: "the mystery was made known to me by revelation" being also "revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit," namely, that "the Gentiles are fellow heirs" (Eph. 3:3, 5–6).[23] The primary revelation was given to Paul and the other apostles and prophets; all other subsequent revelation is subordinate[24] to it.

But having emphasized this primacy of apostolic revelation, we note again that others may receive revelation. I have already mentioned 1 Corinthians 14:26 and Ephesians 1:17 (also 1 Cor. 2:10 is a possible example). Paul spoke further in Colossians 1:26 of "the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints."[25] Behind this manifestation to believers stands the office of Paul "to make the word of God fully known" (v. 25, hence again the priority is with the apostle), but there is also manifestation[26] to the saints. Then in Colossians 2:2–3 Paul expressed earnest desire for both Colossians and Laodiceans that "their hearts may be encouraged as they are knit together in love, to have all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." The Colossians and Laodiceans did not already have this assured understanding and knowledge of "God's mystery"; rather, Paul's prayer is that they might get it. To have such would be to know God's mystery and this means revelation.[27]

Our discussion brings us to the point that a word or utterance of wisdom, as a "manifestation of the Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:7), is based on revelation. There is first of all the apprehension of some aspect of God's mystery in Jesus Christ; this occurs through the revelation of the Spirit. Then there is the speaking forth of that revelation in which the mystery is made manifest. By this the Holy Spirit, who is the revealer of mystery, manifests Himself through the spoken word. This, accordingly, is a word of wisdom.

It is apparent that the word of wisdom occupies a high place among the manifestations of the Spirit. For it signifies the speaking forth of a revealing word that centers in Jesus Christ. While it is a mental operation, it is more than a merely rational utterance because it involves deep things that only spiritual eyes

and hearts can apprehend. Also it adds nothing to Scripture but exposes some depth or height of what Scripture attests. But when such a word is spoken through the Spirit, the Spirit certainly manifests Himself and all who hear this word are truly blessed.

Finally, a few other comments: A word of wisdom does not depend on one's being either a wise person or a persuasive speaker. Concerning the former, in the same letter where Paul spoke of someone uttering a word of wisdom (1 Cor. 12:8), he earlier said, "Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards" (1 Cor. 1:26). "Not many" implies that some were wise, but whether one is naturally wise or not is basically irrelevant. For, as Paul adds shortly after that, it is Christ Jesus "whom God made our wisdom" (v. 30).

Hence, to be grounded in Christ as a person, to truly know "Christ and him crucified," to be given "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him"—these are the things that really count. A naturally wise person may actually be blocked from this true wisdom because of pride in his or her own wisdom and utilization of worldly insight and judgment in approaching things of faith. On the other hand, a naturally wise person or one who has grown in wisdom through much study and experience may also receive this wisdom in a "mystery" if humbly open to it. In the latter case, God may mightily use him (as He did Paul the scholar); but he can also use the uneducated, the "common person" (as represented by Peter).

In regard to being a persuasive speaker, a word of wisdom clearly does not depend on this either. As we have observed, Paul vigorously emphasized that his speech was "not in persuasive words of wisdom." Paul made no claim to being an orator; moreover, there were those who found his speech "contemptible."[28] The important thing, however, was not persuasive oratory, which could have stood in the way of truly spiritual utterance, but words spoken through the enabling of the Holy Spirit. The persuasion thereby was totally from the Spirit of God and not from human eloquence. So it remains to this day. The speech may be far more "contemptible"[29] than that of Paul; but if the words are inspired by the Holy Spirit, they may verily proclaim the wisdom of God.

A final comment: "Word of wisdom" is particularly needed in the preaching ministry of the church. We may here recall Paul's statement that he was sent by Christ "to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom" (1 Cor. 1:17 NIV). Preaching, or proclamation, that sets forth Christ under the anointing of the Spirit is the utterance of spiritual wisdom. We may think particularly of the pastoral function of ministering the word in a local congregation, where preaching may indeed be the occasion for a word of wisdom. The fact that much

preaching is little more than an exercise in human wisdom and oratorical skill ought not to derogate from the fact that preaching can also be and often is so anointed by the Holy Spirit that wisdom from God is proclaimed.[30]

The important matter concerning word of wisdom is that both the wisdom and the utterance come from the Holy Spirit. Whether in a more formal preaching situation or simply in a gathering of believers for mutual edification, the Holy Spirit may so move upon a person as to impart depth-understanding to a truth of the gospel. As He speaks this forth, a word of wisdom is truly being exercised.[31]

II. WORD OF KNOWLEDGE

"Word of knowledge" is listed second in the two *logos* gifts and in close conjunction with word of wisdom. Paul elsewhere links wisdom and knowledge, and in the same order. In this connection we may again recall Paul's words in regard to Christ as One "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). Also Paul says in Romans: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!" (11:33). Wisdom *and* knowledge—and in that order. Further, each is a gift of the Holy Spirit: a word of wisdom "*through* the Spirit," a word of knowledge "*according to* the same Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:8).

In regard to the speaking or utterance—hence, word—of knowledge, we turn again to 1 Corinthians 2. Paul writes, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit" (vv. 12–13 NASB). Three things are said here: first, there is the background of the reception of the Spirit;[32] second, thereby are known the things God has given; and third, these things are spoken in words the Spirit teaches. Hence, they will be "according to," that is, in accordance with, the Spirit's teaching. This clearly is Paul's own example of a word of knowledge.

Let us examine Paul's statement more closely. First of all, for a word of knowledge to occur there must be the prior reception of the Holy Spirit. This, of course, is true of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit; the gift of the Spirit precedes the gifts. Second, Paul deals here in the realm of knowledge of "the things" God has graciously given. Accordingly, reference is made to knowledge of the wide range of blessings[33] that God has bestowed on us in Jesus Christ. Third, out of the knowledge of these things, and in words taught by the Holy Spirit, we then speak.[34] It is this third stage that, strictly speaking, is a word of knowledge. Not until the speaking occurs is the gift of a word of knowledge made manifest.

Now looking specifically at the occurrence of a word of knowledge: the words are those taught by the Holy Spirit. This further suggests that the message comes forth in the form of teaching. So Paul continues by saying, "… interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:13 RSV),[35] i.e., truths

about God's blessings in Spirit-taught words.

The matter of knowledge is critical because the gift is a word of *knowledge.* Here we recall Paul's words about "having the eyes of your hearts enlightened." After making this statement Paul adds, "that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in[36] us who believe" (Eph. 1:18–19). This describes believers'[37] knowledge of both future and present blessings. To know such hope, such riches, such power surely provides abundant background for their declaration to others. Hence, we may say that the more fully such blessings are known, the more opportunity there is for a word of knowledge to be spoken.

The knowledge just referred to is the knowledge of an enlightened mind: "that you may know… ." It is more than a knowledge to be gained from even the most thorough biblical study; it is a deeper knowledge, which, while based on such study, is brought directly to the human mind by the Holy Spirit.[38] A word of knowledge, accordingly, is an utterance stemming from this spiritual illumination.

It is interesting that Paul speaks of the Corinthians as a people abundantly blessed: "In every way you were enriched in him [Christ] with all speech [or utterance] and all knowledge" (1 Cor. 1:5). Their knowledge was not limited nor was there any limitation on its expression; a word of knowledge could therefore readily occur. This does not mean that the Corinthians were a profoundly spiritual church, for they were not.[39] But insofar as knowledge and utterance were concerned, they were amply equipped. A word of knowledge could be spoken at any time through the Spirit in the gathered assembly of believers.

Paul speaks similarly of the Romans. They were a people 'full of goodness, filled with all knowledge" and, he adds, "able to instruct one another" (Rom. 15:14).[40] People so abundantly endowed with knowledge are thus qualified to teach one another.[41] Such teaching is an utterance, a word of knowledge.

Hence, a word of knowledge is essentially an inspired word of teaching or instruction that occurs within the context of the gathered community. To be sure, there are also those who hold the office of teacher and thus have a unique place in giving instruction. However, the gift of a word of knowledge is that which is expressed from within the community itself. Perhaps nowhere is this put more vividly than in Paul's words to the Colossians: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish [or "instruct"[42]] one another in all wisdom" (3:16). It is apparent that Paul here refers to mutual teaching and admonishment. The background is not the office of teacher but the word of

Christ indwelling “richly.”[43] With the word of Christ so indwelling believers, there can be beneficial teaching of one another.[44]

Yet, I must immediately add, this gift is not just mutual teaching. It is, in addition, a special impartation of teaching that is given by the Holy Spirit through a particular person. It is the speaking of inspired knowledge, an articulation of truth, that in its very utterance edifies the gathered body of believers. The Holy Spirit enables the one who so speaks to declare truth in a way totally beyond his own natural capacity or experience. The words, while being framed by the mind of the speaker, spring from a higher source. Accordingly, they are oracular utterances.[45]

Such a word of knowledge will often, as we have seen, relate to God’s blessings. We may here again recall Paul’s statement about “the things freely given to us by God.” To know these and to express them in particular ways and at particular moments is truly the utterance of knowledge. However, the important matter is the conveyance of God’s truth whatever its nature—the “things” of God in any aspect—in such a manner as to make them clearly known.[46]

How, we may finally inquire, do word of wisdom and word of knowledge relate to each other? Obviously they are closely connected as gifts of utterance and both have to do with the truth of God. The gifts, consequently, are sometimes difficult to distinguish. However, from what has been said it is apparent that word of wisdom has more to do with the speaking forth of the central mysteries of Christian faith. Such mysteries are disclosed to the enlightened mind and heart; hence there stems from it a depth of understanding and declaration. All of this occurs through the activity of the Holy Spirit. Word of knowledge likewise is concerned about the truth of God but operates more in terms of articulation. It is the knowledge of a spiritually enlightened mind that, in correspondence therewith, clearly sets forth the truth for others to understand. It is utterance stemming from inspired knowledge.

Again, word of wisdom refers to the essential truth of God wrought into man’s inmost self: his heart, his spirit. The communication of that truth through the mind speaks profoundly to the hearts and spirits of those who hear. Word of knowledge may relate to the same truth or similar truths (such as God’s varied blessings); but in it the truth is intellectually apprehended, objectified, and set forth. What occurs in a word of wisdom “ *through* the Spirit” is expounded “*according to* the same Spirit” in a word of knowledge. Word of knowledge makes the things of God understandable to His people.

Both gifts are spiritual manifesta tions. Whereas the gift of a word of wisdom

is more related to the preacher and a word of knowledge to the teacher, neither preaching nor teaching as such is the manifestation of the Spirit. Both depend on the anointing of the Holy Spirit through revelation and enlightenment. Moreover, the two gifts may be apportioned by the Spirit in a given situation to those who occupy neither an official preaching nor an official teaching position. The Holy Spirit distributes “as he wills” (1 Cor. 12:11); hence anyone in the assembly of believers may be used by God to declare His truth.

Finally, we rejoice that all gifts relate to Jesus Christ. Since in Him are “hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” both word of wisdom and word of knowledge will exhibit some aspect of that treasure. Unto Him be all praise and glory!

III. FAITH

Faith is next listed as a manifestation or gift of the Holy Spirit—"to another faith *[pistis]"* (1 Cor. 12:9). It may be called "special faith."[47] Such faith is to be differentiated from both "saving faith" and "fruit faith," the former referring to the faith through which a person comes to salvation,[48] and the latter to faith as a fruit of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life.[49] The gift of faith is rather a special impartation of faith by the Spirit that is for the good of others—"the common good." Moreover, it is granted to a particular individual: "to another [is given] faith."

Faith as a gift of the Spirit is the first of a series of gifts that operate in distinction from the mind.[50] These gifts—faith, gifts of healing, effecting of miracles, prophecy, and distinguishing of spirits—are particularly active ministry gifts.[51] They represent faith flowing out in action.

The gift of faith relates to the first two gifts, word of wisdom and word of knowledge, operating "by the same Spirit." Accordingly, though there is transition into a different area, it is the same Spirit who is at work in the gift of faith.

Moreover, the first two gifts may also prepare one for the exercise of the gift of faith. The very utterance of a word of wisdom or a word of knowledge wherein the things of God are spiritually declared may make for the creation of an atmosphere of faith. The statement that "faith comes from hearing" (Rom. 10:17 NASB)[52] also applies to the gift of faith; for against the background of hearing a spiritual utterance of the truth of God, faith may spring forth.

The gift of faith, in turn, may be the immediate background for the exercise of the two ministry gifts that follow: gifts of healing and effecting of miracles. Faith is the atmosphere in which healings occur;[53] it is likewise the basic precondition for the working of miracles.[54] For example, the gift of faith trusts for miracles, whereas (obviously) the working of miracles effects miracles. Faith, while seemingly passive, is the critical factor in these ensuing gifts.[55] It is a faith that has visible results.[56]

Before examining further the relation of the gift of faith to what follows, it is important to recognize that this gift has its own unique significance. Because it is

listed as a separate gift from what follows, faith may operate in other spheres of ministry as well. For example, there may be a special God-given faith in some situation to strengthen the faith of others. An illustration of this is Paul's prophecy on board a violently storm-tossed ship; he said to others who had given up all hope: "Take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told" (Acts 27:25).[57] Although the men in the boat were not believers,[58] Paul's words doubtlessly much encouraged them not to despair.

Similarly, the gift of faith may occur in a situation today where someone is given a special trust in God that reassures others. Where faith is weak or wavering, words of encouragement or exhortation issuing from the gift of faith can be exactly what is needed. For example, one who has been given a strong faith in God's presence and purpose can be a catalytic agent to mightily affect those around him or her. Through the gift of faith the faith of others is thereby built up.[59] The situation may be one of crisis involving anxiety and fear; the gift of faith can bring courage. Or it may be in a gathering of believers that this gift will offer assurance that God is ready to speak and act if people will not hold back. God is ready to move; let us move with Him![60]

In the Old Testament there are many illustrations of special faith. Elijah on Mount Carmel, believing that God would vindicate Himself before Israel, cried out for the fire to fall: "Answer me, O LORD … that this people may know that thou, O LORD, art God" (1 Kings 18:37). Concerning Daniel in the lion's den, the Scripture says, "No manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God"[61] (Dan. 6:23 KJV). Both stories depict extraordinary faith in God. The writer of Hebrews, looking back, said, "Time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions …" (11:32–33). These and the others that follow are examples of heroic faith and better help in understanding the significance of the gift of faith.

Now to return to the New Testament: the gift of faith may appropriately be called "mountain-moving faith." In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul speaks about "all faith, so as to remove mountains" (v. 2).[62] This suggests that the gift of faith specified in 1 Corinthians 12:9 relates to the moving of "mountains." In this connection we may also turn to this statement of Jesus: "Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him" (Mark 11:22–23).

What, we may inquire, is the nature of a "mountain" and how is it removed?

Paul does not say what it is, but Jesus spoke against the background of the withering of a fig tree He had cursed (Mark 11:12–14, 20–21). The fig tree, withered to its roots, was totally removed—and surely by no human means. A mountain, accordingly, is that which cannot be overcome or accomplished by human effort. Its removal therefore requires the humanly impossible. In one Old Testament situation a "mountain" referred to a seemingly insurmountable task: "What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain" (Zech. 4:7).[63] That this task was humanly impossible is disclosed in the prior statement to Zerubbabel: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts" (v. 6). In sum, a mountain and its removal goes far beyond any human capacity.

And the limits? According to Jesus, there are none, for in a parallel passage, after the words "it will move," He added, "nothing will be impossible to you" (Matt. 17:20). Truly, this is an astounding statement!

Now the critical matter is faith. According to Jesus, it does not have to be large—the size of a tiny mustard seed will do[64] —but it has to be there. The preface to Jesus' words concerning moving a mountain is faith: "Have faith in God" and "If you have faith … ."[65] Few things disturbed Jesus more than the lack of faith on the part of His disciples. This is markedly brought out on another occasion when a demonized boy was brought by his father to Jesus' disciples, who were unable to cope with the situation. When Jesus saw this, He cried out: "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?" (Mark 9:19 NASB). Having spoken these words, Jesus proceeded to cast out the demon.

It is important next to emphasize that the necessary faith is wholly related to *God—"Have faith in God"!* This means, for one thing, that this special faith is faith in God's power and ability to do wonders.[66] It is not faith in any word or action of one's own—for example, believing that by speaking to the mountain it will move. It is not faith in faith, as if by believing with sufficient strength and vigor the wonder will be accomplished.[67] It is faith *in* God—believing that He as the living God is able and ready to move mountains. Such faith rests wholly in God.[68]

Accordingly, this faith has its source in God: it is faith that comes from Him. It is, as I said at the outset, a gift of the Holy Spirit. Like all the other gifts, faith is apportioned according to His will.[69] He either gives it or there is no faith at all. It may be no larger than a mustard seed, but if the faith, the believing, is from God, it can accomplish far more than the greatest of human efforts to believe.[70] To say, "I believe, I believe" before praying for a healing is to substitute a mental

activity for the grace of faith by which the work is truly accomplished.[71] Faith comes only from God.

Still, we may, and should, ask for it. Like all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, this kind of faith may be earnestly desired[72] and prayed for. On one occasion Jesus' apostles said to Him, "Give us faith" (Luke 17:5 Weymouth).[73] It does not take much, for Jesus replied, "If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this sycamine tree, 'Be rooted up, and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you" (v. 6). But even that much faith—a faith that can bring about amazing results—must come from the Lord. This the apostles knew, as their request demonstrated. Unmistakably, the same thing is true today. The Lord, the Spirit, apportions as He wills, but not without regard to the prayers and desires of His people.[74]

Another point: this faith cannot coexist with doubt. According to Matthew 21:21, Jesus said to His disciples, "If you have faith, and do not doubt, you shall not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it shall happen" (NASB). Doubt clearly abnegates faith; indeed, if it is present, there is no faith at all—and no results. The words might be spoken, "Be taken up … " (or any other "mountain-moving" words), yet the results would be nil.

But how, one may ask, is it possible not to doubt, especially in light of the things Jesus talked about—blighting fig trees, moving mountains, uprooting sycamines?[75] Am I to try with all my might not to doubt, saying, "I will not doubt, I will not doubt, I will not doubt …"?[76] Such efforts are surely in vain, for not only is such a mental exercise more likely to increase doubt than to dispel it, but also—and this is the real issue—doubt is most deeply a matter of the heart. In the parallel Markan account of the fig tree, Jesus said (as we have earlier quoted) that the true believer "does not doubt *in his heart*" (11:23). This means that no effort of mind and will can suffice.[77] It is only through the dispelling of doubt in the heart that faith can exist and bring about results.

Here a word about the importance of prayer in relation to faith and doubt should be injected. According to the earlier incident in which Jesus cast the demon out of the boy, the disciples afterward asked Him, "Why could we not cast it out?" Jesus replied, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer" (Mark 9:29 NASB).[78] When we relate this to Jesus' previous words "O unbelieving generation …," it is apparent that He is declaring the close connection between faith (or the lack of it) and prayer.[79] Mountain-moving, demon-exorcising faith, while truly from God, is given to those who in much

prayer are open to receive it. Prayer, accordingly, is an antidote to doubt arising in the heart because in such prayer God is experienced as powerfully present and at work.

A further word about prayer and doubt: if one is given to prayer, there is also a greater sensitivity to God's purpose in a particular situation. A person will not be praying for every mountain to be removed or even seeking to exorcise every demon *unless* he senses it is God's intention and God's timing. Doubt may arise in the heart when one is *not* certain he is in God's will.[80] This may be all the more the case if the person is self-preoccupied and basically seeks his own good rather than that of others. Since the gift of faith is *wholly* oriented (as are all the spiritual gifts) to the good of other people, doubt is sure to exist where self-concern dilutes faith's operation.

To not doubt and, consequently, to believe also applies to what one says. The words of Jesus in Mark 11:23 continue—after "does not doubt in his heart"—thus: "… but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him." Believing, therefore, relates not only to faith in God ("Have faith in God" [v. 22]) but also to the words spoken—"Sick man, be healed"; "Blind eyes, be opened"; "Evil spirit, come out"—and expects their fulfillment. It is not as if the words themselves have the power to accomplish such results,[81] for the power resides in God and the faith that issues from him. Simply to pronounce a healing or a miracle and assume that fulfillment will automatically follow is totally mistaken. However, if the words are spoken in the faith that comes from God without any doubt in the heart, then, according to Jesus, they will surely be fulfilled.

Here a statement needs to be added about the danger of presumption. Words and actions cannot be some kind of demand upon God. Jesus Himself was tempted by Satan to leap from the pinnacle of the temple—"Throw yourself down from here" (Luke 4:9)—by claiming God's Old Testament promises "He will give his angels charge of you, to guard you…. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone" (vv. 10–11, quoting from Ps. 91:11–12). Jesus replied bluntly: "You are not to put the Lord your God to the test" (v. 12 NEB, quoting from Deut. 6:16). For Jesus to have thrown Himself down from the temple even on the basis of Scripture would not have been an act of faith but of presumption; it would actually have been an attempt to force God's hand.[82] Similarly, to say to a lame person, "Throw away your crutches" and God "will bear you up" may be no word of faith at all, but a demand upon God to intervene. The results, moreover, can be serious indeed—broken bones, emotional pain, and even diminished faith.[83] Jesus did indeed say that it is

necessary to believe what one says, but such speaking must not presume upon God and seek to coerce His action. However, if the words and actions spring out of the faith that comes from God—a faith that also is not alloyed with doubt—there can be no coercion, no presumption. For it is God Himself moving through that kind of faith, and the results are sure.

Let me conclude by emphasizing the importance of the gift of faith. Through that gift God often brings about healings, works miracles, and meets many human needs. This special faith recognizes the existence of problems, sickness, pain,[84] and the like, and confidently through God seeks to minister help in these situation. All believers, to be sure, have faith and all are called upon to minister;[85] however, there is also this special gift of faith uniquely apportioned within the body that can have extraordinary effects. Accordingly, this manifestation of the Holy Spirit, the gift of faith, needs earnestly to be sought, recognized, and utilized so that the community of believers may receive fuller ministry and God may be all the more fully glorified.

EXCURSUS: THE WORD-OF-FAITH TEACHING

Here I add a few comments about the "word of faith teaching"[86] and its relation to the gift of faith. Kenneth Hagin through his many writings has been the chief proponent of this faith teaching[87] and has had wide influence.

My first comments are positive. Hagin's life and ministry have surely been a testimony to him as a man of faith who has ever been willing to venture forth for God. Moreover, through his ministry large numbers of people have heard the gospel and particularly his teaching on such matters as total belief in God's Word, faith's priority over feelings, and the importance of a positive orientation to life. Kenneth Hagin will be remembered as one of the leading charismatic figures of the twentieth century.

I do, however, have serious reservations about Hagin's teaching at certain critical points. First, there is an exaggeration of the *role of faith*: it assumes almost godlike proportions. In Lesson 21 of his book *New Thresholds of Faith* entitled "The God Kind of Faith" Hagin speaks of God's creating the world through faith: "How did He do it? God believed that what He said would come to pass."[88] This statement clearly is contrary to the scriptures that *never* attribute faith to God; rather He created through the Word. In the subtitle of this lesson Hagin writes, "Central Truth: The kind of faith that spoke the universe into existence is dealt to our hearts."[89] This means that we have "the God kind of faith,"[90] the same faith as God the Creator has. As a result, says Hagin, we can put God to work for us: "I have learned how to put the Greater One to work for me."[91] Such an incredible statement actually places my faith in control of God: *He works "for me"*! Hagin entitled a later lesson, "How to Write Your Own Ticket with God."[92] This equally extraordinary statement shows what faith can do: *By it you can write your own ticket with God!* Hagin adds in the same lesson: "Too few people today know that they can write their own ticket with God."[93] Since "the God kind of faith" can do this, faith almost becomes divine, because it is not God but we who write the ticket. God's sovereignty is now overarched by man's control.

Second, there is a misapprehension of the *place of confession.* Hagin has much to say about confession; e.g., every chapter in *How to Turn Your Faith*

Loose has to do with confession. Chapter 3, "A Positive Confession," climaxes with these words: "*You will never be a conqueror before you believe you are one*… . You have to *confess* it first to become one. *Faith's confessions create reality*" (all italics his). Confession, accordingly, because it is the means of turning faith "loose," now occupies center stage: it—confession—*creates* reality! Thus what you confess is yours: you possess it. In his *Bible Faith Study Course*, a section entitled "Confession Brings Possession,"[94] Hagin writes, "To tell you the truth about it, what I confess—I possess. If you want to wait and possess it first, and then confess it, you're wrong…. You'll never get it that way."[95] Again, "My confession gives me possession. Faith is governed by our confession."[96] Surely this misconstrues confession, placing it over faith, and therefore leads to some dangerous conclusions. If what I confess is what I possess, then, for example, in the financial area the key to results is confessing prosperity.[97] Hagin speaks of a time when money was in short supply and many were confessing lack (a "negative confession"); then they shifted to "positive confession." The result: "We confessed plenty and we had plenty."[98] So it is that "our lips can make us millionaires or keep us paupers."[99] Since "faith's confessions create reality," how could it be otherwise?

Obviously there is something critically off-balance here. The area of prosperity alone is a far cry from the New Testament picture of Jesus, who confessed (negatively?) to not having even a place to lay His head (Luke 9:58), and Paul, who said, "I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want" (Phil. 4:12). Why did not Paul make a "positive confession of plenty" (recall Hagin: "We confessed plenty and we had plenty") rather than a "negative confession" of hunger and want, and thus have all in abundance? Paul's position is far different, as his next statement reads: "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (v. 13). Hagin's "positive confession" of plenty is light years distant from Paul's confession of Christ, who strengthens *regardless* of one's earthly condition. Positive-confession teaching, further, may result in anguish and pain: what if my confession of plenty is followed by nothing but more want? Paul's words on the other hand provide a way of peace and joy whether there is want or abundance.

The word-of-faith teaching, all in all, is man-centered and not God-centered. This has been evidenced in such errors as believing that we can put God to work for us and that our lips can make us paupers or millionaires. Both faith and confession tend to assume divine prerogatives; that is, they create realities. A positive confession is seen to be a sure ticket to health and prosperity because

the confession itself brings about the possession. Such a viewpoint, prevalent also in much so-called positive thinking today, is basically self-oriented and ultimately makes our words (not God's Word) the power behind successful living.

One final word: "Faith teaching" has little to say about faith as a gift. The important matter in this teaching is the *release* of faith (so the title of Hagin's book, *How to Turn Your Faith Loose).* There is the valid recognition that faith is based on hearing and accepting God's Word, but then the important matter becomes the release of one's faith by confession. What is needed in this teaching is a deeper stress on faith as God's gift—a gift of the Holy Spirit—and on the fact that He apportions faith as He wills. The truly basic matter is not the expression of my faith so that I possess what I confess, but faith as God's continuing gift by which He always remains in charge and my confession stems out of *His* will and purpose.[100]

IV. GIFTS OF HEALINGS[101]

The next manifestation of the Spirit, "gifts of healings," is also an individual distribution of the Spirit: "to another gifts of healings *[charismata iamaton]* by the one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:9). Paul refers to this again in his later rhetorical question: "All do not have gifts of healings, do they?" (v. 30 NASB).[102] "Gifts of healings" are undoubtedly individual appointments by the Holy Spirit within the community of believers.[103]

It is significant that this gift of the Spirit is not healings as such but *gifts* of healings. This is the only gift *(charisma)* that is gifts *(charismata);*[104] hence the gift is not healings as such but gifts or *charismata* of healings. Thus the one who receives such gifts does not directly perform the healings; rather he simply transmits the gifts. He is a kind of "delivery boy" who brings the gifts to others. Hence such a person does not become a healer even for a moment: he or she only passes on the healings to others.[105]

Let us also observe that though the gifts of healings are many, the person is one. It is not that one person has a particular gift of healing and somebody else another; rather to the one person the *charismata* of healings are given. Even as the Spirit from whom the gifts come is one—"by the one Spirit"—so the person is one. To one person from the one Spirit come multiple gifts.

Now to return to the emphasis on multiple healings: this suggests that even as there are many sicknesses and diseases, the gifts relate to healings or cures of many disorders. Looking back into Jesus' ministry, we recall that He went about "preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people…. They brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them" (Matt. 4:23–24). Since it is the same Lord Jesus who by the Holy Spirit is at work in the gifts, there is no limit to the infirmities and diseases that He will heal through one to whom the gifts are given.

Gifts of healings are wholly supernatural endowments. They are not natural gifts, nor are they the result of developed skills. The word "gifts," *charismata*, emphasizes their continuing divine origin and character. They come directly from the exalted Lord. Where He is recognized and received as Lord ("Jesus is

Lord" [1 Cor. 12:3]), He freely moves through a particular person to bring about healings.

Gifts of healings, however, may use natural means: a human touch and/or the use of various materials. One situation in Paul's own ministry involves the laying on of hands for healing: "It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery; and Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him healed him" (Acts 28:8).[106] Paul's laying on of hands was not the cause of healing but did provide a tangible human contact. Similarly James writes, "Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord" (James 5:14).[107] The anointing with oil as such had no medicinal value but did represent the healing of the Spirit. We note that in His ministry Jesus often used a human touch, for example, in curing people of leprosy (Matt. 8:3), fever (Matt. 8:15), blindness (Matt. 9:29), and deafness and dumbness (Mark 7:33–35). Jesus' disciples also "anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them" (Mark 6:13). In summary, natural means may be used; however, there is no suggestion that the natural or material means in themselves had any curative power.

To reinforce this last point: most instances of healing in the New Testament make no reference to any natural means. The opening statement in Matthew 4:23–24 about Jesus' healing ministry only says that "he healed them." The same thing is true in many situations after that.[108] This was often the case in the early church; for example, "The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed" (Acts 5:16). Nothing is said about human contact.

Now let us look again at Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 12:9 "… to another gifts of healings by the one Spirit." What is said elsewhere about healing at large surely applies to healings in the body of believers. One who is gifted by the Spirit with gifts of healings may or may not use natural means. The laying on of hands, the use of oil, the touch of an affected area of the body—all may be used, but there is surely no requirement. The person bringing a gift of healing may simply pass it on verbally. A fine illustration of this is found in the words of Peter to the bedridden and paralyzed Aeneas: " 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.' And immediately he rose" (Acts 9:34). What counts is not the method of healing but the One who does it—Jesus Christ.

Before saying more, I call attention to the relationship between the gift of faith and the gifts of healings. They are separate distributions of the Holy Spirit, but they also operate in close connection with each other. We have observed this in the preceding section on the gift of faith, especially noting that faith is the

background and energizing force for the gifts that follow, the most immediate one being gifts of healings. It is a faith *for* healings, then for miracles, and so on. Where the gift of faith is present there is an atmosphere conducive to healings.

We may briefly review the incident of Jesus' ministry to the demonized boy. The father declared, "I brought him to your disciples but they could not heal him." Then Jesus quickly exclaimed, "0 unbelieving and perverse generation … how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?" (Matt. 17:16–17 NIV). With those words Jesus passionately and painfully condemned His generation for its perverseness and lack of faith. Jesus then had the boy brought to Him, and He cast out the demon. The result was that "he was healed from that moment" (v. 18 NIV). When Jesus' disciples later asked Jesus privately why they could not cast out the demon, Jesus replied, "Because of your little faith" (v. 20 RSV). From this narrative it would be hard to imagine a more vivid demonstration of the vital connection between faith and healing:[109] faith makes possible the healing of even the most desperate situation.

The change in Jesus' disciples after Pentecost was indeed extraordinary. For example, when Peter and John encountered a man lame from birth, Peter said to him, "I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk" (Acts 3:6). Here in the power of the Spirit was demonstrated an unwavering faith, and the man was immediately healed. Later when Peter was sharing the event with the gathered crowd, he said, "His name, by faith in his name, has made this man strong … and the faith which is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all" (v. 16). Faith in the name of Jesus, first on the part of Peter and then on the part of the crippled man himself,[110] brought about total healing.

Now let us consider again the gift of faith and the gifts of healings. Although they are not the same gift, the vital connection between faith and healings is unmistakable. One may be apportioned the gift of faith, another gifts of healings, but the latter surely require faith for their operation. Moreover—we need now to stress—it is faith *totally directed away from oneself*. Shortly before Peter made the statement to the assembled crowd (quoted above), he said, "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?" (Acts 3:12). Jesus alone is the healer, and only by faith in Him and in His name can a gift of healing be imparted to another. This cannot be emphasized too much.

But now having observed the close connection between the gifts of faith and healings, we must not simply merge the two. A person may be apportioned the gift of faith without that faith being directed to healing. As I have commented

earlier, the gift of faith makes an impression on all the succeeding gifts; however it is a gift distinct from the others. Accordingly, as closely related as the gift of faith is to the gifts of healings, a person may function in the one without the other. Specifically, a person may be a channel for the *charismata* of healings without having the gift of faith. Of course, there has to be faith present in the one ministering if healing is to occur; he must surely be a believer.[111] But this does not, in and of itself, mean that he also has the *charisma* of faith—"special faith," "charismatic faith."[112] In another situation, perhaps on another occasion, the same person may that time operate in the gift of faith (or another gift), because the Holy Spirit is free to distribute all the gifts "as he wills" (1 Cor. 12:11). But my basic point here is that the two, the gift of faith and the gifts of healings, are distinctive apportionments of the Holy Spirit.

We may now raise the question, How does one receive the gifts of healings? [113] Two answers may be given. First, since the Holy Spirit is in charge, it is He alone who makes the decision. Each and every gift is His sovereign disposition, thus He may give something entirely different from what a person expects. A doctor or nurse, for example, has no more claim on, or right to, gifts of healings than anyone else, even as desirable as such gifts would seem for those in a healing profession. Indeed there is the danger in such a case to view the gifts of healings as an auxiliary to what one already has (the knowledge and experience of healing gained over the years), and then to boast in both one's professional and spiritual competence. However, the Holy Spirit must—and will—remain Lord! Second, since we are also told to "eagerly desire the spiritual gifts," there is no reason anyone may not desire—ask for, seek after, pray for—the gifts of healings. Indeed, to put it more positively, the Lord welcomes our earnest requests so that if a person really and sincerely wants to be used in healings, He would encourage that individual (whether layman or professional) to seek after these gifts. When the earnest desire is for His glory—not ours—and to bless others, He all the more delights to answer our request.

Another question may follow: How does a person know whether he has received gifts of healings? Is there a word from the Lord, the Spirit, that this has happened? Such a word may indeed be spoken[114] but often is not. Is there perhaps a tingling or warm sensation in one's body of healing power going out to another that confirms that the gifts have been given? Sometimes this oc curs,[115] but often does not. Usually the best way to know is to *venture forth.* If there is someone sick, and a person has any reason to believe that the Holy Spirit is anointing him with gifts of healings, then he should step out in faith![116] If a healing occurs, this confirms that the Spirit has singled out that person to bear a

gift of healing to another person.[117]

Still another important question: If a healing does not occur, does this necessarily mean that the one ministering does not have gifts of healings? The answer, I submit, is no for several reasons. First, the persons prayed for may not have faith to receive the healing. As Mark records, even Jesus' healing power could be limited by unbelief: "He could do no mighty work there [in His home town], except that he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief" (Mark 6:5–6). Jesus healed "a few," but many obviously were not healed, not because Jesus lacked the healing power but because they did not believe. Now of course a charismatic fellowship, unlike Jesus' home town, consists of believers. But believing is not simply a fixed condition; it is also an active trusting, accepting, receiving. Hence one may be moving fully in the gifts of healing; however, if there is not the response of faith, the healings cannot be received.[118]

Second, the one who is prayed for may have some sinful impediment that needs removal for healing to occur. An Old Testament illustration of this is the case of Miriam, Moses' sister, who was smitten with leprosy by God for condemning an action of Moses. Moses cried out, "Heal her, O God, I beseech thee" (Num. 12:13). Rather than granting Moses' request to heal her at the time, God shut Miriam outside the camp for seven days, and only then was she restored. Thus if sin or evil, especially of a blatant or persistent kind, stands in the way, healing will not occur. In similar vein James wrote, "Therefore[119] confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16). For example, if someone in the fellowship asks for prayer for an illness brought on by a bitter and unforgiving spirit, a change in attitude is essential for the healing to occur. It is significant that in the Gospel of Mark after Jesus said, "I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you receive it, and you will" (11:24), He ddded, "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses" (v. 25). Hence if one asks for a healing, believing is urgent; and receiving will occur unless an unforgiving spirit stands in the way. The poiht is this: One may be truly operating in the gifts of healings, yet a person will not be healed if there is a sinful barrier.

Third, and this is the most difficult area, the illness may be dealt with in other ways than through ministry in the gifts. On one occasion in the Old Testament God promised healing to King Hezekiah through Isaiah the prophet: "I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you" (2 Kings 20:5 NIV). Verse 7 reads, "Then Isaiah said, 'Prepare a poultice of figs.' They did so and applied it

to the boil, and he recovered" (NIV). A supernatural sign was also given (see vv. 8–11); however, the relevant matter is that a medical means was used.[120] To apply this to today: it might be a serious misreading of God's intention to pray for the supernatural healing of a boil or any other physical ailment when there are natural means available.[121] The mistake sometimes made is to fail to see God at work in the natural as well as the supernatural, through physicians and nurses as well as the prayers of believers. Truly we should use whatever means God provides.[122]

It is sometimes said that the New Testament changes all this. While it is true that the ministry of spiritual healing abounds, this does not deny all possibility of natural means or the role of the physician. Sometimes the verse is quoted about the woman with a serious hemorrhage, "who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse" (Mark 5:26), as if this were a condemnation of physicians and medical help. However, in the narrative of healing that follows, Jesus did not condemn her actions (vv. 27–34). In another situation the Synoptic Gospels all report this statement of Jesus: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (Matt. 9:12; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31). Although Jesus later applied these words to His own ministry, He clearly seemed to acknowledge the legitimate place of a physician in relation to the sick.[123] In reference to medical help, Jesus told the parable of the Samaritan who, after ministering to a man beaten by robbers, "bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine" (Luke 10:34). Paul wrote Timothy, "Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses" (1 Tim. 5:23 NIV). Here, if anywhere, is an unmistakable affirmation of the use of natural means for even "frequent illnesses." Paul did *not* say, "I am praying for your healing" or "If you have sufficient faith, God will heal you" or "Do not confess to being sick, else you will continue that way."[124] No, since wine—a natural product of God's creation and of human production—was adequate, there was no need to look for supernatural healing.[125]

To return to the main point: ministry in the gifts, while truly a blessing of God, does not necessarily apply to every sickness. Thus one may genuinely be a channel for gifts of healings and yet a particular healing not be received. However, this should in no way lessen a ministry in these gifts, because the Holy Spirit through them often does mighty works of healing grace.

Now a further question may be raised about the nature of sickness for which ministry may be offered. It is sometimes said that the proper sphere for this ministry is the wide range of psychosomatic ailments—i.e., those of body and

mind resulting from emotional stress, but not those that are organic or structural. However, in the New Testament no such limitation is apparent. The Gospels attest that Jesus healed every kind of disease—"healing every disease and every infirmity" (Matt. 4:23; 9:35).[126] On one occasion Jesus said about His ministry: "The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up" (Luke 7:22). This was clearly not limited to the psychosomatic;[127] whatever the ailment, Jesus healed it. Likewise, Jesus sent out the apostles "to heal *every* disease and *every* infirmity" (Matt. 10:1). To the seventy He said, "Whenever you enter a town … heal the sick …" (Luke 10:8–9)—obviously no limitation. Believers, according to Mark 16:18, "will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover"—again no limitation. It follows that in the ministry of the gifts through believers of all times including today, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Lord, will heal every kind of disease. We *must* not place limitations on what God is willing and able to perform.

A final comment in the general area of healing: Although God's will is perfect health, this does not mean that human life will be free of all sickness. This is true of even the most dedicated Christian lives. We have just recalled the situation of Timothy who had "frequent ailments." Paul himself at least on one occasion had a severe bodily ailment. He wrote the Galatians, "You know it was because of a bodily ailment[128] that I preached the gospel to you at first" (4:13). Paul wrote to Timothy about a Christian brother named Trophimus: "Trophimus I left ill at Miletus" (2 Tim. 4:20). If Paul, Timothy, and Trophimus all had occasions of illness, then it can hardly be suggested that a truly dedicated, Spirit-filled believer will always experience perfect health. Truly God "heals all your diseases" (Ps. 103:3), but this is no guarantee of freedom from all disease.[129] Since God's will is health, when disease and sickness come upon us, He will again and again act as our Healer.

Thus we should not hesitate to move boldly in the area of gifts of healings. "Gifts of healings" have been permanently placed in the church ("God has *appointed* in the church … gifts of healings" [1 Cor. 12:28 NASB]).[130] To the degree we are open to such gifts, desire such gifts, and minister such gifts, God will be glorified and His people richly blessed. The living Lord Jesus through the Holy Spirit is ever ready to bring healing!

V. WORKINGS OF MIRACLES[131]

We come next in the list to "the workings of miracles"—"to another the workings of miracles *[energmeata dynameon]"* (1 Cor. 12:10). Miracles or powers (*dynameis*) are again mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:28—"then miracles" (NASB).[132] As with "gifts of healings" Paul thereafter asks rhetorically: "All are not workers of miracles, are they?" (v. 29 NASB). Thus, as with the others, this gift is an apportionment of the Spirit to a particular person.

Note again the plural words:[133] workings of miracles. The person is one—"to another"—but the gift is multiple. Since the word "workings" is plural, a miracle may be wrought by many ways or methods. Since the word "miracles" is plural, many kinds of miracles may take place.

In a broad sense miracles as powers include all demonstrations of supernatural power. When on one occasion Jesus sent out the apostles, He said, "Preach as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons" (Matt. 10:7–8). Healing is here included along with other works of power.[134] The Gospel record thereafter and the Book of Acts show the apostles many times healing the sick, casting out demons (e.g., Mark 6:13; Luke 10:17), and both Peter and Paul raising the dead (Acts 9:36–41 and 20:7–12).[135] Thus the apostles accomplished many miracles.

In the Fourth Gospel Jesus spoke of what believers in Him may do: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father" (14:12). The works that Jesus did, as reported in the Fourth Gospel, included turning water into wine (chap. 2), healing at a distance an official's dying son by speaking a word (chap. 4), healing a man crippled and helpless for thirty-eight years (chap. 5), feeding a multitude with five loaves and two fish (chap. 6), giving sight to a man born blind (chap. 9), and raising a man (Lazarus) from the dead (chap. 11). According to Jesus, one believing in Him will be able to do the same works—and even more: "Greater works than these will he do." These words are all clearly works of supernatural power. Even the healings go beyond the limits of many healings recorded in the other Gospels. For example, a blind man did not

only have his sight restored by Jesus (similar to other Gospel accounts),[136] but he was one who had been born blind. The other works of Jesus clearly moved beyond healing into unmistakably miraculous deeds. All this—and more—one believing in Christ will be enabled to accomplish.[137]

Hence when we look at Paul's words again—"to another the workings of miracles"—much is to be expected. Paul as an apostle had healed the sick,[138] cast out demons,[139] and raised the dead.[140] Paul made no claim in 1 Corinthians 12 that he alone could do such works; rather, he included the company of believers. Indeed, in his letter to the Galatians, Paul also spoke of miracles done within the community. This comes out indirectly in a question: "Does he [God] who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?" (3:5). The working of miracles within the Galatian churches was a recognized fact. Could this not have been additional demonstration of Paul's phrase "to another … miracles"? Is it not also possible that many miracles relating to Jesus' words in John 14:16 were also being accomplished?

Now we need to examine the connection of miracles with faith. The gift of miracles is sovereignly distributed by the Holy Spirit but also is clearly given to one who believes. We have observed that the works of Jesus, including greater works, will be done by a believer ("he who believes"). Also we may recall the words of Mark 16:17–18 about believers in general: "These signs[141] will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them;[142] they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." Believing in Christ, from the human side, is the essential matter.

In relation to believing and miracles, two things need emphasis. First, believing is an ongoing *trust* in Christ. It is a continuing faith in Him as the living Lord who is active among His people. Such dynamic faith expects miracles now, because "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday *and today* and for ever" (Heb. 13:8). Even as He did many miracles "yesterday" in New Testament times, so He will do them today: Christ does not change. Hence in a gathering of believers where there is need for a miracle, we may expect a miracle to happen. Since Christ is one person, He will ordinarily move through one person to perform a mighty work; hence, "to another the workings of miracles." If we truly believe in Christ and His promises of mighty works, then the atmosphere becomes increasingly expectant for Him to move mightily.

Second, believing also means *acting.* Christ never performs a miracle among His people unless there is the readiness to step out for Him. A miracle does not

happen by sitting back and waiting for it to occur. A person must step out in faith. One of the extraordinary miracles in the New Testament was Peter's walking on the sea (Matt. 14:28–32). It would never have happened unless Peter had courageously stepped out.[143] Moreover Jesus had said to him, "Come" (v. 29), so it was not a foolhardy or presumptuous action. *He stepped out at Jesus' bidding.* So in the occurrence of any miracle there must be movement only when one knows Jesus is calling for it and then acting without hesitation. One further thing about such action: it is essential to keep on believing for the miracle. Peter continued to walk on the water for a time; then he began to sink until Jesus reached out and saved him, saying, "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?" (v. 31). Little faith mixed with doubt[144] spells the end of a miraculous event.

Thus we return to the gift of faith. We have observed that this is a special faith not given to everyone ("to another faith by the same Spirit"), yet this special faith stands in the list of the nine gifts prior to both gifts of healings and workings of miracles. Hence, though this faith has its own unique place without necessary connection to healings and miracles,[145] it surely prepares the way for them. Thus in regard to miracles this faith may be called "faith for miracles": a special Spirit-given faith that believes a miracle will happen. As was said earlier, the gift of faith trusts for miracles, the working of miracles effects miracles. Thus in a given situation the Spirit may apportion to one person this special faith that provides the atmosphere and background for another to perform a miracle.[146] It may be a simple statement in a community gathering such as "I have faith that the Lord is ready to move in miracles" that prepares the way for the gift of miracles to be set into operation. Faith of course, as we have observed, needs to be present in the person who performs the miracles; but special faith, the gift of faith, may provide an additional valuable stimulus.

Next we observe that there must be the need for a miracle to be performed. Miracles were never done in the New Testament by Jesus and His apostles simply as a display of power[147] but invariably because of a compelling need. The motive again and again was compassion. For example, preceding the miracle of feeding four thousand people with seven loaves and a few fish, Jesus declared, "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days, and have nothing to eat" (Matt. 15:32; Mark 8:2). Similarly, before the miracle of raising the son of a widow from the dead, the Scripture reads, "And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her …" (Luke 7:13).[148] The same compassion was shown by Jesus in healing a leper: "Moved with compassion, He stretched out His hand, and touched him" (Mark 1:41 NASB); likewise in giving sight to two blind men: "Moved with compassion,

Jesus touched their eyes" (Matt. 20:34 NASB). When Peter raised Tabitha from the dead, he was responding to the tears of many widows (Acts 9:36–41). And when Paul brought the boy Eutychus back to life, he first "threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him" (Acts 20:10 NIV). In all these accounts there is striking evidence of compassion and of deep human need.

It follows that when believers work miracles, there likewise must be a real need that only a miracle can remedy and a genuine compassion on the part of the one ministering to the need. Since Jesus Himself through a human vessel is ultimately the One who does the miracle, there cannot possibly be anything less.

Since this area of miracles is one of high intensity and often results in confusion, I will summarize a number of additional points.

1. Miracles are *not magic.* Magic stems from psychic or demonic forces rather than from God. Aaron by the command of God cast down his rod in the court of Pharaoh and it became a serpent; the magicians of Egypt did the same "by their secret arts" (Exod. 7:10–12). The act seemed the same (rods becoming serpents) but only the act of Aaron was a true miracle because it came from God. Hence in our proper concern for the recurrence of miracles today we must guard against the pseudo-miracles that stem from other forces. Indeed, one of the marks of "the man of lawlessness" (2 Thess. 2:3) in the days shortly before the return of Christ is his performance of pseudo-miracles: "The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders" (v. 9 NIV).[149] Hence not all that purports to be miracles is of God. So while we should desire miracles in our time, we must guard against magical practices abounding in the realm of the occult—witchcraft, spiritualism, Satanism, and the like.

2. Miracles are *not to be associated with exhibitionism.* We have already seen how Jesus was tempted by Satan to leap spectacularly from the temple and thus dazzle the crowds. By such an extraordinary feat Jesus could have possibly avoided the hard and sacrificial way of the cross and instantly been proclaimed Messiah and King. Something perilously close to this occurs today when an evangelist perhaps advertises, "Come, tonight, and see miracles happen!" "Come, claim your miracle," etc. The Pharisees wanted Jesus to perform a miracle,[150] but He would not go on exhibition for their satisfaction. Thus in a revival, a church meeting, or a prayer group the moment there emerges a desire to show off, *nothing* will happen (at least nothing from God). Miracles are not the display pieces of those seeking to demonstrate their own powers.

3. Miracles *cannot be programmed.* Although the Lord is a miracle-working God, He acts according to His own purpose. In a given situation one may

genuinely be open to “the gifts of miracles,” there may be a vital faith present, and the occasion may seem to call for a miracle,[151] but God does not act in the way expected. He remains the sovereign Lord and is ever ready to work through gifts of miracles, but He may delay or choose another way. Indeed, the Lord may work a miracle even when there is little faith for it. Peter was thrown into prison by King Herod and “earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church” (Acts 12:5). Miraculously Peter’s chains fell off, and the prison doors were opened. But when he went to one of the houses “where many were gathered together and were praying” (v. 12), no one at first believed it had happened. “You are mad,” they said to the servant girl who announced that Peter was at the door (v. 15). God sovereignly wrought the miracle: it was His time, His programing. So it remains today: it is important that we seek to operate in the gifts of miracles, but God is free to move in surprising ways outside and beyond the gifts. For that we should indeed be grateful.

A final word: We may be in the beginning of a period of increased miracle activity.[152] If miracles may also be described as “powers of the age to come”[153] (Heb. 6:5) and if that age is drawing quite near, we may expect increasing miraculous activity. Miracles were in some sense signs of the inbreaking of the kingdom in Jesus’ day; thus His words: “If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt. 12:28). Hence as the time draws near for the final coming of the kingdom, miracles may multiply as powers of the age to come breaking in upon the present age. The “man of lawlessness” is only a counterfeit of the real thing (as the magicians were of Aaron and Moses); hence we may hope and expect that far greater will be the genuine miracles that herald the coming of the kingdom in power and glory. To God be all praise!

VI. PROPHECY

Paul wrote, "… to another prophecy *[propheteia]"* (1 Cor. 12:10). This is again the listing of an individual distribution of the Holy Spirit—the Spirit who "apportions to each one individually as he wills" (v. 11).

The importance of prophecy, as has been earlier noted, is highlighted in Paul's injunction "Earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy" (1 Cor. 14:1). Also in the listing of *charismata* in Romans 12 Paul first mentions prophecy: "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith" (v. 6). No other gift can excel prophecy in importance for the body of Christ.

Although this gift is an individual distribution by the Holy Spirit, it is available to all. In Paul's discussion of prophecy he later begins a statement with these words: "If all proph esy. . (1 Cor. 14:24) and shortly thereafter in another context says, "You can all prophesy one by one" (v. 31). Potentially, everyone in the assembly of believers can prophesy. Peter on the Day of Pentecost declared that the words of Joel were now fulfilled: "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy … yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants … I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17–18). Accordingly, wherever the Spirit is outpoured, the result is that people without distinction of sex or class are able to prophesy. In regard to gender it is worth noting that even before Paul begins his discussion of the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12–14 he had already spoken (in chap. 11) of both men and women prophesying—"any man who prays or prophesies … any woman who prays or prophesies …" (vv. 4–5). Thus at Corinth and in all Spirit-anointed assemblies, everyone may prophesy.

On the other hand, since prophecy is also an individual apportionment of the Spirit, a certain person or persons will be singled out on a given occasion to speak forth in prophecy. This is the gift of prophecy to be eagerly desired; by no means do all persons assembled have it. Those who do may be designated "prophets." Paul's statement, already noted, beginning, "you can all prophesy one by one," continues a few words later, "and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets" (1 Cor. 14:32). Thus those particularly gifted with prophecy

function[154] as prophets whenever they are used by the Holy Spirit in this role. This does not mean that a person functioning as a prophet at a given time holds the office of a prophet. The New Testament clearly portrays others also called prophets who in association with the apostles laid the foundation of the church[155] or who were a special order in the early church.[156] However, in the context of 1 Corinthians 14:32 prophets are simply those who prophesy.[157] They are persons gifted individually by the Holy Spirit on a particular occasion to speak forth prophetically.

The background of prophecy is revelation. Paul wrote about two or three prophets speaking (1 Cor. 14:29), immediately adding, "If a revelation is made to another [prophet] sitting by, let the first [prophet] be silent" (v. 30). Thus a person prophesies because God has revealed something to him, and through his mouth a message from God is declared. This obviously is not a prepared message, for the revelation immediately issues in the spoken prophecy. Spontaneity marks such an occasion and the words are divinely inspired.[158] Such revelation, I must immediately add, does not place the prophetic message on the same level as Scripture.[159] It is revelation that is subordinate[160] to what God has specially revealed to apostles and prophets[161] and has been set forth in Scripture.[162] Nonetheless such subordinate revelation is directly from God and is spoken with divine authority.

Prophecy, accordingly, is an immediate communication from God in the common language. It is a "speaking for"[163] God by which a person's tongue is completely at the disposal of the Holy Spirit. The concepts and words do not derive from the speaker[164] but from a divine source. So God communicates in a given situation a special message to His people.

Thus the occurrence of prophecy is an extraordinary event. Perhaps the fact that Paul lists it immediately after miracles is significant. Prophecy has been called "miracle in the form of speech,"[165] for while prophecy is in the common language, it is given by God. Even such a miracle as God's raising the dead bodily is not as extraordinary as God's speaking directly in human words to the minds and spirits of His gathered people. Prophecy, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:9, is "in part,"[166] but that is due primarily to the fact of our finite situation. God speaks fully but within the limits of the human condition. Such is the amazing nature of prophecy.

Now let us look at the purpose of the gift of prophecy. According to Paul it is for upbuilding, exhortation, and consolation: "One who prophesies speaks to men for edification [upbuilding] and exhortation and consolation"[167] (1 Cor.

14:3 NASB). Prophecy is for the purpose of building up and strengthening people, exhorting and encouraging certain actions, and bringing consolation and comfort.[168] Hence prophecy, as a direct word from the Lord, serves first to build up people.[169] Prophecy, accordingly, is not destructive in tone or manner; it is for building up, not tearing down.[170] Prophecy is an edifying message, strengthening people in their faith and life. Second, prophecy may be a word of exhortation. In that sense prophecy may contain an admonition about certain activities[171] and an urging to move ahead in a proper manner.[172] Hence there is also a note of encouragement.[173] Third, prophecy may serve for consolation and comfort. Where there is hurt and suffering[174] or need for a sympathetic word, a prophecy may speak an inspired message that brings comfort and consolation. Altogether the threefold purpose of prophecy—upbuilding, exhortation, and consolation—speaks to a wide range of needs in the gathered assembly.

Prophecy in the assembly, I now add, is not basically foretelling.[175] It is much more a "forthtelling" than a "foretelling." Prophecy speaks to the present situation of people within the congregation. Of course, a word of upbuilding, exhortation, or consolation may very well have a future aspect (for example, "God's grace will be sufficient for you in the days ahead"), but it is not primarily predictive (as in some such word as "If you go to this place, God will richly bless you"). A related remark is that prophecy may confirm but never by itself direct (as in some such word as "God wants you to marry this person"). Directional prophecy can undermine a person's own relationship to God and also possibly lead to disastrous results. However, a prophecy may indeed be confirmational; for example, a person in the assembly already through Scripture reading, prayer, and the like, may have become convinced that God is leading in a certain direction. Then a prophecy occurs that confirms this leading and as a result the person is much blessed. Predictive prophecy—prophecy as essentially foretelling—is to be strongly guarded against.[176]

From what has been said, it is clear that prophecy is primarily for believers. So Paul later wrote, "Prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers" (1 Cor. 14:22). However, a secondary function of prophecy is to convict unbelievers of sin so that they turn to God. Paul continues, "If all prophesy,[177] and an unbeliever or outsider[178] enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you" (vv. 24–25). This extraordinary change occurs not through the proclamation of one person (as in preaching) but through the prophesying of many. That many believers are

channels for God to speak directly brings such overwhelming conviction, judgment, and heart searching that the unbeliever or outsider can only fall on his face and worship God. Moreover, he will know for a certainty that God is truly present among His people. It is most noteworthy that this happens as prophecy goes forth *not* to the unbelievers and outsiders but to believers ("prophecy is … for believers"). The coming of unbelievers and outsiders to a vivid experience of the Lord is a *side effect* (but what a great one!) of prophecy sounding forth in the believing community.

Because of the importance of prophecy, the words spoken need to be considered carefully. Paul writes, "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others[179] weigh[180] what is said" (1 Cor. 14:29). The basic purpose of this weighing is to discern the significance and relevance of a given prophecy within the body of believers.[181] If God is truly speaking in prophecy, then it is important to weigh each word. This includes such matters as the import of the prophecy, the person(s) addressed, and the relation to other prophecies that may have been spoken. There should be no hurrying past a prophecy as if it were only a human word. The prophetic message, as God-given, needs careful weighing by all.

But the weighing may also include judging. In fact the admonition of Paul could be read thus: "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment" (NASB).[182] In another letter Paul wrote, "Do not despise prophesy ing, but test[183] everything; hold fast what is good" (1 Thess. 5:20–21). But why, one may ask, would prophecy, or prophesying, call for judging and testing? Is not prophecy (as earlier stated) God's speaking directly? The answer is yes—in all *true* prophesying. Let me clarify. There is always a possibility that a presumed prophecy is *not* from God. John writes, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). A person may claim to speak in the name of God, and yet his spirit is not "of God"; hence the prophecy is a false one. Someone may enter the assembly and speak a "Thus says the Lord"[184] and yet the message be totally false.[185] In addition it is possible for someone in the assembly to claim to speak a prophetic word, but it may come from his own mind and spirit.[186] There is no guarantee that because one uses the language of prophecy he is truly prophesying. Thus the importance, the urgency, of testing prophecy cannot be overemphasized.

In summary, the weighing of prophecy consists of discerning both the significance and the source of what is uttered.[187] The latter is actually primary, for if the source is not of God, then it is pointless to consider the significance.

However, ordinarily in a believing community where Jesus is recognized as Lord, the significance is the main concern. What, and perhaps to whom, is the Lord speaking through this prophecy?

Nonetheless, testing remains important because of the high-powered nature of prophecy. Because true prophecy is the very utterance of God, hence extremely important, it is urgent that any recognized false prophecy be cast aside. Let us, accordingly, look at a number of statements that will affirm the character and spirit of true prophecy and at the same time throw light on the dubious and the false.

1. True prophecy is an expression of the mind and Spirit of Christ. Prophets of old prophesied "by the Spirit of Christ within them" (1 Peter 1:11). This is true in even greater and fuller measure since Christ has come in the flesh and has sent the Holy Spirit. Any prophecy, accordingly, that breathes a spirit foreign to Christ cannot be a true prophecy. This is the primary test of prophecy: namely, a valid representation of Christ.

2. True prophecy is harmonious with God's own word in Scripture. Because the Scriptures have the Holy Spirit as their ultimate Author and it is the same Spirit who speaks in prophecy, there can be no dissonance. Moreover, since the Scriptures are God's comprehensive word to which nothing substantial can be added, any utterance that goes beyond or adds to what is contained in Scripture cannot be true prophecy. Prophecy has its checkpoint in Holy Scripture.

3. True prophecy builds up the community: "He who prophesies edifies the church" (1 Cor. 14:4). Accordingly, any utterance that is basically judgmental or negative in word or manner is false prophecy. Prophecy is for building up, not tearing down. There may indeed be admonition and warning, even exhortation to desist from some evil, but the whole purpose is positive: the strengthening of faith and practice.

4. True prophecy finds consent and agreement in the minds and hearts of others in the community. Since the same Holy Spirit is at work in all, all are in a position to "pass judgment" on the validity of what is spoken. There should be a prevailing sense in the community that the prophecy was divinely inspired. The spirit of one prophesying and his or her words stand under the judgment of others.

5. True prophecy serves to glorify God, not man. Peter writes, "As each has received a gift *[charisma]*, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God … that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 4:10–11). Such oracular utterance surely includes prophecy. Hence if one prophesying seeks by that to elevate himself, if prophesying is basically self-serving, it cannot be from

God. The end of true prophecy is the glorification of God.

Now I add a few miscellaneous remarks about prophecy. First, the act of prophesying has a vital connection with faith. As we have earlier observed, the gift of faith is related to the gifts that follow: healings, miracles, and now prophecy. Without faith, healings and miracles do not occur, nor does prophecy. Paul, writing to the Romans about the *charismata*, says, "… if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith" (12:6 NASB). Prophecy, while coming from revelation, must find a correspondence in faith,[188] so that the person who prophesies does so out of a faith that God will speak through his words. Prophesying calls for the courage to launch out in speech, believing that God will supply the words. This is not always easy because the one prophesying usually knows nothing of what will be said beforehand and must rely totally on the Spirit of God.

Second, there is no set form for the language of prophecy. Since God is speaking through the words of true prophecy, the language is often in the first person, like the language of Acts 13:2: "The Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'"[189] Or the language may be more that of the third person, such as that of Agabus, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this girdle. . (Acts 21:11).[190] In either case, God is speaking through the lips of people.[191] True prophecy may be spoken a variety of ways as the Lord Himself wills it.

Third, prophesying should be done in an orderly manner. Paul wrote, "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another [prophet] sitting by, let the first be silent" (1 Cor. 14:29–30). Orderliness calls for one person to prophesy at a time and a readiness on the part of that person to defer to another when he receives a revelation. Prophesying can and should be done "one by one" (v. 31). It is not a disorderly outburst—an "I *just had to* do it" sort of thing. Thus Paul adds, "The spirits of prophets are subject to prophets" (v. 32),[192] meaning that prophetic speech, though it is of God, is always under the control of the one prophesying. This implies that there is no justification at any time for one prophesying to interrupt what else is going on, for example, preaching and teaching. Disorderliness is not God's way, for, as Paul concludes at this point, "God is not a God of confusion but of peace" (v. 33).

We are just beginning again to appreciate the powerful gift of prophecy in the assembly of believers. There is little wonder that Paul said, "Eagerly desire the

spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.” We are to desire this not for self-aggrandizement but that God’s voice may be heard and His people thereby edified. May prophecy truly flourish in the church!

VII. DISTINGUISHINGS OF SPIRITS[193]

This next listed gift of the Holy Spirit again relates to an individual: "to another the distinguishings of spirits *[diakriseispneumaton]"* (1 Cor. 12:10 NASB). As with all the preceding gifts, this is a particular gift or manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

The word "distinguishings" may also be translated as "discernings"[194] and refers to a "judging through,"[195] a piercing through what is outward to the inner reality. Since "distinguishings" is in the plural, more than one discerning in a given situation is implied. The individual to whom the gift is imparted will be enabled to accomplish more than one distinguishing or discerning.

This discerning is not just discernment in general[196] but relates to "spir its." "Spirits," in turn, may refer to a wide range of the human, the demonic, even the angelic. All human beings are embodied spirits, the spirit being the inmost essence of human nature; demons are evil, unclean spirits; and angels are "ministering spirits" (Heb. 1:14). Hence, discernings of spirits can well relate to a whole range of spirits possibly operating in a given situation.[197] Accordingly, more than one discerning (thus the plural, "discernings" or "distinguishings") may be needed to deal with the complexity of spiritual forces that are at work.

Such distinguishings of spirits are possible only by another spirit, indeed by the Holy Spirit. It is by the illumination of *the* Spirit through the spirit of a particular individual that spirits are perceived. Since this manifestation of the Spirit is for the common good, it serves particularly to discern the spirit at work in any expression or activity within the Christian community.

A. Human Spirits

First, there is the perception of human spirits. Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 14:32 about "the spirits of prophets." Accordingly, one who is operating by the Holy Spirit in the gift of discernings of spirits is able to perceive the spirits of those prophesying. By extension, since all may prophesy[198] (1 Cor. 14:24), the discernings of spirits relates to each person who is present in the fellowship. By the sudden illumination of the Holy Spirit, hence a supernatural action, the spirits of those present may be discerned.

Jesus Himself had a total sensitivity to people in their inner nature. On first seeing Simon, Jesus declared, "You shall be called Cephas (which means Peter)," that is, "Rock" (John 1:42). Jesus looked deep into Simon's inner being and saw the making of solid character. Jesus, shortly thereafter, saw Nathanael and declared, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" (v. 47); hence Jesus perceived in Nathanael a guileless spirit. According to John 2:25, Jesus "knew what was in man." This is demonstrated in accounts that follow—for example, Nicodemus (John 3) and the woman of Samaria (John 4). Another Gospel states that Jesus perceived "in his spirit" that some scribes "questioned within themselves" (Mark 2:8). Jesus is shown in these accounts, and many others, to be One who in His spirit sensed the nature and motivations of those whom He encountered. Since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, that same Spirit through the gift of discernings of spirits can reach deep into the spirits of people.

Through the gift of discernings of spirits, it follows that inner feelings and motivations are perceived. It again is the piercing through the outer surface to the inner spirit. People who gather in the fellowship represent a wide spiritual range. Some may be present with a heavy spirit or an anxious spirit; there may be a weak spirit or a proud spirit; some may come with a jealous spirit or a bitter spirit. Such spirits may not be apparent to others; indeed, the believers may not be fully aware of them among themselves. Yet such spiritual attitudes are likely to affect whatever happens in the dynamics of interrelationships. Hence, the gift of the discernings of spirit can be of signal importance, for by a supernatural action—that of the Holy Spirit—the spirits of people are disclosed.[199] When this oc curs, the area of need may become apparent and proper ministry rendered.

Some illustrations may help. For example, as the body of believers comes together, someone senses by the Spirit that a certain person has a spirit of

heaviness and anxiety. This spirit is a block for him in group participation; for it is hard to speak a word of wisdom or knowledge, to minister in healings or miracles, to give a prophetic utterance when one is inwardly burdened. Furthermore, this person may not even be aware of his situation until someone in the Spirit says something like this: “I perceive in you, my brother, a heavy spirit of deep anxiety.” When this spirit is recognized and ministry follows,[200] not only is the burdened person blessed but also the whole group may move ahead in the operation of the other gifts. A further example: someone in the gathering may come with a headache and ask for ministry through the gifts of healings. Another person who senses that the Holy Spirit will use him as a channel for healing is about ready to minister when still another individual now being gifted with discernings of spirits senses that the root of the headache is a bitter and unforgiving spirit. Until this is recognized and properly dealt with, healing is quite unlikely to occur. Thus the gift of discernings of spirits may clear the way for the healing to take place.

Through this gift the Holy Spirit provides depth perception of a spiritual problem that lies at the root of a human ailment. There are bodily ailments that physicians are competent to deal with; there are many difficulties in the human mind and emotions that psychologists can help to resolve. However, on the deepest level of the human spirit,[201] where many problems have their rootage, there can be no perception of what lies there except through the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

We must be circumspect here. The gift of discernings of spirits by which the human spirit is probed is not a problem-solving gift. Like X-ray, it provides in-depth illumination without which the inner person is shrouded in darkness. But the illumination itself does not resolve the problem. Nevertheless, the important thing is that the spiritual situation be discerned; after that other actions may follow (such as proceeding with the ministry of the gifts of healings, suggesting possible follow-up by qualified physicians, psychologists, and the like). Without the original illumination by the Holy Spirit there is likely to be uncertainty and confusion as to how to proceed.

But there is also another direction the gift of discernings of human spirits may take. Beyond focusing on problem situations, there may also be the perception of the positive. For example, a person may sense the Holy Spirit moving upon the spirit of someone to manifest Himself in a specific way, but that person is holding back. A word of encouragement may help him step out in the gift that he is being granted. For example, “I discern that the Spirit is anointing you to prophesy” may be all that is needed for someone to begin to speak forth. A

gentle nudge by the Spirit can make a great difference!

Or it may be that through the Holy Spirit a person discerns, for example, love, joy, and peace in the spirits of many people. As the discerner calls attention to this, all in the gathering may thereby be edified. One line in a chorus expresses this beautifully: “There’s a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place; and I know that it’s the Spirit of the Lord.” To discern that Spirit and share it with others is to bring a rich blessing.

B. Demonic Spirits

Second, the perception of demonic spirits is a critically important function of the gift of discernings of spirits. For where the Holy Spirit (the true supernatural) is at work, often the counter-force of evil spirits (the false supernatural) is also present. Hence, there is the urgency of a clear discerning of such demonic forces. Only then can they be adequately dealt with.

Jesus is frequently shown in the Gospels as One who discerned demonic spirits. To illustrate: He recognized immediately an "unclean spirit" torturing a man (Mark 1:23–25); He also saw behind many illnesses the presence of demonic forces, for example, a "deaf and dumb spirit" (Mark 9:25). He saw Satan at work in a seemingly loyal statement by Peter and responded vehemently, "Get behind me, Satan!" (Matt. 16:22–23). He "perceived" the "craftiness" of the Pharisees in an apparently open question about tribute to Caesar (Luke 20:23–25). Jesus often discerned behind the outward semblance an inner force of the demonic at work.

In the early church Peter demonstrated discernings of spirits when he perceived that Ananias and Sapphira had lied about the disposition of their property: "You have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord" (Acts 5:1–9). Earlier Peter had said to Ananias, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" (v. 3). Hence Peter perceived that Satan was at work. Paul likewise showed discernment of a demonic force as he "looked intently" at Elymas the magician and declared Elymas' opposition to the gospel to be satanic —"You son of the devil" (Acts 13:8–10). Later Paul recognized "a spirit of divination" in the slave girl who repeatedly declared that Paul and his companions were "bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming … the way of salvation"; Paul "greatly annoyed … turned and said to the spirit, T command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!' " (Acts 16:16–18 NASB).[202] Through such spiritual discernment of demonic spirits Peter and Paul gave leadership to the church in its formative period.

Now let us move into the local church setting. Insofar as the Holy Spirit is at work in the various gifts, it is important to recognize where evil may also be operative. This can be particularly true in the case of prophetic utterance. Significantly, Paul lists the gift of discernings of spirits immediately after prophecy as if to say that discernment is particularly needed when prophecies occur.[203] We have previously noted that true prophecy finds consent and

agreement with others in the community;[204] now we further observe that a particular individual through the discernings of spirits may perceive on occasion an evil force at work even when "good things" are proclaimed. So it was with Paul and the slave girl who spoke quite flattering, even true, words about Paul and his companions; yet Paul perceived that they came from a spirit of divination, not from the Holy Spirit. How particularly subtle such "religious" words, or similar ones, can be within the Christian community! And how important it is that they be recognized.

To follow up on this last point: pleasant and soothing words are not always from God. A prime example of this is found in the Old Testament narrative of some prophets who prophesied victory for the king of Israel: "Go up to Ramoth-gilead and triumph; the LORD will give it into the hand of the king" (1 Kings 22:12). However, this was a "lying spirit" (v. 23), and the king of Israel thereafter was killed in battle. The lesson here is that prophecies in the Christian community that speak only good things—which, of course, people generally like to hear—may not be from the true Spirit but from a lying spirit. For example, a prophetic word such as "All is well; go ahead; God will give you success in this undertaking" *might not* be a word from the Lord but from the adversary. The end could be anything but pleasant. Hence I stress the importance of the gift of discernings of spirits that may quickly perceive the deception at work and alert others before dire results follow.[205]

The failure to discern an evil spirit can indeed be tragic. This was the terrible failure at the beginning of the human race that led to sin and the Fall. When the evil spirit, Satan himself, in the guise of a serpent, declared to the woman the heady words "You will be like God" (Gen. 3:5), she discerned no evil at all and, with her husband later concurring, took the fatal plunge by eating the forbidden fruit. If there had been a true discernment of spirit, Satan would have been repulsed and the man and the woman would have remained in fellowship with God. The failure to discern led to tragedy beyond measure.

The discernings of spirits is also important in dealing with certain cases of illness. Is a particular ailment only physical or mental, or is there perhaps some demonic power at work? It is quite significant that in His ministry Jesus dealt with two situations of deafness in radically different ways. In the one case there was a man who "was deaf and had an impediment of speech"; and in relation to the deafness Jesus placed His fingers in the man's ears saying, "Be opened," and the deaf man was healed (Mark 7:32–35). In the other case there was a convulsive boy who was deaf and dumb; Jesus helped him by saying, "You dumb and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him

again," and the boy was made whole (Mark 9:25–27). The first case of deafness was physical and dealt with by a healing touch; the latter was spiritual and handled by deliverance. *Jesus discerned the difference*. Surely this is relevant today, for it is sometimes urgent to discern the root of a given illness and thus to know whether the ministry of healing or exorcising is called for.

Another important and somewhat similar function of the discernings of spirits is in relation to miracles. We have earlier discussed "the workings of miracles" as a gift, or manifestation, of the Holy Spirit. Now I emphasize that not all that seems to be a miracle is of God; for Satan can produce his counterfeits. Accordingly, there is critical need for discerning what forces are at work. From Pharaoh's court magicians who could also turn rods into serpents (Exod. 7:10–11)[206] and water into blood (vv. 21–22) to "the man of lawlessness," who will display "all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders"[207] (2 Thess. 2:3–9 NIV), there is the continuing need to discern the source of supernatural deeds.[208] In our day, with the multiplication of occultism, witchcraft, spiritism, etc., and the demonic powers operating in them, there is all the more need for spiritual discernment. This is true even in the church, the fellowship of believers, because Satan most desires to penetrate there[209] and to perform his counterfeit miracles. So it is that in the body of believers, where miracles, along with other spiritual gifts, are much to be desired, there must be spiritual discernment of the nature and source of supernatural manifestations when they do occur.

Thus it is apparent that the gift of discernings of spirits is of much importance in relation to the preceding three gifts of healings, workings of miracles, and prophecy. For through this gift or manifestation of the Holy Spirit there is invaluable discernment as to whether healing or deliverance is called for, what spirit is at work in a supernatural demonstration of power, and what is the source of a prophetic utterance. Because of the possible penetration of evil forces in all these areas, the distinguishings, or discernings, of such demonic spirits is greatly needed. In this central area of active ministry gifts[210] the discernings of spirits is of critical importance.

C. Angelic Spirits

Third, there may be the perception of angelic spirits.[211] If evil, or demonic, spirits are perceptible by a special gift of the Holy Spirit, it surely follows that good, or angelic, spirits may likewise be recognized by that same Spirit.[212]

I have earlier mentioned the description of angels as "ministering spirits." The full text in Hebrews is "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" (1:14 NIV). If angelic spirits (angels) are sent to serve believers,[213] then we may expect to have some experience of their presence and activity. This could be all the more true for one who is gifted with the discerning of spirits.

An Old Testament illustration of angelic perception is found in a narrative relating to Elisha the prophet. Elisha was surrounded in a city by the horses and chariots of the king of Syria; however, the prophet, undisturbed, said to his servant, "Fear not, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Elisha then prayed, "O LORD … open his eyes that he may see." As a result the servant saw, and "behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (2 Kings 6:16–17). These were angelic forces that Elisha, and subsequently his servant, discerned. It all happened through spiritually opened eyes.[214]

Angels often are recognized in the New Testament. Among those who saw them were Joseph, Mary, Zechariah, certain shepherds, Mary Magdalene, Peter, Cornelius, Paul, and John. After Jesus' temptation experiences, "angels came and ministered to him" (Matt. 4:11; cf. Mark 1:13); also during His agony in Gethsemane "there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him" (Luke 22:43). The New Testament is laden with experiences of angels.

In regard to angels and the gathering of the Christian community, one of the most relevant passages is found in Hebrews 12. There the worship of believers is vividly depicted: "You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering …" (v. 22). Although this great company (literally, "myriads") of angels ordinarily is as invisible to us as "the heavenly Jerusalem," they surely may be spiritually experienced. Indeed, it is quite possible that someone gifted with the discernings of spirits may perceive God's presence and that of His angels. So a contemporary chorus testifies:

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.
I can feel His mighty power and His grace.
I can hear the brush of angels' wings,
I see glory on each face.
Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.[215]

To "hear the brush of angels' wings" (or however else the perception of angels may be understood) may well be the climactic experience in the discernings of spirits.

INTRODUCTION: KINDS OF TONGUES AND INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES

These final two gifts of the Holy Spirit—kinds of tongues[216] and interpretation of tongues—belong together. Even as the first two (word of wisdom and word of knowledge) relate to word or utterance so the last two (tongues and interpretation of tongues) relate to tongues. However, the relation between tongues and interpretation is more intimate, for one is not to function without the other.[217] Tongues and interpretation of tongues are twin gifts to be properly exercised together in the assembly of believers.

Both tongues and interpretation of tongues are unique in that, unlike the preceding seven gifts, they never occurred before the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Hence, we cannot go back, as we can with the other seven gifts, to the Old Testament or even to the Gospels to find illustration. In connection with tongues Paul did quote a passage in Isaiah thus: "With men of other tongues[218] and other lips will I speak unto this people" (1 Cor. 14:21 KJV; Isa. 28:11 LXX). However, Paul does not apply this passage to a pre-Christian situation but to the Corinthian context (see 1 Cor. 14:20–22). The Gospels contain no incident of speaking in tongues with interpretation following.[219] Hence, these last two gifts occur only with the dawn of the Christian era.

In regard to the listing of the gifts, it is possible that tongues and interpretation of tongues are mentioned last because they were the last *charismata* to be given. They were the last to arrive on the scene.[220] Also these two gifts signify in a climactic way the Spirit's own self-expression—people speaking but the Holy Spirit giving the utterance and in turn giving the interpretation of what has been said. It is sometimes said that Paul lists these gifts last because they were least[221] or because they (especially tongues) were the problem in Corinth;[222] however, such viewpoints seem quite inadequate. I would far rather say—to repeat—that they are listed last because they were the last gifts given and in unique fashion highlight the Spirit's self-manifestation. Truly these two gifts point in singular fashion to a community of believers moving in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

One further word of introduction: These last two manifestations of the Holy

Spirit form a distinctive category of gifts that operate *beyond* the mind. When Paul says, “If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful [’my intellect lies fallow’ NEB]” (1 Cor. 14:14), he is speaking of a category of gifts quite different from the first two (word of wisdom and word of knowledge, which are *mental* gifts) and the next five (which are *extramental* gifts).[223] Here in these climactic two gifts the human mind is transcended[224] by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the human spirit to give both language and the interpretation: these are *supramental* gifts.[225] Tongues and interpretation of tongues operate on a level above and beyond the mind; they signify the climax in spiritual directness and intensity.

VIII. KINDS OF TONGUES

This is the gift of "kinds of tongues *[gene glosson*]" (1 Cor. 12:10). The word "kinds" suggests that the tongues referred to are not always of the same character, hence there may be a variety of tongues uttered. Since this is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, there is no limitation on the languages spoken: spiritual utterance is multiple in kind.[226]

Moreover, this gift is *not* "the ability"[227] to speak in tongues; *nor* is the gift that of "ecstatic utterance."[228] "Ability" implies some human capacity, whereas the gift is essentially the Spirit's doing; "ecstatic utterance" suggests irrational speech, whereas the gift is suprarational and profoundly spiritual. The only ability a person has is to make his tongue and lips available to the Holy Spirit for Him to give the utterance: the Spirit alone has the ability. Ecstasy is a term that at best connotes emotional delight. Although speaking in tongues surely is a joyous experience, there is always the content of communication; it is speech, not simply emotional expression.

Kinds of tongues is a particular gift, or manifestation, of the Holy Spirit: "… to another various kinds of tongues." As with the other spiritual gifts, it is a distribution of the Spirit "individually as he wills" (1 Cor. 12:11). Thus this is not a gift that everyone has. Paul emphasizes this in a later rhetorical question, "Do all speak with tongues"? (v. 30). The implied answer is no—"All do not speak with tongues, do they?"[229] The Holy Spirit sovereignly manifests Himself in tongues through an individual: it is a particular gift or manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

This gift of tongues belongs within the context of the gathered community. Like all other spiritual gifts, it is "for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7). "Kinds of tongues" is a gift of the Spirit for the edification of the body. Tongues function as a necessary manifestation through one or more individual members of that body without which the community would be incomplete.

At this point we need to recognize that there is an important difference between tongues as an accompaniment of the coming of the Holy Spirit and tongues as an individual gift of the Spirit. As we have observed in some detail,[230] the accounts of speaking in tongues in Acts included all persons

present: it was not limited to one or a few. In the Epistles, as we noted, speaking in tongues is frequently referred to or implied as a continuing experience in the lives of believers.

Tongues belong to the ongoing life of prayer and praise. There is no limitation: all believers thus may speak in tongues. Moreover, this New Testament truth has been confirmed countless times in the lives of Spirit-filled believers. However—and herein is the critical point—by no means do all who speak in tongues devotionally (i.e., in prayer and praise) also speak in tongues for the edification of the body of believers. Tongues in the latter case—"kinds of tongues"—are not spoken by all but only by those through whom the Holy Spirit chooses to act.

Since there often is confusion in this matter, we need to stress the difference between *devotional* tongues and *ministry* tongues. Devotional tongues, originating in the coming of the Spirit and continuing in the life of prayer and praise, have no limitation: *all* may speak in tongues. Indeed, Paul implies this later in 1 Corinthians 14:5, where he says, "I want[231] you *all* to speak in tongues." The apostle is obviously talking about something desirable and possible for all. Also Paul begins a later statement in this way: "If … the whole church assembles and *all* speak in tongues …" (v. 23). In this statement Paul goes even further by implying that all the Corinthians could speak in tongues. Clearly such speaking must refer to a different use of tongues than is described in 1 Corinthians 12, where Paul refers to tongues as an individual gift ("to another" [v. 10]) so that not all speak in tongues ("Not all speak with tongues, do they?" [v. 30]). The difference is apparent: Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:10, 30 is dealing with speaking in tongues as a particular gift for ministry; in 1 Corinthians 14:5, 23 Paul is referring to the general practice of tongues in the devotional life of all in the community.

Hence, although it may be correct to say (as sometimes people do), "I do not speak in tongues because that is not my gift" in reference to body ministry, it is incorrect to add, "Therefore God does not want me to speak in tongues at all." Such an attitude may both prevent a person from experiencing the overflow in tongues that results from being filled with the Holy Spirit as well as the continuation of prayer and praise in the fullest dimension. It is *urgent* that we distinguish between tongues as a normal accompaniment of the Spirit-filled life and tongues as a gift (freely given, never possessed) of the Spirit when the community comes together. Both devotional tongues and tongues for ministry are urgently needed.

There is, however, no essential difference between devotional and ministry tongues. The differentiation is *not in essence but in practice.* For example, a

person who speaks in tongues on an occasion of body ministry is one who *already* speaks in tongues in his prayer life. It is essentially the same speaking but now oriented to the upbuilding of the community.

Another point: a person may regularly speak in tongues, even sing in tongues,[232] but only rarely, if at all, experience the gift of tongues. The latter depends basically on the Holy Spirit, who distributes that gift as He wills.[233] It may be His decision to apportion another gift rather than tongues. However, the gift of tongues for ministry may, like all the other gifts, be earnestly desired and prayed for. Although such a desire does not determine what the Spirit does, it may prepare the way for God's sovereign action.

I will now summarize a few additional points about tongues.

1. The very expression "kinds of tongues" suggests a variety and multiplicity. The double plural is similar to that of gifts of healings, workings of miracles, and distinguishings of spirits. Although the person is one, he speaks various kinds of tongues in the community. This in itself is an extraordinary phenomenon because most people who speak in tongues speak only one tongue in ordinary speech. Now by the Holy Spirit a person is enabled to speak not only a new tongue but a variety of tongues.

We have earlier observed that the content of tongues at various times is at least threefold: praise to God, speaking His mysteries, and offering supplications.[234] Here is a variety of utterances in tongues (hence "kinds of tongues") that when offered in the community of believers edify much. Since speaking in tongues is primarily transcendent praise, and praise is the basic activity of a gathering of believers, it follows that tongues, whether spoken or sung,[235] may be the catalyst to bring forth further community praise. Traditional prayers and hymns, even choruses, though surely valuable, may after a time become somewhat routine, with little spiritual vitality in their utterance. Then someone speaks or sings in tongues, and often a spiritual breakthrough oc curs. Again, since in tongues a person speaks forth mysteries, hidden things, the very declaration of these things of God can have profoundly significant effects in the community. We have earlier observed how word of wisdom and word of knowledge open up many vistas of truth; speaking in tongues reaches deep into the mysteries of God and thus can richly bless the community. Still again, since tongues may also at times be avenues of supplication and intercession, this can greatly enhance the outreach of the community in its prayerful concern for others.[236]

Now none of this means that only one person may be used by the Holy Spirit for such multiple ministry. One person *may* be, for the gift is kinds of tongues.

However, Paul, in describing the community in action, later says, “If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three” (1 Cor. 14:27 NASB).[237] In any event, whether there be only one or two, or three, each person speaking can greatly edify the body of believers. “Kinds of tongues” are invaluable to full ministry.

2. Speaking in tongues, while a blessing for believers, is a sign to unbelievers. Paul writes, “So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers” (1 Cor. 14:22 NASB). The background of Paul’s statement is his free quotation from the Book of Isaiah: “In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that they will not hear me, saith the Lord” (v. 21 KJV). The words “So then …” immediately follow. Although the “other tongues” in Isaiah refer to the language of a foreign nation through whom God spoke to an uncomprehending people,[238] Paul freely applies this to the language of glossolalia to which unbelievers turn a deaf ear. The very fact that God speaks through tongues and yet unbelievers spurn the words is a judgment on them: they are all the more confirmed in their disbelief.[239]

Let me apply this briefly to today. Speaking in tongues should be evidence to unbelievers of supernatural utterance. The very fact that the utterance cannot be satisfactorily explained as a language of man, moreover that millions of believers today speak in tongues *none* of whom claim that the language comes from themselves, ought to be striking evidence that a Higher Power is involved. The fact that unbelievers do not listen, indeed, often are very critical of glossolalia, only deepens their unbelief and hardness to the things of God.

This serves to confirm Paul’s earlier words in 1 Corinthians: “A natural man[240] does not accept the things[241] of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised”[242] (2:14 NASB). The person who is an unbeliever, a “natural man,” cannot “accept” speaking in tongues—one of “the things” of the Spirit of God. By not accepting tongues, even declaring them to be “foolishness,” the natural man stands all the more under God’s judgment. So it is that speaking in tongues is a sign not to those who believe,[243] for they spiritually discern the Spirit of God in operation, but it is a sign to those who are unbelievers. They are confirmed as “natural” persons. The situation has not changed in our own time.

But now, to turn in a different direction, tongues may in some situations be a sign to unbelievers that prepares the way for faith. I refer particularly to the Pentecostal event of Acts 2 in which a multitude of unbelieving Jews heard the 120 speaking in tongues, and some 3000 hearers came to believe the gospel. All

of the multitude gathered at the sounding forth of tongues—"at this sound[244] the multitude came together" (v. 6). It was speaking in tongues that first caught their attention. So in this case speaking in tongues was used by the Holy Spirit to bring a multitude of inquisitive unbelievers together, a number of whom later came to salvation. Speaking in tongues at Pentecost therefore did not deepen the unbelief of all who heard; rather it was the primary attractive force that eventuated in salvation for many.[245]

We may draw some contemporary parallel in that speaking in tongues, because of its extraordinariness, can gain an unbeliever's positive attention. The hearing of tongues spoken or sung may have a kind of shock effect that leads to inquiry and sometimes openness to the message of the gospel.[246] 3. Tongues have a regular place in the ongoing ministry of the church. This is apparent from the fact that tongues is one of the manifestations of the Spirit for the common good: "to another kinds of tongues." In this connection we may observe an additional statement of Paul, relating particularly to worship: "When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation" (1 Cor. 14:26 NASB). Moreover, it is not a matter of "*may have*" but "*has.*" "Each one" does not mean that everybody has a tongue any more than every one has a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, and an interpretation. Paul means rather that one person has this, another person has that; hence each person is fully involved. And this unmistakably includes having "a tongue."

In this portrait of assembled believers it is striking that none of the other spiritual gifts except interpretation is directly mentioned. A psalm or hymn is a song of praise,[247] a teaching is probably a spontaneous word of instruction,[248] and a revelation quite likely refers here to the background for a prophetic utterance.[249] But a tongue is unambiguously what Paul has been describing throughout.

If we view what Paul is describing in 1 Corinthians 14:26 as paradigmatic for a contemporaneous gathering of believers, then the gift of tongues clearly occupies a place of continuing importance. Unfortunately if Paul were to visit most churches in our time, he would have to say not "each one" but "no one" has a tongue. Indeed, if someone does have a tongue, often it is discouraged or even forbidden. This leads us to some words of Paul about tongues: "Do not forbid speaking in tongues" (1 Cor. 14:39). There are many churches and church institutions that either overtly[250] or covertly[251] act counter to Paul's injunction. For the church at large in our day tongues simply have no place at all.

On the other hand we must guard against exaggerating the place of tongues. It seems that the Corinthians did precisely that. These words of Paul imply as

much: “But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what shall I profit you, unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching?”[252] (1 Cor. 14:6 NASB).[253] Then follow a number of statements by Paul about the need for intelligibility in utterance (vv. 7–11), concluding with the words “So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church” (v. 12 NASB). There may have been so much elation among the Corinthians over their ability to speak in tongues that such speaking became the predominant feature in their assembly. Later Paul says, “If, therefore, the whole church assembles and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?” (v. 23 RSV). “All” seem to have been speaking in tongues, and this produced a negative effect on outsiders and unbelievers. Tongues have a proper but not all-important place.

This leads to a final word on speaking in tongues: there needs to be order. One of the last statements of Paul relating to tongues is this: “If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn” (1 Cor. 14:27). By this he speaks of both limitation, “two or at most three,” and order, “each in turn.” The Corinthians, abounding in tongues, doubtless needed that word—and so do some Pentecostal and charismatic groups in our day. Disorder brings neither edification to the body of believers nor attractiveness to outsiders who may be present. Another summary statement of Paul reads, “All things should be done decently[254] and in order” (v. 40). Propriety and fittingness are to be the hallmark of all things in the assembly. The immediate context is tongues—“Do not forbid speaking in tongues” (v. 39)—and behind that are prophecy and other spiritual manifestations. Earlier Paul had written, “God is not a God of confusion but of peace” (v. 33). This is truly an important message to the church at Corinth and to the church of any time and place.

IX. INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES

The final gift of the Holy Spirit listed by Paul is "interpretation of tongues" *[hermeneia glossono*] (1 Cor. 12:10). This is likewise a gift to an individual: "to another the interpretation of tongues." Paul later asks rhetorically, "Do all interpret?" (v. 30),[255] implying that interpretation of tongues is an individual gift or manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

This gift is not interpretation in general but functions only in relation to tongues. All the other gifts, though closely related, are independent manifestations of the Holy Spirit.[256] However, there is no spiritual gift of interpretation as such; rather, the gift is only that of interpretation of tongues.

To be sure, there are other kinds of interpretation. For example, in the Scriptures there is the interpretation of dreams. Joseph and Daniel were both interpreters of dreams through which God spoke.[257] God Himself gave the interpretation.[258] There is also the interpretation of the Scriptures themselves. Jesus, for example, "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, … interpreted[259] to them [the men on the road to Emmaus] in all the scriptures the things concerning himself' (Luke 24:27). Christ Himself continues to be the key to biblical interpretation, and through the Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of Scripture the truth is made known. The proper interpretation of Scripture[260] therefore is basic and normative for Christian faith and experience. But now we are focusing on neither the interpretation of dreams nor the interpretation of Scripture but on the interpretation of tongues.

The interpretation of tongues is a supramental[261] operation of the Holy Spirit. Interpretation of tongues is in a known language; however, there is no rational comprehension of what the prior tongues have declared. The one interpreting has no more knowledge than the glossolalist of what has been said; the interpreter simply speaks out and the Holy Spirit gives the interpretation. Unlike interpreting a foreign language into common speech, no human ability is required. Of course, as with speaking in tongues, there must be the utilization of mouth and lips and, as with prophecy, a person must begin to speak in his native language. However, what is said in interpretation is basically from a realm beyond the human mind. It is not that the interpreter understands what is said in

the tongue and so makes its contents known; rather, the interpretation is solely and totally from the Holy Spirit.

By this gift there is the interpretation of what is spoken in a tongue. Interpretation can be translation, so that what is said in tongues is set forth word by word;[262] however, interpretation is directed more to the meaning of the prior utterance. Paul writes that the problem for the hearer of a foreign language is that he or she does not know "the meaning of the language" (1 Cor. 14:11); later, in relation to tongues, Paul discusses the need for interpretation (v. 13). To know the meaning of what is spoken in a foreign language usually calls for more than word-for-word translation. Skilled interpretation is needed to elucidate the meaning fully and accurately. Thus an interpretation, whether of an unknown foreign language or a tongue of the Spirit, may be lengthier, or sometimes it may even be shorter, than the incomprehensible utterance.[263]

The latter statement is quite pertinent to what often happens in a charismatic fellowship when a tongue is interpreted. The interpretation sometimes varies considerably in length from the tongue spoken, so much so that those present may wonder if the interpretation is actually of the tongue. It is possible that the words of a presumed interpretation are not given by the Holy Spirit (a parallel to a prophecy that is from the human spirit or even from a diabolical spirit)[264] and need to be quickly refuted. Also it may be that the apparent interpretation is a prophecy, since the language of interpretation and prophecy are often much the same.[265] In that case there is need to recognize the prophecy and continue to look for an interpretation of the tongue.[266] But now that we have recognized these two other possibilities, it is also a fact that many a valid interpretation will be of a longer, occasionally shorter, duration than the tongues spoken.

The significance of interpretation of tongues is that it makes known the valuable content of what has been spoken in a tongue. For example, a tongue is often simply an offering of praise to God.[267] This was the case at Pentecost when the 120 Spirit-filled believers were speaking in "other tongues" (Acts 2:4) and declaring in those tongues the "wonderful works of God" (v. 11 KJV). Paul, after writing about praying "with the spirit" (1 Cor. 14:15)—that is, praying "in a tongue" (v. 14)—proceeded to speak of blessing "with the spirit." He said, "If you bless ("are praising" NIV, NEB) with the spirit,[268] how can any one in the position of an outsider[269] say the 'Amen' to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying?" (v. 16). Interpretation is needed if the content of the tongue spoken, namely blessing or praise, is to be made known to the outsider[270] and he can respond with an "Amen."[271]

A tongue, as we have earlier observed, may also be the speaking of mysteries: "One who speaks in a tongue … utters mysteries in the Spirit"[272] (1 Cor. 14:2). By "mysteries" Paul refers to hidden or secret things that are not achievable by human understanding and accordingly can be disclosed only by the Holy Spirit. These mysteries are not ultimate ones such as Paul himself occasionally received through special revelation;[273] however, they are hidden matters spoken in a tongue, perhaps about such matters as God's purpose, His blessings, and His direction, and these matters can have tremendous value. Hence there is the signal importance of interpretation, for through interpretation the hidden things are made known.

In both cases mentioned above, in which through tongues there is the offering of praise and the speaking of mysteries, it is apparent that a person is speaking directly to God and not to other people. Yet communication to others does take place because through interpretation there is understanding of what has been said in tongues of praise or in the speaking of mysteries. For example, although the 120 on the Day of Pentecost were speaking in tongues only to God of His "wonderful works," the very words were a communication to all who heard and understood. This doubtlessly later prepared the way for Peter's preaching the gospel. Again, when a person blesses God in tongues and interpretation follows, there is intellectual comprehension that further adds to the richness of worship. Or once more, when there is an utterance in a tongue of some "mystery" or hidden things followed by interpretation in intelligible speech, this very communication can have a powerful impact on mind and will.

Hence, through interpretation a *message* may be given. Interpretation, as we have observed, is usually more than literal translation: it is a setting forth of the meaning of an utterance in tongues. Now, we further note, the word interpretation also implies personal application. For example, Psalm 145 begins, "I will extol thee, my God and King, and bless thy name for ever and ever" and ends with the words "Let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever." The praise spoken includes a summons to praise; so likewise may a tongue of praise.

Similarly mysteries spoken in the Spirit, while addressed "not to men but to God" (1 Cor. 14:2), may contain a message to people when interpreted by that same Spirit. What is spoken to God about hidden things when interpreted can bring a powerful message to whomever it is especially addressed.[274] The same thing is true of tongues that speak forth supplication and intercession:[275] although they are addressed to God and not to people, such prayers obviously relate to people. Hence if interpretation occurs, there will be a message that significantly relates to others who are present. Tongues indeed can convey

personal messages.

Accordingly/there is a distinctiveness about what is spoken through tongues and interpretation. It is sometimes said that tongues plus interpretation equals prophecy (T + I = P).[276] However, although both may contain a message, this does not mean that the results are identical. Prophecy, as we have seen, is basically for the threefold purpose of edification, exhortation, and consolation (1 Cor. 14:3). Tongues relate essentially to the praise of God, uttering mysteries in the Spirit, and offering supplications. Thus the interpretation of tongues, while often including elements of edification,[277] exhortation, and consolation, operates out of a different context. The results accordingly are not the same.[278]

Now I will make a few comments about *order* in interpretation of tongues. The basic matter is that only *one* person is to interpret. Previously we have noted Paul's words "… to another the interpretation of tongues." Later Paul applies this singularly to a situation in which two or three people speak in tongues. As earlier quoted, Paul writes that "if any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn"; then he adds, "and let one interpret" (1 Cor. 14:27). This "one" does not necessarily mean one of the tongues speakers, though that is possible,[279] but simply some person. This suggests that since tongues are to be spoken "each in turn," interpretation will follow in turn after each utterance. Thus one person—and only one—who has the gift of interpretation of tongues will be used in interpreting each tongue in sequence.[280] Hence, in summary, there may be two or three tongues spoken but *not* two or three interpreters: only one person will be gifted by the Holy Spirit to that end on that occasion.[281]

But there is also an earlier directive given by Paul that needs to be heard: "Let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret" (1 Cor. 14:13 NASB). Paul writes this because of the urgency of interpretation following a tongue[282] and because the speaker himself may be the one so anointed by the Holy Spirit.[283] It may be that there is no one else to interpret, and if such is the case the speaker in tongues must remain silent. Immediately after Paul said, "Let one interpret," he added, "If there is no interpreter,[284] the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God" (v. 28 NIV). Of course, if the speaker prayed for the gift of interpretation (as Paul earlier directed) and believed God had heard his request, he would not have to remain silent: he could boldly speak forth in tongues. Also, he would be able to interpret other tongues that might later be spoken.

This matter of order in regard to interpretation of tongues is important for all

believers moving in the gifts of the Spirit. Sometimes the situation is quite confusing with more than one person seeking to interpret tongues. Accordingly, words may be spoken that are *not* interpretation,[285] and there is no edification of the body.

This brings us to another critical issue: the failure to have interpretation at all. In the Corinthian situation this seems to have been the basic problem: people were speaking in tongues with little or no concern for interpretation to follow. This is apparent from a number of things Paul says. In 1 Corinthians 14, following a word about interpretation ("greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying" [v. 5 NASB]), Paul devotes several statements to the inadequacy of simply speaking in tongues. We have already noted the statement "If I come to you speaking in tongues, what shall I profit you, unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching?" (v. 6 NASB). Later Paul talks about musical instruments that give indistinct sounds and tongues speech that either is not clear or is unknown to the hearer—all of which refers to tongues that are not interpreted (vv. 7–ll).[286] This obviously relates to the Corinthians' practice of speaking in tongues without interpretation following.

Two other illustrations of the Corinthians' disregard for interpretation may be noted. First, there is the picture of the person who blesses "with the spirit" (v. 16) but does not interpret.[287] Second, there is the picture of the assembly where everybody is speaking in tongues but is obviously unconcerned about interpretation: "If, therefore, the whole church assembles and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?" (v. 23). Paul is by no means opposed to the Corinthians' speaking in tongues, even all of them;[288] but if everyone is involved at the same time, it will sound to outsiders and unbelievers like sheer madness. Without interpretation of what has been said—and interpretation is impossible when all the believers are speaking at once or even in sequence—the effect on others will be wholly negative. Indeed, Paul says later, two or three may make ready to speak in tongues, but "if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silence in church and speak to himself and to God" (v. 28). Interpretation of what is spoken is utterly essential.

Let it be stated strongly: the problem at Corinth was not their speaking in tongues but the failure to give an interpretation. *The problem was uninterpreted tongues.*[289] Although speaking in tongues is spiritual utterance, there is also need for rational comprehension. Intelligibility must follow if there is to be the edification of all who are present. *Tongues plus interpretation* make for the edifying of everyone.

Indeed, we may note that interpreted tongues are equal in value to prophecy.[290] Let us look again at the words of Paul, "Greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying" (1 Cor. 14:5 NASB). The first part of the statement without the second would place prophecy on a higher value scale than tongues with interpretation.[291] However, the second part definitely elevates interpreted tongues to the same level as prophecy.[292]

Furthermore, since prophecy is surely one of the "greater gifts" (1 Cor. 12:31) to be eagerly desired,[293] this places interpreted tongues among these gifts.[294] Strikingly, perhaps even surprisingly, rather than tongues with interpretation being the least of the gifts (as it is sometimes claimed), they are now seen to occupy, with prophecy, the very top echelon!

Finally, let me say a word concerning the importance of the gift of the interpretation of tongues. Without interpretation spiritual tongues must remain silent in the gathered community. From all that has been observed about the intrinsic value of tongues, such silence would indeed be a serious loss. Thus interpretation of tongues in itself is a gift of the Spirit to be earnestly desired. "Earnestly desire the spiritual gifts" (1 Cor. 14:1) means *all* of them, the last of which (in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10) is interpretation of tongues. Perhaps this gift seems modest when compared with such gifts as healings and miracles (who would not desire them?); moreover, it is dependent on another gift, the gift of "kinds of tongues," even to function. *Yet*—and this is a large "yet"—the interpretation of tongues alone is the key that for the community unlocks the profundity of things that are uttered in the Spirit.

"To another the interpretation of tongues." The Holy Spirit apportions the gift as He wills. Are we eager to receive it?

[1]Paul does not say that the nine gifts he lists are the only gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is quite possible that the Holy Spirit manifests Himself through other gifts. Thus the list may be exemplary rather than inclusive. However, since Paul speaks of the gifts as 44the manifestation of the Spirit" and, after listing the gifts, says, 44one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills" (v. 11 NASB), I will operate within the confines of the nine gifts.

[2]The two-five-two groupings are connected by the Greek word heteros,4'another." Thus the text reads, 44to another [hetero] faith," 44to another [hetero] various kinds of tongues." Between all the other gifts the word alios with de is found, e.g., between word of wisdom and word of knowledge-44and to another [allo de] the word of knowledge," between faith and gifts of healing-44and to another [allo de] gifts of healing," etc. Because the word heteros is used to connect the two-five-two groupings, this may be Paul's way of suggesting a transition to a different category of gifts. As EGT, in loco, puts it, 44The third (faith) and eighth (tongues) … indicate points of transition … from one sort of endowment to another." (It could be argued that heteros and alios refer more directly to persons than to gifts; however, gifts may be implied since Paul's concern here is primarily with the various manifestations, or gifts, of the Holy Spirit.) ICC states, "The change to ἑτέρῳ may be made merely to break the intolerable monotony of ἄλλῳ eight times in succession," but then adds: "Nevertheless, if we take each as marking a new division, we get an intelligible result …" (1 Corinthians, 265). The result will be discussed later. Godet (Commentary on First Corinthians, 622) and Lenski (Interpretation of First and Second Corinthians, 499) write similarly. Conzelmann (1 Corinthians, 209) briefly speaks of the same things.

[3]Quite commonly, particularly in Pentecostal and charismatic expositions, Paul's sequence is somewhat altered by organizing groups of three: to word of wisdom and word of knowledge is added distinguishing of spirits; prophecy is added to tongues and interpretation of tongues; faith, gifts of healing, and effecting of miracles are retained in that order. Such groupings are done perhaps for symmetry (three-three-three is neater than two-five-two!) but also because of the way in which some of the gifts are viewed. I will comment on this later. It seems better to me to follow Paul's own order rather than some other pattern. Ray Hubbard

puts it bluntly: “The arrangement on which to work is the two, five, two, division, given by the Spirit” *(Gifts of Grace*, 41). In any event, I believe that as we proceed the advantage of viewing the gifts seriatim will become increasingly clear.

[4]According to Proverbs 2:6, “the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.”

[5]“We are not speaking of a wisdom or knowledge attained gradually by practice and faith but of a condition proceeding from higher illumination” (Hermann Olshausen, First and Second Corinthians, 195).

[6]This is unlike the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and interpretation. See later discussion.

[7]As in RSV; NIV has “message.” According to Thayer, logos may refer to speaking or thinking. He adds in regard to speaking that it is “a word, yet not in the grammatical sense … but language, vox, i.e. a word which, uttered by the living voice, embodies a conception or idea.”

[8]“It is the discourse, not the wisdom or knowledge that is behind it, that is the spiritual gift” (C. K. Barrett, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, HNTC, 284-85). “The word of wisdom is the gift of speaking or communicating wisdom; and the word of knowledge is the gift of speaking or communicating knowledge” (C. H. Hodge, An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, 245).

[9]Peter writes, “As each has received a gift [charisma], employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles [logia] of God” (1 Peter 4:10-11). “Oracles” (also the KJV translation of logia) refers to divine utterances given through a charismatic gift. BAGD describes logia in 1 Peter 4 as “the utterances of those Christians gifted w. the charisma of the word.” TDNT speaks of these logia as “the words and statements spoken by the charismatic” (4:139).

[10]Notice especially chapters 1-3, where the word “wisdom” (or “wise,” “wiser”) occurs twenty-five times. Quite often it is the utterance of wisdom that Paul has in mind. Incidentally, it is important to turn to Paul’s own writing, especially 1 Corinthians, to discover what he means by “word of wisdom.” There can be much wasted, even misdirected, energy in beginning elsewhere.

[11]Literally, “in wisdom of speech,” en sophia logou.

[12]Literally, “in excellence of speech,” hyperochen logou.

[13]Donald Gee, after quoting Paul's words about "demonstration of the Spirit and power," comments: "Note carefully that he is not saying that his preaching was accompanied by such demonstrations; it was in itself just such a demonstration. It manifested the Spirit of God in action through the speaker" (Spiritual Gifts in the Work of the Ministry Today, 23).

[14]The Greek word is apodeixei; in addition to "demonstration" it also contains the meaning of "a making manifest, showing forth" (Thayer).

[15]Leon Morris, commenting on "to us" (KJV-"unto us") of verse 10, says: "Unto us, believers, great things have been revealed" (italics his) (The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, TNTC, 57). Similarly, F. W. Grosheide writes that "in this verse Paul states … what God has given to believers" (The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 67). However, the primary revelation was surely to Paul.

[16]Paul speaks later about such revelation in 1 Corinthians 14:26: "What then, brethren? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson [or "a teaching" NASB], a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation." Cf. Philippians 3:15: "God will reveal that also to you."

[17]The Greek word bathe may be translated either as "depths" or "deep things" (Thayer).

[18]According to Robertson and Plummer, "the logos sophias ["word of wisdom"] is discourse which expounds the mysteries of God's counsels and makes known the way of salvation" (1 Corinthians, ICC, 265).

[19]Paul wrote these words to people who had been "sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" (v. 13)-hence had received the Holy Spirit, the "Spirit of truth"-that they might be further gifted with "a spirit of wisdom and revelation" in the knowledge of God. According to EGT, in loco: "What Paul prays for on behalf of these Ephesian converts is that God might continue to bestow upon them the gift of His Holy Spirit already imparted to them, and that to the effect both of making them wise to understand the things of His grace and of disclosing to them more of the mysteries of His kingdom."

[20]The Greek word translated "hearts," kardias, may also be rendered "understanding" (so KJV).

[21]"… the scriptures … bear witness to me" (John 5:39).

[22]According to 2 Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is inspired by God … ," literally, "God- breathed" (theopneustos).

[23]Later in Ephesians Paul also speaks of the mystery concerning Christ and

His church (5:32). For the subject of mystery primarily related to Paul's ministry, also see 1 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 1:9; 3:9; 6:19; and Colossians 4:3.

[24]For a brief discussion of "subordinate revelation" see vol. 1, chapter 2, 43-44.

[25]"Saints," of course, refers to believers ("God's people" NEB).

[26]The Greek word for "made manifest" (above) is ephanerothe, the verbal form of phanerōsis used by Paul in relation to "the manifestation of the Spirit" in 1 Corinthians 12:7.

[27]A mystery can be disclosed only by revelation. E.g., recall Paul's words in Ephesians 3:3: "The mystery was made known to me by revelation." (Also see vol. 1, chapter 2, 32-33.)

[28]Paul quotes others as saying about him: "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive, and his speech contemptible" (2 Cor. 10:10 nasb).

[29]We should not make too much of the word "contemptible" in relation to Paul's speech. For, as is elsewhere shown, he could stand before an Athenian audience that included philosophers and draw careful attention (Acts 17:22-34). We may recall also that Festus and King Agrippa (Acts 26) were impressed with Paul's "great learning" (v. 24) and persuasive ability (v. 28).

[30]See Donald Gee, *Spiritual Gifts in the Work of the Ministry Today*, chapter 2, "Spiritual Gifts for Preaching and Teaching," where, for example, Gee says, "At the heart of such ministries there can sometimes be a supernatural operation of the Spirit that adds something that lifts them to a truly Pentecostal lever' (37-38).

[31]Some Pentecostals and charismatics see other aspects in word of wisdom." Arnold Bittlinger, a Lutheran charismatic, begins his presentation of "the word of wisdom" thus: "In a difficult or dangerous situation a word of wisdom may be given which resolves the difficulty or silences the opponent" (Gifts and Graces, 28). As an illustration of the former, Bittlinger discusses first Solomon's word to two women, each of whom claimed a certain living child as her own (1 Kings 3:16-28) and, in regard to the second, the words of Jesus to a trick question about tribute to Caesar (Luke 20:20-26). Bittlinger then adds a third category to word of wisdom, namely, a word spoken by a Christian in an adversarial situation (e.g., Luke 12:11-12). My reply is that I do not question that such situations represent the expression of supernatural wisdom;

however, they hardly seem to represent what Paul was talking about nor the community context for a word of wisdom. The late Pentecostal teacher Harold Horton takes a still more extreme position: “The Word of Wisdom is the revelation of the Purpose of God concerning people, things or events in the future or looking to the future” (The Gifts of the Spirit, 57). Horton misses both the point that a word of wisdom is a gift of utterance stemming from revelation (indeed he adds, “it is not a gift of utterance but of revelation” [58]) and that the word basically relates to Jesus Christ. It is unfortunate that Bittlinger and Horton, among some others, have not first turned to Paul for insight into what he means.

At the other extreme is the quite limited view that word of wisdom is something like advice or practical instruction. In the popular Living Bible 1 Corinthians 12:8a is paraphrased, “To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice.” C. K. Barrett, speaking from an Old Testament perspective, suggests that word of wisdom is possibly “a practical discourse, consisting mainly of ethical instruction and exhortation” (The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 285). Such views, whether in popular paraphrase or scholarly language, scarcely do justice to the basic biblical meaning.

Truly in both charismatic and noncharismatic circles there is often need for a more perceptive biblical understanding in this regard.

[32]Grosheide writes in regard to the reception of the Spirit: “The reference is here to Pentecost…. What is meant is not the perpetual indwelling of the Spirit in the congregation but the historical fact of his coming” (First Epistle to the Corinthians,NICNT, 70).

[33]RSV translates “the things” as “the gifts.” However, the Greek word is simply ta, literally, “the things.” “Gifts” as a translation might suggest only spiritual gifts (charismata). Paul, rather, is thinking of the manifold things, hence blessings, we have in Christ, neb vividly translates: “… all that God of his own grace has given us.”

[34]J. D. G. Dunn writes that against the background of 1 Corinthians 2:12 this denotes “some charismatic insight into ‘the things given us by God’ … that is, some understanding of the relationship of God to the believer(s), some recognition of the charismatic dimension … to the believer’s life individually or as a community” (Jesus and the Spirit, 219). In chapter 10, “The Mission of the Holy Spirit,” I dealt with the words about speaking (v. 13) in terms of Paul himself. However, it is also the case (as I am now saying) that the phrase “which things we also

speak" refers to others who have likewise received the Holy Spirit ("we have received … the Spirit" includes both Paul and others). Paul's word (the apostolic word) is alway primary and normative for our speaking but by no means eliminates our own utterance (or word) of knowledge.

[35]Or "combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words" (nasb). See chapter 10, n. 26.

[36]Or "toward" (nasb). The Greek word is eis.

[37]For a valuable discussion of this, see The Gifts of the Holy Spirit by C. R. Vaughan, chapter 2, entitled "Gift of Peculiar Knowledge or Intuition to Believers."

[38]Biblical study is essential, for through such study the Holy Spirit may bring this deeper knowledge. My point is that the study of Scripture in itself without the activity of the Spirit can bring no true enlightenment.

[39]As Paul says later, "I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ" (1 Cor. 3:1).

[40]I earlier quoted this verse with emphasis on the Romans' being "filled with all knowledge" (chap. 10, I, "Guide Into Truth"). Here I am stressing the second part of the verse: "able to instruct one another."

[41]This by no means eliminates the office of teacher (see, e.g., Eph. 4:11), or teaching as a particular charisma of God's grace (see, e.g., Rom. 12:7). Nonetheless all are "able to instruct one another."

[42]As in Romans 15:14. The same Greek word, noutheted, is used in both Romans 15:14 and Colossians 3:16.

[43]The "word of Christ" indwelling "richly" is doubtless a parallel to the Spirit's infilling. In Ephesians 5:18 Paul writes, "Be filled with the Spirit" and shortly after adds in verses 19-20 many of the same, or similar, words to those found in Colossians 3:16-17.

[44]I. Howard Marshall writes in another context that "Christians possessed by the Spirit give one another mutual instruction, without which no single individual can appreciate the whole of God's truth" (The Epistles of John, NICNT, 163).

[45]Recall note 9 on 1 Peter 4:10-11.

[46]According to a popular understanding of "the word of knowledge," such "things of God" relate particularly to hidden facts within the human situation, for example, that someone has a certain disease, that a lost article may be found in such and such a place, etc. This would be superaaturally revealed information rather than teaching or instruction.

The background for such information is often that of a vision or picture that is given the one who is to declare the information. In the Old Testament "the seer" (hence, a man of vision) might see into a situation as common as one in which animals are lost and he would know their location (e.g., the location of Saul's father's lost donkeys, which Samuel "the seer" perceived [1 Sam. 9:3-10:2]). In the New Testament, e.g., Jesus declared to the Samaritan woman, without her telling Him, that she had had five husbands and that the one she was then living with was not her husband (John 4:16-18). To this the woman replied, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet" (v. 19). Both of these examples (and many others could be added) demonstrate the activity of a seer/prophet who truly does perceive and declare hidden things. But they are not as such the speaking of a word of knowledge. Stanley Horton has put it well: "God did give knowledge of facts through visions and in various other ways, but there is absolutely no indication in the Bible that the gift of a word of knowledge is meant to bring revelation of where to find lost articles or of what disease or sin a person may be suffering with" (What the Bible Says about the Holy Spirit, 272-73). By no means do we discount the importance of such God-given knowledge of facts. The only point here is that to speak of that kind of knowledge as a "word of knowledge" is a mistake.

[47]Weymouth in his New Testament in Modern Speech so translates (even though the Greek word is simply pistis, "faith").

[48]"Saving faith" is referred to in Ephesians 2:8: "By grace you have been saved through faith." This salvation, by grace through faith, is a gift of God. Such faith through which salvation comes is prerequisite to faith-"special faith"-as a gift of the Spirit.

[49]"Fruit faith," a fruit of the Spirit, is delineated in Galatians 5:22: "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy … faith [pistis]" (kjv). Pistis is translated "faithfulness" in rsv, nasb, and niv, and "fidelity" in neb. In these cases pistis does not so much signify faith toward God as faithfulness, trustworthiness, and dependability in relation to other persons. Whether the best translation is "faith," "faithfulness," or "fidelity," pistis in Galatians 5:22 refers to character; hence, like a fruit, it may take some time to mature.

[50]The first two, word of wisdom and word of knowledge, as we have observed, are basically mental gifts-the Holy Spirit working through the mind. The five gifts that follow are extramental. According to EGT, the

first category "exhibits the πνεῦμα [Spirit] working through the νοῦς [mind], the second in distinction from the νοῦς (2:888). As was previously noted, the Greek word heteros is the connective between these two categories.

[51]Godet uses the word "force" in connection with them: "The following five [after the word of wisdom and word of knowledge] proceed from a communication of force, in other words, from an influence of the Spirit, no longer specially on the understanding, but on the will" (Commentary on First Corinthians, 624).

[52]"Although the faith mentioned in Romans 10:17 relates more specifically to "saving faith," it is nonetheless true that the gift of faith may come the same way.

[53]See the discussion of this in section IV.

[54]See the discussion of this is section V.

[55]This could also include the other two ministry gifts, prophecy and distinguishing of spirits. EGT speaks of the gifts of healing and working of miracles as the "material" sphere, prophecy and distinguishing of spirits as the "spiritual" sphere-and that faith operates through both: "ἰαματα [healings] and δυνάμεις [miracles] are operations of such faith in the material sphere…. προφητεία [prophecy] and διακρίσις πνευμάτων [distinguishing of spirits] in the purely spiritual sphere" (2:888).

[56]Gordon Lindsay puts it well: "Although the gift of faith appears to be passive … in reality it sets forces in motion that are irresistible" (Gifts of the Spirit, 2:43).

[57]Paul had been assured by an angel that no life would be lost. Paul believed what he was told; hence, his words to the seamen may be viewed as an expression of the gift of faith.

[58]I say this in light of the fact that gifts of the Spirit are basically for the edification of believers. However, in this case the purpose of Paul's expression of faith was likewise to strengthen, hence edify, those around him.

[59]Arnold Bittlinger speaks of certain situations in which "the gift of faith is given, above all, to strengthen the weak faith of the people" (Gifts and Graces, 33).

[60]Dennis Bennett describes the gift of faith as "a sudden surge of faith, usually in a crisis, to confidently believe without a doubt, that as we act

or speak in Jesus' Name it shall come to pass" (The Holy Spirit and You, 134). Dunn writes similarly: "Paul presumably has in mind that mysterious surge of confidence which sometimes arises within a man in a particular situation of need or challenge and which gives him an otherly certainty and assurance that God is about to act through a word or through an action (such as laying hands on someone sick)" (Jesus and the Spirit, 211). It is interesting that both Bennett and Dunn use the word "surge." Truly this well expresses what happens in the gift of faith: faith surges!

[61]Daniel himself is a good illustration of the faith that trusts for miracles (as previously discussed). Also in the Book of Daniel there is the amazing testimony of the three Hebrews facing the fiery furnace: "O Nebuchadnezzar. … If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not… we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up" (3:16-18). Our God is able! Truly this is a vivid demonstration of a faith that believes, whether or not a miracle occurs.

[62]The stress in 1 Corinthians 13 is the necessity of love for the beneficial operation of the gifts. Regarding faith: "If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing." Here, for all its importance, our concern is not with love but with Paul's amplification of the gift of faith.

[63]Reference is to the mountain of opposition that impeded Zerubbabel from completing the rebuilding of the temple.

[64]It is interesting that in Matthew 17:20 before Jesus declared the need for mustard seed faith to remove a mountain, He spoke of the "little faith [Gr. oligopistia]" of His disciples. This implies that their faith was less than that of a grain of mustard seed! Another interpretation of Jesus' words is that He was not actually dealing quantitatively with faith ("little faith" compared to "mustard seed" size might suggest a rather minute quantitative difference), but was referring to their faith as poor faith, a poverty of faith (see, e.g., EBC: "Despite the etymology of the word, it probably does not refer so much to the littleness of their faith as to its poverty" [8: 391]). In any event, a vital faith, though small as a mustard seed, is what Jesus calls for.

[65]"If you have faith" is found in Matthew 21:21. This is the parallel passage to Mark ("Have faith in God") concerning the fig tree and moving a

mountain.

[66]Another name for this special faith, in addition to “mountain-moving,” might be “wonder-working” faith! The Amplified Bible reads: “To another (wonder-working) faith.”

[67]There is always the danger, even unknowingly, of replacing God with faith.

[68]The Greek words translated “Have faith in God” are echete pistin theou. This means, “Have a faith which rests on God” (so NBC, in loco). Incidentally, it is a mistake to read the genitive theou as a subjective genitive, hence “of God,” as if the faith were God’s faith (an impossible conception). Rather it is an objective genitive, thus “in God” (as all translations read).

[69]Recalling the words of 1 Corinthians 12:11: “All these [charismata] are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.”

[70]What is needed is not so much a great faith in God as faith in a great God!

[71]Charles S. Price writes, “To believe in healing is one thing; but to have faith for it is altogether something else …. We have made faith a condition of the mind, when it is a divinely imparted grace of the heart” (The Real Faith, 8-9). Truly said!

[72]To “make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts” (1 Cor. 14:1) surely includes the gift of faith.

[73]In most translations the wording is “Increase our faith” (so kjv, rsv, nasb, niv, and neb). That translation is surely possible, for the Greek word rendered “increase,” prostithēmi, often means “add, put to” (BAGD, 719). However, a secondary meaning is “provide, give, grant,” which results in the translation (as BAGD gives it) “grant us faith.” TDNT concurs with this, translating Luke 17:5 as “Lord, confer faith on us” (8:168).

[74]According to Luke 11:13, the gift of the Holy Spirit comes to those who ask God. In this verse Jesus said, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.” Surely the gifts come the same way (cf. Matt. 7:11)-by asking.

[75]One might add to the list the ability to walk on water! We may recall the words of Jesus to Peter, who had ventured out to walk on the sea and began to sink: “O man of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Matt. 14:31).

[76]This obviously is the counterpart to “I believe, I believe” mentioned earlier.

[77]This is why the suggestion of some that the way to handle doubt is not to admit its existence misses the mark. Kenneth Hagin, for example, writes, “You don’t have to doubt, because you are not a doubter: you are a believer. So keep on believing” (How to Turn Your Faith Loose, 28). Such a denial of doubt-“you are not a doubter”-may only compound the problem. If I do doubt in my heart, no matter how much I try with my mind to “keep on believing,” I will only fail.

[78]Some manuscripts add “and fasting.” EBC, in loco, speaks of the addition of “and fasting” as “probably an early scribal gloss.” This seems likely.

[79]Prior to casting out the demon Jesus had been on a mountain (the Mount of Transfiguration) praying (Mark 9:2-8; cf. Luke 9:28: “He … went up on the mountain to pray”).

[80]For example, a person may pray for a mountain literally (i.e., a geographical mountain) to be removed, and doubts will surely crowd in because one suspects such is not God’s intention (even Jesus never removed an earthly mountain). Another example on a less grandiloquent scale is that of praying for a dying person to continue to live. If, however, it is God’s time for the person to end his days on earth, doubts will surely enter, for the prayer is actually contrary to God’s determination.

[81]Such a view is closer to magic than faith. See, e.g., Acts 19:13-16 where such a view backfired on the sons of Sceva.

[82]Charles Farah writes in his valuable book From the Pinnacle of the Temple: Faith vs. Presumption that “presumption is such a universal possibility that even our Lord was tempted by it” (p. 21). Farah thereafter paraphrases Jesus’ words to Satan: “No one has the right … to put God to the test-not even the Son of God. No one has the right to force God’s hand” (p.25).

[83]Far worse than the illustration above about crutches being discarded are instances in which medication has been dispensed with (insulin, for example, being laid aside), with sometimes fatal results. To be sure, God may heal in response to faith so that medicine becomes unnecessary, but to discard medicine prior to God’s healing is presumptuous: this is again an attempt (whether realized or not) to force God’s hand. The difference can be a matter of life and death. Incidentally, in the words of C. S. Price, “the act can be bora of faith, not faith of the act” (The Real Faith, 27); that is to say, giving up crutches, medication, etc., may follow a word of

true faith but to take some such action in an attempt to muster up faith is wholly mistaken and possibly calamitous.

[84]I earlier quoted Kenneth Hagin's words about doubt-"you are not a doubter." To confess doubt is a "negative confession," so likewise is it to confess sickness. "Confessions of lack and sickness shut God out of your life and let Satan in. Confession of disease and sickness gives sickness domain over you" (Bible Faith Study Course, 91). What is needed, therefore, is the recognition by the believer that these evils do not exist; instead, he will only confess prosperity (not "lack") and health (not "sickness"). This is "positive confession." From this perspective there is no need for the gift of faith by which life's negativities may be overcome; faith rather makes a "positive confession" that all is well. I submit that this viewpoint is basically unbiblical, renders unnecessary the gift of faith (also the next gift, healing), and is seriously ineffective in dealing with human problems. To confess healing, for example, in spite of continuing sickness may lead to disillusionment and despair because it leaves people in their situation rather than providing a way out. (See also the Excursus to follow.)

[85]According to Mark 16:17-18, "These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons … they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."

[86]Sometimes called simply "faith teaching."

[87]Kenneth Copeland is the other best-known "faith teacher."

[88]New Thresholds of Faith, 75.

[89]Ibid., 74.

[90]Hagin retranslates Mark 11:22, "Have faith in God" as "Have the God kind of faith." This, says Hagin, is how "Greek scholars tell us this [verse] should be translated" (ibid.). No Greek scholar, to my knowledge, gives such a translation (see also n. 68).

[91]Ibid., 80. Hagin uses the expression "the Greater One" in reference to 1 John 4:4: "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (kjv).

[92]Lesson 23. "How to Write Your Own Ticket with God" is also the heading for a section in Hagin's Bible Faith Study Course, 103-10.

[93]Lesson 23 in New Thresholds of Faith, 84.

[94]Pages 92-96.

[95]Ibid., 93.

[96]Ibid., 96.

[97]Hagin assures us in How to Turn Your Faith Loose that "God wants us to have material, financial, physical and spiritual prosperity" (141).

[98]Bible Faith Study Course, 96.

[99]"Ibid., 91. Also in New Thresholds, 77.

[100]For a further helpful evaluation of "faith teaching" or "positive confession," see the Assemblies of God brochure #34-4183, "The Believer and Positive Confession" (copies are available from the Gospel Publishing House, Springfield, MO 65802). Also see Bruce Barron, The Health and Wealth Gospel, and D. R. McConnell, A Different Gospel.

[101]The kjv, rsv, NIV, nasb, and neb all read "gifts of healing." I have here added the s (as in asv and nkjv) because the Greek phrase is definitely plural: "charismata iamaton." "Gifts of healings" sounds a bit awkward; however, it is important to retain the double plural (see below).

[102]"Gifts of healings" is also mentioned by Paul shortly before he raises the above question. Paul had just spoken of various appointments in the church: "God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings" (1 Cor. 12:28 nasb). (On the matter of "appointments" see discussion in preceding chap. 13, IV.A.n.56.)

[103]Paul is not dealing here with the fact that all believers may engage in healing especially in the proclamation of the gospel. Mark 16:18 reads, "They [believers] will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover"-a statement that is set within a missionary context. Paul's concern is ministry within the body, where healing is particularized.

[104]Note that this is the only time that charismata appears in the list of nine gifts. The word "charismata" was earlier used by Paul to refer to "varieties of gifts" (v. 4) of the Spirit, namely, to all the gifts. But in regard to the area of healing, there are gifts.

[105]"Each individual healing is a gift of God's grace. The bearer of the gift has nothing in his hand; each cure is a new charisma" (Siegfried Grossman, Charisma: The Gifts of the Spirit, 42).

[106]The Scripture adds, "And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured" (v. 9). This demonstrates "gifts of healings" for many people and many illnesses.

[107]This does not exactly parallel Paul's description of one person ministering the gifts of healings, for here elders (plural) minister. The

words of James, however, should not be understood to rule out individual ministry. Individuals, whether elders or not, may be used in the ministry of healing.

[108]E.g., see Matthew 8:13, 16; 12:15; 14:14; 15:28, 30; 19:2; also accounts in the other Gospels.

[109]Although the account deals more directly with demon possession than a bodily ailment, there is unquestionably a healing involved (note the word "healing" twice used). In any event, whether there is need of healing or exorcism, unmistakably faith is critically needed to handle it.

[110]F. F. Bruce writes, "Was the faith theirs [John and Peter's] or his? Probably both" (The Acts of the Apostles, 110). EGT speaks of "the faith of the Apostles as of the man who was healed" (in loco). IB stresses more the apostles' faith: "The faith in question is either the lame man's or, perhaps more probably, the apostles' faith in Jesus which enables them to work miracles in his name" (in loco).

[111]Recall again the words of Mark 16:17 where "those who believe" will, among other things, "lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover" (v. 18).

[112]It may be possible that one person will have both gifts (or perhaps other additional ones); however, the stress in 1 Corinthians 12 is on the diversity of distributions and individuals.

[113]I have often heard it said, "If I could have any gift, I would prefer healing, because it would be such a blessing to others."

[114]Perhaps through a word of prophecy (see sec. VI, pp. 380-88).

[115]Jesus on occasion recognized a healing power in Himself that moved through Him to energize and heal others. In relation to the woman with a hemorrhage who touched His garment, the Scripture reads, "At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him" (Mark 5:30 NIV). Interestingly, Dunn writes concerning Mark 5:30: "This sort of experience is fairly common in cases of faith and spiritual healing" (*Jesus and the Spirit*, 401, n. 36). Then Dunn quotes from J. C. Peddie (*Forgotten Talent*, 123): "The person ministering is always conscious of the power passing through (provided he has developed sufficient spiritual sensitivity) and the patient is aware of its presence from the strange heat or coldness that develops."

[116]Frequently in charismatic groups everybody joins in prayers for healing (perhaps in a circle around the sick person, all laying on hands). This is

not wrong surely, for all believers should pray for the sick. However, this group effort may actually frustrate the activity of the Holy Spirit in anointing *one* person (according to 1 Cor. 12) with gifts of healings. Thus it may be much better for the group to wait for such a person to step forward in ministry. More significant results may follow.

[117]Incidentally, to say a healing has occurred when there is no evidence of such is a serious breach of truth. In that situation, to say, for example, "You are healed; claim your healing in faith" is a disservice both to the one praying and the one prayed for. Sometimes a person prayed for will say, "I am healed though the symptoms still remain." This sounds pious enough and may for the moment make everyone feel good, but it may be a gross distortion. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, desires no hypocrisy.

[118]We may recall again the words about the healing of the lame man through Peter and John's ministry. There was faith on *both* sides. Also a later Scripture about Paul and another cripple reads: "Paul, looking intently at him and *seeing that he had faith to be made well*, said in a loud voice, 'Stand upright on your feet.' And he sprang up and walked" (Acts 14:9–10).

[119]The word "therefore" refers to the preceding words about a sick person calling for the elders of the church to pray for him; then "let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven" (5:14-15). In those words the emphasis is on "the prayer of faith" (which I have also been stressing) and, secondarily, on the forgiveness of the sick man's sins. However, James 5:16 proceeds to point out an integral connection between confessing sins and being healed.

[120]A poultice of figs was commonly used for opening boils and abscesses of many kinds. Incidentally, in the noncanonical Book of Ecclesiasticus are these words: "The Lord created medicines from the earth, and a sensible man will not despise them" (38:4). It is interesting also that Ecclesiasticus combines prayer to God with the importance of a physician: "My son, when you are sick do not be negligent but pray to the Lord and he will heal you … and give the physician his place…. There is a time when success lies in the hands of physicians for they too will pray to the Lord that he should grant them success in diagnosis and in healing, for the sake of preserving life" (vv. 9, 12-14). Sometimes 2

Chronicles 16:12- which reads “[King] Asa was diseased in his feet, and his disease became severe; yet even in his disease he did not seek the Lord, but sought help from physicians”-is viewed as condemning turning to physicians. However, the words “even in his disease he did not seek the Lord” refer back to Asa’s not seeking the Lord in a time of battle but relying instead on foreign help (v. 7). So now Asa totally relied on physicians. Keil and Delitzsch speak of Asa’s “superstitious trust in physicians” and add, “Consequently it is not the mere inquiring of the physicians which is here censured, but only the godless manner, in which Asa trusted in the physicians” (Commentary on the Old Testament, 3:370).

[121]I vividly recall the instance of a friend with a broken leg being prayed for and expecting a miracle. When the miracle did not occur, he very reluctantly went to the hospital where the fracture was mended. My friend felt that God had let him down.

[122]There has been some serious misunderstanding in this area. Harold Horton writes, “Medicine and surgery is the world’s way. God’s way, the only way revealed in the Word, is healing by supernatural divine power. These two ways are entirely opposed” (italics added) (Gifts of the Spirit, 96). Horton even discounts medical healing as “second best”: “Medical healing is not as some people declare, ‘God’s second best.’ It is entirely of the educated world. God has no second best” (ibid.). This view has wrought havoc in some situations where people with medically controllable or curable ailments have spurned treatment, believing that God works only supernaturally. As a result, bodily deterioration and even death have sometimes ensued. For example, there is the tragic account of twelve-year-old diabetic Wesley Parker, who was taken off insulin by his parents because they believed God would heal him through prayer. (See the account in the book of Charles Farah, From the Pinnacle of the Temple, chap. 1).

[123]On one occasion Jesus applied to Himself the proverb “Physician, heal yourself” (Luke 4:23). Again, there is no suggestion of antagonism against the role of a physician.

[124]According to “faith teaching” (discussed in the previous section), it is the “negative confession” of sickness that closes the door to becoming well. Recall the quotation from Hagin (n. 83): “Confessions of lack and sickness shut God out of your life and let Satan in. Confession of disease and sickness gives Satan dominion over you.” Paul’s words “Stop

drinking only water" would be radically altered by Hagin to "Stop confessing you are sick." Furthermore, Paul, by recognizing Timothy's "frequent illnesses," was from the "faith teaching" perspective clearly playing into Satan's hands-letting "Satan in." (It is obvious that the apostle was not aware of the dangers of "negative confession"!)

[125]Unfortunately in some groups today if a Timothy were to show up with a stomach problem, there would be much more readiness to pray for a supernatural healing than to give some down-to-earth Pauline advice! Such advice seems so much "less spiritual." The mistake obviously is to set the spiritual and natural into an antithesis. A good balance, I suggest, is to first pray for the physical ailment. If there is no spiritual healing, then encourage the person, as Paul did Timothy, to use the best natural means (doctor's help, medication, etc.) available.

[126]Also cf. Mark 1:34; 3:10; Luke 4:40; 6:17.

[127]Dunn writes contrariwise: "No doubt Jesus was responsible for curing mental illness, blindness, lameness and deafness; but these could all be hysterical disorders. Even the healing of leprosy and raising of the dead, which Jesus probably [sic!] claimed … may not take us beyond the range of psycho-somatic illnesses…. What is rather striking is that no instances of healing purely physical injuries or mending broken limbs are attributed to Jesus in the earliest stratum of tradition…. There is no instance of a healing miracle which falls clearly outside the general category of psycho-somatic illnesses" (Jesus and the Spirit, 71). It is hard to see how Jesus' healing the blind, lame, and deaf, the curing of lepers and the raising of the dead can possibly be reduced to the level of psychosomatic illnesses. Dunn's reductionism is an unfortunate reading of Jesus' full healing ministry.

[128]The Greek phrase is *astheneian tès sarkos*, literally "illness of the body." The NEB and NASB translate this phrase as "bodily illness." This illness may have been of the eyes (based on Paul's further statement, "You would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me" [v. 15] and "See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand" [6:11]). EGT speaks of Paul's eyesight as possibly "imperilled by a virulent attack of ophthalmia" (3:178). Some have suggested also the possibility of a form of malaria prevalent in regions of Galatia (e.g., see EBC, 10:478; Alan Cole, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*, TNTC, 121); however, there is no biblical evidence of that. Since the word *astheneia* may also be translated "weakness," or "infirmity" (KJV), others

have suggested that Paul was not referring to a disease but to a bodily condition resulting from the many attacks against him in that region, including stoning (see Acts 14:19; cf. 2 Tim. 3:11). So Ridderbos writes, "We can think of this infirmity as the result of what Paul had suffered from his enemies" (*The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, NICNT, 166). However, as Cole says, "The stoning itself was not a 'bodily weakness' " (The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians, TNTC, 121). The language of Galatians 4:13, I submit, points clearly to a bodily, physical ailment.

[129]One will not be free of all ailment any more than one will be free of all sin. God in Christ does bring salvation from sin, yet sin remains in even the most holy life. Only in the world to come will we know perfect holiness. The same is true of perfect health. We have yet to receive what Paul called "the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:23).

[130]Especially sad, then, is the view of some that such gifts are no longer operational. Ronald E. Baxter writes, "Does God heal today? Yes. Are 'the gifts of healing' for today? No. God always healed and always will, but the gifts of healing were temporary" (Gifts of the Spirit, 129). Such antiscriptural teaching is unconscionable and destructive. If God still heals, why will He not do so through healing gifts? Baxter gives this reason: "They [the gifts of healing] passed away as the need for authentication of both the message and the messengers of New Testament truth was swallowed up in the unspeakable power and grandeur of the perfect word of God" (ibid.). Tragically, Baxter's denial of that teaching of "the perfect word of God"-namely, that "to another [is given] gifts of healings by the one Spirit"-strips that very word of its living truth.

[131]NASB has "effecting of miracles" (as in my quotation from 1 Cor. 12:8-10 in the introduction to chap. 13); the rsv reads "working of miracles." However, the Greek word translated "effecting" and "working" is in the plural: energemata. I am using the plural, despite its seeming awkwardness, for reasons I will shortly mention.

[132]In this verse "miracles" precedes "gifts of healings." Their order seems to have no particular significance.

[133]As with "gifts of healings."

[134]I say this because, though healing is mentioned by Paul as a separate gift of the Spirit, it is likewise a work of supernatural power.

[135]No direct reference is made to the apostles' cleansing lepers; however, that activity is probably included in the general references to their

"healing everywhere" (Luke 9:6).

[136]E.g., see Matthew 9:27-30; 12:22; 15:30-31; 20:30-34; Mark 8:22-26; 10:46-52; Luke 7:21-22; 18:35-43.

[137]See my prior discussion of John 14:12 in volume 1, chapter 7, "Miracles," 156-58. Incidentally, to view the promise of Christ to do His works and greater works as having only a spiritual meaning, i.e., the bringing of people into His kingdom, is to disregard the meaning of "works" in the Gospel of John and to limit Jesus' promise. Finis Dake puts it well: "To make this a promise of spiritual works only when he did material and spiritual works is a poor excuse for unbelief' (Dake's Annotated Reference Bible, The New Testament, 112, note r).

[138]According to Acts 19:11-12, "God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them." See also Acts 28:7-9 for other healings.

[139]Acts 16:18; cf. 19:12.

[140]As previously noted.

[141]"Signs" is a word often used for miracles; the Greek word is semeia. See vol. 1, chapter 7, "Miracles," 149-53.

[142]References to picking up serpents and drinking poisons are protectional statements. Paul, for example, was protected from harm when a deadly viper was accidentally picked up and it "fastened on his hand" (Acts 28:3). This was such a miracle that the natives who saw it came to view him as "a god" (v. 6). The New Testament records no example of a person protected from the effects of drinking poison; however, Eusebius (The History of the Church, 151) states that this happened to Joseph Barsabbas (named in Acts 1:23). In any event, the deliberate picking up of snakes or the drinking of poison should not be understood as the demonstration of a miracle. Either would be testing God, and Jesus spoke against this kind of evil when He was tempted by Satan to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test" (Matt. 4:7; Luke 4:12 niv). Thus the activities of snake-handling cults should be viewed as presumptuous rather than miraculous.

[143]To be sure, Peter soon began to sink because of his "little faith" (v. 31), but this does not discount the miracle of his walking on water for a time.

[144]Recall our earlier discussion of the problem of doubt in section III on "the gift of faith."

[145]Recall our earlier discussion of this.

[146]It is worth noting that the first miracle of Jesus, turning water into wine, came at the instigation of His mother Mary. At the wedding in Cana when the wine ran out, Mary said simply to Jesus, “They have no wine” (John 2:3). Regardless of the fact that Jesus responded to Mary rather abruptly, “O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come,” she turned to the servants and said, “Do whatever he tells you” (vv. 4-5). Mary had not the slightest doubt that Jesus could and would act. Thus her complete faith in Him set in motion actions that led to the miracle.

[147]While miracles are “powers” (dynameis), they are not wrought to display power.

[148]Likewise in raising Lazarus, the love of Jesus stood behind it: “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus” (John 11:5).

[149]The man of lawlessness will operate “in the temple of God” (v. 4). This could signify the church (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16). Actually the word translated “temple” is naos, the inner sanctuary, the Holy of Holies. Probably, Paul is saying metaphorically that “the man of sin” and deception will operate out of the very shrine of God’s usual presence.

[150]“The Pharisees came … seeking from him a sign [semeion] from heaven, to test him” (Mark 8:11).

[151]E.g., the death of Stephen (the first martyr) might have been followed by the miracle of his resurrection. Stephen had been active as a deacon in the community of faith, and he himself had done “great wonders and miraculous signs among the people” (Acts 6:8 NIV). However, after Stephen was stoned to death (Acts 7:58), the only thing said about the action of the church was that “devout men buried Stephen, and made great lamentation over him” (Acts 8:2 RSV). Seemingly there was no prayer or other activity by the believing church for a miracle of Stephen’s return to life (as, for example, when Peter prayed for Tabitha and she was restored). If the church (Peter or someone else) had prayed for Stephen’s resurrection, it would doubtless *not* have happened because the Lord had other reasons for Stephen’s death (see Acts 8:1 about Saul’s consenting to Stephen’s death: Saul’s later conversion may have been affected by the way Stephen died. Also there is reference in the same verse to resulting persecution and scattering of the church, which led to a wider Christian witness). So today the situation from the human perspective may seem to warrant a miracle, but it may not be God’s intention. (I recall quite

vividly some years ago a group of us praying a long time over the body of a young child whose death was seemingly accidental. It was a believing, "Spirit-filled" group, including the parents, who prayed and reached out to the little body. Through prophecy a word finally came that God had honored our faith and obedience, but that He had sovereignly taken the child to Himself and was fulfilling His own good purpose.)

[152]See, e.g., John Wimber, Power Evangelism "Appendix B: Signs and Wonders in the Twentieth Century." Also see Pat Robertson, Beyond Reason: How Miracles Can Change Your Life.

[153]The Greek phrase is dynameis te mellontos aidnos. BAGD speaks of dynameis in Hebrews 6:5 under the heading of "deed of power, miracle, wonder."

[154]Wayne Grudem speaks of the functional use of the word "prophet" and adds that "Paul calls anyone who prophesies a προφήτης in 14.32" (The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians, 232, from the section entitled, "Informal Recognition: Those Who Prophesy Are Prophets," 231-34).

[155]Paul speaks in Ephesians 2:20 about the church as "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (cf. 3:5; 4:11; Rev. 18:20). In regard to the order of divine appointments he writes, "God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets …" (1 Cor. 12:28).

[156]See Acts 11:27-28: "In these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them, named Agabus …"; 13:1: "In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers"; 15:32: "Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets …"; 21:10: "…a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea." (Acts 21:9 speaks of Philip's daughters as those "who prophesied"; they are not designated "prophetesses" [as nasb translates the term]).

[157]This distinction between a prophet as one who occasionally prophesies and the prophets (foundational or special) is not always clear in the New Testament. G. W. H. Lampe says, "Within the New Testament period there seems to have been a definite, though to us obscure, distinction between occasional prophesying by 'ordinary' church members, on the one hand, and the exercise of a ministry by 'specialist' prophets on the other" (Christ and Spirit in the New Testament, 257). However obscure, this "definite" distinction needs to be carefully recognized.

[158]Dunn writes, "For Paul prophecy is a word of revelation. It does not denote the delivery of a previously prepared sermon; it is not a word that can be summoned up to order, or a skill that can be learned; it is a

spontaneous utterance, a revelation given in words to the prophet to be delivered as it is given (14:30)" (.Jesus and the Spirit, 228). George Montague writes that "the text of 14:30 suggests that the gift involves a sudden revelation at the moment" (The Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition,! 53). It is important to recognize this because prophecy has sometimes been identified with preaching. For example, Robertson and Plummer write that prophecy is "preaching the word with power…. This gift implies special insight into revealed truths and a great faculty for making them and their consequences known to others" (7 Corinthians, ICC, 266). Leon Morris distinguishes the two by saying that prophecy is "something like our preaching, but it is not identical with it. It is not the delivery of a carefully prepared sermon, but the uttering of words directly inspired by God" (1 Corinthians, TNTC, 187). Gordon Fee writes, "By prophecy … [Paul] does not mean a prepared sermon, but the spontaneous word given to God's people for the edification of the whole. Most contemporary churches would have to be radically reconstructed in terms of their self understanding for such to take place" (The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 660, italics added). Fee's statement is worth pondering.

[159]D. A. Carson writes, "When Paul presupposes in 1 Corinthians 14:30 that the gift of prophecy depends on revelation, we are not limited to a form of authoritative revelation that threatens the finality of the canon" (Showing the Spirit, 163).

[160]See vol. 1, chapter 2, B.3. "Subordinate Revelation."

[161]These are the apostles and prophets of Ephesians 2:20.

[162]The canon of Scripture contains this special revelation given to the apostles and prophets.

[163]"Prophecy" is from the Greek words pro ["for"] and phemi ["speak"].

[164]Dunn, as earlier quoted, referred particularly to 1 Corinthians 14:30 as "a revelation given in words to the prophet to be delivered as it is given" (italics added). In this connection Dunn also quotes favorably words from J. Lindblom, Prophecy: " The prophet knows that his thoughts and words never come from himself; they are given him' " (Jesus and the Spirit, 418). Grudem in regard to the same passage (1 Cor. 14:30) denies a "divine authority of actual words" and speaks only of "a divine authority of general content" (The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians, 67). This statement says far too little. Of course, if a prophecy derives from God, it may be wondered why words often differ so much. Why, for

example, do the words of God in Hosea sound quite different from those in Amos; or why, on the contemporary scene, does one person sometimes prophesy in King James English and another in more modern speech if the words in both cases are from the Lord? The answer surely is that whatever the mode God may speak His word through any human utterance.

[165]F. L. Godet (Commentary on First Corinthians, 626). In relation to another gift, healing, Godet adds that the result of prophecy "is in the spiritual domain an effect analogous to that which is produced on the sick man by the 'Rise and walk' pronounced by him who has the gift of healing" (ibid.).

[166]So reads kjv, niv, nasb (neb similarly has "partial"). The Greek phrase is ek merous, signifying not "imperfect" (as rsv translates) but partial. Ek merous is quantitative rather than qualitative. As Fee says, "It [prophecy] is 'partial' because it belongs only to this age" (The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 645). The next verse (10), reading "when the perfect [teleion] comes, the partial will be done away" (nasb), is better translated by C. K. Barrett as "when totality comes, that which is partial shall be done away with" (The First Epistle to the Corinthians, HNTC, 306). Prophecy is "in part," not because of imperfection in it, but because the complete, the "totality," belongs to the future age.

[167]The Greek phrase is oikodomen kai paraklesin kai paramuthian. The rsv translates this phrase as "upbuilding and encouragement and consolation"; niv, as "strengthening, encouragement and comfort."

[168]In Ellicott's vivid words, prophecy is for "building up, stirring up, cheering up!" (as quoted by Harold Horton in The Gifts of the Spirit, 170).

[169]Prophecy generally is directed to the whole assembly-"he who prophesies edifies the church" (1 Cor. 14:4); however, because (as quoted) the one prophesying "speaks to men," this could imply speaking to individuals as well. Experience today in the charismatic renewal points to both general and individual prophecy.

[170]Similarly Paul wrote later to the Corinthians about the authority given him as an apostle, "for building [them] up rather than pulling [them] down" (2 Cor. 10:8 niv).

[171]Dunn speaks of prophecy meeting a "need in the assembly … for a word of challenge and rebuke to careless or slipshod or detrimental activities" (Jesus and the Spirit, 229). This is well said.

[172]The first use by Paul of parakaleo in 1 Corinthians is in 1:10, where Paul says, “I exhort [parakalo] you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment” (nasb). (See also, e.g., Rom. 12:1; 15:30; 2 Cor. 10:1; Eph. 4:1; Phil. 4:2; 1 Thess. 4:1; 1 Tim. 2:1; note also the use of parakalo in 1 Peter 2:11; 5:1). An exhortation in the assembly by a believer might be similar to these admonitions by Paul and Peter.

[173]The Greek word *parakleesis* is often best translated “encouragement” (as in RSV and NIV here). Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:11: “Therefore encourage *[parakaleite*] one another, and build up *[oikodomeite]* one another, just as you also are doing” (NASB). A further translation of *parakaleo* is “comfort” (especially see 2 Cor. 1:3–6, where a form of *parakaleo* is “comfort” (especially see 2 Cor. 1:3–6 where a form of *parakaleo* is used nine times; clearly “comfort” is the proper translation in these verses). However, in 1 Corinthians 14:3 either “edification” or “encouragement” is more likely (cf. 14:31, where “comfort” is even less likely than in v. 3). Also since Paul uses a third term, *paramythia* (see next above), which may also be translated “comfort,” it is unlikely that *paraklesis* should bear so similar a meaning.

[174]The use of paramythia in its verbal form is clearly shown in John 11:31 that speaks of “the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling [paramythoumenoi] her,” namely, Mary who was mourning the death of her brother Lazarus. ParakaleO and paramytheomai may also be seen together in 1 Thessalonians 2:11: “We exhorted and comforted … every one of you” (kjv). In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul writes, “If one member suffers, all suffer together” (v. 26). It may be to that particular situation that Paul writes in 14:3 about prophecy as consolation.

[175]One in the special order of prophets, namely Agabus, did predict the future. I earlier quoted words from Acts 11:27: “Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch [hence reference to a special order of prophets].” Then the text continues, “And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world; and this [famine] took place in the days of Claudius” (v. 28). (Also see Acts 21:11 for a further prediction by Agabus.) We should continue to bear in mind that in regard to the gifts of the Spirit Paul is not talking about a special order of prophets but of prophesying within the gathered community of believers. Agabus was an

itinerant prophet (along with others who "came down" to a certain place) and as such did predict the future; prophesying in the local body is (as I have described it) basically nonpredictive.

[176]This is especially true today when astrology, fortunetelling, and horoscopes abound. Their claims to predict the future (and thereby possibly to control it) are a far cry from genuine prophecy.

[177]This is contrasted with everyone's speaking in tongues and the effect that that would have on unbelievers (v. 23). (See section VIII, "Kinds of Tongues," for a discussion of that matter.)

[178]The Greek word is ididtes. The kjv reads "one unlearned," nasb "an ungifted man," niv "some who do not understand" (Nivmg "some inquirer"). According to BAGD, the "ἰδιῶται and ἄπιστοι [unbelievers] together form a contrast to the Christian congregation. The ιδ. are neither similar to the ἄπιστοι … nor are they full-fledged Christians; obviously they stood betw. the two groups as a kind of proselytes or catechumens." Hence an *idiōtēs* may also be called an uninitiated person, one who is not yet a "full-fledged" Christian but is inquiring about, looking into, and perhaps being instructed in the faith. He is an "outsider," but as prophecy goes forth his position may quickly change.

[179]"The others" (hoi alloi) is best understood to refer to the others not prophesying, hence the rest of the assembled believers. If the reference were to a limited group of prophets, the Greek phrase would probably be hoi loipoi, "the rest" (i.e., of the prophets). In verse 31 Paul adds, "You can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged." Thus "the others" refers to "all" the rest (i.e., the entire assembly). (On this see especially Grudem, The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today, 70-74, and Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 694.)

[180]The Greek word is diakrinetdsan; niv (similar to rsv above) has "weigh carefully."

[181]F. F. Bruce, following the words "weigh what is said," has in parenthesis "(lit. 'discern' or 'distinguish' it [cf. 12.10], or, just possibly, 'discuss' it), so as to ascertain its direct relevance" (1 and 2 Corinthians, NCBC, 134).

[182]KJV reads "judge"; neb has "exercise their judgment upon what is said."

[183]The Greek word is dokimazete; "to test, examine, prove, scrutinize (to see whether a thing be genuine or not), as metals" (Thayer).

[184]As Amos did in the Old Testament (Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4; 3:11;

5:4 kjv); similarly Agabus in the New Testament: “Thus says the Holy Spirit” (Acts 21:11).

[185]Jesus Himself said, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing …” (Matt. 7:15). Our gathering of believers some years ago had a jolting experience. A man entered the group and prophesied that God wanted all the people gathered to leave their “dead churches.” After the immediate shock many in the group expressed their judgment that the Lord was not speaking in the man’s word. The man, now shown to be a false prophet, left the meeting in anger, never to return.

[186]In the Old Testament God through Jeremiah denounced the false prophets. He said to the people, “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes; they speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord” (Jer. 23:16). Through Ezekiel God similarly spoke against “those who prophesy out of their own minds” (Ezek. 13:2). Such false prophesying is still possible.

[187]Dunn speaks of “an evaluation, a testing, a weighing of the prophetic utterance [italics his] by the rest … to determine both its source as to inspiration and its significance for the assembly” (Jesus and the Spirit, 234). This is well said. Grudem views the weighing as relating to the individual words spoken, “a process whereby every member of the congregation would listen carefully and evaluate each statement, distinguishing what he felt to be good from the less good … helpful from the unhelpful … true from the false” (The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians, 64-65). However, contra Grudem, there is no suggestion in Paul’s words about “weighing” that he intends such piecemeal evaluation. A prophecy is either from God or not; if it is, then it is to be totally received.

[188]EGT speaks of prophecy as “an ἀποκάλυψις [revelation] of hidden things of God realised through a peculiar clearness and intensity of faith” (2:888).

[189]The prior verse speaks of “prophets and teachers” (v. 1). The implication is that through one of the prophets present the words of the Holy Spirit came forth.

[190]In both cases just described, the prophets were those recognized as such and not those who occasionally prophesied. However, whatever the variation between established and occasional prophets, there seems no reason to believe that the method of prophesying differs.

[191]Incidentally, this does not call for an unnatural voice. A loud, booming

voice crying forth a “Thus saith the Lord” is no more divinely inspired fian a quiet and natural voice declaring His word! (The unnatural voice, meant to impress, night even be that of a false prophet.)

[192]The niv translates verse 32 thus: “The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.”

[193]The Greek word translated “distinguishings” is in the plural. So again (as with the previous two gifts), despite the awkwardness in English, I am translating it as plural.

[194]KJV reads “discerning” (singular). I will frequently use the plural, “discernings,” in what follows.

[195]The verbal form of diakrisis is diakrinō-literally, to “judge through” (dia + krinō). Diakrinō is the same verb used in 1 Corinthians 14:29: “Let the others weigh [or judge] what is said” (recall our discussion in sect. VI, “Prophecy”).

[196]As Harold Horton says, “There is no such gift as the Gift of Discernment” (The Gifts of the Spirit, 70).

[197]Bittlinger speaks of this gift as “the ability to distinguish between divine, human, and demonic powers” (Gifts and Graces, 45).

[198]Recall our discussion in section VI.

[199]In Hebrews 4:13 there is this statement: “Before him [God] no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” Accordingly, through the action of the Holy Spirit-the Spirit of God operating by the gift of discernings of spirits-human spirits are “open and laid bare.”

[200]This is not necessarily done by the person operating in the gift. Someone else, or others, may now be used in providing that ministry.

[201]A person in totality is body, soul (including mind, emotions, and will), and spirit (see vol. 1, chap. 9, “Man,” II.). Spirit is more than and deeper than soul or mind even when such is viewed in its subconscious dimension.

[202]Three comments: (1) The gift of discernings of spirits is much needed before an exorcism occurs: it can be a serious mistake, often resulting in serious harm, if deliverance is attempted when no evil spirit is present. (2) The gift of discernings of spirits is not a gift of exorcism. When the discernment is correctly made, the way is prepared for any believer- of course, including the discerner-to engage in deliverance. (3) The gift of discernings of spirits does not ordinarily relate to exorcism within the

Christian fellowship, since (as previously discussed) believers are not demon-possessed; however, there can be demonic attacks of many kinds that need to be perceived and properly dealt with.

[203]EGT states that " 'discernment of spirits' is the counterpart and safeguard of 'prophesying' " (2:888). Dunn writes, "Discerning of spirits is to be understood as evaluation of prophetic utterances, an investigating and interpreting which throws light on their source and their significance" (Jesus and the Spirit, 236, italics his).

[204]Section VI, 4.

[205]Dunn adds to the words quoted in n. 203: "The importance of this charisma as a regulative force within the charismatic community can hardly be overemphasized" (Jesus and the Spirit, 236).

[206]Recall the earlier discussion in section V, "Workings of Miracles."

[207]Literally, "miracles, signs, and wonders of a lie [Gr. pseudous]."

[208]Not all that is supernatural is of God. Satan also operates in that realm.

[209]"The man of lawlessness," it is important to observe, "takes his seat in the temple of God" (2 Thess. 2:3-4). See n. 149 supra. Whether "the temple" refers to Jerusalem (many commentators) or the church (Calvin and others), the significant thing is that the force of evil is most satanic-subtle, blinding, misleading-when operating within God's holy precincts.

[210]To review: these five gifts are faith, gifts of healings, workings of miracles, prophecy, and discernings of spirits. Faith heads this list as essential basis for all that follows; discernment rounds out the list as illumination on all that has preceded. Thus ideally all these gifts work together in perfect harmony.

[211]For a helpful discussion of this see Gifts of the Spirit by Gordon Lindsay, volume 2, chapter 2, "The Discerning of Angelic Spirits."

[212]See also vol. 1, chapter 8, section V: "Human Experience of Angels."

[213]"Those who will inherit salvation" points to the believers' completion of salvation in the coming age.

[214]Elisha also had beheld "a chariot of fire and horses of fire" (2 Kings 2:11) when Elijah was taken up into heaven. Truly Elisha had a singular gift of perception.

[215]By Lanny Wolfe, used by permission, Lanny Wolfe Music Co. (ASCAP).

[216]RSV and nasb translate 1 Corinthians 12:10 as "various kinds of tongues"; niv- "different kinds of tongues; kjv-"divers kinds of tongues."

However, the Greek phrase is simply gene glosson, “kinds of tongues.”

[217]Word of wisdom is not necessarily followed by word of knowledge whereas tongues must be followed by interpretation (see below for fuller discussion).

[218]The Greek for “other tongues” is heteroglossois in 1 Corinthians; it is glosses heteras in the lxx. It will be recalled that “other tongues” in Acts 2:4 is heterais glossais. (Also see chap. 9, n. 62.) I will discuss the Isaiah quotation later.

[219]In the Gospels there is frequently a word or words given in Aramaic then immediately translated into Greek (e.g., Matt. 27:33; Mark 5:41; 15:34; John 1:38, 41-42). Obviously, Aramaic is not spoken in tongues; nor is the translation an interpretation (see section IX).

[220]The other seven gifts are found earlier in the Old Testament and the Gospels.

[221]E.g., Bruce speaks of “nine forms of ‘spiritual manifestation’” as “probably in descending order of value” (7 and 2 Corinthians, NCBC, 119), thus tongues and interpretation of tongues are the least in value. Incidentally, the idea of “last because least” hardly is in line with Paul’s speaking in 1 Corinthians 13 about “faith, hope, love” (v. 13) in that order. “Love” is listed last, but it surely is not least, for Paul adds, “but the greatest of these is love”!

[222]Fee says that tongues “is listed last not because it is ‘least,’ but because it is the problem” (First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 572). Even if one were to affirm that the Corinthians overrated tongues (which is quite possible), it by no means follows that Paul’s order relates to a problem.

[223]Recall footnote 50 regarding mental and extramental phenomena.

[224]The quotation from EGT (in n. 50 referred to above), following the statement about the Holy Spirit working “through the nous [mind]” (the first two gifts), and “in distinction from the nons” (the next five gifts), continues with the words “in supersession of the nons” (the last two gifts). The Greek word heteros, “another,” as previously mentioned, separates these three categories.

[225]Prophecy might also seem to belong in this category. However, although the message is from the Holy Spirit, the words are in one’s native tongue, so in that sense they could be called extramental rather than supramental. Interpretation of tongues to be sure is also in one’s native speech (in that sense like prophecy); however, since the tongue interpreted is in the

language of the Spirit, this belongs to the supramental category.

[226]It has been frequently suggested that Paul was referring to “kinds of tongues” when he wrote, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels … “ (1 Cor. 13:1). Tongues from such a viewpoint would refer to a multiplicity of human languages (as possibly at Pentecost) and of angelic languages. In regard to human languages see my previous discussion (chap. 9, III.). Regarding languages of angels I have earlier called attention to Dunn’s statement that “Paul thought of glossolalia as speaking the language(s) of heaven” (Jesus and the Spirit, 244). See likewise Fee, First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 630; Barrett, First Epistle to the Corinthians, HNTC, 299-300; Bruce (1 and 2 Corinthians, NCBC, 125). H. Conzelmann writes that “the wording does not in itself require the equating of angels’ language and speaking with tongues,” but then he adds, “Yet Paul is presumably after all thinking realistically of the language of angels” (1 Corinthians, 221). I have some difficulty in equating angelic languages with speaking in tongues since it is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, who gives the utterance and therefore presumably would speak more than the language of angels. Ralph P. Martin perhaps put it best when he said that “the tongues of angels’ “ is “a Jewish phrase to denote a type of prayer-speech eminently suited to praising God” (The Spirit and the Congregation, 43). Thus the “tongues of angels” is another way of referring to spiritual utterance as being from heaven, even if it is not literally the speech of angels. (Cf. 2 Cor. 12:4, where a man [presumably Paul himself] was said to have been “caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words” [kjv].)

[227]As in the 1978 edition of the niv: “to another the ability to speak in different kinds of tongues.” In the 1983 revision the word “ability” is omitted, the reading being simply “to another speaking in different kinds of tongues.” This is a fortunate alteration.

[228]As in the neb translation: “another has the gift of ecstatic utterance of different kinds.” (See chap. 9, n. 24, for my objection to the use of the word “ecstatic.”)

[229]This is the NASB translation, a good rendition of the Greek text, “*me* [not] *parties glossais lalousin?*”

[230]See chapter 9, “The Phenomenon of Tongues.”

[231]The Greek word for “I want” is thelo. According to TDNT, “θέλειν [thelein] denotes in Paul the weighty and authoritative discharge of office. In this form it always implies resolute will” (italics added) (3:49).

Translations of 1 Corinthians 14:5 that read, “I wish that you all spoke in tongues” (nasb), “I would like every one of you to speak in tongues” (niv), and “I would that ye all spake with tongues” (kjv) are far too weak. The rsv is correct; it is a matter of Paul’s will: “I want you …” (Note the “I want” [thelo] likewise in 1 Cor. 10:1, 11:3, and 12:1; in these instances thelo is translated “I want” [or “do not want”] also in niv and nasb.)

[232]Recall the previous discussion of this in chapter 9.

[233]To be sure, all tongues are given (one does not achieve such) including devotional tongues; however, tongues for ministry is a special charisma or gift of the Holy Spirit.

[234]See chapter 9, “The Phenomenon of Tongues,” IV, “Content.”

[235]As in 1 Corinthians 14:15.

[236]To be effective all of this calls for interpretation (see section IX).

[237]Paul is speaking of the regulation of tongues (see below); however, the relevant point here is that there may be more than one person who speaks in tongues.

[238]Isaiah 28:11, which reads in the rsv as “strange lips and with an alien tongue the Lord will speak to this people,” refers to the speech of the Assyrians who invaded Judah in Isaiah and Hezekiah’s day. Assyrian/Akkadian, while a cognate language to Hebrew, was different enough to be incomprehensible to the average Judean.

[239]Barrett puts it well: “When they are not met with faith (cf. Heb. iv. 2) tongues serve to harden and thus to condemn the unbeliever” (The First Epistle to the Corinthians, HNTC, 323).

[240]The Greek phrase is psychikos anthropos. The rsv reads “unspiritual man”; niv has “man without the Spirit.” These translations make it clear that “natural man” (nasb and kjv) is opposite of “spiritual man.”

[241]The RSV reads “gifts.” Although the Greek is simply ta, “things,” the RSV correctly appreciates that Paul is dealing with spiritual gifts. The background of Paul’s statement relates particularly to the gifts of “word of wisdom” and “word of knowledge” (see previous sections I and II).

[242]Or “discerned” (kjv, rsv, niv). The Greek word is anakrinetai.

[243]In another sense, speaking in tongues is a positive sign for believers: a sign of God’s spiritual presence and power. Paul, however, as we have observed, is speaking in 1 Corinthians 14:22 of a sign in terms of judgment, a sign “to” unbelievers.

[244]I.e., the sound of tongues. See chapter 9, n. 11.

[245]George Montague writes, “A sign is something that makes a person stop and think- and the gift of tongues at Pentecost did just that for the Jews of all languages living in Jerusalem. … It got their attention. In this sense it was a sign for those who did not believe, of whom some would come to believe, some not” (The Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition, 179).

[246]In my experience, singing in the Spirit (in tongues) may particularly have this effect. This is especially the case when a number of people sing together, both words and melody being spontaneously uttered. It is as if an unseen Director were leading the music. The impact on an unbeliever can be quite pronounced.

[247]This psalm or hymn (rsv, niv, neb; the Greek word is psalmon) is probably a charismatic utterance in the Spirit. Barrett writes that psalmon refers to “a fresh, perhaps spontaneous, composition, not an Old Testament psalm” (First Epistle to the Corinthians, HNTC, 327).

[248]“A teaching” likely is a charismatic presentation (see Rom. 12:7 on the charisma of teaching) of a particular theme, hence spontaneous. Dunn writes in regard to this verse (also 1 Cor. 14:6) that “in Paul’s view the activity of teaching ... is also a charismatic act ... in v. 26 both ’hymn’ and ’teaching’ are probably thought of as spontaneous utterances” (Jesus and the Spirit, 237).

[249]For a connection between revelation and prophecy recall 1 Corinthians 14:30: “If a revelation is made to another [prophet] sitting by, let the first [prophet] be silent.” Revelation may also be the background for “word of wisdom” and “word of knowledge” (as discussed in sections I and II). In any event revelation itself is not a gift of the Spirit but background for gifts to follow.

[250]Recall my illustration in chapter 9, n. 67. I will now give another. An applicant for a particular church college must sign the following statement: “If I am offered admission to … and become enrolled, I will not speak in tongues publicly or privately and I will not promote the gift of tongues to fellow students, staff, or faculty.” This is as flat a denial of Paul’s words “Do not forbid …” as can be imagined.

[251]While I was teaching in a seminary some years ago, it became known that I spoke in tongues. For several years afterward there was a quiet but persistent attempt to silence me or else to get me to move on to another place. This covert action in my case has had many parallels elsewhere.

[252]Recall the discussion of teaching and revelation in prior footnotes 247

and 248. “Knowledge” probably refers to “word of knowledge” (1 Cor. 12:8). In this case revelation seems to be the immediate background, but prophecy may also be in view.

[253]Ervin opts for the latter and writes that “tongues are the vehicle for conveying revelation, knowledge, prophecy, and teaching” (Spirit Baptism, 131). I have difficulty with this viewpoint because of the lack of biblical and experiential evidence for tongues and interpretation covering this wide a range.

[254]The Greek word is euschēmonōs. The niv has “fitting” (“a fitting and orderly way”); nasb reads “properly.” BAGD has “decently, becomingly.”

[255]The nasb reads, “All do not interpret, do they?” This more literally follows the Greek me parties diermeneuousin (“not all interpret?”).

[256]This is true even of the gift of faith. Although this gift is often the background and stimulus for such other gifts as healings and miracles, faith has its own unique contribution (see earlier discussion in section III).

[257]For Joseph, see especially Genesis 40-41; for Daniel, see Daniel 2-5, 7.

[258]In the words of Joseph, “Do not interpretations belong to God?” (Gen. 40:8).

[259]The Greek word is diermeneusen.

[260]This is the area of hermeneutics (from hermeneia): principles of interpretation.

[261]See the previous references to this in the introduction to sections VIII and IX.

[262]An interesting Old Testament prefigurement is found in the narrative of Daniel and the handwriting on the wall of Nebuchadnezzar’s palace-MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN, literally “Numbered, numbered, weighed, divided.” Daniel took this cryptic message and then proceeded to interpret its fuller meaning (Dan. 5:25-28).

[263]In either case there is a dynamic equivalence. David Pytches speaks of interpretation as “the dynamic equivalent of that which was spoken in tongues” (Spiritual Gifts in the Local Church, 73).

[264]See the discussion of this in section VI.

[265]For a discussion of the difference see footnotes 276, 278, 290.

[266]This is quite irregular, although it does happen occasionally. Such disjunction is largely due to inexperience. Paul’s prescription (about

which more will be said later) is that interpretation should immediately follow (see 1 Cor. 14:13, 27).

[267]For a fuller discussion see chapter 9, IV; also see the brief reference in preceding section VIII.

[268]Fee translates this phrase as “by the Spirit” (The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 667; also see his n. 3). Whether lowercase s or uppercase 5, the meaning is the same: Paul is referring to tongues.

[269]The Greek word is idiotou. See section VI, n. 178 on the idiotes as an uninitiated or inquiring person. An idiotes was not an unbeliever (1 Cor. 14:23-24 differentiates “outsiders” from “unbelievers”), but not yet a member of the church (as 1 Cor. 14:23 makes clear: “If, therefore, the whole church assembles … and outsiders or unbelievers enter …”).

[270]In a sense this would likewise be the case for all believers present, since they also would not understand the language. However, because of their previous experience of blessing God “with the spirit,” they could, regardless of interpretation, more readily say the “Amen” than one who as an uninitiated or inquiring person is still an “outsider.”

[271]Often in charismatic fellowships singing in tongues occurs without interpretation following. Paul speaks in both Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 about singing “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” If spiritual songs are songs in tongues, as seems likely (recall my previous discussion in chap. 9, III.), there is no suggestion by Paul in this context of subsequent interpretation. Perhaps the reason is that such spiritual singing-a high occasion in worship, both words and melody coming from the Spirit-is in itself edification for all present, including the “outsider.” It could be urged, however, that with interpretation following, there would be further benefit. Either way, the important matter is that all present may be fully able to enter into the worship of God.

[272]Again see chapter 9, IV., and preceding section VIII.

[273]For some of these mysteries see chapter 9, n. 88.

[274]It is sometimes said that since in a tongue one speaks not to men but to God, the interpretation following must likewise be addressed to God. Hence there can be no message to people. Thus if such a presumed interpretation is spoken, it is either another gift of the Spirit (for example, prophecy) or simply a false statement. This viewpoint, I submit, is mistaken. Harold Horton puts it well in writing, “Suppose that in other tongues one were saying to God, O Lord, thou lovest the humble and resistest the proud, would it not be a perfectly good and truthful

interpretation on the lips of another: The Lord loveth the humble and resisteth the proud"? (The Gifts of the Spirit, 155).

[275]Again see chapter 9, IV, and preceding section VIII.

[276]If tongues plus interpretation equals prophecy, I submit, there would be no need for the former two. Why bother about those two gifts (with their complexity) when one gift will do equally well? Remember, however, that both tongues and interpretation are as much distinct gifts of the Holy Spirit as prophecy. Would the Holy Spirit apportion tongues and interpretation when prophecy would suffice? Clearly there must be room, important room, for all three manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

[277]Definitely edification also occurs through interpretation (see 1 Cor. 14:5: "Some one interprets, so that the church may be edified").

[278]Many charismatic fellowships need to reflect more on this matter. The tendency often prevails to identify the interpretation of a tongue with a prophecy. Indeed, as earlier mentioned, though it is out of order, someone may prophesy following a tongue. If, however, an interpretation properly follows a tongue, the results will be different. The interpretation will be of the praise, mystery, or supplication uttered in a tongue; prophecy will be essentially edification, exhortation, or consolation. There is a difference, but it is not always readily recognized. It may take a while for the fellowship to perceive the difference, but the gain will be significant. To recognize and act on the different messages of the Holy Spirit coming forth through prophecy and interpretation is much to be desired.

[279]See next paragraph.

[280]Robertson and Plummer wrote: "One, and one only … was to interpret; there was to be no interpreting in turn, which might lead to profitless discussion. Moreover, this would be a security against two speaking with Tongues at the same time, for one interpreter could not attend to both" (First Epistles of St. Paul to the Corinthians, ICC, 321). This is an interesting observation!

[281]Often in Pentecostal churches one individual regularly speaks in tongues while another usually gives the interpretation. This is not what Paul is speaking about.

[282]I will discuss this in some detail later.

[283]This also demonstrates that though the gifts are individual impartations of the Spirit- "to one … to another … to another" (on through the list of the nine gifts)-the same person may be granted more than one gift.

[284]The Greek word is diermeneutes, the only use of the noun in the New Testament. One should not, however, understand “interpreter” to be an office (i.e., an “official” interpreter), for no such office exists. “Interpreter” simply means “someone interpreting” (the rsv translation, “if there is no one to interpret,” is a helpful paraphrase).

[285]As earlier noted, such words may be valid as another operation of the Spirit or invalid as coming from another spirit.

[286]Verse 13, already quoted, shows Paul’s concern: “Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret” (nasb).

[287]See prior discussion. Also we may observe that Paul soon after adds, “I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind, that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue” (vv. 18-19 nasb). Here Paul expresses both his own superabundant use of tongues and his personal desire to instruct people with his mind. To that end tongues, even “ten thousand,” with interpretation are inadequate (none of the gifts of the Spirit rule out the need for solid teaching). Paul is by no means setting aside tongues and interpretation, but he “also” (a key word in Paul’s statement) wants to instruct people: to that end ten thousand words in a tongue are of less value than five words with the mind.

[288]Recall that Paul said, “I want you all to speak in tongues” (v. 5).

[289]Accordingly, Fee writes about the Corinthians: “The real issue is not tongues per se, but uninterpreted tongues” (italics his) (The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 653).

[290]Earlier I made the point that tongues plus interpretation do not equal prophecy in their results. Now I refer not to results but to value.

[291]Paul’s prior words all the more seem to elevate prophecy: “I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy” (also v. 5).

[292]So Grosheide writes, “Interpreted glossolalia has the same value as prophecy” (The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 320). Similarly Montague: “Paul equates interpreted tongues with prophecy” (The Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition, 176). According to EGT, “The power to interpret superadded to the glossolalia … puts the mystic speaker on a level with the prophet: first, ‘uttering mysteries’-and then making them plain to his hearers, he accomplishes in two acts what the prophet does in one” (2:903).

[293]Recall our discussion of this in chapter 13, IV.C.

[294]For a much more comprehensive discussion of this, see my article entitled “The Greater Gifts” in Charismatic Experiences in History, Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., editor.

15
Christian Living

In this final chapter we will deal with some basic elements of the Christian way of living. This will contain both a review of some things said previously and a consideration of new areas. The subject before us is the Christian lifestyle.

I. DOING THE WILL OF GOD

The primary concern in Christian living is that of doing the will of God. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). Paul speaks about "doing the will of God from the heart" (Eph. 6:6);[1] the writer of Hebrews prays, "The God of peace … equip you with everything good that you may do his will" (13:20–21); John writes that "the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever" (1 John 2:17). The will of God should stand at the forefront of Christian living.

Before proceeding further, let us observe that the will of God is the cause of all that exists. The universe itself came into being because God willed it. In the Book of Revelation the elders around the throne of God sing forth, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (4:11 NIV). *By God's will all things exist.* Again, Christ gave Himself for our redemption according to God's will: "[He] gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father" (Gal. 1:4). *By God's will Christ died for us.*

Also, according to Paul, our salvation is the result of God's will: "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention[2] of His will (Eph. 1:5 NASB). *By God's will we have been adopted as His sons.* Similarly, our sanctification has occurred: "By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10). *By God's will we have been sanctified.*[3] Further, God's will is all encompassing: He "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11 NASB). *By God's will all things are accomplished.*[4] The will of God stands behind everything.

To do the will of God, therefore, is to be in accord with God's will. It is a harmonious flow between heaven and earth. In Christian living doing God's will should have priority over all else.

In His own life Jesus again and again demonstrated the absolute priority of the will of God. Several statements in the Gospel of John particularly show this. On one occasion Jesus said to His disciples, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (4:34). The will of God was the basic

subsistence of His life. Later Jesus declared, “I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me” (5:30). Again Jesus said, “I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me” (6:38). Jesus completely placed His will at the disposal of God the Father. The Synoptic Gospels record Jesus’ readiness to do God’s will even in the midst of great anguish. He prayed in Gethsemane, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39; cf. Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). He prayed similarly two more times, asking to avoid, if possible, the coming horror of crucifixion, but only if such were God’s will. However, since God willed the cross for His Son, Jesus thereafter unhesitatingly accepted it. The will of God was supreme in Jesus’ life.

It is apparent that for Jesus, doing God’s will was neither automatic nor coercive. Since He was the Son of God, it might be assumed that He automatically did His Father’s will. Although He came from heaven, as He said, to do the Father’s will, Jesus still spoke about seeking the will of His Father. Even though He was the Son of God, Jesus was also human and, accordingly, had to seek God’s will. Nor was the will of God a matter of coercion. Jesus’ struggle in Gethsemane, if nothing else, makes it abundantly clear that whereas the Father willed the cross for His Son, He did not compel it. Jesus willingly went to His death on the cross.

This highlights two important facts. First, although God’s will is supreme in the universe, so that by His will all things are accomplished, this did not rule out the freedom of Jesus’ action in doing that will. Second, it follows that for those who belong to Jesus there is likewise freedom to do that same will. There is neither necessity nor compulsion.

Now let us observe the high importance Jesus likewise attached to His disciples doing the will of God. On one occasion Jesus was teaching in a house, and a man told Him that His mother and brothers were standing outside trying to speak to Him. Jesus replied to the man, “Who is My mother and who are My brothers?” Then, “stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, ‘Behold, My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother’” (Matt. 12:48–50 NASB). This doubtlessly shocked all who heard Jesus. His listeners must have been startled at such a seeming breach of the commandment, “Honor your father and your mother,” as well as a denial of obvious family relationships. Mary and her sons must have felt a sharp anguish and the pain of exclusion as they remained outside. And Jesus’ own disciples surely must have been amazed at hearing themselves described as His mother and brothers, indeed His family. The climax was like a lightning bolt: “*Whoever* does the will of My Father … is My

brother and sister and mother."

This incident dramatically shows the importance of doing the will of God. Since Jesus Himself constantly did that will, all who do the same are His spiritual family: they are of kindred spirit. A person cannot, of course, do God's will if his will is still in bondage to sin and evil (there must be prior salvation); but if that bondage has been essentially broken (as with every true believer), then the person is able to do God's will. To do God's will faithfully is to be close to Jesus, so that among those doing His will an older woman may be called His mother, a younger woman His sister, and other men His brothers.[5] A higher stress on the importance of doing God's will would be hard to imagine.

Jesus also spoke in the Sermon on the Mount on the relationship of doing of God's will to entrance into the kingdom. "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21 NASB). Then Jesus spoke of those who some day will say, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" adding, "Then I will declare to them, I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS"[6] (vv. 22–23 NASB). What is of striking relevance here, especially for the charismatic renewal in our time, is the fact that disciples may prophesy, exorcise demons, even perform miracles, *all in Jesus' name*, but not truly belong to Him.[7] Supernatural demonstrations as such do not prove citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. The final proof—above and beyond all mighty works—is the doing of God's will.

Let us leave the subject of false disciples and again stress the need for Jesus' true disciples to do the will of God. Bear in mind the ongoing example of Jesus who said, "I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me" and "Whoever does the will of my Father … is my brother and sister and mother." We need to check often to see whether the will of God is foremost in our lives. There simply is no guarantee that because we are growing in holiness or because we are charismatically endowed that we are living according to God's will. Indeed, if the Father's will was not always easy for Jesus—*the* Holy One and *the* Charismatic One—how much more is it the case for us!

I will be quite blunt. Again and again today there are examples of Christians —many of them longtime believers—who have allowed concern for their own goals and ends to usurp the place of seeking God's will and purpose. This is often the most obvious among church leaders who become driven by a will to succeed, to receive the acclaim of others, to be a "kingdom builder." Once perhaps they were sincerely devoted to God's will, but self-will now drives them

on. Thus no longer are they truly acting as brothers and sisters of Jesus, a part of His doing-God's-will family, although they may achieve worldly success. Moreover, even if they are so spiritually endowed as to prophesy mightily, to cast out demons, to work miracles, they are now existing in the camp of the false followers of Jesus who deserve only a "Depart from me… ." How much they need—indeed, how much all of us need—to say from the heart "Not my will, Lord, but thine be done."

But let us move from these higher echelons of church leadership to the practice of the average Christian. Here we need to ask ourselves, How much am I really concerned to do God's will? This pertains, first, to major decisions in life such as vocation and marriage. Is God's will primary for me as I consider a vocation or a vocational change? Is it what *I* want or what *He* wants? In a marriage consideration, there may be love, but is this the partner God intends for me? Likewise, am I the one for the other person? Then, second, there are the day-by-day decisions at home, school, business, and so on, to be made. Am I asking at every point, "Lord, is this what you want me to do?" James in his epistle speaks of businessmen who say, " 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money'" (4:13 NIV). James then expostulates, "Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that' " (vv. 14–15). *If it is the Lord's will:* this should be the concern of every Christian man and woman in every plan and decision.

It is unmistakable that the doing of God's will should be foremost. But now the important question follows: *How do we know God's will?* We cannot very well do it if we do not know it. In the matter of knowledge Paul prayed for the Colossians that they might be "filled with the knowledge of his [God's] will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Col. 1:9). How can we be "filled" with such knowledge? Later in the same letter Paul speaks of being "mature and fully assured in all the will of God" (4:12).[8] How does such assurance come about? These are no small matters, for knowing the will of God in matters both great and small is of signal importance.

First, *we must be seekers.* Once again we hear the words of Jesus: "I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me." "Seek" is the key word. It means to make the knowledge of God's will a dedicated concern. It is quite possible that a Christian may become so preoccupied with the things of the world—"the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16)[9] —

that any real desire to know God's will recedes into the far background.[10] Consequently, we do not really want to know God's will; we are even fearful that it might not be what we want. As a result nothing is revealed. It may even seem safer to pray, "Thy will be done on earth," than to pray "Thy will be done in my own life," or in this particular matter. To seek is urgent[11] —and as we honestly, earnestly, and perpetually seek to know God's will, He will surely reveal it.

Second, *we need to pray much.* Again, our true guide is Jesus Himself. Not only did He teach His disciples to pray for God's will to be done, but He also demonstrated this in His own life. Many times in the Gospels Jesus is shown to be in prayer. One of the most significant was early in His ministry when He spent a whole night in prayer. The next morning He chose twelve to be His apostles. The Scripture reads, "He went out to the mountains to pray; and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called his disciples, and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles" (Luke 6:12–13). Doubtless, these many hours of prayer were spent seeking His Father's will about the choice of apostles. This would be a momentous decision affecting the whole future of the church, so Jesus knew that He must be in perfect agreement with His Father's will. So He prayed hour after hour through the night. This extended praying of Jesus dramatically shows that the will of His Father, which He always did, was not received or understood except through persistent praying. It follows that if this was true of the Son of God, how much more do we need to pray, and sometimes at great length, to know what God's will is. The other outstanding occasion in Jesus' life, already mentioned, was in the Garden of Gethsemane, where He agonized long in prayer. He prayed once, twice, three times before he had the final assurance that all other possibilities were ruled out and the Father willed that He continue to the cross. Thereafter, despite all the humiliation, pain, and suffering He went calmly to His death.

These accounts of Jesus refer to matters of huge consequences in which through prayer He sought the Father's will. Surely it needs to be the same with us when critical matters calling for decision are at hand. If Jesus did not say a quick prayer of "God's will be done" but prayed long and earnestly on many occasions, can we do less? It is also certain that in all matters, however large or small, we need constantly to know what God's will is. There is hardly a day when we will not profit from praying quietly, "O Lord, what is your will in this regard?" God will surely guide and bless those who so seek.

Third, *we must constantly hear God's word in Scripture*. The most direct answer to knowing God's will is that of listening to His written word. The

psalmist declared, “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (119:105). The more we are immersed in Scripture the more that lamplight illumines the way to go. For example, the Ten Commandments, the words of the prophets, and the teachings of Jesus and the apostles all give concrete instructions on what God wills. Since the Tenth Commandment says, “Thou shalt not covet,” coveting the things of the world must not replace zeal for God’s will and desire. We must keep that commandment always before us. The Lord spoke through Jeremiah, saying, “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me” (9:23–24). Thus, we must glory in only this; it is God’s will. Since Jesus declared “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23), we are not free as His disciples to seek our own self-fulfillment and personal ambition. We must apply Jesus’ words continuously to all our projects. Many other scriptural injunctions, Old Testament and New, could be added; however, the important thing is to so live in God’s word that we will increasingly know God’s will in all matters.

Fourth, to know God’s will *we often need the help of other believers.* It is important to listen to the word of God from a Christian brother or sister. Peter in his first epistle writes to “the exiles of the Dispersion” (1:1) that “it is God’s will that by doing right you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” (2:15). This is a specific word about the will of God addressed to a large number of fellow Christians.[12] So it is today that God’s will may be spoken through one of God’s servants, perhaps a pastor, an evangelist, or a prophet. Through the Christian community a word spoken may serve to clarify or confirm God’s intention. I have discussed at some length the gifts of the Holy Spirit,[13] all of which are for the edification of the assembled believers. This edification will, at times, include a word that enables a person to know God’s will better.

The community cannot substitute for the personal seeking of God’s will. However, because we are members of one another in Christ, we need never go it simply alone. Through the fellowship of others and by their words, we may often gain further insight into the will of God.

Fifth, *we need to have a personal ongoing renewal of the mind.* The will of God is clearest to those whose minds are continually being renewed. Here we focus on the words of Paul: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove [by testing][14] what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom.

12:2 NASB). In this extraordinary statement Paul declares that we may prove by testing and therefore truly discern God's will.[15] This implies that God's will can be proved and tested in any given situation. A person has many possibilities, but which of these is what God desires? Even the reading of Scripture does not always clarify. The answer of Paul is that we may prove, that is, be certain of, the will of God through the renewal of the mind. A person whose mind is regularly renewed can truly discern the will of God. Such a one can perceive God's intentions beyond the conflicting opportunities and possibilities. Indeed, a person with a renewed mind can test alternatives and know the certainty of God's will. Even more, "what is good and acceptable and perfect" will be known. This indeed is much to be desired!

Since such proof and knowledge come through the renewing of the mind, how does this process take place? Paul's words are clear: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed… ." The less we are conformed to the world—its ways, values, goals—the more we can be transformed by the renewing of our minds and, as a result, prove out the will of God. Still, nonconformity to the world is not an easy thing. How do we become nonconformed? Paul answers this in the prior verse: "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies[16] a living and holy sacrifice" (v. 1 NASB). This is not a once-for-all action; rather, we are continually to surrender our total selves to God. Such a surrender is the opposite of conformity to the world. Through this ongoing surrender the renewing of the mind occurs. In this renewal a transformation takes place whereby we can then prove God's will by testing it.

Accordingly, this is one aspect of the process of sanctification.[17] The more we surrender ourselves totally to God[18] the more we will know His will. By undergoing this transformation we can actually examine various possibilities and so prove (as one might prove metal) what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. It is no longer a matter of guesswork or of hoping we have chosen rightly: we *know* what is His will.

Our statements in this section about the renewing of the mind should not stand alone. We also continuously need to be seekers, to pray much, to hear God's word in Scripture; none of this can be overlooked. Without the continuous renewing of the mind, however, we lack that culminating proof of God's will. The decisions may still not be easy, but with a renewed mind we have a touchstone for examining what lies before us and for determining God's will from among all the options.

But let us remember this: the critical matter is the surrender of oneself. The more we offer ourselves as "living and holy" sacrifices—that is, die to ourselves

—the more we are able to discern God's intention and purpose. If we are dying to self-will, no longer are we blocked from seeing and knowing God's will. Our minds, our thoughts, our plans no longer center in ourselves; they center in God. We then see, know, and, yes, prove God's will. The challenge is before us: let us die to self-will and live in the will of God!

We have spoken of *knowing* the will of God; now, as a final point, how do we go about *doing* it? Knowing, though obviously basic, is by no means enough; there must be the follow-up of doing the will of God.

First, there is need for *energetic action.* Few people disturbed Jesus more than those who heard God's word but did not do anything about it. We have earlier noted Jesus' statement that to say "Lord, Lord" is not enough; a person must do the will of the Father. Shortly after this, Jesus brought his Sermon on the Mount to a climax: "Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock… " (Matt. 7:24). Those who hear but do not act are "like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand" (v. 26). Although one must begin by hearing (and in that sense knowing), if there is no corresponding action his house is built on sand that will soon collapse.

Hence, as surely as we know God's will, we must act on that knowledge. If God has revealed to me a certain course of action (perhaps in regard to vocation, marriage, or business, or some more mundane matter), I must forthwith act on it. Indeed, if I do not so act, I may become self-deceived, namely, as if to know God's will somehow suffices for doing it. James puts it bluntly: "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). We must not fail to act on what God has revealed about His will.

This is not always easy. What God wills we may not like. The Bible is laden with accounts of persons, often leaders and prophets, who were bidden to do things that they would not ordinarily choose to do. God spoke to Moses, "I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people … out of Egypt" (Exod. 3:10). Nothing could have suited Moses less; the will of God was not easy. Or consider God's commission to Isaiah, "Go…. Make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes" (Isa. 6:9–10). Who would naturally want this? Both Moses and Isaiah obeyed, and God used each of them mightily.

But, I repeat, action is urgent in small matters as well as large. I quote James again: "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin" (4:17). We may paraphrase this by saying, "Whoever knows what God wills in a given matter and fails to do it, for him it is sin." Our God is a God of action,

Jesus was a man of action—a "doer of the word"—and as His disciples we must energetically do whatever God reveals to us.

Second, *there is need for endurance.* It is important to persevere in the action to which we commit ourselves. The way may seem difficult, the obstacles many, the results slow in working out; nonetheless, if we know we are on the path of God's will, we must endure. This is especially needed if our action results in travail and pain, perhaps persecution. The Book of Hebrews, after speaking about suffering and abuse, adds, "You have need of endurance, so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised" (10:36). Yes, endurance is highly important. Sometimes persons begin on the path of doing God's will, but because of rough experiences they simply fall away. Truly we all have need of endurance.

The example of Paul's determination to get to Rome is especially noteworthy. In his letter to the Romans Paul twice refers to God's will in this connection. He first speaks of his own prayers "asking that somehow by God's will[19] I may now at last succeed in coming to you" (1:10), and later "that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company" (15:32). Paul has no question about God's will in this matter or other matters,[20] for he himself had doubtless done what he urged the Romans to do about proving the will of God.[21] Timing was the only question, that is, exactly when it would occur. In any event Paul, knowing God willed that he go to Rome, remained steadfast through many trials, attempts on his life, and near death at sea (Acts 21–28). Even when he reached Rome, he became a prisoner there. But at last he was able to preach the gospel in Caesar's stronghold. In writing Timothy Paul later said, "This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect" (2 Tim. 2:8–10 NIV). "I *endure everything*." Paul knew the will of God and endured all things to fulfill it. Then come the triumphant words of Paul in which he includes all true believers: "If we endure, we shall also reign with him [Jesus Christ]" (v. 12 NIV).

Endurance in doing the will of God is imperative. Again, this refers not only to large matters such as persevering in our life's calling, but also to any and every situation in which God has placed us. If we know what the will of God is, we are called upon to endure—to hold fast, to persevere regardless of what may come. Satan may attempt to frustrate our action, untoward circumstances may cause much difficulty, even friends may seek to lure us away (perhaps thinking they know better); through it all we must endure.

If endurance sounds grim and heavy, actually there can be joy in it. Jesus, far more than Paul, is the great example of endurance, indeed all the way to the cross. But there was joy even in that. Hebrews puts it like this: "[Christ] *for the joy set before Him* endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (12:2 NASB). Accordingly, we are summoned to "run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith" (vv. 1–2). Whatever may be God's will, by following Jesus' example we can endure with joy.

Third, and finally, we need *supernatural strength.* We are called to act energetically according to God's revealed will and to endure throughout; however, we can do this only by looking for strength beyond ourselves. I have earlier called attention to Paul's statement about being "filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Col. 1:9). A few words later Paul says, "May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy" (v. 11). Note again, incidentally, the phrase "endurance with joy." But the critical matter is that we be "strengthened with all power" to carry out the will of God. We need the supernatural strength that comes from "his [God's] glorious might."

Luke records one of the most touching scenes in Gethsemane in his Gospel. Just after Jesus prayed, "Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (22:42), the narrative reads, "And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him"[22] (v. 43). Even the Son of God in His humanity needed supernatural strength to follow the will of God to the very end. Also memorable are the words of Paul: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13 NASB). Paul could not have endured all his trials without relying on the strength of the Lord.

In conclusion, doing the will of God simply cannot be carried out in our own strength. No matter how great our resolve—since it is *God's* will, not ours—we need His supernatural strengthening. Paraphrasing the words of Paul: "May we —you and I—be strengthened with *all* power … for *all* endurance." In His strength we can accomplish *all* His will. Praise God!

II. WALKING IN THE LIGHT

A second concern in Christian living is walking in the light. Paul puts it in imperative form: “Walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:8). Let us consider what it means to walk in this light.

By way of background, we first observe how the Gospel of John especially sets forth Jesus Himself as the light. According to the prologue, “in him was life, and the life was the light of men…. The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world” (John 1:4, 9). Later Jesus declared, “I am the light of the world” (8:12; also 9:5; cf. 12:46). As the true light Jesus always walked in the light. At one point He asked, “Which of you convicts me of sin?” (8:46). None could respond, for He was wholly light, with no trace of darkness in Him. He walked only in the light.

Second, believers are those who have become people of light. Jesus declared, “While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light” (John 12:36). Paul describes believers as “sons of light”: “You are all sons of light and sons of the day” (1 Thess. 5:5). Elsewhere Paul speaks of believers as “saints in light,” for, he said, “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness …” (Col. 1:12–13 NASB). Peter, in similar fashion, writes about “the wonderful deeds of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). The New Testament bears striking witness that believers are people of light.

Surely our Christian experience confirms this. There was a time when each one of us was in darkness, lost in the shadows of sin and evil. The paths we trod may now and again have seemed to be light, but in the end they were swallowed up by darkness. Then the day came when the “light of the world” truly enlightened us, and we knew for the first time the wonder of becoming people of light. Paul can say to each one of us, “Once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord” (Eph. 5:8). Yes, praise God, we are light in Him!

This is tremendously important because the surrounding world is still in darkness. Paul speaks of “a crooked and perverse[23] generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:15). Without the light of Christ shining through believers, deep darkness enshrouds all. The people of light are essential to a world still in darkness.

But now we come to a critical point: unfortunately we do not always show forth that light. Although we are people of light, we often allow the darkness to crowd in again. If this happens, the darkness can be vast indeed. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said to his disciples, "You are the light of the world,"[24] and then added: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:14, 16). Later Jesus declared, "If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"[25] (6:23).

Against this background the challenge is clear: we must indeed determine to walk in the light. It is immediately following his words "Now you are light in the Lord" that Paul speaks the imperative: "Walk as children of light." Listen to the apostle's full statement in this regard:

> Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them (Eph. 5:8–11 NASB).

Paul's words provide a helpful framework for this walk in the light.

A. The Character of This Walk

This walk must be "in all goodness and righteousness and truth" (Eph. 5:9 NASB)

This is "the fruit of the light," for walking in the light means walking in goodness, righteousness, and truth. To walk in the light is to be devoted to the good over against the evil, to the right or just over against the wrong, to the truth over against what is false. The walk is by no means an easy one because we likewise live in "a crooked and perverse generation"—indeed in a time when crookedness, perversity, and depravity seem greatly on the increase. But people of the light *must* not participate in any of this.

Shortly before Paul wrote about walking in the light he firmly declared: "Among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people" (Eph. 5:3 NIV). "Not even a hint!"[26] These words are much needed today, for sadly many "people of light" have become involved in sexual immorality, various kinds of impurity in life and speech,[27] and are following the world's way of greed and covetousness. However, not the slightest hint of such activity should be among us, for we are children of light, not children of darkness.

As I write these words, there are many scandals abroad in the land among God's people. "Hints" of immorality? Alas, far more: indulgence in sexual vices and greedy materialism have infected large numbers in both high places and low. This is not simply happening among lukewarm believers who are easily carried away by the corruption of our time, but also among many in positions of church leadership. In particular, I must painfully refer to some in the Pentecostal tradition who occupy places of high responsibility. They have succumbed to immorality and greed, giving in to sexual vice and allowing covetousness for the things of the world to pervert their ministries. This is a double tragedy: not only have they nearly destroyed themselves,[28] but they have also undermined the faith of many who had believed in them.

Let me speak quite plainly: There can be *no* substitute for goodness, righteousness, and truth, or, in a word, *holiness*. Preaching the gospel with great effectiveness, "soul-winning" on the streets and in the marketplace, abounding in charismatic gifts—all such admirable activity needs the deep undergirding of holy living. I will speak here particularly of this in relationship to charismatic gifts. Previously I have devoted many pages to the gifts of the Holy Spirit—their

importance, nature, function, etc. But now I must warn about accompanying immoralities.

Let us first look again at the Corinthian situation. As we have noted, Paul could say of the Corinthians that they abounded in spiritual gifts: "You are not lacking in any spiritual gift" (1 Cor. 1:7). In that sense they are an ideal over against today's church, which so often lacks in this area. However, the Corinthians lacked much in terms of holiness and righteousness. For example, there was the heinous sin of incest in their midst—"immorality," says Paul, "of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife" (5:1). Moreover, the Corinthians were doing nothing about the situation. Also, they were defrauding one another: "You yourselves wrong and defraud, and that even your own brethren" (6:8). In addition, they were also guilty of gluttony. When the Corinthians gathered for the Lord's Supper, described by Paul as "a participation in the blood of Christ" and "a participation in the body of Christ" (10:16), they were profaning the holy: "It is not the Lord's Supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk" (11:20–21). These are glaring examples of unrighteousness in a church that abounded in spiritual gifts!

Paul is very blunt: the charismatic Corinthians *must* mend their ways. We may particularly note Paul's strong words regarding the incestuous relationship: "Drive out the wicked person from among you" (1 Cor. 5:13).[29] Paul's intention was not to condemn the man forever but actually to save him,[30] *and* that thereby the church might be purged of its inner evil. Indeed Paul, in this same context, further tells the Corinthians, "You [are] not to associate with any one who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of [sexual] immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber—not even to eat with such a one" (v. 11). Paul had made it clear that he was not referring to association with the immoral of the world: "… then you would need to go out of the world" (v. 10). In the church, however, the situation has to be entirely different, for in it toleration of sin and association with overt sinners must not exist. At one point Paul asks, "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" (v. 6). Then the apostle adds, "Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened" (v. 7). Later in his second letter to the Corinthians Paul urges, "Beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord" (7:1 NASB). The emphasis of Paul is starkly clear: known sin is intolerable in the Christian community; it must not be dealt with lightly, for the Lord intends his people to be a holy people.[31]

I have dealt at some length with the Corinthian situation because of its only

too obvious parallels with the contemporary church scene. Paul's words, to be sure, relate to any church, whether liberal, traditional, or evangelical—all need to hear these apostolic injunctions. But since the Corinthians were charismatics par excellence ("not lacking in any spiritual gift"), the words of Paul should send a strong message particularly to the charismatic renewal of our time. Simply put, charismatic gifts, even in multiplicity, cannot and must not be a substitute for goodness, righteousness, and truth. *A charismatic community, just because it is laden with so much spiritual power, must be all the more concerned that such power be allied with holiness*. From the leadership down to all in the community there needs to be a vital concern for integrity, rignteousness, and holiness in every matter.

Moreover, the members of the community must not be tolerant of evil in their midst (for example, by quickly condoning or too lightly forgiving). God's people should not display harsh judgmentalism but should temper their mercy with an eye to God's justice.[32] There needs to be a strong, ongoing concern for purity and holiness.

Let it be said loudly and clearly: a multiplicity of spiritual gifts cannot substitute for goodness, righteousness, and truth. On the other hand—I must add—a genuine concern for holiness ought never to be set over against the gifts of the Spirit. How desperately the church needs both: a holy and righteous walk on the one hand and an ongoing exercise of the gifts on the other. When and if that day comes, the blessings of God will surely abound.

B. The Motivation for the Walk

Our motivation for the Christian walk is "trying to learn[33] what is pleasing[34] to the Lord" (Eph. 5:10).

These words of Paul introduce an additional note, namely, that God's people of light should walk with a total desire to learn what pleases the Lord. The Christian walk, which is doing the good and the righteous and the true, is inspired by a continuing desire to learn and do what is pleasing to Christ.

The word "please" removes any possible idea that walking in the light is only a matter of doing the right thing. Such could become an impersonal legalism by which believers do the good, the righteous, and the true because it is commanded of them. But when the motivation and—I might add—the goal of walking in holiness is to please the living Lord, there is a great desire to learn what is pleasing in His eyes and to act accordingly.

Here we first have the example of Jesus Himself. In relation to God the Father Jesus declared, "I always do what is pleasing to him" (John 8:29). Note the word "always"—not just now and then but at every moment. Paul writes similarly, "We speak, not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts" (1 Thess. 2:4), adding later, "You ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you may excel still more" (1 Thess. 4:1 NASB). Pleasing God is both the motivation and goal for the Christian walk. Paul's strongest personal statement in this regard relates to his discussion of being at home in the body (this life) or at home with the Lord (the life to come): "Whether we are at home [in the body] or away [with the Lord], we make it our aim to please him" (2 Cor. 5:9). The pleasing of the Lord: motivation and aim both now and in the life to come!

It is quite significant that immediately following Paul's prayer for the Colossians that they might be "filled with the knowledge of His will,"[35] Paul adds, "so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects" (1:9–10 NASB). Here is an additional striking idea: Since believers have a Lord, they should walk worthily of Him in every way, thus reflecting His own nature and character. To claim to be a Christian and *not* to walk in the way of Christ is surely a dishonor to Him and a disgrace before the world.

Finally, doing what pleases the Lord is also the strongest motivation to shun the things of evil and darkness. If one constantly seeks to please a living Lord who is the very embodiment of goodness, righteousness, and truth, there is an

inner revulsion against walking in evil. Sin is intolerable, even a hint of it, in the presence of the holy Lord. To seek to please Him in all things is the surest way to walk in the light.

C. The Walk in Light and the Surrounding Darkness

The Christian has this directive: “Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them” (Eph. 5:11 NASB).

Paul at this point contrasts the blessedness of walking in the light with the hurtfulness and fruitlessness of walking in darkness. The apostle adds that “it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret” (v. 12 NASB). Thus believers are not only to walk in the light by abstaining from all evil,[36] but also to expose the works of darkness—to “show them up for what they are.”[37]

First, there is a strong sense in which the very walk of Christians in the light exposes surrounding evil and darkness. Light by its nature exposes darkness, so that everything hidden becomes visible. So Paul continues, “All things become visible when they are exposed by the light” (5:13 NASB). Things may have been in deep darkness, even hidden, but when the light shines, they are exposed. So when believers walk in the light, the deeds of darkness are made manifest. Jesus declared, “For nothing is hid that shall not be made manifest, nor anything secret that shall not be known and come to light” (Luke 8:17).[38] This occurs through His disciples, true believers who steadfastly walk in the light. The hidden, the secret, perhaps covered over and even tacitly approved, is exposed by the light.

Hence, from this perspective it is not so much what believers say but who they are that exposes the darkness. On occasion Jesus did not have to speak a word; His presence was sufficient to expose evil and darkness, which cried out in the anguish of exposure. Two demoniacs, seeing Jesus approaching, called out, “What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?” (Matt. 8:29). Similarly the very presence of believers walking in the light can expose the darkness of the surrounding world.

This is not to say that a darkened world likes being exposed. We have just noted how the demons cried out in torment at the presence of Jesus. So it is that evil people hate the light. According to the Fourth Gospel, “every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (3:20). Accordingly, believers who shine forth the light ought not to expect evil to delight in their presence. Indeed, as with Jesus, those in darkness will often do everything they can to extinguish the light so that they can continue their evil way.[39] This does not matter: we *must* allow the light to keep on shining

forth as purely and brightly as possible so that evil may be exposed.

I hasten to add that the purpose of our light's shining is not simply to expose evil, but that people, whose evil is now unmistakably manifest, will come to the light. Jesus' very presence was like a brilliant light that exposed the deep and vast darkness of the human race. However, the Lord Jesus did not come to condemn but to save, so that when people recognize their darkness they may come into the light of salvation. Thus it must be for Christians: we are to shine as lights in a darkened world so that people may see their evil in all its dark and terrible dimensions, turn from it, and enter upon the way of eternal life.

Second, walking in the light also includes exposure of the surrounding evil and darkness by speaking to those who are evil. Although the primary exposure of evil is through the presence of the good and righteous and true, there are times when reproof is necessary. The word earlier translated "expose" ("even expose them") may also be rendered "reprove":[40] "even reprove them." One clear illustration of this is King Herod, who had taken his brother's wife and who was verbally "reproved"[41] (Luke 3:19) by John the Baptist for committing this sin. Jesus, the light of the world, many times reproved the evil that confronted Him. For example, He did not hesitate to reprove the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy and evil, even calling them "serpents" and "a brood of vipers." He asked them, "How are you to escape being sentenced to hell?" (Matt. 23:33). Paul many times in his epistles reproved evil in the world. Addressing humanity in general, "O man," he declared, "by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath …" (Rom. 2:3, 5). To Timothy Paul wrote, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus … preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove,[42] rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction" (2 Tim. 4:1–2 NASB). A great number of other similar references could be cited.

The point, then, is this: walking in the light often also includes the reproof of evil wherever it exists. The example of believers as shining lights is in itself an exposure of evil; however, the exposure is intensified when words, like shafts of light, further penetrate the darkness. If words are *not* spoken—and sometimes action not taken—it may seem as if Christians are not really serious about sin and evil, indeed consenting to its practice. In a day when evil is so rampant in the world, can Christians, the people of the light, afford to be silent? Surely judgment begins "with the household of God" (1 Peter 4:17), and we must continue to do housecleaning of our own evil (as we earlier discussed). But this cannot relieve us of speaking against the evil in the world.

Christians should be the first to speak out against moral corruption in society.

This should be done by the church at large wherever it sees God's moral laws being broken—for example, through killing, adultery, stealing, false witness, greed, the killing of the unborn, sexual perversions of multiple kinds (in addition to adultery), misuse of public funds (a form of stealing), lying in high places and low, covetousness of riches and power, and on and on.

Personally also—although this is often more difficult—there needs to be the reproof of evil, especially when it lies close at hand. If, for example, in the place of business, corruption is unmistakably going on, the Christian needs to bear witness against it. Primarily, of course, there should be the witness of one's own honesty and integrity; however, there may also need to be verbal reproof of corrupt practices. Or, if in the public school where one is teaching it becomes apparent that reference to God and moral values is being increasingly eliminated, the Christian teacher needs to continue to bear witness to the truth and possibly reprove corrupting forces. For where neither God nor morality is recognized, the door is wide open for the whole tide of evil (dishonesty, insubordination, drug abuse, covetousness, sexual license, etc.) to sweep in. Or again, if a Christian has responsibility for some aspect of the television medium and encounters an increasing tendency to portray violence and obscenity, he has the right and the obligation to speak out against such and, if necessary, to take appropriate action.

Many such examples could be added. The word of Paul—to repeat—is clear: "Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them" (Eph. 5:11 NASB). This is not an injunction to leave the world—e.g., the place of business—but a call to nonparticipation in the "deeds of darkness." To be sure, the Christian may finally, if there is no change, decide to leave—or he or she may be forced to leave (the world does not often take kindly to Christian reproof!). The hope, of course, is that positive change may occur. For the purpose of reproof and rebuke is never destructive, but they are offered in the hope and prayer that repentance and alteration may come about.

In this connection we may understand the climactic words of Paul: "Everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said, "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you' " (Eph. 5:13–14 NIV). The final intent of all exposure and reproof is that one who receives it (could this include an institution as well as an individual?) may awaken from deadly evil and corruption and thereby receive the light of Christ. Reproof can indeed lead to new life and salvation.[43]

I close this section, "The Walk in the Light and the Surrounding Darkness," with some memorable words from John: "If we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His

Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7 NASB). Our concern now moves from our witness in the world to the life of Christians among themselves. The message is clear. First, walking truly in the light makes for genuine fellowship with other believers. The darkness of sin—self-assertion, jealousy, rivalry, pride, and the like—that enshrouds human relationships is now pervaded by light, so that believers can walk in an even richer and fuller harmony with one another. By walking in the light, Christians experience deep and abiding fellowship among themselves. Second, for those who walk in the light Jesus' blood is available to cleanse from all sin. This is good news indeed, for no matter how faithfully we seek to walk in the light, sinful elements often stand in the way. Christ our Savior, however, knowing that we seek to walk in His light, continues to cleanse us of every sin that mars our walk. For truly, as John later adds, "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (v. 9). Confessing our sins and receiving His cleansing forgiveness, we move ahead in the light.

To walk in the light stands at the center of Christian living.

III. FOLLOWING THE WAY OF LOVE

The final concern of Christian living is following the way of love. Paul writes, "Follow the way of love … "[44] (1 Cor. 14:1 NIV). To follow this way is the climax of the Christian lifestyle.

Jesus Himself was, of course, the supreme example of One who followed this way. The love of Christ—His compassion and His mercy—is shown throughout the Gospel narratives. In regard to Jesus' own disciples, the Fourth Gospel states, "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (13:1). Later in this same chapter Jesus declared, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (v. 34).[45] The new commandment is not love—such had been commanded before—but to love one another *even* as He had loved. Such love also goes beyond the love of Christians for one another: it includes all people whether believers or not, and beyond that even one's enemies. Jesus commanded, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). What Jesus commanded He also did. Even at the cross among His last words were these: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Truly Christ loved to the very end.

So when Paul writes, "Follow the way of love," he means to follow the way of Christ. Indeed, the apostle puts it vividly elsewhere: "Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2). "As Christ loved us" parallels "even as I have loved you"; hence to walk in love is to follow the way of Christ, which He has made known to us. It is, further, to show forth this love to all people.

Here we turn again to 1 Corinthians 13,[46] for nowhere else does Paul spell out more comprehensively the way of love.[47] Furthermore, it is only after the description of love in this chapter that Paul proceeds to say, "Follow the way of love" (1 Cor. 14:1 NIV). As we have earlier observed, this chapter is immediately preceded by these words of Paul: "I will show you a way beyond measure"[48] (1 Cor. 12:31). Hence, 1 Corinthians 13 spells out this way of love that Paul urges us to pursue. While reference will be made to other scriptures, the focus of our attention will be this famous "love chapter."[49]

I will be dealing largely with 1 Corinthians 13:4–7, where Paul describes the way of this love. However, it is important to recall that before Paul arrives at his description of the way of love, he speaks of the urgency of all spiritual gifts being exercised in love (vv. 1–3). Indeed, says Paul, even the most extraordinary exercise of the gifts is profitless without love. The five "ifs" (in vv. 1–3) are an imposing array—"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels …. *If* I have prophetic powers [or "prophesy"], and understand all mysteries and all knowledge[50] …. *If* I have all faith, so as to remove mountains…. *If* I give away all I have…. *If* I deliver my body to be burned … ." Hence, if I have not just one gift but several even to the maximum degree (note the repetition of the word "all"), plus sacrificially endure martyrdom,[51] but do not have love, the results are virtually nil. "I am," says Paul, "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal … I am nothing … I gain nothing." The gifts are still valid—Paul does not question that—but the results are jarring and abrasive for the community, and the person himself becomes nothing and gains nothing from such exercise.[52]

It may seem strange that people can move in the spiritual gifts to an unparalleled degree and yet not have love, but such is possible. The Corinthians themselves are sad illustrations. They were "not lacking in any spiritual gift" (1 Cor. 1:7)—quite an amazing statement by Paul about them. Yet in succeeding pages Paul speaks of such matters as their dissensions and quarrels (1:10–13), jealousy and strife (3:3–4), conceit and boasting (4:6–7; 5:2–6), grievances against one another (6:1–8), pride of knowledge and insensitivity (v. 8), and selfishness at the Lord's table (11:17–34).[53] The Corinthians who lacked nothing in spiritual gifts seemed to lack everything in terms of love.

The relevance of all this for the present-day charismatic renewal should not be missed. Many groups have been blessed with a multiplicity of spiritual gifts; others are hoping for and praying for a larger endowment of the gifts; but often there has not been a corresponding growth in love. Earlier I wrote that one of the effects of the renewal is a new sense of unity and community:[54] this has been all to the good. Yet too often divisions have arisen; petty jealousies and struggles pervade groups; pride and ambition so affect leaders as to bring much opprobrium on the whole movement. The sad, even tragic, thing about some of those who are spiritually blessed in the charismatic renewal, is that through lack of love they have fallen so low as to become—in Paul's word—"*nothing.*" Yes, such persons often still operate in the gifts, exhibit great faith, move in healings and miracles, speak in tongues, and prophesy. By doing so they often attract large numbers of people, but in the eyes of God they have become as nothing because of lack of love. *God is love*—and when there is no love, a terrible

vacuum exists: “I am—we are—nothing.”[55]

On the other hand, if love is truly present, a community moving in the gifts can be a tremendous place of God’s power and presence. If, for example, what Paul speaks of in the opening three verses of 1 Corinthians 13 in terms of tongues, prophecy, knowledge, and faith is happening and is also suffused with love, then the community of believers is greatly blessed and is of untold blessing to others about them.[56]

Before going further we need to proceed with Paul’s description of the way of love. This can serve as a kind of grid to be placed over the Corinthian lifestyle as well as our contemporary situation. Some of Paul’s emphases seem particularly relevant to our day, and these will be considered in more detail. Also I will be alluding to other scriptures, especially in Paul’s writings, statements that deal with the relevance of love to the community of faith. Let us concentrate, however, on 1 Corinthians 13:4–7.

A. The Exercise of Love

Paul begins his description of the way of love with a twofold affirmation: "Love is patient, love is kind"[57] (v. 4 NIV, NASB). More literally, this reads, "Love exercises patience, love exercises kindness."[58] Hence patience and kindness are aspects of love in operation. Love is not an abstraction but is concretely shown in the exercise of patience and kindness.

This is demonstrated, first of all, by God Himself. In his letter to the Romans, Paul speaks of patience and kindness as attributes of God in relation to people who think they will escape His judgment: "Do you presume upon the riches of his *kindness* and forbearance and *patience*? Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" (2:4).[59] Hence we can see that patience and kindness find their origin and pattern in the love of God that is extended generously to all people.

Jesus Himself in every way demonstrated patience and kindness. Indeed, Paul refers to the "perfect patience" of Christ. He describes himself as the "foremost of sinners" who "received mercy … that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience[60] for an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life" (1 Tim. 1:15–16). Jesus' "perfect patience," His longsuffering, even when Paul persecuted Him,[61] is an example of the way He deals with others as they come to faith in Him. In regard to Jesus' kindness Peter wrote, "You have tasted the kindness of the Lord" (1 Peter 2:3). Indeed, throughout Jesus' whole ministry He showed kindness repeatedly to the weak, the poor, the outcasts of society, the brokenhearted, the little children. Many truly "tasted" Jesus' kindness.

It follows that God's people, believers in Christ, should likewise act with patience and kindness. This exercise of love is in one sense an action of the will. Paul makes this point in writing, "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, *kindness*, lowliness, meekness, and *patience*" (Col. 3:12). Like clothing that a person puts on at the beginning of the day, so kindness and patience are to be worn by the believer in his contact with others. Patience and kindness are not so much virtues to be admired as actions to be fulfilled. Love puts on and exercises patience and kindness.

However, lest this seem too voluntar-istic, it is important to recognize that the source of patience and kindness is the Holy Spirit. These qualities are designated

by Paul as belonging to "the fruit of the Spirit": "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, *patience, kindness* … " (Gal. 5:22).[62] The Christian virtues of patience and kindness stem from the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God. Surely they are to be "put on," hence there is a continuing action of the will, but this can be done only in the strength of the Holy Spirit. Since the word "fruit" also suggests maturation (fruit does not mature overnight), this further points to the fact that the exercise of patience and kindness is a matter of growth and development. If this comes slowly, we must keep at it!

Patience and kindness—constantly demonstrated by God in Christ—represent the operation of love in relation to all people. Although in the context of 1 Corinthians 13 this particularly refers to the life of the community of faith, such love must reach far beyond.

1. Patience

Let us now examine *patience* more closely. The exercise of patience suggests, for one thing, a willingness to give people time to change their ways or to perform in some better manner. Paul writes, "We exhort you, brethren, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak," completing his exhortation by saying, "Be patient with them all" (1 Thess. 5:14). Patience does not mean tolerating laziness or timidity or weakness but while exhorting toward positive improvement of action to be patient with results. For example, in the area of the gifts of the Spirit people may be reluctant to move out in boldness. Thus encouragement may be needed as well as patience with those who are slow to act. Patience in any situation means a willingness to wait so that people are given time to move ahead. James writes that "the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until it receives the early and the late rain" (James 5:7). Patience is needed if one is to see results happen in due time.

Patience also closely relates to *forbearance.* Patience is not always easily acquired because it may mean forbearing things in others we do not like. Paul writes the Ephesians, "I… beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with *patience, forbearing*[63][64] one another in love" (4:1–2). Also following the word "patience" in Colossians 3:12 (quoted above), Paul adds, "forbearing one another" (v. 13). To forbear—to put up with—the attitudes and personality traits of some people is not easy. They may "rub" the wrong way; hence all the more patience is needed. This may particularly be the case in a small group of Christians where

the faults and foibles of people become increasingly apparent to one another. Even the way some may operate in the spiritual gifts can seem offensive ("he [or she] is too loud in prophesying" or "too quick to lay hands on everybody," etc.). Forbearance can be quite difficult.

Further, forbearance may also mean *forgiveness.* This can be even harder. Paul continues in Colossians 3:13, "If one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." Even in the closest-knit Christian communities complaints and grievances often occur. Rather than holding on to them, perhaps suppressing them, or even giving vent to them, the way of love is the way of forgiveness. By remembering that the Lord has forgiven far worse things in us than we can ever find in a brother or sister, we are able then to forgive.

Love—as patience, forbearance, forgiveness—is the beginning of the way of love.

2. Kindness

Love also is kind: it exercises kindness. Again this goes back to God Himself. In Jesus' words, [65]'He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked" (Luke 6:35 NIV). Paul speaks of God's kindness in regard to our salvation: "When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy" (Titus 3:4–5 NIV).[66] This kindness of "God our Savior" was exhibited in Christ throughout His earthly life. To walk in kindness is to walk in the way of Christ.

So it is that Paul says, "Be kind to one another" (Eph. 4:32). Love exercises kindness in that it always exhibits goodwill and benevolence to other persons. Kindness accordingly is quite the opposite of harshness and bitterness. Regardless of how unresponsive, even antagonistic, another person may be, love continues to reach out in kindness.

Kindness, accordingly, is a matter of the heart. Added to Paul's words "Be kind to one another" is the word "tenderhearted."[67] Peter similarly writes, "All of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind" (1 Peter 3:8). The word "sympathy" also beautifully expresses a tenderness of heart, for sympathy means to reach out to the other person, to enter into his situation, to share his feelings, even, if need be, to suffer with[68] him. Similar is our English word "compassion,"[69] which also expresses a loving outreach to others. Frequently Jesus is described as having compassion on

people. For examples note the following statements: “He had compassion for them [the crowds], because they were harassed and helpless” (Matt. 9:36). “Moved with compassion, He stretched out His hand, and touched him [a leper], and said … ‘Be cleansed’” (Mark 1:41 NASB). “When the Lord saw her [a widow whose only son had died], he had compassion on her” (Luke 7:13) and raised her son from death. Such compassion was deeply from the heart and issued in acts of kindness.

Being kind to one another is very much needed in the fellowship of believers. A kind word, a sympathetic touch, a compassionate deed—all from the heart and at the right moment—can do wonders in the lives of people. This is love in action; it is following the way of Jesus.

Showing *mercy* is another way of expressing kindness. Just after Jesus said, “He [God] is kind to the ungrateful and wicked,” He added, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36 NIV). Kindness moves into mercy when an action toward the other person goes beyond what he really deserves to receive. Mercy does not disregard what justice may call for, but reaches out to the undeserving in loving and compassionate concern. Mercy toward another person, who rightly stands under judgment for his own actions, often radically changes the person for the better. As James puts it, “Mercy triumphs over judgment” (2:13). Mercy truly can be the way to restoration and wholeness.

In connection with kindness we may likewise speak of *gentleness.* Paul also calls it a fruit of the Spirit. I believe this appropriately comes after kindness[70] because gentleness adds the note of careful, loving action. On one occasion Jesus declared, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden…. I am gentle and humble in heart; and YOU shall find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:28–29 NASB). Jesus was One who would “not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick” (Matt. 12:20).[71] He was gentle with broken spirits, with weary and torn people, with all who cried out for help. In relation to the Thessalonians Paul writes, “We were gentle among you, like a nurse taking care of her children” (1 Thess. 2:7). There again is the note of careful, loving action. In Ephesians Paul links gentleness with humility as an aspect of the Christian walk: “I … entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness” (4:1–2 NASB). Gentleness should mark our daily lives in every relationship,[72] and surely in our close relationships within the community of faith. Especially is the latter important when someone in the community has strayed from the path. Paul writes, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness”[73] (Gal. 6:1). This, indeed, is not easy to do, but gentleness should

mark all dealings that lead to restoration.

The way of love is the way of kindness, tenderheartedness, mercy, and gentleness. Those who walk this way are following the way of Christ.

B. The Opposites of Love

Paul continues his description of the way of love by setting forth a number of opposites. He speaks eight times of *what love is not* before proceeding again in a positive direction. By setting forth these opposites of love the way of love can be seen all the more clearly.

1. Jealousy

"Love is not jealous"[74] (1 Cor. 13:4).

The first problem in Corinth that Paul addressed was jealousy. Despite all their complement of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 1:7), there was quarreling, strife, and divisions among them. Some of the people claimed to belong to Paul, some to Apollos, some to Peter, and some to Christ (vv. 11–12). Paul later refers to this as "jealousy and strife" and says, "For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?" (3:3 NASB).[75] In fact this jealousy was so serious a matter that Paul said, "I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh" (v. 1). If love truly operated among them, this jealousy, strife, and rivalry would not exist.

Unfortunately the situation at Corinth is often repeated today. Far too often local churches become involved in petty quarrels that result in jealousy, strife, and rivalry among the people. Frequently divisions occur and the unity of Christ's body is further broken. Love is wholly eclipsed when jealousy brings forth such strife and division. Many charismatic churches and fellowships have likewise given in to jealousy and strife. Divisions often follow.

Jealousy also may occur among leaders in the church. One leader vies with another to win the adulation of the people and to gain their commitment to his views and enterprise. Sometimes a leader, intensely jealous of the seeming success of another church or group, will adopt almost any plan or program that will denigrate the other while elevating himself. Love is forgotten—as further ill will and separation occur.

A word needs to be added to those in charismatic fellowships. If jealousy among believers about the accomplishments or successes of others occurs, there is, regardless of the operation of the gifts, little or no edification. Jealousy, sadly, replaces love.

Jealousy indeed may be the primary evil to break down fellowship. In the words of Proverbs 27:4: “Wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming; but who can stand before jealousy?” Wrath and anger are indeed cruel and overwhelming, but when jealousy begins to operate, *no one* can stand.

Love is the answer to jealousy. Love unites what jealousy divides; it rejoices in the success of another and is always glad to take second place.[76] Such is the way of love.

2. Boastfulness, Arrogance, Rudeness

“Love is not … boastful; it is not arrogant or rude” (1 Cor. 13:4–5).

These three terms may be grouped together because they all represent egocentric actions that are the opposite of love.[77] Moreover, each was occurring in the church at Corinth and frequently takes place in the church of our day.

Love does not boast.[78] This may initially refer to a whole community of believers who are given to boasting. The Corinthian church was indeed a boasting church, tending to forget that everything it had was a gift of grace. Paul writes, “What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?” (1 Cor. 4:7). Doubtless the Corinthians boasted of their superior status because of the multiplicity of their spiritual gifts. Over against all boasting Paul early in his letter wrote, “God chose what is low and despised [i.e., even the Corinthians] … so that no human being might boast in the presence of God … as it is written, ‘Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord’” (1 Cor. 1:28–29, 31).

Much harm is done today when boasting occurs: leaders who brag of their big churches, evangelists who boast of the numbers of souls saved in their meetings, charismatics who vaunt themselves as being on a higher spiritual plane than others. All such is the denial of love.

Love is not arrogant.[79] Arrogance is really another aspect of boastfulness. To boast about anything (except the Lord!) is a sign of arrogance, false pride, and conceit. Paul urges the Corinthians not to be “puffed up in favor of one against another” (1 Cor. 4:6). This statement of Paul immediately precedes his words about their boasting, and is again related to their party spirit[80] —how they became “puffed up” in their sectarian position. Also they were arrogant in spite of gross sexual immorality in their midst: “A man is living with his father’s wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done

this be removed from among you" (1 Cor. 5:1–2). Some of the Corinthians were so arrogant that they were not willing to submit to the apostle's teaching (1 Cor. 4:18).[81] Also there was the Corinthian way of allowing knowledge to eclipse love. Paul declared, "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (1 Cor. 8:1 NIV).[82] Arrogance lay at the heart of many of the Corinthians' problems.

Unfortunately the same situation often prevails today. Party spirit in the church, prideful unwillingness to deal with gross sin, rebellion against God-given authority, haughtiness of those who claim to know but act without love—in various ways we see these ancient Corinthian attitudes everywhere around us. Moreover, all the spiritual gifts in operation, both then and now, are no guarantee against the destructive forces of arrogance. Love alone can change this; so "follow the way of love."

Love is not rude.[83] Love does not act in an unbecoming or shameful manner. Love senses what is proper in any given situation.[84] Again the Corinthians were failing badly in this regard. Paul had earlier written about the situation of women in the church at Corinth who were not covering their heads when praying or prophesying (1 Cor. 11:2–16). The apostle said that by so doing a woman "disgraces her head" (v. 5 NASB) and disregards her proper relationship to men (vv. 7–9).[85] Such behavior, therefore, is rude and unseemly. Next Paul deals with another impropriety in the church (11:17–34), namely, the rude behavior of people when they came together in a fellowship meal to partake of the Lord's Supper. Actually, says Paul, "it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk" (v. 20–21 NIV). Again, in relation to the operation of the gifts, unseemliness and disorder were doubtless occurring. This is clearly implied in Paul's language, for example, about all speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 14:23) and prophecies given without weighing (v. 29).[86] In all these situations there was rudeness, impropriety, and unseemly action. What love called for was sadly lacking.

The issue is not so much that of right and wrong, but of what is seemly and orderly. Hence, wherever in our churches and fellowships there is indecorous dress and behavior, rudeness with others on an occasion of coming together,[87] disorderliness in the practice of the gifts, and other similar improprieties, there is much need for correction. It is interesting that Paul concludes his discussion of prophecy and tongues by saying, "All things should be done decently[88] and in or der" (1 Cor. 14:40). Such is the way of love.

3. Self-seeking

"Love … is not self-seeking"[89] (1 Cor. 13:5 NIV).

Here we arrive at the total opposite of love: self-seeking. This is not just self-seeking in general, which is always wrong, but self-seeking over against seeking the good of other persons. That this is the meaning is apparent from Paul's earlier words: "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor"[90] (1 Cor. 10:24). Love is totally outgoing.

Surely this is first of all exemplified in Jesus Himself. As Paul puts it in his second Corinthian letter, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (8:9 NIV). "For your sakes"—surely not for His own did He forsake the riches of heaven and take on the poverty of an earthly existence. Likewise throughout His ministry on earth Jesus totally embodied a lifestyle of concern for other persons. In His own words: "The Son of man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). Even as Jesus sought only to do the Father's will,[91] so also He sought always to reach out to others: to teach, to heal, to bless, to save. Jesus walked the way of love.

Let us turn again to Paul. Shortly after urging that no one seek his own good but that of his neighbor,[92] Paul adds, "Give no offense to Jews or Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please all men in everything I do,[93] not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved" (1 Cor. 10:32–33). "Not seeking my own advantage" is the crux: it was the way of Christ, so that Paul can say in the next verse, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (11:1).[94] Paul, like His Master, constantly sought the good of others.

It is apparent that the Corinthians were little concerned about seeking the good of others. For one thing they filed lawsuits against one another. Rather than being concerned about the good of the other person, they were suing and being sued. Paul writes, "To have lawsuits at all with one another is defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that even your own brethren" (1 Cor. 6:7–8). Again, there was the matter of food offered to idols.[95] Some Corinthian believers evidently felt conscience-free to eat such food regardless of the fact that weaker brethren, seeing them, might be caused to stumble. Paul concludes, "If food is a cause of my brother's falling, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall" (1 Cor. 8:13). Paul expands this elsewhere, saying, "It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles" (Rom. 14:21 NASB). To return to the matter of lawsuits: one's rights are not nearly so

important as the concern for the good of the other. If one is willing to suffer wrong, even to being defrauded, the brother may change by this show of love. This is what Paul describes as overcoming evil with good: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21). One’s rights are not the primary issue: indeed, one should gladly forswear these for the good of the brother.[96] The same thing is true about freedom. A strong Christian may be able freely to eat and drink with no compunction of conscience, but if what he eats and drinks causes another person to stumble, then love calls for abstention. For, as Paul says, “if your brother is being injured by what you eat [or drink],[97] you are no longer walking in love” (Rom. 14:15). The basic issue for one’s walking in love can never be one’s own rights or freedom, but always the good of other persons.

Love thus is not self-seeking. This does not mean that there are no legitimate self-concerns. We all have to eat and drink, clothe ourselves, work for a livelihood, carry out innumerable responsibilities, and indeed work faithfully to fulfill God’s purpose in our lives. But still, the emphasis of love in whatever we do comes down to seeking the good of others. Paul wrote the Philip-pians, “Do not merely[98] look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (2:4 NASB). Ultimately, whatever may be our own legitimate interests and concerns, the emphasis cannot rest there. We must ever be reaching beyond to other persons. Such is the heart of following the way of love.

4. Irritability, Resentfulness, Rejoicing at Wrong

“Love … is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong” (1 Cor. 13:5–6).

These three may be grouped together as unloving responses to other persons.[99] Let us examine each briefly.

Love is not irritable.[100] It is very easy for any person to become irritable or provoked at the attitude or behavior of others. This may have been the reason the Corinthians were going to the civil authorities about one another. In any event, other Christians can so get on our nerves that it is difficult not to become irritable and be provoked into some unloving response and action. Hence even though, for example, we and our fellow believers also may be used powerfully in the gifts, the atmosphere can become one of irritability, either overt or covert, and the spirit of love dissipated.

Prickly Christians, touchy Christians,” are not loving Christians. Being quick

to react against the slightest offense (whether imagined or real), being easily upset if others do not agree with one's words or actions, becoming aggravated by another person's peculiarities of speech and manner: these are some of the ways in which irritability expresses itself. All such is the opposite of love.

Love is not resentful.[101] It cherishes no resentment. Again, as in the case of irritability, the actions of other persons may bring about increasing vexation and annoyance. As such actions continue, it is far too easy to become annoyed at every perceived offense and thus to build up resentment. Love, however, is quite the opposite. It takes no offense at a wrong suffered; it keeps no record of evils endured;[102] it is only concerned about the welfare of the other person.

Surely the most significant New Testament statement regarding this is found in the words of Paul concerning God's action in Christ: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting[103] their trespasses against them" (2 Cor. 5:19). Rather than maintain a vast ledger in which are entered all human debts, i.e., trespasses, God was concerned through Christ to reckon not a single sin against the human race. God harbored no resentment despite the countless evils He had endured; rather, He acted in love to save those who had sinned against Him.

Love is not vindictive. No matter what the vexation or evil that one experiences, love seeks to bless the offender. Love forgives—and forgets—and in its so acting, all things take on fresh life and meaning.

Love does not rejoice at wrong.[104] One who walks in love can take no delight in the wrongdoing of other persons. Whatever is wrong or unrighteous aggrieves one whose heart is full of love. Such a wrong may refer to acts of social or economic injustice, for example, abuse of the poor and downtrodden; or to acts of personal immorality—for example, adultery, theft, false witness. Love rejoices over none of these, because all such evils destroy human well-being.

Paul may also mean that love takes no delight in rejoicing over the wrongdoing of someone who has been a source of personal provocation and resentment.[105] It is quite possible, humanly speaking, to delight in the faults of another person, especially if these faults are getting him into trouble. Love cannot, and will not, rejoice in the wrong whether perpetrated against another or inflicted on oneself.

Over against this last negative Paul declares a positive: Love "rejoices with the truth" (NIV, NASB).[106] Wherever truth appears, love greatly rejoices. Paul in 2

Corinthians declares, “We cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth” (13:8). It is in that kind of attitude that love delights, for love can rejoice only where truth abounds.

Love’s rejoicing with the truth occurs even if the truth adversely affects it. It is not easy to rejoice, for example, if the truth spoken against oneself is a word of discipline or rebuke. Still, if the word is true, genuine love takes no offense but rejoices at the word spoken. Love rejoices greatly whenever and wherever the truth is made manifest.

C. The Scope of Love

Now the climax is reached in the description of the scope of love. After Paul carefully delineates the opposites of love, he declares, “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor. 13:7). The scope of love is indeed vast.

1. Love Bears All Things[107]

Love bears whatever may come. Paul had earlier written, “We put up with anything [literally, “all things”][108] rather than hinder the gospel of Christ” (1 Cor. 9:12 NIV). Now he proceeds to say that love does this in regard to all things: it bears, it puts up with, whatever may happen. Love can stand[109] under the most difficult of circumstances. Love bears all things without wavering.

To bear all things surely refers to many of Paul’s previous statements about love. It is not easy for patience and kindness to continue when there is only a negative response. How long can one bear it when the recipients of patience and kindness show thank-lessness, indifference, or—far worse-become even more hardened and unresponsive? How long can one continue to seek the good of others rather than one’s own good when those being helped become antagonistic and belligerent? How long can one endure provocation and avoid resentfulness when others seem determined to irritate and offend? The simple but profound answer is that love bears all things.

Jesus Himself was the perfect demonstration of this love. He bore with the multitudes around Him who pressed Him on every side; He put up with His own disciples in their slowness to learn and ultimately even in their forsaking Him; He received the attacks of His enemies, never protesting or crying out under their mockery and persecution. Jesus, the incarnation of love, bore all things.

That love bears all things means that nothing is excluded. Whatever may come at a person from the outside—whether from the world, from other people, or from fellow Christians—is borne with fortitude and patience. This is by no means easy; for, indeed, only the control of love can keep a person from retaliating. In this connection we may now recall that the last fruit of the Spirit mentioned by Paul is *self-control.* “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,

patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."The constraint of love (the first fruit) is self-control (the last fruit), hence, though they may be viewed separately, it is actually love operating through self-control[110] —thus one basic fruit of the Spirit. Through persistent self-control, made possible by the Spirit, love can indeed bear all things.

The scope of love is thus unlimited. It bears without murmuring or negative reaction all things regardless of their nature or force. Moreover, in this very bearing of all things love operates as a powerful force in the world. For the love that bears up under provocation and irritation—even more, bears up under the attacks of others (whether from friend or foe)—releases a tremendous force for good that can bring about vital change. Such love, truly the love of God in Christ, is a love that knows no bounds.

Love verily bears all things.

2. Love Believes All Things[111]

Love reaches out in belief to all things. Love "always trusts" (NIV), "there is no limit to its faith" (NEB); as such, love "believes all things."

This statement about love is indeed remarkable. If the reference were primarily to God and the things of God—thus believing Him and all things He has given us in His word—it would be immediately understandable. Over and over again the Scriptures attest the importance of such total faith in God; however, Paul here continues to speak about the way of love, namely, in relation to one's fellow man. And this is the remarkable feature: love believes all things in relation to other people. Could this not be the way of deception and folly? A child may believe all things, likewise a foolish person; but does not maturity call for discrimination and judgment? At least from a worldly perspective to believe all things regarding people is surely a gross mistake. If love believes all things, perhaps some counterbalance to love is needed!

Let us pursue this inquiry further. Have not Christians at times been "overbelievers" or, perhaps more accurately, "overtrusters"? The very principle of love seemingly has been a blinder to evil in many situations. Indeed, we are warned in Scripture, "Do not believe every spirit" (1 John 4:1), a warning against false prophets and teachers. How do we reconcile "Love believes all things" with "Do not believe every spirit"? Again, if we believe all things, does not anything and everything become tolerable in the community of faith? Has not such an attitude allowed evil to multiply so that wrong actions of church

leaders and members are readily condoned? Paul himself earlier in his letter to the Corinthians instructed them to deliver the incestuous offender "to Satan for the destruction of the flesh" (5:5). How does such an action accord with Paul's words, "Love believes all things"?

Now it is time to answer. Love is not credulous, gullible, blind, unaware of evil; indeed, it sees deeply into every situation—and still believes. Love-lessness is just the opposite: it believes nothing at all. Mistrust thus dominates every situation.[112] Love perceives the total situation and still believes. Surely the primary example of the love that perceives yet still believes is that of Jesus in regard to Simon Peter. John 1:42 reads, "Jesus looked at him, and said, 'So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas' (which means Peter)," that is, "a rock."[113] Jesus doubtless saw what was in the man Simon—a long way yet from being a rock; but He also perceived the Peter that Simon could become. Jesus was never deceived by Simon, but believing "all things," even the seemingly impossible, Jesus' faith was finally vindicated and Simon became the Rock of the early church.

So it is that we are challenged in love to believe all things. This means that love "always trusts"[114] and believes for the best. The darkness in the human situation and in people must not be casually overlooked or excused—indeed, at times it must be exposed—but through it all love believes in the possibilities that are always there for the good to finally come through. To the very Corinthians whom Paul chastised severely in his first letter he wrote in his second letter, "I have confidence in you in all things" (2 Cor. 7:16 KJV).[115] This indeed was a love that in spite of what was known continued to believe.

In a very practical sense today love keeps on believing when, for example, a child wanders from the path of truth. Love has no blinders on; it fully recognizes the evil but never fails to believe. Moreover, that very believing can be a tremendous force in bringing about eventual, possibly radical change.[116] Similarly, when a Christian leader, long recognized for his upstanding character, falls into gross sin—sin that calls for punishment—love never gives up. It continues to believe that the person will eventually repent and be restored. Love believes to the very end.

3. Love Hopes All Things[117]

Hope[118] is the companion to faith. Indeed, it goes even beyond, for when love

sees no result in its believing, it still hopes. One of the most vivid biblical illustrations of the relation between faith and hope is the life of Abraham. In Romans 4 Paul speaks first of Abraham's faith: "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (v. 3). Later Paul added about Abraham, "In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations" (v. 18). This suggests that Abraham against all earthly hope continued to hope when there was nothing outward to justify that hope. Hope thus belongs to the outer reaches of faith and enables one to move ahead into the future.

In connection with love, hope knows no disappointment. Paul writes in Romans 5: "Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (v. 5 NASB). The love of God floods the believer's heart and reaches out in hope, triumphing over any possible disappointment. According to Proverbs, "hope deferred makes the heart sick" (13:12), but where love abounds, no matter how meager the results, there is no heart sickness or disappointment. For example, one may pray many years for another person's change of heart, but nothing seems to happen. Even so, love does not give up; it continues hoping. There is no disappointment in such hoping, for love by its very nature never ceases to hope.

This means, further, that love is never pessimistic. Even though love sees utterly no results, it does not become downcast. Indeed, as Paul says later in Romans, "Hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?" (8:24). Accordingly, when one hopes for some alteration of the human situation, and things only seem to go from bad to worse, love does not stop hoping. Love knows no despair.

Hope therefore is without limits. When flowing out of love, hope reaches far beyond any earthly hope. Love "always hopes" (NIV) and "hopes all things," even to the boundaries of eternity.

4. Love Endures All Things[119]

The love that bears all things, believes all things, and hopes all things is a love that is steadfast and persistent: it endures all things. Love is unlimited in its endurance.[120] Such love perseveres in and through every situation.

Paul writes Timothy, "I endure all things[121] for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation …" (2 Tim. 2:10 NASB). The apostle had just spoken of his "suffering and wearing fetters like a criminal" (v. 9 RSV). Thus it is endurance through suffering and shame for the sake of others—

the endurance of love. Shortly thereafter Paul specifically links love and endurance: “You, however, know … my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings” (3:10 NIV). Love endures all things —“persecutions, sufferings”—and never ceases to love.

The ultimate demonstration of that love was the suffering of Christ on the cross. Christ “endured the cross” (Heb. 12:2)—all the anguish and torment, all the bitterness and evil heaped upon Him. He “endured from sinners such hostility against himself” (v. 3). The endurance of love is the continuation of love regardless of whatever hostility and persecution may be encountered.

The love that endures all things is love in its ultimate expression. We have noted that love always believes for the best and continues to hope, regardless of the human situation. But now we reach the amazing climax: love endures all things that the world may throw against it. Even if faith and hope should seem to be dissipated in the dark night of evil’s violent attack, love endures. Never in human history has there been a more haunting cry of utter dereliction than that of Christ on the cross, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). *Yet He endured*—to the end!

Such was the love that endured all things: it never fought back, never responded in anger, never sought vengeance. By enduring everything that evil could unleash against Him and absorbing all that evil to Himself, Christ, by His unfailing love, made possible the redemption of a lost world. Love endured—and won the victory.

So we have beheld love in its amazing scope: it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. This leads to a powerful conclusion: “Love never fails; love never ends”[122] 22 (1 Cor. 13:8). Let us finally view love in this double perspective.

5. Love Never Fails

The love that bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things is a love that can never fail. There can be no defeat for a love that bears the seemingly unbearable, believes when all belief seems in vain, hopes in the midst of the most desperate situations, endures through all time and circumstance. This is the love of God in Christ that reaches out through Christians to all people. Such love can know no failure. In the end it always triumphs.

6. Love Never Ends

Love continues even into eternity. Paul immediately adds, “As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge,[123] it will pass away” (1 Cor. 13:8). The spiritual gifts, for all their importance in this life, will be superseded in the world to come when we see “face to face” (v. 12). But love goes on forever. Faith and hope also continue: “Faith, hope, love abide, these three” (v. 13)—faith as eternal trust in God and His purposes, hope as eternal anticipation of ever-new things. However, greater than both faith and hope is love. For love is the very nature of God: to abide in love is to abide in God both now and in all the ages to come.

“Follow the way of love” is the ultimate imperative for Christian living. It is the way that we have entered upon through our Lord Jesus Christ, the way that we are commanded to follow amid all the vicissitudes and challenges of end in the far reaches of eternity. To follow love is to follow God both now and always, this life, and the way that has no through our Lord Jesus Christ, the way that we are commanded to follow amid all the vicissitudes and challenges of this life, and the way that has no end in the far reaches of eternity. To follow love is to follow God both now and always.

[1]This is said to Christian slaves (see vv. 5 and 8), but surely applies to all believers.

[2]The kjv reads “good pleasure.” The Greek word is eudokian.

[3]This refers to our initial sanctification (there is also continuing sanctification). See chapter 4, “Sanctification.”

[4]For detailed discussion see vol. 1, chapter 6, “Providence,” 123-26.

[5]None, however, could be called His father because Jesus had but one Father in heaven (cf. “My Father” in the quotation above).

[6]Capitalized in the nasb because it is a quotation from the Old Testament.

[7]Later in Jesus’ ministry one of His disciples said to Him, “Teacher, we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him, because he was not following us” (Mark 9:38). Hence the man did not truly belong to Jesus. Quite interestingly, Jesus replied, “Do not forbid him; for no one who does a mighty work [or “miracle”] in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me” (v. 39). In the Book of Acts there is the account of “some … itinerant Jewish exorcists [who] undertook to pronounce the

name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits" (19:13). (See also my earlier discussion of false prophets and counterfeit miracles [chap. 14, sections V and VI].)

[8]Paul writes that this was the prayer of Epaphras, "one of yourselves" (also v. 12). Doubtless Paul concurred with it.

[9]These words precede the statement previously quoted, "The world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever" (v. 17).

[10]Earlier I stressed how ego interests may bring about a decreasing concern for God's will. Here the basic point is that lusting after things of the world can have the same result.

[11]This is apparent also in the words of Jesus regarding the kingdom of God, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33); likewise in relation to the gift of the Holy Spirit: "Seek, and you will find" (Luke 11:9, 13). According to Hebrews, God "rewards those who earnestly seek him" (11:6 niv).

[12]See context of 1 Peter 2:13-17 for what this "doing right" involves.

[13]In chapters 13 and 14.

[14]See chapter 4, n. 62.

[15]The neb translates, "Then you will be able to discern the will of God."

[16]While "bodies" is the literal translation (the Greek word is somata), Paul doubtless intends the total self (so neb translates: "your very selves"). Since in the Old Testament animals were killed and their dead bodies presented as sacrifices, Paul is saying that our bodies, hence our whole selves, should be presented not as dead but as living sacrifices. Paul J. Achtemeier writes, "Like the burnt offering given wholly to God, the Christian is to be a total sacrifice to God, and that sacrifice is to consist of the whole of life" CRomans, 195).

[17]See chapter 4, "Sanctification," III.B.2.a, "The Mind."

[18]I spoke in chapter 4 of "dying to sins" (IV.B.l).

[19]The will of God is much stressed by Paul. He uses the Greek word for "will," thelema, twenty-four times in his letters.

[20]In one of the accounts of his conversion Paul declared that Ananias said to him, "The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will" (Acts 22:14).

[21]Recall our prior discussion of this.

[22]This verse is omitted in some early manuscripts. Geldenhuys writes that

"most probably the verses were omitted by later copyists because they had no idea of the Saviour's real humanity and could therefore not understand why an angel had to strengthen Him" (The Gospel of Luke, NICNT, 577).

[23]The Greek word diestrammenes may also be rendered "depraved" (so niv; cf. BAGD-"perverted in the moral sense, depraved").

[24]It is interesting to compare this with the words of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, "I am the light of the world."

[25]Jesus had just spoken of the physical eye as "the light of the body" (6:22 kjv), which he applies metaphorically to spiritual light. Although the context of Matthew 5:14, 16 and 23 is different, the relevant point for our consideration is that though we are shining lights the light in us may become darkness. How great-tragically great-is that darkness!

[26]The Greek text more literally reads "not even be named among you" (as in rsv and nasb). However, the niv vividly captures the meaning of these words.

[27]Paul adds, "Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking" (v. 4 niv).

[28]Paul explicitly adds, "For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure, or greedy person-such a man is an idolater-has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (v. 5 niv). It can be argued that Paul is now speaking of unbelievers; however, his words follow injunctions to "God's holy people" (v. 3). For them surely there is the possibility of repentance and forgiveness no matter how egregious the immorality and/or greed; however, the warning of Paul must not be minimized. Such sins are not insignificant: they are contrary to all that represents "the kingdom of Christ and of God."

[29]F. F. Bruce writes concerning this verse: "It is almost an exact quotation of the LXX version of Dt. 17:7b; 22:24 (cf. Dt. 13:5), where idolatry and adultery are to be purged out of the community by the most drastic means" (1 and 2 Corinthians, NCBC, 59).

[30]Paul had earlier said, "You are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (v. 5). Although the worldly ravages of Satan would be fierce indeed, repentance and thus salvation were the goal.

[31]'Gordon Fee perceptively comments, "The Pauline principle is simple: Free association outside the church, precisely because God, not the

church, judges those on the outside; but strict discipline within the church, because in its free association with the world it may not take on the character of the world in which it freely lives" (The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 227).

[32]Sin by God's people often has tragic consequences. David's adultery with Bathsheba resulted in the death of their son despite David's repentance (2 Sam. 12:13-19).

[33]The Greek word is dokimazontes, translated in the kjv as "proving." Since dokimazo basically refers to proving or testing (e.g., precious metals), Paul's idea here is to try to learn through testing what pleases the Lord.

[34]The Greek word is euareston, translated in the kjv as "acceptable." Although this translation is possible, "pleasing" or "well pleasing" is the more likely translation in this context (see TDNT, 1:457).

[35]Recall our discussion of this in section I.

[36]As discussed in the previous section.

[37]The neb translation of Ephesians 5:11.

[38]These words do not directly speak of Jesus' disciples as the light. However, the preceding verse (v. 16) about the lamp on a stand undoubtedly relates to His own followers (cf. Matt. 5:14-15).

[39]A striking passage is found in The Wisdom of Solomon (a noncanonical apocryphal book) in which evil men say, "Let us lie in wait for the righteous man … the very sight of him is a burden to us, because his manner of life is unlike that of others…. Let us condemn him to a shameful death" (2:12, 15, 20). Note the statement "The very sight of him is a burden …"

[40]As in the kjv. The Greek word is elenchete. Elencho is frequently best translated "reprove" (or perhaps "rebuke"). See, e.g., Luke 3:19; 1 Timothy 5:20; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:13; 2:15.

[41]The Greek word is elenchomenos, literally, "being reproved."

[42]The Greek word is elenxon.

[43]According to EGT, "the quotation ["Wake up, O sleeper … "] comes in relevantly, therefore, as a further reinforcement both of the need for the reproof which is enjoined, and of the good effects of such a reproof faithfully exercised" (3:360).

[44]The Greek phrase is diôkete tën agapën. According to BAGD, diôkete in this context means "pursue, strive for, seek after, aspire to." The kjv has "follow after charity," rsv, "make love your aim," nasb, "pursue love."

The niv reading, “Follow the way of love,” seems appropriate in the light of Paul’s previous description of the “way” of love in 1 Corinthians 13.

[45]See also John 15:12 and 17.

[46]Recall chapter 13 (pp. 343-45).

[47]The word agape (love) is found 75 times in Paul’s letters (eight of which are in this chapter). This is out of a total of 116 times in the New Testament.

[48]This is my translation, as in chapter 13, n. 89.

[49]In chapter 13 I dealt to some degree with 1 Corinthians 13 in discussing the gifts of the Spirit. My concern in that chapter was to emphasize in a cautionary manner that love not be viewed as the greatest of the spiritual gifts but as the “way beyond measure” of the gifts. I also stated that Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 is primarily addressing people who are exercising these gifts. However, as I further intimated there, Paul’s words also refer to all Christians. Karl Barth puts it well in saying that love is “the way which Christians have always to tread whether or not they are endowed by the Spirit or however they are endowed” (Church Dogmatics 4,1, 825).

[50]Paul’s reference to “all mysteries and all knowledge” probably has for background such gifts as word of wisdom and word of knowledge (see chap. 14, I and II). In the context of tongues and prophecy (also faith to be mentioned next), the gifts themselves are also doubtless in mind.

[51]Paul goes beyond the spiritual gifts in referring to giving away all one’s possessions and laying down one’s life. This is significant to note because although Paul is primarily demonstrating the need for the gifts to operate in love, he also includes sacrificial acts that could occur without genuine love. For example, a person might give away everything out of a sense of duty or even sacrifice his body to gain some hoped-for glory (perhaps a better reward in heaven). It is interesting that some early New Testament manuscripts, after the words “my body to be burned,” add “that I may boast [or “glory”].” See margins of rsv, niv, nasb, and neb.

[52]Dunn emphasizes thus: 44Even man at his religious best, at the limit of charismatic possibility, if in all that he lacks love, does neither himself any good (nor presumably his community)” (Jesus and the Spirit, 294). Bruce writes, “The most lavish exercise of spiritual gifts cannot compensate for lack of love” (1 and 2 Corinthians, NCBC, 124).

[53]See below for a fuller description of some of these Corinthian failures.

[54]Chapter 12, section IV.

[55]Although I refer to charismatic renewal groups above, it hardly needs adding that the problem of lack of love is often to be found in many other sectors of the church. My point, however, is that the more that has been given, the more tragic is the default. As Barth says, “The more intensive the work of the Holy Spirit, the richer and the more powerful His gifts … the more urgent it is indeed to call them [Christians] back to this distinctive reality, which is love” (Church Dogmatics 4, 2, 826).

[56]Lenski writes, “While these three verses are negative in form they, nevertheless, imply a corresponding affirmative thought, namely that with love present in the heart all gifts and all works become the treasures which God intends them to be for their possessor” (Interpretation of First and Second Corinthians, 553-54).

[57]The Greek words are makrothymei and chresteuetai.

[58]The Greek words are both verbs. The kjv catches the verbal note in regard to the first by translating “suffereth long.”

[59]Cf. 2 Peter 3:9-“He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (niv). Also on God’s patience see Romans 9:22; 1 Peter 3:20.

[60]Literally His “all-patience”; the Greek is hapasan makrothymian. The niv reads “unlimited patience.”

[61]Recall the words of the exalted Lord to Saul who was ravaging the church: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4).

[62]Paul here lists patience and kindness alongside love, whereas in 1 Corinthians 13 they are described as aspects of love in operation. However, since love is listed first among the fruit of the Spirit, it is possible to view love as having priority over patience and kindness. Surely love, though it may be viewed separately, includes patience and kindness.

[63]The Greek word is anechomenoi, from anecho, “endure, bear with, put up with” (BAGD). To “put up with” is a vivid, down-to-earth translation (see, e.g., 2 Cor. 11:1—“I hope you will put up with [aneichesthe] a little of my foolishness” [NIV]).

[64]Also see Romans 11:22-“God’s kindness to you.” Paul also speaks of “the severity of God … toward those who have fallen [away].” The kindness of God does not eliminate His severe judgment upon sin. However, kindness is the primary note in God’s dealings with mankind.

[65]The kjv, nasb, and neb also read “tenderhearted”; niv has “compassionate.” The Greek word is eusplanchnoi.

[66]The Greek word for sympathy is sympathes, from sympathed, literally “to suffer with.”

[67]Compassion” is from Latin: com-“with” and pati-“suffer.”

[68]Kindness, in Paul’s statement about the fruit of the Spirit, is followed by “goodness,” “faithfulness,” then “gentleness” (Gal. 5:22-23). In another place gentleness is also mentioned after kindness: “kindness, humility, gentleness” (Col. 3:12 niv).

[69]Matthew quotes here from the prophecy of Isaiah in which God declared, “A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench” (Isa. 42:3).

[70]Paul also speaks of gentleness in relation to opponents: “The Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to every one … correcting his opponents with gentleness” (2 Tim. 2:24-25). Peter urges believers in relation to outsiders: “Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15). Gentleness should mark our way in relation to the outside world.

[71]Bruce writes in regard to this passage: “It is likely that Paul is not thinking of behaviour which so flagrantly flouts accepted standards that it brings the community into public disrepute (cf. 1 Cor. 5:5) or which can best be dealt with by a temporary withholding of social fellowship (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:11)” (Commentary on Galatians, NIGTC, 260). In line with Bruce’s statement I would especially urge that when a church leader flouts Christian standards and thereby also brings the church into public disrepute, procedures and actions mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:5, 11 and Romans 16:17 are then in order. An early restoration, as in Galatians 6:1, even “in a spirit of gentleness,” may deal far too lightly with the matter.

[72]The Greek word is zeloi. The niv reads “It [love] does not envy” (similarly kjv and neb). Either “jealous” or “envy” is an adequate translation.

[73]Also see 2 Corinthians 12:20, where Paul speaks of his concern that there may still be “quarreling, jealousy …” among the Corinthians. In Galatians 5:20 Paul includes “strife, jealousy” among “the works of the flesh.”

[74]As Lenski puts it, “Instead of being envious love is satisfied with its own

portion and glad of another's greater portion" (Interpretation of First and Second Corinthians, 556).

[75]Also they are connected with the prior sin of jealousy. In regard to boasting and what precedes it, Godet writes, "With envy [or jealousy], which bears on the advantages of others, there is naturally connected boasting in regard to one's own" (Commentary on First Corinthians, 673).

[76]The Greek word translated "boastful" in rsv is perpereutai, a verb, hence, "Love does not boast" (so in Niv; kjv reads, "vaunteth not itself"). BAGD gives for the verb perpereuomai, "behave as a πέρπερος ("braggart, windbag")." nasb translates, "Love does not brag."

[77]The Greek word is physioutai and is also translated "puffed up" kjv, "proud" niv, "conceited" neb. The verb physioo may also be translated "to inflate … to bear oneself loftily" (Thayer).

[78]See the beginning of verse 6, where Paul speaks of Apollos and himself.

[79]See verses 14-21. The word "arrogant" twice occurs.

[80]Chapter 8 begins, "Now concerning food offered to idols … ." Throughout the verses that follow Paul deals with the difficult question of whether Christians should eat food previously offered to idols and then sold in the marketplace. Knowledge says of course one may eat, for idols have no real existence; however, love says that if some weaker believer may stumble because one eats this food, forbearance is called for. The danger, however, is that knowledge will so "puff up" that the imperative of love will be completely disregarded. Knowledge pridefully claims the right to eat; love foregoes the claim.

[81]The Greek word is aschemonei, a verb, hence "does not act rudely"; "unbecomingly" nasb; "doth not behave itself unseemly" kjv, "behave disgracefully, dishonorably, indecently" BAGD. I believe that nasb and kjv best capture the meaning of aschemonei.

[82]Paul's only other use of the verb aschemoneo is in 1 Corinthians 7:36, translated in niv thus: "If anyone thinks he is acting improperly [aschemonein] toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if she is getting along in years and he feels he ought to marry … they should get married." This suggests the impropriety of stirring up a young woman's affections but holding her off until she is past the blossom of youth. Marriage should take place. (1 Corinthians 7:36 is a difficult passage; so note other translations. Regardless of the varying renditions, the main point is the impropriety, the unseemliness, of a certain action.)

[83]Despite the commonly accepted custom in Paul's day of women being veiled in any public place, it is apparent that some Christian women in the Corinthian church were disregarding this practice, hence "disgracing" their heads. Paul also asserts that since a man properly prays with his head uncovered, for a woman to do the same is to disregard the distinction in sexes. Propriety and order call for the Christian woman praying or prophesying in the church to be veiled. The principle remains the same today, I would add, even though veiling is no longer a sign of modesty and sexual orderliness in Western countries. Women (and men) should dress modestly (I like the words of Robertson and Plummer: "Love is tactful, and does nothing that would raise a blush" [7 Corinthians, ICC, 293]).

[84]Just after discussing the exercise of tongues and prophecy Paul adds, "God is not a God of confusion but of peace" (1 Cor. 14:33). Obviously confusion existed.

[85]What happened in Corinth regarding people rudely rushing ahead to eat while leaving some hungry, also some even getting drunk, may seem little related to today. However, the Corinthian disregard for other persons at the fellowship meal, which led to unseemly behavior, surely can be repeated. Such behavior may not be as crude as that of the Corinthians, but who has not experienced the subtle temptation, for example, at a potluck supper to rush ahead of others to get the "choice" food? Sometimes the last in line finds little remaining! Such rude behavior is the opposite of love.

[86]The nasb reads "properly"; "in a fitting … way" niv. The Greek word is euschēmonōs, the opposite of aschemdnei in 1 Corinthians 13:5. "Decently" is, I believe, a better translation to set over against the idea of the rude, the unseemly, the disgraceful.

[87]The Greek reads literally, "seeks not the things of itself" (ou zetai ta heautes); similarly kjv and nasb. The rsv reading, "does not insist on its own way," is more of a paraphrase.

[88]Literally, "of the other." The Greek phrase is to tou heterou. The kjv reading "another's wealth" is quite misleading today.

[89]Recall our discussion in section I of this chapter.

[90]Corinthians 10:24, supra.

[91]This is not the pleasing Paul speaks against in Galatians 1:10 and 1 Thessalonians 2:4, namely, a compromise of the gospel to curry people's

favor. Paul in 1 Corinthians is talking about no unnecessary offense. See also 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, which begins, “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more.”

[92]This is an unfortunate chapter division; 1 Corinthians 11:1 is the climax of Paul’s preceding words.

[93]See note 80 for elaboration.

[94]C. K. Barrett puts it well: “Love not merely does not seek that which does not belong to it; it is prepared to give up for the sake of others even what it is entitled to” (The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 303).

[95]It is proper to include “drink” here as Paul speaks of drinking wine in verse 21.

[96]The word “merely” (“only” [rsv, niv]) is not in the Greek text. Although it is justifiable to add “merely” because of the “but also” in the words that follow, it is apparent that the emphasis falls on “the interests of others.” The succeeding words about Christ’s total self-emptying (vv. 5-8) make this all the more apparent.

[97]Bittlinger speaks of these three as “the trial experienced by the Christian because of the darkness in others” (Gifts and Graces, 85). The prior five represent “the trial experienced by the Christian because of the darkness within himself” (ibid., 82).

[98]The Greek word is paroxynetai, a verb. The nasb translates “is not provoked”; kjv reads “is not easily provoked” (however, there is no “easily” in the Greek text); similarly niv has “is not easily angered”; neb reads “not quick to take offence.” The only other New Testament usage of paroxyno is in Acts 17:16-Paul’s “spirit was provoked [paroxyneto] within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.” It is interesting that our English word “paroxysm,” which refers to “a sudden violent emotion or action” (Webster), derives from the Greek substantive form paroxysmos.

[99]Barrett translates Paul’s words thus: “Love is not touchy” (The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 303).

[100]The Greek expression is ou logizetai to kakon, literally, “does not reckon the evil.” The nasb translates “does not take into account a wrong suffered”; niv reads “it keeps no record of wrongs” (similarly neb). The kjv reading, “thinketh no evil,” misses the meaning, since it implies that the evil is given rather than received. (See BAGD on logizomai, sec. 1.)

[101]D. A. Carson puts it well: “Love ‘keeps no record of wrongs,’ a private

file of personal grievances that can be consulted and nursed whenever there is possibility of some new slight" (Showing the Spirit, 62).

[102]The Greek word for "counting" is logizomenos, a form of the same word as in 1 Corinthians 13:5.

[103]The Greek phrase ou chairei epi te adikia literally reads "does not rejoice over wrong [or "unrighteousness"]. The wrong, or unrighteousness, is not in oneself but in the other person: it is "over" wrong. The kjv, niv, and nasb translations that variously read "in" are misleading. The neb, while more of a paraphrase than the rsv, rightly reads "over": "does not gloat over other men's sins."

[104]As previously discussed.

[105]The Greek reads syncharei … te aletheia. Note that this second rejoicing is more intensive. The word for the previous rejoicing concerning wrong is only charei, but in regard to truth it is syncharei. The neb rendering of syncharei as "delights in" catches the note of this more intensive joy.

[106]The Greek phrase for "bears all things" is panta stegei. The neb reads, "There is nothing love cannot face"; niv has "It [love] always protects." This latter reading derives from another meaning of the verb stegd. For translations of stego Thayer first mentions "protect" and "cover," adding that some view the meaning of stegd to be "hides and excuses the errors and faults of others; but it is more appropriately rendered … beareth." TDNT renders stegd as "covers" (7:587). Barrett translates it "supports" (First Epistle to the Corinthians, 304). Gordon Fee writes that the "range of meanings [for stegd] would allow 'protect … cover … supports' "; however, he opts for "puts up with," similar to "bears" (First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 640, n. 24). I believe Thayer and Fee are correct, so I am retaining the more traditional translation (as in kjv, rsv, and nasb). Paul's use of stego elsewhere (as we will see in later discussion) gives further support to the translation "bears" (note "puts up with," "stands," in what follows).

[107]The Greek phrase for "we put up with all things" is panta stegomen, hence basically the same as in 1 Corinthians 13:7.

[108]The same Greek word stego is used by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 3:1: "So when we could stand [stegontes, literally, "standing" or "bearing"] it no longer … "(niv). Also verse 5 reads, "When I could stand [stegon] it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith" (niv).

[109]The Greek word is enkrateia. Also see Acts 24:25 and 2 Peter 1:6.

[110]Even as love functions through patience and kindness (see earlier discussion).

[111]The Greek phrase for “believes all things” is panta pisteuei.

[112]Søren Kierkegaard :n his book Works of Love writes, “Love is the exact opposite of mistrust and yet is based on the same knowledge … where love, for instance, believes everything, it is by no means in the same sense as thoughtlessness, inexperience, and credulity believes everything, which believe everything through ignorance and naïveté. No, love is just as well aware as anyone of everything which mistrust knows, yet without being mistrustful” (p. 185). The title of the chapter containing this quotation is “Love Believeth All Things-and Yet Is Never Deceived.”

[113]Both Cephas (Aramaic) and Peter (Greek) mean “Rock” (see Nivmg).

[114]Recall the niv translation.

[115]Note the parallel to the love that believes “all things.”

[116]Augustine attributed his conversion from an immoral life to the many years of believing and weeping prayers of his mother, Monica. A priest once said to Monica, “Go thy way, and God bless thee, for it is not possible that the son of these tears should perish” (Confessions, Pusey trans., 3:12). Later Augustine wrote, “To the faithful and daily tears of my mother, I was granted, that I should not perish” (ibid., 189 n. 2).

[117]The Greek phrase for “hopes all things” is panta elpizei.

[118]The noun “hope” in Greek is elpis. Including the verb elpizein, hope occurs 84 times in the New Testament. Paul uses either the verb or the noun 55 times.

[119]The Greek phrase for “endures all things” is panta hypomenei.

[120]The neb reads “There is no limit to … its endurance.”

[121]The Greek phrase is panta hypomend, almost identical with the panta hypomenei in 1 Corinthians 13:7.

[122]I have given two translations of the Greek verb piptei. Piptei literally means “falls” (see, e.g., 1 Cor. 10:8); however, here the better translation is “fails” or “ends” (see BAGD on πιπτω, 1 Cor. 13:8—“become invalid, come to an end, fail”). The NIV and NASB translate this word as “fails”; KJV has “faileth”; RSV, “ends”; NEB, “will never come to an end.” Both translations, 1 believe, contain important elements of truth.

[123]“Knowledge” refers here to the charismatic gift of 1 Corinthians 12:8. So Gordon Fee writes, “Knowledge in this passage does not mean ordinary human knowing or learning, but refers to that special manifestation of the

Spirit, the utterance of knowledge" (First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 644). Also see my chapter 13, note 94.

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Volume Three

Renewal Theology

The Church, the Kingdom, and Last Things

PREFACE

This volume of *Renewal Theology* is divided into two parts: “The Church” and “Last Things.”

Part 1 begins with a definition of the church. Then such matters as the scope of the church, various descriptions of the nature of the church, and diverse functions of the church are considered. This leads to a discussion of ministry in the church, the ordinances (or sacraments), and the relation of the church to civil government.

Part 2 begins with a brief study of the kingdom of God and after that focuses on the return of Jesus Christ. From the perspective that the return of Christ is *the* great event yet to occur, such matters as the signs, manner, and purpose of His return are considered next. Finally, after reflection on the millennial question, the book concludes with a study of the final judgment and the consummation in the new heaven and new earth.

Renewal Theology: The Church, the Kingdom, and Last Things is the third in a series of volumes. The first two are subtitled, respectively, *God, the World, and Redemption* and *Salvation, the Holy Spirit, and Christian Living*. This present volume brings to a close a study of the full round of Christian doctrines.

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My gratitude to my wife, Jo, is unlimited. She has put all the material on

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CONTENTS

PREFACE

Part One THE CHURCH
1. Definition
2. Scope
3. Description
4. Functions
5. Ministry
6. Ordinances
7. The Church and Civil Government

Part Two LAST THINGS
8. The Kingdom of God
9. The Return of Jesus Christ
10. Signs
11. The Manner of Christ's Return
12. The Purpose of Christ's Return
13. The Millennium
14. The Last Judgment
15. The Consummation
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Part One
THE CHURCH

1
Definition

The word *church*[1] is the usual translation of the Greek word *ekklēesia*.[2] The word *ekklēesia* (plural: *ekklēesiai)* occurs 114 times in the New Testament, and, with four exceptions in the Book of Acts[3] and one in the Book of Hebrews,[4] is translated throughout as “church” (or “churches”). In the Gospels *church* occurs only three times, all in Matthew;[5] nineteen times in Acts; in Paul’s letters sixty-two times (most frequently in 1 Corinthians, twenty-two times); in Hebrews, James, and 3 John five times; and in the Book of Revelation twenty times. The word *church* does not occur in Mark, Luke, John, 2 Timothy, Titus, 1 and 2 Peter, 1 and 2 John, and Jude. It is apparent that the word belongs largely to the period following the life and ministry of Jesus.

I. BACKGROUND

A. The Old Testament

In the New Testament there are two places where in reference to the Old Testament the word *ekklēesia* is usually translated "assembly" or "congregation": Acts 7:38[6] and Hebrews 2:12.[7] In the former, Stephen spoke of "the *ekklēesia* in the wilderness," referring particularly to the occasion at Mount Sinai when Moses received the Ten Commandments. Moses, alluding to that event in Deuteronomy 10:4, spoke of the Ten Commandments as given "out of the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly."[8] Thus the *ekklēesia* was the coming together, the assembling, of the people of Israel. It was the congregation of Israel understood in a dynamic sense as the assembled gathering.[9] Hebrews 2:12 reads: "I will proclaim thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the *ekklēesia* I will praise thee." This is a quotation from Psalm 22:22: "I will tell of Thy name to my brethren; In the midst of the assembly[10] I will praise Thee" (NASB). *Ekklesia* in both Acts 7:38 and Hebrews 2:12 refers to the active assembly of the people of Israel whether for hearing the law or offering up praise.

B. The Greek State

The word *ekklēesia* was also used in the Greek world of New Testament times to refer to political assembly. The assembly consisted of the citizens of a Greek city. In this connection *ekklēesia*, translated “assembly,” occurs three times in Acts 19. The citizens of Ephesus had rushed together to defend their goddess Artemis against the gospel: “Some cried one thing, some another; for the assembly was in confusion” (v. 32). The town clerk finally quieted the crowd, gave some advice, and added, “But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular[11] assembly” (v. 39). After a few more words, the clerk “dismissed the assembly” (v. 41).

The “assembly,” *ekklēesia*, in this incident obviously conveys the note of coming together. The “regular assembly” refers more to official occasions when citizens in a Greek city were called from their usual duties to meet together to act on civic and political affairs.

C. Summary

It is significant that the references in both the Old Testament and Acts 19 to the *ekklēesia* allude to an assemblage of people. The Israelites and the Greeks were called from their regular activities and ordinary responsibilities into assembly. While the *ekklēesia* primarily refers to the ongoing congregation of Israel and to a regular assembly of Greek citizens, there is also the dynamic and active sense of a people called for a particular purpose and activity.

II. THE CHURCH AS “CALLED”

Let us now move on to the predominant use of *ekklēesia* in the New Testament, where the translation is invariably “church.” We may properly define the church as “the assembly of the called.”

A. Called Out

The church consists of those who have been "called out." This is its basic meaning. The word *ekklēesia* is derived from two Greek words, *ek*, "out," and *kaled*, "call" ; hence the church is composed of "called out" people.[12] However —and here is the great difference—the calling is not from ordinary responsibilities but from the dark situation of sin and evil.

In this connection Paul writes the churches (the *ekklēesiai)* of Galatia that Christ "gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of *[ek]* this present evil age" (1:4 NASB). The church accordingly is composed of those "delivered out," hence "called out" ones. Peter, while not speaking of the church by name, speaks similarly in describing his readers ("God's scattered people"[13] [1 Peter 1:1 NEB]) as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people," and then adds that God has "called[14] [them] out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). Thus the church consists of those "called out" of darkness into light. Two other references in Paul's letters are noteworthy. He writes Timothy that God has "saved us and called us with a holy calling"[15] (2 Tim. 1:9). Hence "saved" ones are "called" ones; thus they are the *ek-klēesia.* Paul begins his first Corinthian letter with these words: "Paul … to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling"[16] (1 Cor. 1:2 NASB). The church is composed of those "sanctified" in Christ, that is, "saints" through their call from God. To sum up, the church by definition consists of those called out of the world—delivered, saved, sanctified —whatever the terminology. The church is the *ek-klēesia.*

This is apparent likewise from the perspective of the church on the Day of Pentecost. Peter proclaimed to the assembled multitude, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" (Acts 2:40 NASB). His was a call to come out of the perversity and evil of the world: it was a call to salvation. Hence when some three thousand persons that day "received his word were baptized" (v. 41), this signified their salvation. Truly this was the establishment of the church in Jerusalem:[17] a "saved" people. They came out of the past into a new life in Christ.

The church thus is characterized by an event. It consists of those who have actually made the transition from lostness to salvation. Such people are the church—the called-out ones. Clearly if this event of calling out has not occurred,

there is no church; the word *church* is evacuated of all meaning. The church in its very being is constituted by an event:[18] the event of salvation.

The important thing to bear in mind is the dynamic character of the church. People who constitute the church have been "called out" from sin and lostness, and as such are the *ek-klēesia*. Again, if this event has not occurred, there is no church, whatever claims a gathering of people might make for themselves. Moreover, individuals may be called "church members," but if they have not been called out, they do not truly belong. The church is the *ekklēesia* of the redeemed.

B. Called Together

In addition, the church is the assemblage of those who are called. Like the Israelites who came together in assembly, so also is the church an assemblage of believers. The church is the gathered community of believers. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians about a certain matter, says, "When you come together as a church …"[19] (1 Cor. 11:18 NIV, NASB). The church is the assemblage itself. Paul speaks of "the church of the Thessalonians" (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1), which emphasizes that the church is the actual gathering of the believers in Thessalonica. The church obviously is not a building or even a place; it is the assembly of believers wherever they come together.

This does not mean that there is no continuity. The Greek citizens were an *ekklēesia* only when they assembled; after that the *ekklēesia* ceased to exist until the next occasion.[20] There was no *ekklēesia* in the Greek city-state between the called meetings. Unlike this, Paul speaks of the church "at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2; see also 2 Cor. 1:1) or "in Corinth" (NIV)[21] and "the church in Cenchrea" (Rom. 16:1 NIV). In Acts there are references to "the church in Jerusalem" (8:1; 11:22) and "the church at Antioch" (13:1), and in the Book of Revelation there are messages to "the church in Ephesus" (2:1) and elsewhere.[22] Thus although the church has the being of an event and is basically an assemblage of believers, there is continuity. The church in Corinth, and elsewhere, has an abiding reality.

Further, the church, while being an assemblage of believers, is more than just a collection of individuals. This was surely true of the Old Testament assemblage: it was a people, a nation, who gathered at Mount Sinai. They met together as a corporate entity. As a people they had been brought out of Egypt, and as a people they gathered on "the day of assembly." Similarly the New Testament depicts the church as a redeemed people. For example, Paul speaks of "the church … which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28 NASB). Thus the New Testament *ekklēesia* is called together as those who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ and are corporately united in Him. In Ephesians Paul addresses the saints as "the faithful in Christ Jesus" (1:1–2 NIV), "in" signifying that the believers were "incorporate in Christ Jesus" (the NEB translation).[23] Thus the church is not only "saved" individuals coming together in assembly; it is also, and more profoundly, a people whom God has redeemed who come together unitedly as His church.

To be more specific, we may observe the situation in Acts on the Day of Pentecost. After Peter's message "Be saved from this perverse generation" had gone forth and people responded in faith and baptism, "there were added that day about three thousand souls" (2:41). The relevant matter is the expression "there were added," "added" referring to the approximately one hundred and twenty believers (see Acts 1:5) to whom they were now joined. The Scripture does not say that as a large group of individuals the new believers added themselves to, or joined themselves to, other believers. Rather, they "were added" to the body of believers by the very fact of salvation. Moreover, it was the Lord's doing, not their own. Later in the Acts narrative, after the addition of the three thousand to the one hundred and twenty, a description is given of the life and activity of the Jerusalem church (2:42–47). This concludes with this statement: "And the Lord added to their number[24] day by day those who were being saved" (v. 47). It was still a matter of the saved being added immediately to the church, but here the emphasis is that it was the Lord's doing.

Hence, salvation is into the body, that is, the already existing community of believers. As a believer, one does not have a solitary life. The *ekklēesia* was, and is, the believer's life from the beginning. Further, salvation means that believers are joined not only to Christ but also to one another. A person is added by the Lord to others on the very occasion of salvation. Thus there is no genuine Christian life outside the church.

C. Called For

The church is called for obedience to Jesus Christ. Israel, as we have noted, was "the assembly"—the *ekklēesia*—before God at Mount Sinai, gathered to hear the law. Also the assembly, after hearing the law, expressed obedience to God by saying, "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do" (Exod. 24:3, 7; see also 19:8). Israel was called to totally obey the Lord. Likewise—but with even more reason because of the great work of redemption—the New Testament *ekklēesia* is called for total obedience to Jesus Christ.

In his first epistle Peter writes, "To God's elect,[25] strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia … chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood" (1:1 NIV). "For obedience to Jesus Christ" is the calling of the elect of God, the church. Paul writes the Romans, "We have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his [Christ's] name among all the nations, including yourselves who are called[26] to belong to Jesus Christ"[27] (1:5–6). Those in Rome[28] were called, along with all nations, to faithful obedience to Jesus Christ. Also, Paul's opening words to the Corinthians are relevant: "To the church of God which is at Corinth … saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon[29] the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours" (1 Cor. 1:2 NASB). The church consists of those who call on the name of Jesus Christ as Lord wherever people are. This means the acknowledgment of His lordship and obedience to His name and purpose.

Here let us step back and observe that in the first recorded words of Jesus about the church He refers to it as His church: "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). Thus the church belongs to Him; He is its Builder, and to Him total obedience is due. This is all the more apparent from the fact that the church was later purchased by the blood of Christ. Paul speaks in Ephesians about how Christ "loved the church and gave himself up for her" (5:25). Christ is both Builder and Savior of the church: He is indeed its Lord. As we have previously observed, it was also the Lord who added to the church daily those who were being saved. Thus He continues to add to, hence, to build, His church. It is His church, and He is therefore Lord of it.

Again, this means obedience. The church exists to carry forward the will and

work of Jesus Christ. The church is His representation on earth. At every moment in the church's life the one critical factor is total obedience to whatever He has commanded[30] and will command. Truly the church is called to give total obedience to Jesus Christ. He alone is Lord of the church.

III. THE DUAL ASPECT

It is apparent that the church has a dual aspect: it is both a spiritual and a social reality.

A. Spiritual

The church is composed of persons whose common basis for existence is spiritual. Paul declares that "our citizenship[31] is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20 NIV, NASB). The church has been called out of the world—out of darkness into light. To use the language of Jesus in John 3, the church consists of those who have been "born anew" (vv. 3, 7), or "from above,"[32] and are like the wind that cannot be seen. Like the wind, this spiritual reality is invisible, but it can be sensed and felt. People "called out" may even look like everybody else, but there is an unseen, spiritual depth. The church is "from above"; its origins lie in God and its essential life in a realm not open to observation.

Indeed, the church is the only body on earth that has its roots beyond the earth, and thus is sure to be victorious. Even, Jesus declared, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18 KJV). The church has its spiritual being from beyond itself: it is "the *ekklēesia* of God."[33] In essence it is an invisible, spiritual reality.

It is important to emphasize the spiritual essence of the church. Often people who constitute the church fail to bear in mind its divine origins. They view the church as just another human organization—one among many—that serves a valuable moral and social purpose, but it is little more. What is spiritually invisible, the church rooted in God, is totally unknown to them, and great is the loss.[34] Surely many Christians need to recapture the eternal significance of the church as a supernatural entity on earth that has come down "from above."

B. Social

The church is also a social reality. It is the assembly of those on earth who belong to the Lord; hence it has an empirical social dimension. This was true of the assembly of Israel in the wilderness and of the Greek citizens who came together for civic duties, and it is likewise true of the Christian church. The church exists on earth as one social entity among many others. Significantly Jesus, who had referred to the spiritual dimensions of reality in His statement "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18, KJV), says later in regard to a rather mundane matter, "Tell it to the church" (Matt. 18:17). The church, while from above, exists on earth and definitely has a visible shape and form.[35] "Tell it to the church" means to tell it to a tangible body of believers existing in a specific place.

The church as a social entity is the concrete expression of the church in its spiritual depth. Accordingly, it includes only believers—those called out of the world. It is true, however, that again and again the institutional church[36] will have unbelievers in its midst. Some who are attached to the church profess faith in Christ but are not truly "called." In this connection Jesus' parable about the good seed and tares (or weeds) is quite relevant. He speaks of sowing "good seed" of wheat, which "means sons of the kingdom" (those who receive the word and truly believe), but along with this the enemy, the devil, sows tares —"the weeds are the sons of the evil one" (Matt. 13:24–30; 36–43). The true church accordingly will often have evil in its midst, namely, unbelievers. However, they are by no means a genuine part of the church: they still belong to the enemy, the evil one. The visible church may include such persons, but they are not truly the assembly of the "called out" ones.

We may ask, "Then what is to be done about unbelievers attached to the *ekklēesiaV* For by their very presence unbelievers bring an alien element into the church as a social entity. Should the true believers seek to have them removed? The answer is no.[37] In the same parable of the wheat and the weeds Jesus speaks against trying to get rid of the tares: "No … because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest [the end of the age]" (Matt. 13:29–30 NIV). There is such an intertwining of weeds with wheat, such an admixture of the "sons of the evil one" with the "sons of the kingdom," that only the Lord Himself can some day accomplish the task. Jesus' words also imply that, because of the admixture, true believers may

not always be able to discern clearly between wheat and weeds. To attempt this separation could do more harm than good. “The Lord knows those who are his” (2 Tim. 2:19). That is sufficient for now.

Thus it is a serious mistake for believers to withdraw from a given church in an effort to create or find a perfect church. The enemy will always infiltrate (“sow tares,” which is his business) the purest church on earth. Hence the proper attitude is to recognize this fact and seek to move ahead under the lordship of Christ.

Now to return to the main point: the *ekklēesia* is both a spiritual and a social entity. It has an invisible, transcendent spiritual aspect; it also has a social and empirical dimension. On the one hand, it originates in God and is from above; on the other, it exists on earth as a visible assemblage of believers. Indeed, in the latter sense the church is a human institution not unlike many other social institutions. From this perspective the church is an organization with authorities and forms, certain practices and activities, and various cultural and linguistic expressions. It is, from the human side, one social entity among many and is subject to social analysis. However—and this must not be forgotten—the basis and source of the *ekklēesia*, its lifeline of vitality and direction, does not stem from anything of earth. The church is ultimately the church of the living God.

EXCURSUS: THE CHURCH AS "INVISIBLE" AND AS "VISIBLE"

Since Reformation times there has often been a distinction made between the "invisible" church and the "visible" church. For example, John Calvin declares that "the Scriptures speak of the Church in two ways … the Church as it really is before God—the Church into which none are admitted but those who by the gift of adoption are sons of God, and by the sanctification of the Spirit true members of Christ." Again, "by the name of Church is designated the whole body of mankind scattered throughout the world, who profess to worship one God and Christ…. In this Church there is a very large mixture of hypocrites, who have nothing of Christ but the name and outward appearance."[38] The former is the invisible, the latter the visible church.[39]

The basic problem with this distinction is that it is foreign to the Scriptures. As we have noted, there are invisible and visible dimensions of the church. But these dimensions refer to the church—the *ekklēesia*—in both its invisible spiritual and its visible social reality. The invisible and the visible church are one and the same viewed in dual aspect. As we have observed, the church may indeed have an admixture of alien with good elements; but it is unwarranted to designate such as the visible church in distinction from the invisible church. The believing church itself as both invisible and visible has this admixture within it. The Scriptures do not depict a church invisible "into which none are admitted but the sons of God" and a church visible with a "very large mixture of hypocrites." One danger in this distinction is that it may mislead people to forego membership in the visible church because they think of themselves as participants only in the pure, invisible church. Calvin did not, I hasten to say, counsel such, for he adds that "we are also enjoined to regard this Church which is so called with reference to man [the visible church], and to cultivate its communion."[40] Surely Calvin is correct in saying that we are to cultivate communion with the church regardless of its admixture of evil. The mistake lies in the separation between the invisible church as composed only of true believers and the visible church as the church in which evil dwells. There is the real danger, despite Calvin's admonition, of viewing the invisible church as the true

believer's home and of giving up on the visible church as a sordid mixture of believers and hypocrites.

The one and only church undoubtedly has both invisible and visible dimensions. There is the invisible dimension of not belonging to the world: the church is *ekklēesia*—"called out." There is also the visible dimension of being totally in the world and sharing fully in it as a social entity. It is important to maintain this distinction that the one church of Jesus Christ as such is both invisible and visible. This recognition enables us to participate in the one church on earth with full devotion.

[1]Our English word church (also, e.g., Scottish kirk, German Kirche) is derived from the Greek word kyriakos, meaning "belonging to the Lord" (kyrios). This Greek word, however, was never applied to the church in the New Testament. The closest approximation is 1 Corinthians 11:20, "the Lord's [kyriakon] supper" and Revelation 1:10, "the Lord's [kyriake] day." In post-Apostolic times kyriakos was applied to the church; kyriakon referred to a church building. Even though kyriakos does not in the New Testament specifically relate to the church, surely the church does belong to the Lord!

[2]In many Romance languages a direct connection with ekklēsia has continued. Note, for example, French église, Spanish iglesia, Italian chiesa. In English we maintain the connection through descriptive terms such as "ecclesiology" and "ecclesiastical."

[3]Acts 7:38; 19:32, 39, 41. I will discuss these passages later.

[4]Hebrews 2:12 (the kjv alone translates it as "church").

[5]Matthew 16:18; 18:17 (twice).

[6]The niv reads "assembly"; the neb has the verbal form "assembled"; rsv and nasb have "congregation." The kjv translation "church" is somewhat misleading, since the church as such did not exist in Old Testament times.

[7]The neb reads "assembly"; rsv, niv, and nasb have "congregation." The kjv again translates it as "church."

[8]The Hebrew word is qahal. Qahal is "especially an assembly for religious purposes" (TWOT, 2:790). See also Deuteronomy 5:22; 9:10; and 18:16 where qahal is also used for "assembly."

[9]Another Old Testament word, *eddh, is most commonly used to signify the "congregation." This could apply to the people of Israel in all their

functions apart from their coming together in assembly. For example, the Lord says to Moses, “Speak to all the congregation of Israel…” (Exod. 12:3 nasb). These words simply refer to the people, or community, of Israel and not to any particular gathering or assembly. Incidentally, wherever the Septuagint (lxx) has ekklēsia it is invariably a translation of qahal, not of *edah.

[10]The Hebrew word is qahal. The kjv, rsv, and niv translate it as “congregation”; neb and nasb, as “assembly.” The translation “assembly,” I believe, better retains the active note of coming together.

[11]“The Greek word is ennomo, translated “lawful” in kjv and nasb. The niv reads “legal”; neb, “statutory.”

[12]According to Thayer, ekklēsia is “from ἐκκλητος, called out or forth, and thus from ἐκκαλέω.” TDNT raises some question as to whether such etymology was in the mind of New Testament writers when they spoke of ekklēsia; however, these words are added: “‘Εκκλησία is in fact the group of men called out of the world by God even though we do not take express note of the ef” (3:531). I submit that in light of both the Old Testament references and early Greek city-state usage, but most of all because of New Testament appropriateness, ekklēsia may be properly understood to mean “called out.”

[13]The Greek phrase is parepidemois diasporas, literally “sojourners of the dispersion,” referring to believers scattered throughout “Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,” all in Asia Minor (present day Turkey).

[14]The Greek word is kalesantas, from kaled.

[15]The Greek word is klesei, a cognate of kaled.

[16]The Greek word is kletois, a cognate of kaleo. “Saints by calling” is a better translation than “called to be saints” (kjv, rsv) or “called to be holy” (niv). These translations may suggest that sainthood or holiness is a future calling, something yet to happen. Paul’s point, however, is that the church is composed of saints by virtue of their calling.

[17]The word church is not used in Acts until some time later (see Acts 5:11). However, there can be no question that the church is referred to in Acts 2. Incidentally, by “establishment” I do not mean the origination of the church. Later, I will discuss an earlier beginning. My point now is simply that the church in Jerusalem by definition consisted of those who had received and acted on the injunction “Be saved from. …”

[18]Karl Barth speaks of the being of the church as “the being of an event”

(Church Dogmatics 4.1.652; cf. “the church as event” in NIDNTT, 1:298).

[19]Note: Publication data for this and other works cited in this volume may be found in the Bibliography.

[20]Literally, “in church” or “in assembly” (en ekklēsia).

[21]Recall the words of Acts 19:41 to the effect that the town clerk “dismissed the assembly.”

[22]The Greek preposition is en. “In” may be the better translation.

[23]See Revelation 2 and 3 for messages to the other churches-those in Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

[24]According to F. F. Bruce, the phrase “in Christ Jesus” is “incorporative-that is to say, it does not point to Christ Jesus as the object of belief but implies that the saints and believers are united with him, partakers together of his new life” (italics mine) (Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians, NICNT, 251).

[25]The kjv reads “added to the church.” Although the word church has little manuscript evidence (on this see Bruce, The Acts of the Apostles, 102), the kjv correctly understands the thrust of the text, namely that the addition was to “the church.” views “the elect” corporately (recall 1 Peter 2:9-“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation … called … out of darkness”). Thus they are the ekklēsia.

[26]The Greek word is kletoi. Recall the connection with ek-klēesia.

[27]The kjv and nasb read “the called of Jesus Christ.” The Greek phrase is kletoi lesou Christou; hence those readings are quite possible. However, the rsv reading above (likewise niv) more likely captures Paul’s meaning. Paul uniformly speaks of God the Father as author of the call (cf. Rom. 8:30; 11:29; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Tim. 1:9). Thus John Murray writes, “They are the called of Jesus Christ in the sense of belonging to Christ” (Epistle to the Romans, NICNT, 14).

[28]Paul does not use “church” in these opening verses. Rather, after the words quoted above, he writes, “to all God’s beloved in Rome” (v. 7). However, it is surely the church that Paul is addressing (note also Rom. 16:16: “All the churches of Christ greet you”- obviously a greeting to the sister church in Rome).

[29]The Greek word is epikaloumenos, literally “calling upon.”

[30]In the Great Commission to the apostles, and thereby the believing church, Jesus declared that this included “teaching them [the nations] to

observe" all that He had "commanded" the disciples (Matt. 28:20). This implies that the church, prior to such teaching, was already committed to obeying Christ's every commandment.

[31]The Greek word is politeuma. In its article on Trokirevixa, BAGD quotes M. Dibelius as saying, "Our home is in heaven, and here on earth we are a colony of heavenly citizens."

[32]The rsv and niv margins.

[33]"The church of God" is a frequent New Testament expression. See 1 Corinthians 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:13; 1 Timothy 3:5, 15 ("church of the living God"). Also note "the churches of God" in 1 Corinthians 11:16 and 2 Thessalonians 1:4; "the church of God in Christ Jesus" in 1 Thessalonians 2:14.

[34]C. S. Lewis in his Screwtape Letters depicts the senior devil Screwtape writing his nephew Wormwood, a junior devil. At one point Screwtape says, "One of our greatest allies at present is the Church itself. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean the Church as we see her spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners. That, I confess, is a spectacle which makes ouj> boldest tempters uneasy. But fortunately it is quite invisible to these humans" (p. 15).

[35]In this way there is some parallel to the Incarnation. Christ, while having a divine, even invisible, nature, was also a human being with a visible, tangible body and lived in a specific place. To deny His humanity was the heresy called Docetism (see "Real Man" in Renewal Theology, 1:332-34). Accordingly, to overlook or downplay the church's tangible social reality would be a kind of ecclesiastical Docetism.

[36]By "institutional church" I refer to the church of professing members, whether or not they are true believers.

[37]This is a different matter from the exercise of church discipline. The "sons of the kingdom," true believers, may often need discipline even to temporary exclusion from the church (see the sec. "Exercising Discipline," pp. 120-23). Such discipline is not the same as the attempted removal of unbelievers.

[38]Institutes of the Christian Religion, 4.7.288 (Beveridge trans.).

[39]See context in the Institutes.

[40]Ibid., 4.7.288.

2
Scope

We turn next to a consideration of the scope of the church. Our concern is with such matters as the extent and range of operation of the church. Where is the church to be found?

I. UNIVERSAL

The church may first be viewed as *universal*. Its scope is not limited to any one place: it is worldwide. Although there is much to be said about the church as local[1] and particular, we need first to view the church in its universal expression.

Surely the best place to begin is with Jesus' statement "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). In these words Jesus was not referring to a particular church, but to the universal church: it is not "my churches" but "my church." This is the universal church of Jesus Christ.

Paul refers to the universal church in his address to the elders from Ephesus when he speaks of "the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son" (Acts 20:28). This is not simply the Ephesian church but the whole church of Christ. In his Ephesian letter Paul again speaks of the universal church. Although this letter may begin with Paul's salutation "to the saints who are at Ephesus"[2] (1:1 NASB), hence referring to a particular church, reference throughout is to the church universal. God "has made him [Christ] the head over all things for the church" (1:22); "that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known" (3:10); "to him [God] be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations" (3:21); "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her … that he might present the church to himself in splendor" (5:25–27). Paul may indeed be writing to a local church, but the central theme is the universal church. Similarly Paul writes the church at Colossae that "he [Christ] is the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1:18) and later speaks of "his body, that is, the church" (v. 24). These again are references to the church universal. Likewise we note Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians that "God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers…" (12:28). This clearly goes beyond the Corinthian church into the universal church. Finally, in the Book of Revelation some of the closing words are "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come'" (22:17). "The Bride" undoubtedly refers to the universal church who, along with the Spirit, extends the invitation.

We now focus on various attributes of the universal church. Let us examine four of these.[3]

A. Oneness

The church is essentially one. As surely as God is one and Christ is one, the church is one. It is "*the* church of God," "*the* church of Christ," hence one church. Shortly after speaking of "glory in the church and in Christ Jesus" (3:21), Paul in his letter to the Ephesians declares, "There is one body and one Spirit … one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all" (4:4–6). The "one body" specifically refers to the church. Indeed, such images of the church as "the body of Christ" and "the bride of Christ"[4] declare the oneness of the church. For certainly Christ as the head has but one body, even as the bridegroom has but one bride.

According to the Fourth Gospel, Jesus speaks of "one flock." He declares, "I am the good shepherd … I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also…. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd" (10:14–16). "The sheep" doubtless were those around Him —His Jewish disciples; "other sheep … not of this fold" refers to the Gentiles. All together, Jesus was saying, Jews and Gentiles will compose one great flock under Him, the one Shepherd. Although Jesus does not use the word *church*, His language implies it.[5] There will be one flock, not two or more, however many folds there may be or however far scattered the sheep. Clearly the "one flock" parallels the Pauline images of one body and one bride.

Next we observe that there are, of course, a multiplicity of churches. In addition to the singular "church," Paul refers to "the churches of God" (1 Cor. 11:16; 2 Thess. 1:4), "the churches of God in Christ" (1 Thess. 2:14), and "the churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16). Such language points to geographical diversity: Corinth, Thes-salonica, Rome, etc. The point, however, is that all such churches are expressions of the one church. They are the one church of God, of Christ, assembled in a given place. Thus it is, for example, "the church of God which is at [or in] Corinth"; it is the same church that meets in a great diversity of places.

Simply put, wherever people who have been "called out" assemble, this is the *ekklēesia*. They make up the one church that belongs to Jesus Christ. They may be, and are, from countless nations, languages, and cultures. But they still represent the one church of God in Jesus Christ. Accordingly, there is a oneness of believers around the world.

This given fact of oneness, however, is often threatened by division. What is

essential unity may become disunity. In his epistle to the Ephesians, just prior to his words about one body, one Spirit, one Lord, etc., Paul encourages his readers to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (4:3). There is a given unity of the Holy Spirit that may be threatened. This threat sometimes exists in the local church. Nowhere in the New Testament is this more strikingly depicted than at Corinth, for the unity there was severely threatened by growing factionalism. Some were saying, "I belong to Paul"; some, "I belong to Apollos"; some, "I belong to Cephas [Peter]"; some, "I belong to Christ"[6] (1 Cor. 1:12). Thus the given unity was threatened by disunity, possibly even to the splitting apart of the church. Paul cries out in vigorous protest, "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (v. 13). Paul's point is unmistakable: If the Corinthians would only recall that Christ, and no one else, was crucified for them, and that they in faith were baptized in the name of Jesus, and no one else—indeed, that *they all* belong to Christ,[7] and no one else, then dissension and division would quickly end. As far as we know, this party spirit at Corinth was kept in check, perhaps overcome, and the church maintained its unity in Christ.

The tragedy is that often this has not been the case. Many a church has allowed party spirit, dissension, and rivalries to split it apart. Christ has thereby been divided and His cause severely damaged. To be sure, if it is for the purpose of multiplication, division is good—as in the case of cell division, in which true growth occurs. Indeed, congregations often become too large and need to divide into smaller bodies. But splitting, or schism, is an entirely different thing and can only cause harm to the cause of Christ. The oneness, the unity, of the church is broken. To any church threatened by the specter of division—even for seemingly justifiable causes—Paul's further words should ring in the ears of all: "I … entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling[8] with which you have been called,[9] with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1–3 NASB). Knowing that we are an *ekklēesia*, people "called out," there should be a spirit of gentleness, patience, love, and forbearance (yes, in even the "stickiest" of matters!), all of which should make for an eagerness and a diligence to preserve unity.

Let us now go behind Paul and his great words in Ephesians to the words of Christ Himself in the Gospel of John concerning oneness and unity. We have already noted Jesus' statement "so shall there be one flock, one shepherd." Later He prayed to the Father both for His disciples and for believers after them "that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also

may be in us…. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me" (John 17:21–23). Oneness is essentially a given fact for all who are in Christ, but it is also something that continually needs perfecting. That believers have allowed disunity and separation to intrude is both a denial of their oneness with Christ and the Father and a resulting barrier to the world's coming to faith.

But now something else must be said. There is one legitimate reason for separation, namely the situation of unbelief or apostasy. If a so-called church is merely a gathering of unbelievers—those who have not been "called out," hence know nothing of salvation—it is a church in name only. Paul writes to the Gentiles in the church at Rome: "You stand fast only through faith…. If God did not spare the natural branches [the Jews], neither will he spare you…. You too will be cut off" (Rom. 11:20–22).[10] In the extreme situation of such disbelief, indeed apostasy, there remains no church.[11] Separation truly is necessary.

Caution is needed here. It is far too easy to allow differences such as minor doctrinal matters, liturgical practices, and social orientations to bring about separation. The one fundamental matter is that the church is an *ekklēesia*—it is "called out." If this has not happened, the most orthodox theology, the most impressive forms of worship, the most noteworthy ethical activities are in vain. *They are all operating in a void.* Wherever there is an assemblage of called out—that is, saved—persons, the church exists, and nowhere else.

Let us recall the formation of the Jerusalem church on the Day of Pentecost. After Peter had proclaimed the gospel with such power that thousands were "cut to the heart" (Acts 2:37), he then urged his hearers, "Repent, and be baptized … for the forgiveness of your sins" (v. 38). He continued shortly after with the exhortation, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" (v. 40 NASB). As a result, "those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls" (v. 41). Thus the church in Jerusalem came into being. They had been told enough about God's act in Jesus—His death and resurrection—to bring about conviction, repentance, and faith. Thus they were "called" to salvation. It was only after this event that the Scripture adds, "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching [or 'doctrine']" (v. 42). They would need much teaching to clarify their thinking, which until then had been traditionally Judaistic. But prior to any such teaching, the three thousand had already become a part of the *ekklēesia*.[12] This matter needs emphasis, for it demonstrates that what constitutes the church is the event of salvation and not a

fully formed theology. They were now united in Christ, whatever else may have been their differences. Increased doctrinal formulation was important, but it was secondary to the primary event of salvation by which they had become an *ekklēesia.*

Nothing I have said is intended to denigrate the importance of doctrine. Clearly, essential doctrine is involved in proclaiming the gospel—namely, what God has done in Jesus Christ and how to receive His work of redemption. But there still is no *ekklēesia* until people respond in faith. Thus the most orthodox theology will not suffice. Indeed, there is always the danger of an orthodoxy that tends to substitute doctrine for salvation. For example, the Athanasian Creed[13] declares, "Whosoever will be saved: before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic faith … and the Catholic faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the substance." Finally, after many further, still more technical statements, the Creed continues, "He therefore who would be saved must think thus of the Trinity." If this were really the case, nobody would have been saved on the Day of Pentecost! To be sure, the Triune God was at work in the whole event. But orthodox formulation of the doctrine was by no means yet at hand.

Now let us return to the main point: that the church is one. This is primarily to be understood as a spiritual oneness. The church as represented by true believers —the genuine *ekklēesia*—is one throughout the world. There are many differences in doctrinal formulation, worship practices, organizational forms, and the like, but the church is still one. Oneness is *not uniformity*, but it is unity in the one Lord who has redeemed His people. This oneness, this unity, is there even if many institutional churches have split apart and have little or no fellowship with one another. The one church continues to exist in and through many denominational expressions, for wherever "called out" persons are gathered, there is the church.

I quickly add, however, that this spiritual oneness needs more and more to take on visible expression. The church, as earlier noted, has an empirical, social dimension and therefore needs to express its spiritual unity by a common recognition that every true *ekklēesia* is a part of the one church of Jesus Christ.

This means, first, an openness and harmony of believers with one another in all churches and denominations. Recognizing the oneness of the *ekklēesia* throughout the world, believers should be ready to share in worship, in fellowship, and in ministry. If separate denominations continue to exist, it should be clear to all their members and to the outside world that the church is in unity.

Second, this also means an increasing emphasis on the need for visible unity in the church and among churches everywhere. If it is true that there is only one

church of Jesus Christ throughout the world (as I have earlier stressed), that the church universal is His one body—in that sense organically united to Him—then the church needs likewise to be in visible and outward unity wherever it exists. When Jesus prayed for future believers that they would "all be one," He meant surely not only spiritual but also visible and tangible unity. For, as noted, Jesus immediately added, "Even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee." Out of this unity of being should flow a like unity in the universal *ekklēesia.*

The church is one universal *ekklēesia*, and the more we express that oneness, the more we are at harmony with Christ and with one another, and the stronger our witness becomes to the world. For it is only as we become "perfectly one" that the world is fully able to believe.

B. Holiness

The second attribute of the church is holiness. Peter addresses "God's scattered people"[14] in Asia Minor, declaring them to be "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9). In language borrowed from Exodus about Israel—"you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (19:6)[15] —Peter refers to the dispersed believers collectively. They are "a royal priesthood, a holy nation." Since such believers are the church, the church is a holy nation, a holy people.

The church is holy, first, because it is separated from the world. The word *holy* in the Old Testament,[16] implies separation, apartness. Israel as a nation was separated from all other nations. So the church, the *ekklēesia*, has been called out, separated from the surrounding world. Jesus spoke to His Father of the apostles as men whom the Father had given Him "out of the world" (John 17:6); by implication this includes later believers, hence the church.

The church essentially is holy in that a distinct separation has occurred. The "holy nation" is composed of people who, in Peter's continuing words, have been "called … out of darkness into his marvelous light." Thus they have been separated from the realm of darkness into the realm of light and are therefore "a holy nation."

The church may also be described as a sanctified people. Indeed, Peter begins his letter by addressing the believers of the Dispersion as those "chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit" (1 Peter 1:2). "Sanctified by the Spirit," they are "a holy nation." Similarly Paul addresses "the church of God which is at Corinth" as "those sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:2). This, of course, does not mean that the church was without sin, for the Corinthian church in particular was laden with immorality. Nonetheless, the church was God's church, and the people, whatever their sinful activities, had basically been separated from the world to be a holy people. Thus Paul later adds, "You were washed, you were sanctified" (6:11). It is this basic sanctification, this separation from the world, that made all the more reprehensible their many sinful activities.

The separation of the church is a profoundly spiritual matter. In the Old Testament Israel was separated from other nations in a geographical, political, and cultural sense; however, there was no radical spiritual separation. There were, to be sure, God's given laws and ordinances, the sacrificial ceremonies,

and the continuing call to holiness; but no interior change occurred. In the New Testament the church is a people no longer separated from other nations physically, but spiritually—namely, from the principalities and powers of darkness that dominate this world. The church undoubtedly is a long way from perfection; nonetheless, there has been a break, even a transition, from the old order to the new. The church is a holy nation.

Second, the church is holy because of the holiness of her Head, Jesus Christ. Through faith in Him believers have become united to Christ and are therefore partakers of His holiness. In this vein Paul further writes to the church in Corinth: "You are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-that is, our righteousness, holiness,[17] and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30 NIV). Christ is "our holiness." Surely we have been sanctified by Him,[18] but, even more, the Christ with whom we are united continues to impart His holiness, even as the head through all the body.

One of Paul's most extraordinary statements about Christ's headship over the church is found in these words: "[God] has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:22–23 NRSV). Since Christ is truly "the Holy One,"[19] His holiness is shown forth in the church, which is His fullness on earth. This means, further, that however important the holiness of individual believers is,[20] it is only the church, the collective body of Christians that can reflect the fullness of Christ's holiness. The church is "the fullness" of her head, Jesus Christ.

Hence, for example, when the church comes together for worship, it does so as a holy people. Its purpose is to worship the Lord "in holy array" (Ps. 29:2). It is to allow His holiness to cleanse the sins and evils that have accumulated, perchance to hear the words, "your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven" (Isa. 6:7).[21] It is to go forth as a people renewed in holiness to fulfill the Master's will and to live out His holiness.

Here let me give a word of caution: the holiness of the church does not mean a kind of material holiness that relates to a building or to certain objects. The church is not a building and surely not any of the objects it contains; it is therefore a serious mistake to view a church edifice as a holy place or to speak of holy vestments, holy water, and holy beads. *The church is not where believers meet, but the meeting of believers itself.* Hence holiness cannot attach itself to anything material, indeed not even to certain designated persons. Ordination, for example, confers no holiness upon any church functionary—be he priest or pastor. No individual, properly speaking, is either a "holy" or "reverend" person.[22] The church itself as a body under the sole headship of Jesus Christ is a

holy people.

This also means that the whole body of believers is holy; there are no levels of sainthood. We have earlier noted Paul's address to the Corinthians as "those sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling" (1 Cor. 1:2 NASB). The whole church (even in Corinth!) by virtue of its call to salvation was composed of "saints" and holy people. Sainthood therefore is not a higher level of Christian attainment or recognition;[23] for all of God's people are holy ones. To be sure, there should be growth in saintliness, but there are none who are uniquely saints. The church—not just a higher echelon or a selected few—is holy.

Now, saying that the church is holy does not deny that the church is also called to holiness. Holiness—even sainthood—is a given fact, but there needs to be continuing sanctification and purging. Here the words of Paul in Ephesians are quite relevant: First, "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word." This is the basic sanctification, or being made holy. Second, Paul adds, "and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (5:25–27 NIV). This is the holiness—not a higher level of sainthood—that Christ intends for His church.

Accordingly, the church can never rest in its essential holiness. Indeed, far too often the church falls into the way of the world and needs deep repentance and change. Surely the church, "the saints" of Corinth, needed it so much that large sections of Paul's first letter are devoted to admonition and to a call for repentance. Likewise, the church in our own day—leaders and people alike—often needs serious examination of its worldly ways and pursuits so as to represent more truly the holiness of her Head, Jesus Christ. The church is holy—and ever called to holiness.

Third, the church is holy because of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Here the words of Paul are to the point: "Do you not know that you are God's temple[24] and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are" (1 Cor. 3:16–17). In this context, Paul is speaking of the church,[25] not the individual,[26] though it is true that the Holy Spirit also dwells in each believer.[27] The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God Himself, makes His dwelling in the church. In the Old Testament God's particular dwelling was the inner shrine, the Holy of Holies, of the tabernacle and later of the temple. Now both have been replaced by the church as God's dwelling place. The church therefore is essentially holy because the Spirit of God dwells within it. The significance of this is so vast that if anyone destroys[28] God's temple (i.e., the church), God in turn will destroy[29] him. This

shows the truly awesome nature of the church as the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit: he who destroys[30] the church will himself be destroyed.[31] The church, whatever its flaws, is sacred and holy because God's Spirit dwells within it.

The church as the dwelling place of God's Spirit is also described by Paul in Ephesians 2. There Paul speaks of the church as "the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (vv. 19–22). The household of God consists not only of believing Jews but also of believing Gentiles ("you also"). And in Christ Jesus the comprehensive church is God's holy temple, God's holy dwelling place. In earlier times the temple was viewed as peculiarly a structure for Israel, the Gentiles having access only to the outer courts. But now in Christ Jesus all has changed: the temple is no longer an earthly building whose inner shrine, the place of God's dwelling, is limited to the Jews. It has now become a spiritual temple in which both Jews and Gentiles are built together for God's habitation in the Holy Spirit. The church, not limited to any race or people, is now the unique place of God's holy dwelling.

In regard to this last point, the church is holy, not because its members have reached an exalted level of holiness and righteousness; rather, Jews and Gentiles alike are growing "into" a holy temple and thereby, as being built into it, are God's holy dwelling. The church is holy because the holy God makes it His holy dwelling place.

We move on to observe that Peter, like Paul, depicts the church as a holy edifice. Peter speaks of it as "a spiritual house." He describes Christ first as "a living stone" and then adds, "You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:4–5 NASB). Shortly after that Peter declares, "You are a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (v. 9). Peter does not directly refer to the church as the dwelling place of God's Spirit; how ever, the imagery of "a spiritual house"[32] strongly suggests a holy temple. Moreover, the rest of the language, "a holy priesthood" and "spiritual sacrifices," clearly depicts the church as a temple in which the members are holy priests who offer up spiritual sacrifices.[33] Again, the church is holy because God's Spirit dwells within and all its members are a holy priesthood, not because of the degree of holiness its people possess.

To sum up this section: The church is separated from the world by the holy God. Its head is the Holy One, Jesus Christ, and it is indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

The church is a holy church.

C. Catholicity

The church is also catholic. The word *catholic* is a transliteration of the Greek word *katholikos,* which means universal or whole.[34] *Katholikos* is not a biblical term; it was first used by Ignatius of Antioch in his letter to the church in Smyrna (ca. A.D. 112): "Wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church" (8:2), hence the universal or whole church.

The word *catholic* in this sense refers first to the universal[35] extension of the church. The church is worldwide; it is "ecumenical." *Oikoumene,* from which "ecumenical" is derived, means literally "the inhabited earth,"[36] but it is usually translated in the New Testament simply as "the world."[37] For example, "this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world *[oikoumene]* for a witness unto all nations" (Matt. 24:14 KJV). "Ecumenical" actually refers both to the universal proclamation of the gospel and to the goal of this proclamation: in both cases all the inhabited earth.[38] Hence the church, which is the result of this proclamation, is worldwide, or ecumenical.[39] In this sense the church is catholic: it extends over the whole earth.

The word *catholic* also refers to wholeness. For example, the epistles of James, John, Peter, and Jude are sometimes described as "catholic epistles" because they are addressed to the early Christian church at large, hence to the whole church. The church as catholic therefore does not refer to a certain section of the church, or to particular churches, but to the whole of Christ's church. Catholic therefore also means comprehensive: to be whole is to be comprehensive.[40] Thus the church cath olic includes people of every place and region, of every age and condition. In Revelation 5:9 a "new song" contains these words to the Lamb: "Thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation"—thus from every ethnical, cultural, social, and political group in the world. Truly the church catholic is comprehensive, including all the configurations of mankind.

The word *catholic* in the history of the church has taken on two additional meanings. First, by the time of Augustine (A.D. 354–430) catholic had also come to include the idea of "orthodox."[41] Hence the catholic church was not only universal but was also the church adhering to the true faith. Second, from the sixteenth century to the present the word *catholic* has increasingly become associated with the church related to Rome. Thus there is the title, "the Roman

Catholic Church" or, still more commonly, simply "the Catholic Church." This, I must quickly add, is a quite unfortunate development. "Roman" used in conjunction with "catholic" is a contradiction, for catholic, as noted, refers to the universal, whole church. Even though the Roman church is spread over much of the world, it is only one part of the whole church. Catholic cannot properly refer to Rome or to any other branch of the church,[42] for this implies that the rest of the church is not truly the church. The church is catholic or not the church at all.

Some Protestant churches in using the Nicene Creed or the Apostles' Creed substitute the word "universal" or "Christian" for "catholic," thus seeking to make clear that their creedal affirmation does not refer to the Roman church. Such a substitution is unfortunate for the simple and basic reason that Protestants generally do recognize the whole church and not one particular configuration. Thus to affirm that we believe in "one, holy, catholic church" (Nicene) or "the holy catholic church" (Apostles'), rather than affirming Rome, does quite the opposite. It is to declare that we believe in the catholic (small c), namely the universal, the whole, church wherever it exists.

Who then is "a catholic"? That person is one who affirms the church of Jesus Christ throughout the world. In a sense it is to say with Ignatius that "wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church." For truly Jesus Christ is wherever His church is found—those who have come to new life in Him. Personally I am glad to confess that I am a catholic, a member of Christ's universal church.

D. Apostolicity

Finally, the church is apostolic. This attribute of the church points to the criterion of the church's life—namely, that the church always stands under the normative character of the original apostles' instruction and direction. Christ Himself, according to Hebrews, is "the apostle" (3:1)—as the One originally sent from God.[43] The apostles, in turn, were those specifically sent by Him. Jesus "chose … twelve, whom he named apostles" (Luke 6:13). They were under His teaching and guidance throughout Jesus' ministry and were given instruction by Him for forty days between His resurrection and His ascension.[44] As soon as the three thousand converts in Jerusalem had come to salvation, they "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42). The early church was under the instruction and guidance of the apostles; it was therefore an apostolic church. Paul was later added to the original apostolic group by virtue of a special revelation of Jesus;[45] hence, his teaching and direction also became authoritative for the Christian church.

The church, of course, no longer has the early apostles in its midst; however, it does have the apostolic writings in the New Testament.[46] Hence, by recognizing these writings as authoritative and normative and seeking to be guided by them, the church remains apostolic. Since the apostles were the original witnesses of Christ and received direct instruction from Him,[47] their writings have a unique and irreplaceable role in the life of the church.

None of this signifies a disregard for the authority of the Old Testament. Indeed both Jesus Himself and the apostles draw without hesitation on the Old Testament Scriptures as God's written Word. For example, in John's gospel there is the testimony of Jesus that "the Scripture cannot be broken"[48] (10:35 NIV). Peter declares about the Old Testament that "no prophecy of scripture … ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:20–21). Paul speaks of "the holy Scriptures" that Timothy had known "from infancy" (2 Tim. 3:15 NIV)[49] and then adds: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching…" (v. 16).[50] All these references to the Old Testament make clear that a church that is apostolic gives full weight likewise to the apostolic affirmation regarding the Old Testament.

Let us now discuss a certain error that must be guarded against—the theory of "apostolic succession." By the late second century the view began to be

advanced that apostolic authority and teaching were guaranteed by the bishops of the church.[51] According to this view, the bishops were in a direct line of succession from the original apostles. Presumably the apostles had laid hands upon certain believers and they upon others after them to insure that authentic teaching and practice were maintained. These persons, designated as bishops, were increasingly viewed as being lineal successors of the apostles and thereby guaranteed apostolic perpetuation. "Apostolic succession" therefore became essential to the life of the church. Thus the attribute of apostolicity no longer meant standing under the authority and tutelage of the original apostolic witness but under their episcopal[52] successors. This led increasingly to the Roman idea of the church as *magisterium*, i.e., that the bishops of the church are the authentic teachers and, especially where gathered in council, have the authority and capacity to define apostolic truth for the whole church.[53] Ultimately, in the Roman church—which claims that the pope is in lineal succession from Peter, who is viewed as chief of the apostles—the succession climaxes in the pope's presumed infallible teaching office. Hence, together with the pope—and never without his consent—the bishops as successors of the apostles have supreme authority over the church.[54]

It is apparent that the above view of apostolicity is far removed from the position that the church as apostolic stands under the teaching and authority of the original New Testament apostles. Actually there is no suggestion of apostolic succession in the New Testament. The closest approximation might be Paul's words in 2 Timothy 2:2: "What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able [or 'qualified' NIV] to teach others also." Here is a nonapostolic succession of three: Paul, Timothy, then faithful, qualified men. But there is no suggestion that either Timothy or those after him had Paul's apostolic authority. Paul did lay hands on Timothy to confer some gift—"I remind you to rekindle the gift[55] of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Tim. 1:6)—but this was by no means to perpetuate apostolic authority. Paul, along with Barnabas, did appoint elders in various churches —"they had appointed elders … in every church" (Acts 14:23), but the elders' responsibility was altogether local, that is, for a particular church. Indeed, elders were also described as "bishops"[56] but, to repeat, their sphere of authority was within the local church. In the New Testament there are no bishops over churches, and surely those who were designated elders, or bishops, had no apostolic credentials to define the faith. It is interesting that there is nothing said about Peter or any others of the Twelve appointing successors,[57] nor does early church history attest to any such succession.[58] Rather, in the early church, long

before the present list of New Testament books was fully recognized by the church at large,[59] the letters of Paul and others, as well as the gospels (or portions of them), were circulated throughout the churches and provided the basic apostolic authority and guidance.

To sum up: The church is apostolic because it is based on the witness of the New Testament apostles. The church is apostolic when it is faithful to the apostles' teaching and direction and allows no teaching from without (heresy) or tradition from within (e.g., "apostolic succession") to dilute or expand the New Testament apostolic authority.

In the Book of Revelation "the holy city," the glorified church, had "a great, high wall…. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (21:12, 14). The church was, is, and will be apostolic so long as it remains founded on[60] and faithful to the original apostles.

II. LOCAL

Besides being universal, the church is *local*. The church universal is invariably expressed in the local church. For the church is always a gathered body of believers in a particular location. Paul writes “to the church of God which is at Corinth” (1 Cor. 1:2). He does not address “a church of God” but *the* church *at* Corinth. Then Paul, a few words later, adds, “together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours” (v. 2). “In every place” signifies other places where the church exists. Wherever the local churches are, they come together to call on the name of Christ.

The local church, accordingly, is not just one part or fragment of the church universal. It is not somehow a lesser, perhaps even inferior, assemblage of the whole church. Rather, it is actually the total church in its individual expression.[61] Every local gathering, however small or large, is *the* church of Jesus Christ and is therefore complete in Him. The church is local or it is not the church at all.

We may now observe how the New Testament speaks of various locations of the church.

A. In a House—The Home *Ekklesia*

We begin with the smallest, thus most local, setting of the church: in a house. Paul makes several references to a house church in his letters. Twice he refers to a church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla. He writes to the church in Corinth: "The churches of Asia send greetings. Aquila and Prisca [Priscilla], together with the church in their house,[62] send you hearty greetings in the Lord" (1 Cor. 16:19). Later Paul writes to the Romans: "Greet Prisca and Aquila … to whom not only I but also all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks; greet also the church in their house" (Rom. 16:3–5). In the former instance the house church was probably in Ephesus, the latter undoubtedly in Rome. In his letter to the Colossians Paul writes, "Give my greetings to the brethren at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house" (4:15). The church in Nympha's house was probably in Laodicea, for a little later Paul refers to "the church of the Laodiceans" (v. 16). Finally, Paul writes a letter addressed "to Philemon our beloved fellow worker … and the church in your house" (Philem. 1–2).

In all these references it is significant that the word "church" is used in reference to home assemblies. Such gatherings were not simply home meetings of believers in distinction from a church meeting in a perhaps larger and more formal gathering. No, the gathering in a house or home was equally an *ekklēesia.* Paul can say (as we have noted), "The churches of Asia send greetings," and then immediately add, "Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings." There is no suggestion that the house church is somehow less a church, or only a part of the large church. Even more pertinently, the church in a house was not viewed as some schismatic group that had broken away from the larger church. It was simply believers—"called-out" people—meeting together; therefore, it was truly a gathering of the *ekklēesia.*

The Book of Acts has many references to the early Christians assembling in homes. Indeed, at first it was both in the temple and in homes. In the earliest description of the believers in Jerusalem Luke writes that "all who believed" were "day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes"[63] (2:44, 46). Both temple and home were therefore believers' assemblies, hence *ekklēesia.* So when the text later reads, "The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (v. 47), this was an addition to the church[64] whether meeting in temple or home. Temple and home are again mentioned where Acts records about the apostles that "every day in the

temple and at home[65] they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (5:42). Temple and home were both gatherings of the church. Later when "great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem," the text reads that "Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house"[66] (Acts 8:1, 3 NASB). Since it was no longer possible to meet in the temple, the church truly was none other than the meetings held in various homes; therefore, to "ravage" the church was to ravage the gatherings of believers in individual homes.

To sum up: The house church was simply believers meeting in a home and therefore an *ekklēesia*. The house church was more than just a Christian household consisting of a nuclear family of believers—for example, parents, children, and perhaps grandparents, relatives, and servants. Rather, it was the coming together of a number of believers in a particular home. They knew themselves in such a gathering to be the church of Jesus Christ.

B. In a City—The Urban *Ekklesia*

The most common New Testament designation of the church's location is in a given city. In the Book of Acts the first use of the word "church" follows upon the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira: "And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things" (5:11). The "whole church" refers to all the believers who had been meeting in the temple and in their homes. The next reference to the church concerns "the church in Jerusalem": "Great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem" (8:1). Up to this point that church geographically comprised the whole church. It is interesting that the next specific reference to the church in a given city is to "the church at Antioch" (13:1), the first church to include Gentiles in its fellowship. Throughout Acts there are a number of references to "the church" and "churches," each referring to a given locality.

We have earlier noted Paul's references to the local church "in Corinth," the church "in Cenchreae," "the church of the Laodiceans," and "the church of the Thessalonians" ; likewise the messages in the Book of Revelation were directed to "the church in Ephesus," "the church in Smyrna," and so on. All such references likewise point to the urban *ekklēesia*. So, again, the critical point is that the universal church is invariably local and often has the designation of a given city. This means, further, that all the believers in a given city were viewed as the church in that locality. As we have observed, a house church (possibly house churches), as well as a larger gathering, may also have been in a certain city, but all made up the urban church.[67] Hence whenever believers met in a city, whether as one body[68] or as smaller groups, it was the church in a given city.[69]

There is no suggestion in the New Testament of division or competition between the house church and the urban church. Whether it was the larger meeting, possibly in some public facility or in someone's home, both gatherings were equally the church. It was basically a matter of logistics: the size of the facility that was necessary to accommodate the assemblage of believers. The larger gathering did not view the smaller group as somehow being less a church, nor did the smaller gathering view itself as somehow more truly the church. "All those who in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (to quote Paul again) is the key. Wherever this took place, the church was—and is today—truly in operation.[70]

C. In a Larger Area—The Regional *Ekklesia*

The New Testament also designates the church as existing in a larger area. The most distinctive statement in this regard is Acts 9:31: “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it was multiplied.” Note the singular—”*the* church”; thus the churches in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria are viewed collectively as the church. There are, in addition, New Testament references to the churches in a given area: “the churches of Galatia” (Gal. 1:2), “the churches of Christ in Judea” (Gal. 1:22), and “the churches of Asia” (1 Cor. 16:19). Thus a vital sense of their corporate unity exists; “the churches” are “the church” in a specified region.

However, this corporate picture of the church by no means implies a church somehow above the individual churches. The regional *ekklēesia* is nothing other than the assemblies in a given area. Whether they are urban churches or house churches, it is always the gathering of believers in a particular place.

III. TRANSCENDENT

The church also consists of the saints in heaven. The letter to the Hebrews declares, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly[71] and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect” (12:22–23 NASB). This extraordinary statement, which refers symbolically to the worship experience of believers as coming to Mount Zion, depicts in heaven, in addition to innumerable angels, “the church of the first-born.”[72] This phrase portrays believers in heaven as the transcendent *ekklēesia*.[73] Thus the church is not limited to the earth but consists also of those who have passed on into glory.

The church, accordingly, is not only the redeemed people of God on earth but also the church in heaven. It exists there in purity and holiness: “the spirits of righteous men made perfect.” This calls to mind the statement of Paul that Christ’s intention for the church is to “present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing … holy and blameless” (Eph. 5:27 NASB). Although these words doubtless apply to the church in the final consummation, there is also the possible implication of a purified church in glory that even now fulfills Christ’s final purpose. There may be a further suggestion of this from the scene in the Book of Revelation where there is great joy in heaven: “Let us rejoice and be glad and give him the glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear” (19:7–8 NIV). That this is a heavenly scene is further shown where John writes, “I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (21:2). Once again, although this is a picture of the consummation,[74] heaven is unmistakably the background. There is a church in glory even now.

This, however, is not a church different from the church on earth that is universal and local. It is the same, yet now “a glorious church”[75] —a purified church, a truly holy church. This church in glory is the heavenly Jerusalem.[76] It is surrounded by myriads—thousands upon thousands—of angels; it is the transcendent church of perfected saints. While the church on earth is sometimes

called “the church militant,” its heavenly counterpart is referred to as “the church triumphant.” Its battles on earth are over; the victory has been won![77] However, the important thing is that the church in heaven is the church radiant with the divine glory.

The church in heaven is truly the transcendent church. We cannot behold the heavenly church; however, in worship we come very close to it. Spiritually, as Hebrews describes it, we come to “Mount Zion,” and perhaps we sense the myriad hosts of angels and “the church of the first-born” there assembled. Most of all, in times of high praise we may even envision the myriads of angels also praising God[78] and the glorified church joining them.[79] It is good to know that both on earth and in heaven the worship of God never ceases! Still, the church above is not visible.

Moreover, I must now add, even our richest spiritual experience does not—indeed cannot—include direct contact with the church in heaven. There is no biblical suggestion that we may make contact with the church in glory. The expression “the communion of saints,”[80] while it may include the church in heaven,[81] is not a communion with departed saints. The church in glory may indeed be aware of our praise and activity,[82] but contrariwise there seems to be no biblical evidence of the glorified saints making contact with saints on earth. Still—it is important to add—it is the one church of Jesus Christ on earth and in heaven.

EXCURSUS: THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

One of the most significant features of church activity in the twentieth century has been the ecumenical movement. *Ecumenical*[83] is often used to describe the movement that seeks to foster cooperation and unity among all churches.

The usual date suggested for the beginning of the ecumenical movement is 1910 with the convening of the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh. This was the first truly international and multidenominational conference. Its purpose was to discuss the growing problems connected with disunity and division, even competition, of churches on the mission field. The conference led some to the vision of a united church, and out of it came a call from Edinburgh to the church at large to confront divisive issues of doctrine and practice. One result was the first world conference on Faith and Order that convened in Lausanne in 1927. Rather than being a gathering of missionary societies as at Edinburgh, this was formally an inter-church assembly. As before, it was a Protestant gathering; however, many evangelical churches did not attend. The conference at Lausanne was con cerned primarily with doctrinal questions that divided the churches.

At another world conference on Faith and Order convened at Edinburgh in 1937 came a call for the formation of a world council of churches. As a result, 148 denominational groups gathered in Amsterdam in 1948 and founded the World Council of Churches. The intention was not to create a superchurch, but to serve all the member churches in various ways, including the promotion of visible unity. A brief statement of theological basis was adopted: “The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior.”

In 1961 at New Delhi the World Council of Churches was enlarged beyond its basically Protestant constituency to include the Russian Orthodox Church and two Pentecostal churches from Chile. Also, for the first time, Roman Catholic observers were officially present. Likewise, the International Missionary Council, which had been formed in 1921 as one of the results of the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, merged with the World Council. Further, the original doctrinal statement was expanded to read: “The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God

and Savior according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

Another striking ecumenical development occurred with the convening of the Roman Catholic Vatican Council II (1962–65). Sessions were presided over by Pope John XXIII and his successor, Pope Paul VI, with some 2,500 bishops from around the world officially present. The expressed intention of the Council was to renew and update various areas of the church's faith and life. Along with this was a strong emphasis on ecumenism. For one thing, even as Roman Catholic observers had been present in 1961 at New Delhi, both Protestant and Orthodox observers were invited and so attended all the sessions. Most importantly, one of the deliverances of the Council, the "Decree on Ecumenism," called for "the Catholic faithful to recognize the signs of the times and participate skillfully in the work of ecumenism."[84] For the first time it recognized non-Roman Catholic Christians as "brothers in the Lord," though "separated," for "it is through Christ's Catholic Church alone … that the fullness of the means of salvation can be attained."[85] The Eastern Orthodox Churches were fully recognized as churches and Protestant churches were designated as "ecclesial communities."[86] For Rome these were large ecumenical steps. At the end of Vatican II in December 1965, Pope Paul and Patriarch Athenagoras, head of Eastern Orthodoxy, issued a joint declaration removing the mutual excommunication of A.D. 1054 that had divided the Roman and Eastern churches and expressing a desire for restoration of full communion in faith and sacramental life. Also, a permanent Secretariat for Christian Unity was created. Since that time numerous conferences and dialogues between Roman and non-Roman churches have been held.[87]

Since New Delhi numerous bilateral dialogues between denominations,[88] ongoing Faith and Order conferences,[89] and an increasing number of denominational mergers[90] have taken place. There is undoubtedly a growing conviction among many denominations that the former multiplication of divisions should now move in the direction of cooperation and unity.

Evangelicals on the whole have been hesitant to participate in the ecumenical movement. Since the shift after Edinburgh, 1910, from missionary societies seeking harmony in the mission fields to official church gatherings ultimately seeking union, many evangelicals have drawn back. Another group that emerged from Edinburgh—in addition to Faith and Order—was Life and Work. One of its early mottos was "Doctrine Divides, but Service Unites" (Stockholm, 1925). This is the kind of trend that evangelicals have been wary of: the dilution of doctrine. Even though Faith and Order has been devoted primarily to issues of

doctrine and the World Council of Churches presently has a strong Christological and Trinitarian confessional basis, evangelicals have feared insufficient concern for the full orthodox Christian faith. Also, many evangelicals have questioned the commitment of the ecumenical movement to evangelism and missions as well as to the need for a personal experience of regeneration. Further, evangelicals are concerned about the support that the World Council has often given to Third World leftist movements.

The emphasis of evangelicals has been more on cooperation than on visible union. On the American scene, for example, over against the Federal (later National) Council of Churches (founded in 1908), which sought unification of churches on a federation model and espoused various liberal causes, a number of evangelicals formed the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in 1942. The NAE drew up an orthodox confession of faith, stressing certain fundamentals that are required for churches and de nominations to confess if they wish to belong, and has developed a program of action in such spheres as evangelism, Christian education, and missions. Members of the NAE have also worked with evangelicals in other countries to organize the World Evangelical Fellowship (beginning in 1951). “Fellowship” suggests more concern for working together and mutual support than for church union. Conferences on evangelism and missions have become increasingly the orientation of evangelicals, such as a World Congress on Evangelism in 1966 in West Berlin sponsored by *Christianity Today*, a leading evangelical Protestant magazine; a Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne in 1974 convened by 142 evangelical leaders under the honorary chairmanship of Billy Graham; and Lausanne II in Manila in 1989.

Lausanne I in 1974 produced a widely acclaimed Lausanne Covenant that stressed the need for “the church’s visible unity in truth” along with the mandate for world evangelization. Lausanne II met in Manila with over 3,500 participants from 186 countries present. Facing the last decade of the twentieth century, they sought to lay out strategies for a worldwide evangelistic endeavor. Beginning with Berlin in 1966, these have all been ecumenical conferences in the sense of being worldwide—across “the inhabited earth.” But the emphasis has been on cooperation for a worldwide task rather than achieving a recognizable Christian unity.

In many ways the mainline ecumenical movement—sometimes called the conciliar movement (World Council, Vatican II Council, National Council, etc.)—and the evangelical cooperation movement run side by side. For example, in the same year (1989) that Lausanne II, the evangelical Conference on World Evangelization, was being held, the World Council of Churches had a

Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in San Antonio, Texas. Moreover, there are some evangelical churches in the World Council of Churches,[91] and a number of World Council member churches have groups within that are active in evangelical meetings and activities.[92] So there is overlap, and perhaps an increasing convergence, between the interests and aims of the two movements.

A brief reflection: the concern of this excursus has been primarily on the ecumenical movement and its connection with the unity of the church. I am convinced that this is very important. Cooperation among denominations in evangelism and missions (and in many other ways) is an important first step, but it should not be the final one. Since 1900, multiple denominations in America have sprung up. No matter how much they may work together (often they do not), there is still the stumbling block, the scandal, of divided churches seeking to evangelize the world. The chief evangelical thrust is missionary, namely, to bring the world to faith in Jesus Christ, yet one of the greatest barriers to this is the church's own disunity. It is only, according to Jesus Himself, as we become "perfectly one"—or are "perfected in one"[93] — that the world can believe.

Evangelicals often say that their chief opposition to the ecumenical movement is the matter of truth. I agree that in many denominations affiliated with the movement there has been doctrinal weakness. However, as noted, the World Council of Churches is strong in its declaration of Jesus Christ as "God and Savior" and its statement on the Trinity—"one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Also, many of the denominations involved affirm such ancient orthodox creeds as Nicea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon (the nonaffiliated Roman church does the same). These creedal statements include such additional "fundamentals" as Christ's virgin birth, vicarious atonement, and bodily resurrection. Evangelicals do well to stress the need for doctrinal purity, but they often fail to recognize adequately its existence in the ecumenical movement.

There are doctrinal problems, of course; however, the really divisive issue, I submit, is not theological but existential. Thus it is not primarily a matter of doctrine but of Christian experience.[94] Does the ecumenical movement place sufficient stress on the nature of the church as *ekklēesia*, "called out" of the world together with other believers to Jesus Christ? Its members may make quite correct theological statements about Jesus Christ and the Triune God and confess adherence to orthodox formulations of faith, but none of this is the church's essence. Even Satan knows that Christ is God and that there is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but he surely does not belong to those who are "called out." Hence when the way to visible unity is viewed largely as the way of doctrinal affirmation or practical expression, this is not sufficiently fundamental. The real

issue is calling, without which the church does not exist at all. Hence the fundamental matter is salvation—whether defined as effectual calling, regeneration, justification, or initial sanctification.[95] One may applaud efforts of the churches to unite, but one must also recognize that without the undergirding of salvation there is nothing that can unite them except outward forms.

The primary concern in the ecumenical movement should be with the spiritual vitality of the churches seeking to unite. It is good to know that there is some increasing doctrinal convergence—also progress on such matters as ministerial orders, sacraments, and church polity.[96] But the heart of the matter is still missing if there is not the fundamental, even driving, concern to face up to the issue of salvation in the churches. One may be grateful for the outward witness of the World Council of Churches in seeking to bring churches together and for the fact that the Roman church is becoming more ecumenical in relation to Protestants and has removed a thousand-year-old ban of excommunication regarding the Eastern church. Yet one needs to be aware that the truly critical issues have not yet been dealt with.

This might even mean a call for the conversion of the church! I do not intend to suggest that there are not true believers in all churches—Protestant, Roman, and Eastern—who consequently form a salvific core and are the true church. For indeed there are many. Nor do I intend to imply that all efforts that seek to achieve outward unity should cease. For making these efforts is far better than seeking to maintain old walls of isolated enclaves of churches. Nor again do I intend to suggest that the whole church will ever be completely converted. Among the "wheat" there will always be "tares" that cannot be rooted out. But the basic question must be faced: *Whom are we seeking to unify?* The church in Jerusalem, according to Acts 2, knew tremendous unity; they were together in many ways. But this happened only because they were a saved people and others being saved continued to join them: "The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (v. 47). Thus there needs to be the unmuted call of the church to inward transformation. As the ferment of the gospel works within, increasingly the realization of unity born truly of the Lord will occur.

[1]See the next section.

[2]I say "may begin" because a number of early Greek manuscripts do not contain "at Ephesus." "Ephesus," however, is included in kjv, niv, nasb, and neb. F. F. Bruce states that "the weight of documentary evidence indicates that the phrase 'at Ephesus' is not part of the original wording"

(*Epistle to the Colossians, Philemon, and the Ephesians, NICNT*, 249-50). Bruce suggests that a space may have been left in the original letter to be filled in for each church to which it was sent, e.g., "at Philippi," "at Laodicea," etc. This idea of a circular letter may be appropriate in light of the fact that no references are made in the letter to persons in Ephesus or in any other particular church. (For a fuller discussion of this whole matter see EGT, 3:227-33.)

[3]The four attributes (sometimes called "notes") to be discussed follow the pattern of the Creed of Nicea-Constantinople (popularly known as the Nicene Creed, a.d. 381). In this creed is the affirmation "We believe … in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church" (see, e.g., John Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, 33). The Nicene Creed is generally accepted throughout Christendom as representing the orthodox Christian faith.

[4]See "The Body of Christ" and "The Bride of Christ," pages 65-77.

[5]Compare Paul's words about "the mystery" now "revealed to his [Christ's] holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit … [that] the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body" (Eph. 3:4-6).

[6]Literally, in each case "I am of Paul, … I of Apollos," etc.

[7]The party that said, "I belong to Christ," in this context is apparently a faction also. "I belong to Christ" would seem to be what all should be saying; however, here there is a touch of superiority in these words. I am reminded by this of some denominations that lay claim to *the* name "Christian"-we are "*the* Christian Church," "the Church of Christ," etc.

[8]The Greek word is *kleseos*, from *kaled*, hence referring to the calling to salvation.

[9]The Greek word is *eklethete*, likewise from *kaled*.

[10]The pronoun "you" is in the singular throughout these verses. However, Paul is not addressing a particular person but the Gentiles collectively ("Now I am speaking to you Gentiles" [v. 13]).

[11]According to the Westminster Confession, "the purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan" (15.1).

[12]I say "a part" because they were "added" to the others (the one hundred and twenty at Pentecost); thus the *ekklēesia* was already in existence.

[13]One of the three creeds (the other two are the Apostles' and the Nicene) widely used in Western Christendom to express the orthodox faith. The

date of the creed is uncertain.

[14]Recall the neb translation in 1 Peter 1:1.

[15]See also Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2.

[16]Qädös. See Renewal Theology, 2:83, n.2 for more detail.

[17]The kjv, rsv, and nasb read “sanctification.” The Greek word *hagiasmos* can be translated either way.

[18]"Recall 1 Corinthians 1:2.

[19]Recall Peter’s words: “You are the Holy One of God” (John 6:69).

[20]See *Renewal Theology*, 2:83-117 (chap. 4, “Sanctification”), for a discussion of this matter.

[21]These words were spoken to Isaiah the prophet against the background of the mighty seraphim crying forth, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory” (v. 3).

[22]Psalm 111:9 in the kjv reads: “holy and reverend is his name.” This, of course, refers to God, not to any man.

[23]As, for example, in the Roman Catholic Church, where sainthood belongs only to certain departed ones who are elevated by the church to a higher level through a process of beatification and canonization (see article “Canonization” in EDT). See also *Renewal Theology*, 2:83. n.20.

[24]The Greek word translated “temple” is *naos*, meaning “shrine”-the inmost sanctuary or Holy of Holies, of the Old Testament temple. Another Greek word, hieron, refers to the temple, including all its precincts. Hence, although “temple” is the usual translation for naos, the idea of God’s shrine or Holy of Holies should be kept in mind.

[25]Earlier in this chapter Paul writes to the Corinthians: “You are God’s field, God’s building” (v. 9). Verses 16-18 follow immediately after the description of the church as God’s building (vv. 10-15).

[26]In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Paul does speak of the individual when he writes, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? … Glorify God in your body.” Here the context of Paul’s statement deals with personal, sexual immorality (see v. 18).

[27]This is the basic fact of the believer’s life. So *Paul writes* in Romans: “You are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God really dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him” (8:9).

[28]The kjv has “defiles” instead of “destroys.” The Greek word phtheirei can

mean “ruin” or “corrupt,” hence “defiles.” However, according to BAGD and TDNT, “destroys” is the proper translation in this context.

[29]The Greek word is phtherei.

[30]Paul does not say how one may destroy the church. Probably he is referring to those who were attempting to divide the church in Corinth (1:10-13; 3:1-4) and thus render it a mortal blow: to divide would be to destroy. It is sometimes suggested that Paul may be referring to some of the immoralities in Corinth, to be discussed later. However, this is less likely, for even in the worst case of incest, the offender, says Paul, is to be delivered “to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (5:5). This perpetrator of incest was not therefore ultimately destroyed, for he did not destroy the church despite his gross immorality. Thus it seems clear that Paul is referring to the dividing of the church, God’s holy temple, as the cause for God’s final destruction (see next footnote).

[31]According to BAGD, “destroy” (in “God will destroy”) means to “punish with eternal destruction” (see tfideipa), 2.c.). That this is the meaning is all the more apparent from the preceding verses about the church as God’s building. One may even build poorly upon the foundation, namely Christ, and still “be saved, but only as through fire [consuming the hay, wood, and stubble]” (v. 15). But to destroy the church, God’s holy dwelling place, can only result in eternal destruction.

[32]The Greek phrase is *oikos pneumatikos*.

[33]I will discuss the nature of these spiritual sacrifices at a later place (see “The Primacy of Worship,” pp. 87-90).

[34]*Katholikos* is a combination of *kata*, “through” or “concerning,” and *holos*, “whole” or “entire.”

[35]Recall our previous discussion of “universal” at the beginning of this chapter.

[36]*Oikoumene* is derived from *oikein*, “to inhabit.”

[37]E.g., see Luke 4:5; Acts 11:28; Romans 10:18; Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 3:10. *Oikoumene* occurs fifteen times in the New Testament.

[38]Paul writes to the Colossians about a universal proclamation of the gospel: “the gospel which you heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven” (1:23; cf. Rom. 10:18). F. F. Bruce suggests that this is a “prophetic prolepsis [anticipation]” (*Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT, 791).

[39]The word ecumenical describes the early universal councils of the church, e.g., the councils of Nicea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon. These were councils of the whole undivided church, hence ecumenical. Ecumenical is now more commonly associated with a movement-the "ecumenical movement"-that seeks to restore the visible unity of the church. See "Excursus on the Ecumenical Movement," pages 43-48.

[40]The word *catholic* in a nonecclesiastical context is often used to refer to a comprehensiveness or broadness in attitude and orientation-"in sympathies, understanding, appreciation, and interest: not narrow, isolative, provincial, or partisan" (*Webster's Third International Dictionary*). The latter part of this definition could be used specifically of a truly catholic church.

[41]See, e.g., *The City of God*, 18:51, where Augustine speaks of the Catholic Church as over against various heresies.

[42]Hence also such designations as "Greek Catholic" and "Anglo-Catholic" are improper.

[43]"Apostle" is derived from the Greek word *apostello*, "send out, or away." Christ was the first to be sent by the Father.

[44]Acts 1:2 speaks of the risen Jesus "until the day he was taken up … giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen" (niv).

[45]Paul inquires rhetorically: "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1). A basic requirement for the apostleship was that of having seen Jesus in His resurrection. See Peter's words in Acts 1:22-"a witness to his resurrection."

[46]This is not to say that all the books in the New Testament canon were written by the apostles (e.g., neither Mark nor Luke were apostles). However, they were either written by an apostle or carried apostolic authentication.

[47]Paul again is included, for though he did not know Jesus during the days of His ministry, he was given the gospel by special revelation, "I did not receive it [the gospel] from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:12).

[48]Or "annulled" (*Bruce's trans.*, The Gospel of John, 234). The Greek word is *luthenai*. Although in this context Jesus was referring to a particular psalm (see context), His statement clearly refers to the whole of the Old Testament. (Cf. also Matt. 5:17-18).

[49]A clear reference to the Old Testament. Paul was writing to Timothy when he said, “From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures.” New Testament Scriptures, of course, came many years later.

[50]Here the reference may include the New Testament as well. Peter, for example, speaks of Paul’s letters as Scripture: “His [Paul’s] letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:16 NIV).

[51]Irenaeus (ca. 130–200), bishop of Lyons, in his struggle against heresies wrote that apostles had established a line of succession through the bishops, who by their teaching authority could determine the truth.

[52]The word *bishop* is derived from the Greek word *episkopos*.

[53]According to Vatican Council II (1962-65) of the Roman church, “by divine institution bishops have succeeded to the place of apostles as shepherds of the church, and … he who hears them hears Christ, while he who rejects them rejects Christ and Him who sent Christ [cf. Lk. 10:16]” (*Dogmatic Constitution of the Church*, chap. 3, “The Hierarchical Structure of the Church, with Special Reference to the Episcopate,” sec. 20).

[54]"The order of bishops is the successor to the college of the apostles in teaching authority and pastoral rule…. But this power can be exercised only with the consent of the Roman pontiff. For our Lord made Simon Peter alone the rock and key-bearer of the Church” (ibid., sec. 22).

[55]The Greek word is *charisma*, a “gift of grace.” See *Renewal Theology*, 2:345-46, “Excursus on the Word *Charisma*.”

[56]See, e.g., Titus 1:5, 7 where elders and bishops (or “overseers”) are unmistakably the same persons.

[57]This is all the more strange in light of the aforementioned Roman dogma that “the order of bishops is the successor to the college of the apostles”!

[58]"This theory of succession did not arise before a.d. 170-200” (“Apostolic Succession,” EDT, 73)-the time of Irenaeus (see n.51).

[59]Not until a.d. 367 was the present New Testament canon of twenty-seven books fully accepted.

[60]Two final comments here: (1) Paul speaks of apostles and prophets as the foundation- “the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph. 2:20; see chap. 5 in this volume for a discussion of prophets); (2) ultimately Christ Himself is the foundation,

as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:11-12; however, he may also be called "the chief Cornerstone" (see continuance of Eph. 2:20 nasb). In any event, the apostles are foundational to the life and ministry of the church. (For more on apostles and prophets see pp. 165-74).

[61]A. H. Strong writes, "The local church is a microcosm, a specialized localization of the universal body" (*Systematic Theology*, 892).

[62]The Greek phrase is kat' *oikon auton* and can be translated literally "at their house." The niv so translates it and reads, "the church that meets at their house." Kat* oikon is likewise the Greek phrase in Romans 16:5; Colossians 4:15; and Philemon 1-2 (also quoted in this paragraph).

[63]The phrase (as in 1 Cor. 16:19 and others) is again *kat' oikon*. The translation "from house to house" (kjv, nasb), while not literal, does convey a helpful picture that these were not just families breaking bread in their individual homes but believers meeting in one another's homes, hence the phrase "from house to house."

[64]MIn fact, the kjv reads, "The Lord added to the church [rather than 'to their number'] daily. …" The word "church," *ekklēesia*, however, does not appear in the earliest ancient manuscripts (see chap. 1, n. 24). Nonetheless the kjv translation does properly convey the truth that these gatherings in the temple and in homes were the *ekklēesia* to which God added people day by day. (The word *ekklēesia* is not used until Acts 5:11.)

[65]The Greek phrase again is *kat' oikon*.

[66]The Greek phrase is *kat' tous oikous*.

[67]Recall, e.g., reference to Laodicea where Paul mentions both "Nympha and the church in her house" and "the church of the Laodiceans."

[68]In writing to the Corinthians Paul speaks at one point of the "whole church" coming together-"If … the whole church assembles" (1 Cor. 14:23). This suggests that, in addition to gatherings of the whole church in Corinth, there were also smaller assemblies.

[69]In one sense this means that there was only one church in a given city ; however, this is quite different from a particular church in a city calling itself "the local church" to the exclusion of all other churches. I refer here particularly to the Local Church movement, founded by Witness Lee. Headquartered in Anaheim, California, it claims "one city, one church," thereby designating itself "the Church in Anaheim" (similarly "the Church in Seattle," etc.). All other "churches" are viewed as pseudo-

churches. See Neil T. Duddy and the SCP, *The God-Men: An Inquiry into Witness Lee and the Local Church; also Jack Sparks, The Mind Benders, Part 3, "The Local Church of Witness Lee*."

[70]It is quite significant that shortly after Jesus refers to the church in Matthew 18:17, He declares, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (v. 20). The two or three accordingly are an *ekklēesia*. According to EGT, the wording in Matthew 18:20 "is a synonym for the new society. The *ecclesia* is a body of men [people] gathered together by a common relation to the name of Christ" (1:241).

[71]The niv reads, "thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly" (similarly rsv). The "general assembly" or "joyful assembly" can refer to the angels (so F. F. Bruce in *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT, in loco); however, I am inclined to the nasb (similarly kjv and neb) translation because of the overall context.

[72]"The first-born" refers to Christ. See Hebrews 1:6 (also cf. Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15, 18; Rev. 1:5).

[73]The phrase "the church of the first-born" has also been interpreted as referring to angels (e.g., see EGT, *Hebrews*, in loco) as well as to those who died "in faith" prior to Christ's coming. (Calvin speaks of the phrase as referring to the patriarchs and other renowned saints of the ancient church [*Commentaries, Hebrews*, in loco].) Bruce in response to both such views writes that "more probably the reference is to the whole communion of saints, including those who, while 'militant on earth,' are enrolled as citizens of heaven" (*Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT, 376–77). While Bruce provides a good answer to the prior views mentioned, I do not believe his statement clearly enough differentiates between the church "militant" and the church in heaven. It is interesting that in a footnote to the words I quoted, Bruce affirmatively refers to some words of B. F. Westcott: "Christian believers in Christ, alike living and dead, are united in the body of Christ." This statement clearly distinguishes between the believers living and dead, hence, by extension the church now on earth and the church in heaven. Hebrews 12:23, I submit, refers to the church in heaven.

[74]Revelation 21 begins, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth."

[75]The kjv translation in Ephesians 5:27.

[76]As depicted both in Hebrews and in Revelation.

[77]L. Berkhof writes, "If the Church on earth is the militant Church, the

Church in heaven is the triumphant Church. There the sword is exchanged for the palm of victory, the battle- cries are turned into songs of triumph, and the cross is replaced by the crown" (*Systematic Theology*, 565).

[78]For the continuing praise given by angels see especially Revelation 5:11-13.

[79]Also in Revelation 5:13 John declares, "I heard every creature in heaven and on earth … saying 'To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!' " Every creature in heaven surely includes the glorified church. Some interpreters view the twenty-four elders in heaven who frequently offer praise (Rev. 4:4, 9-11; 5:8-10; 11:16-18; 19:4-5) as representing the glorified church (the twelve Old Testament patriarchs plus the twelve New Testament apostles; cf. Rev. 21:12-14). In any event the church in glory is a praising church.

[80]In the Apostles' Creed just following the affirmation "I believe in the holy catholic church" are the words "in the communion of saints." The last phrase has sometimes been understood to refer to a heavenly/earthly communion, so that, for example, one may pray to the saints in heaven. There is no biblical basis for such an understanding and practice. (For further discussion of "The Communion of Saints" see pp. 82-83.)

[81]Karl Barth writes, "To the *communio sanctorum* belongs not only the *ecclesia militans* but also the *ecclesia triumphans* … therefore the communion of the blessed who have gone before us" (Credo, 194).

[82]If the elders in Revelation represent the glorified church, they seem to be aware of what is happening on earth. Note particularly Revelation 7:13-14, where one of the elders speaks knowingly of "the great tribulation" on earth and of the persons in heaven who have come out of it. Hebrews 12:1-2 depicts the Christian life as a race of perseverance, which begins by affirming that we are "surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses." While these witnesses may refer primarily to Old Testament men and women of faith, they could also include New Testament believers who have passed on into glory. Leon Morris writes that "perhaps we should think of something like a relay race where those who have finished their course and handed in their baton are watching and encouraging their successors" (*Hebrews*, EBC, 133).

[83]See note 39.

[84]Section 4.

[85]Section 3. This sounds, however, as if non-Roman brothers are still deficient. Nevertheless, for Roman Catholics, this was a big step ahead from the days when they recognized no “brothers in the Lord” outside the Roman fold.

[86]I.e., not fully churches. One of the reasons given was this: “The ecclesial communities separated from us lack that fullness of unity with us [and] we believe that especially because of the lack of the sacrament of orders [in which priests alone participate] they have not preserved the genuine and total reality of the Eucharistic mystery” (sec. 22). Although this is a very limited statement from the Protestant perspective, it is a far cry from the older exclusivist Roman position.

[87]This has also included dialogue of the Vatican with representatives of the charismatic movement and Pentecostal churches since early meetings in 1972. The dialogue has continued to prove fruitful in fostering better understanding between the Roman church and the Pentecostal renewal.

[88]See, e.g., H. Meyer and L. Vischer, *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*. In the United States one of the most extended has been the Consultation on Church Union (COCU), which began in 1960, that seeks to bring together several denominations into the Church of Christ Uniting (“uniting” signifying an invitation to other denominations to come into the union).

[89]One of the most significant was the meeting in Lima, Peru in 1982 that finalized a consensus on baptism, Eucharist, and ministry (all highly critical points of traditional differences) as part of a program to set forth a statement of apostolic faith for today that all could agree on.

[90]Some of these have been interdenominational mergers, such as the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Evangelical United Brethren to form the United Methodist Church, and the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Congregational Church to form the United Church of Christ. Others have been intradenominational, such as the Presbyterian Church UPUSA and the Presbyterian Church, U.S. (a cleavage going back to the Civil War), to form the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., and the merger of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), the American Lutheran Church (ALC), and the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (AELC) to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

[91]E.g., Pentecostal churches, mentioned earlier, that are affiliated with the World Council.

[92]Almost all major denominations affiliated with the WCC and/or the NCC have minority groups within that are strongly evangelical-for example, the Presbyterian Evangelical Fellowship (PEF).

[93]The literal translation of John 17:23-"*teteleiomenoi eis hen.*"

[94]This is not to deny that there are serious theological differences, indeed in many cases increasing apostasy from established creedal and confessional standards. However, the root cause of this is existential-the failure to experience the realities to which historical creeds and confessions refer.

[95]See a discussion of these matters in *Renewal Theology*, volume 2, chapters 1-4.

[96]Such discussions continually go on.

3
Description

We will now examine some of the Bible’s descriptions of the church. Our focus will be on those images that give particular insight into the nature of the church.

I. THE PEOPLE OF GOD

The church as the people of God will be our starting point. This image[1] of the church is basic to whatever else may be said.[2] It provides an extraordinary description of the church, bringing together the witness of both the Old Testament and the New. Let us look first at the Old Testament.

Background: Israel as God's People

In the Old Testament the people of Israel were designated God's people. This first occurred when God spoke to Moses at the burning bush. There God said, "I have seen the affliction of my people … and I have come down to deliver them…. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt" (Exod. 3:7–8, 10). "My people," hence the people of God, were declared to be the Israelites. Later God said, "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment, and I will take you for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God" (Exod. 6:6–7). Subsequently the redemption from Egyptian bondage occurred.

Why were the Israelites God's people? The biblical answer is that their selection was wholly due to God's decision. For example, years later Moses declared, "The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deut. 7:6 NASB). He gave this reason: "Because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers" (v. 8 NASB)—i.e., to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—about the future possession of the land of Canaan. Here is both the fact, indeed the mystery, of God's special love for Israel, and His faithfulness to the earlier covenant with Abraham.[3] Accordingly, Israel was God's people not because they decided to call themselves so[4] or because they were a particularly impressive people;[5] rather, it was wholly a matter of God's own doing.

But now an additional fact must be added: Although the Israelites did not choose to be God's people, God's choice laid a definite obligation upon them.

Here we turn to the time when God spoke through Moses on Mount Sinai: “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples…. You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:4–6). This did not mean that God would ever annul a special relationship to Israel; however, obedience to the covenant (particularly the Ten Commandments and the ordinances detailed in chapters 20–23) was required.

The Old Testament picture after these events at Mount Sinai is almost totally one of Israel’s failure to obey. Israel remained God’s people, though at times God’s wrath nearly consumed them. Indeed, while Israel was still at Mount Sinai and Moses was on the mountain receiving instruction for building the tabernacle, Aaron made a golden calf for the Israelites to worship. God declared to Moses, “I have seen this people,[6] and behold, it is a stiff-necked people; now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; but of you I will make a great nation” (Exod. 32:9–10). Moses interceded, “O LORD, why does thy wrath burn hot against thy people …?” (v. 11); and God relented. Israel continued as God’s people despite their frequent acts of rebellion and disobedience. By the eighth century B.C. Israel, through her flagrant idolatry and gross immorality, apparently forfeited any right to be God’s people. Indeed, after a certain son was born to Hosea, the Lord said to the prophet, “Call his name Not my people, for you are not my people and I am not your God” (1:9). Thus Israel was declared to be God’s people no longer. Immediately God added, however: “In the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ it shall be said to them, ‘Sons of the living God’ “ (v. 10). Thus the hope was held out that Israel would some day fulfill her calling to be God’s people.

Finally, we may note the situation of Israel after the Exile. Through the prophet Ezekiel, God gave this promise concerning Judah and Israel: “I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God” (Ezek. 37:23). Israel—God’s chosen people—will truly become God’s people once they have been cleansed of their sinfulness.

This is the climactic Old Testament note about Israel as the people of God. In one sense Israel, chosen by God, remained His people; in another sense Israel, constantly disobeying and finally being sent into captivity, desperately needed a radical change, a full cleansing, a work of salvation (“I will save them…”). Only then could they become truly the people of God.

A. A Composite People

The church is the composite people of God. One of the most striking features of the New Testament is that it depicts the church as composed of both Jews and Gentiles. The extraordinary fact is that the Gentiles are now included in the Old Testament promises.

Let us look first at Paul's teaching in Romans. At one point the apostle speaks of "us whom he [God] has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles" (9:24). Then Paul, quoting freely from Hosea, immediately adds in reference to the Gentiles: "As indeed he says in Hosea, Those who were not my people I will call 'my people'…. And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God'" (vv. 25–26). These words, as we have seen, were spoken by Hosea in regard to Israel; now they are applied to the Gentiles, who formerly were not God's people.[7] Obviously not all Jews or all Gentiles make up God's people, but only those whom God has called "from the Jews" and "from the Gentiles."

In regard to Israel, Paul proceeds to speak of "a remnant" coming to salvation: "Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved'" (v. 27).[8] By the calling of the remnant and their coming to faith, God maintains His original covenant with Israel.

It is important to add that God has not rejected the Israelite people. Even though Hosea's words—"not my people"—now refer particularly to the Gentiles, the Jews are still included in God's overall promise. Paul continues to deal with this matter in Romans, beginning with the question, "I ask, then, has God rejected his people [i.e., ethnic Israel]?" He responds vigorously, "By no means!" (11:1). Later Paul speaks again of the remnant: "At the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace" (v. 5). Thus Israel is not rejected, for through the remnant the promise is maintained. Moreover, as Paul moves on to say, a day is coming when God's promise will be gloriously fulfilled: "all Israel will be saved" (v. 26)! At present, says Paul, "Israel has experienced a hardening in part" and this will continue "until the full number of the Gentiles has come in" (v. 25 NIV). Then Israel will come to salvation.

The people of God—the church—accordingly is now composed of Gentiles and the Jewish remnant. Together both believing Gentiles and Jews constitute the people of God. It is a people no longer based on racial or national lines, but

on the calling of God in Christ. Here we return to the significant words of Peter: “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people…” (1 Peter 2:9). Although much of this language is borrowed from Old Testament[9] references to ethnic Israel, Peter here applies it to Christian believers in many places.[10] Wherever they are and whoever they are, Christians corporately are the people of God.

B. A New People

The church is not simply a composite of Jew and Gentile or a collection of people from many nations who now are joined together. It is all of that, but much more. The church is the new people of God. This truth may be viewed from several perspectives.

1. A People Redeemed

One of the most striking New Testament statements in this regard is that by Paul (as quoted earlier): "Our great God and Savior Jesus Christ … gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own"[11] (Titus 2:13–14). Christ's sacrifice has brought redemption and purification into the lives of those who have received it. They are God's "own," hence the people of God. Here let us observe the words "to redeem us from all iniquity."[12] The new people of God have been redeemed from all iniquity, whatever its size and weight, whatever its perversity and heinousness, whatever its burden and bondage.

The Old Testament people of God, Israel, had likewise experienced a great redemption, namely from bondage in Egypt. In the words of Moses to Israel, "The LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (Deut. 7:8).[13] This redemption was from physical bondage and served as the immediate background for God's declaration that Israel was to be His special people: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians…. Now, therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples" (Exod. 19:4–5). In a real sense Israel always looked back to God's act of redemption from Egypt—the act that freed them to serve God and to be His people.

The New Testament people of God, Jews and Gentiles alike, have experienced a far greater redemption—from all iniquity. It is a redemption not from physical bondage[14] but from that which is far worse, spiritual bondage, not from the land of Egypt but from the realm of evil, not from the power of Pharaoh but from the dominion of Satan and darkness. Or to change the imagery somewhat, the New Testament people have been delivered by Jesus Christ from their former futile

ways and empty lives into newness of life. Peter thus writes, "You were redeemed[15] from the empty way of life[16] handed down to you by your forefathers … with the precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18–19 NIV). The lives of the forefathers, whether Jews or Gentiles, whatever their condition, nonetheless represented a condition of emptiness.[17] But for the redeemed people of God, through Jesus Christ, all of life has taken on new meaning and value.

Thus wherever the church assembles, it is a gathering of the redeemed people of God. They may gladly recall God's deliverance of His ancient people Israel from Egypt, or from later captivity;[18] they may even praise God the Redeemer revealed in various places in the Old Testament and yet know that through Jesus Christ full redemption has been received. In the words of Hebrews it is "an eternal redemption" (9:12).

Moreover, the redeemed people of God encompass a vast number and range of people. In the Book of Revelation a song sounds forth to Christ the Lamb: "Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom [or 'redeem'][19] men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (5:9). Here, indeed, is the new people of God—the church—ransomed, redeemed from all over the world. And it has all happened because of Jesus Christ and His vicarious sacrifice.

2. A Purified People

Redemption also includes purification. To repeat Paul's words: "Our great God and Savior Jesus Christ … gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own" (Titus 2:13–14). Redemption—his deliverance from all sin—is basic, but purification must follow, for God's new people are not only set free from the bondage of sin; they are also a purified and cleansed people.

In the Old Testament, purification followed redemption. For not only was Israel, the people of God, redeemed from Egyptian bondage, but they were also cleansed and purified. Much of this purification was ceremonial—e.g., cleansing rites for dietary and bodily uncleannesses.[20] However, there was also an emphasis on cleansing from sin and transgression, especially as set forth in the Day of Atonement ritual. In Leviticus 16, God declared through Moses to Israel: "On this day shall atonement be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins you shall be clean before the LORD" (v. 30). This cleansing, despite its significance in marking Israel as God's people, was only a foreshadowing of the

deeper and fuller cleansing through Jesus Christ. According to the book of Hebrews, the atonement ritual "cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper" (9:9; cf. also vv. 13–14); indeed, "it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins" (10:4). Moreover, the very repetition each year of the Day of Atonement ritual is in itself a demonstration that sins had not been fully cleansed.

The new people of God have received a profound cleansing. It has reached to the inner life, the heart, the conscience. Through the prophet Ezekiel God declared what He would do on a future day: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses" (Ezek. 36:25). This word spoken to exiled Israel and pointing to the occasion of their return has been fulfilled in the new people of God. In Hebrews, after reference is made to "the blood of Jesus," the writer speaks about "our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience" (10:19, 22). Thus the new people of God, through the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus, have been purified from every uncleanness.

This has all happened through faith in Christ. In regard to the initial salvation of the Gentiles, the turning of the centurion Cornelius and his household in Caesarea to Christ, Peter declared that God had "cleansed their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:9). Peter had preached the word and baptized these Gentiles, the word and water being the external means of cleansing (see Acts 10:34–48). This recalls the statement of Paul that "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word" (Eph. 5:25–26). The church—Jews and Gentiles alike—has been cleansed outwardly by water and the word, even as inwardly there has been a cleansing through faith.[21]

Praise God! The church is the new people of God purified to be His very own!

3. A Changed People

The new people of God are those whose inner lives have been radically changed. Let us now observe several other things.

a. The Law Written on the Heart. Here we turn first to the new covenant as prophesied in Jeremiah 31 and declared as fulfilled in Hebrews 8.[22] The new covenant is first described by Jeremiah with language that seems confined to Israel: "Behold, the days are coming … when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah" (31:31). The almost identical words

are repeated in the Book of Hebrews: “The days will come … when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (8:8). However, it is apparent in Hebrews that this new covenant is one mediated by Christ—“the covenant he mediates” (v. 6)[23] — and that this includes all who are called to Him.[24] It is no longer a covenant with ethnic Israel (or Israel and Judah), but with all who are called to Christ and believe in Him.[25] The church is this “called” people; and as people of a new covenant, they are a new people of God.

In the new covenant, the first statement refers to the law being written within: “This is the covenant which I will make…. I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer. 31:33).[26] The old covenant written on tables of stone (the Ten Commandments) was never truly kept by Israel, because their hearts were not right. As certification of the old covenant Israel practiced circumcision of the flesh, but the real, interior need was for a circumcision of the heart. Moses, who received the tables of stone, knowing where the real problem lay, said to Israel, “Circumcise … the foreskin of your heart” (Deut. 10:16). Then in some of his last words he declared, “The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deut. 30:6). But this never happened under the old covenant: the heart remained “uncircumcised.” Thus the new covenant, as spoken through Jeremiah, refers to a future new people of God who will be circumcised in heart:[27] they will have the law cut into, written upon, their inmost being.

So Paul was able to declare that “circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code” (Rom. 2:29 NIV). He rejoiced with the Philippians when he said, “It is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3 NIV). This is indeed a spiritual circumcision by which “the foreskin” of the heart of flesh has been removed and the law inscribed by the Holy Spirit on the innermost self.

Hence, one of the distinctives of the new people of God is that God’s will is no longer simply an external force that constantly encounters internal resistance;[28] it has now become a positive reality. Paul speaks of how Christ has “condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:3–4 nasb). As the people of God walk according to the Spirit, they fulfill the law of God.

b. A New Heart. We move on to observe that the promise of the Old Testament is not only the law written upon the hearts of people but also that the people of God will actually have an undivided heart, even a new heart, a new spirit.[29] Shortly after the words in Jeremiah about the new covenant is this declaration of God: "They shall be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them one heart and one way,[30] that they may fear [or 'reverence'] me for ever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make with them an everlasting covenant"[31] (Jer. 32:38–40). The one heart and one way, in contrast to the former situation of a people with divided hearts and multiple ways, will be fulfilled in the new and everlasting covenant.

Turning next to the prophecy of Ezekiel, we find this promise: "I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will take away the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes … they shall be my people, and I will be their God" (Ezek. ll:19–20).[32] The "one heart" replacing "the stony heart" is likewise fulfilled in the new people of God. Paul writes to the Corinthians that they are "a letter from Christ … written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor. 3:3).[33] The "stony heart" has been replaced by the "heart of flesh" through "the Spirit of the living God." Such is the picture of the New Testament people of God.

c. The Spirit Within. Two further passages in Ezekiel go even beyond the one, or new, heart and new spirit. According to Ezekiel 36, God declares, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (vv. 26–27 NIV).[34] Not only will there be a new heart and a new spirit but God will also place His own Spirit within His people. Again, in Ezekiel, God declares, "I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live" (37:14).[35]

It is the Spirit of the living God within that is the vital factor of the new people of God. This, of course, goes far beyond the Old Testament people of God, for in the New Testament fulfillment the church composed of Jews and Gentiles alike is indwelt by the Spirit of God. The words of Paul to the Gentile Ephesians are unmistakable: "You also [in addition to believing Jews] are built into it [the household of God, i.e., the church] for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:22). The Spirit has been put within the new people of God.

To summarize: The inner life of the new people of God will be radically

different from that of Israel. The promises in Jeremiah and Ezekiel were that the law would be written upon the heart (circumcision of the heart); there would indeed be a new heart (and spirit) to replace the stony heart; and God's own Spirit would dwell within. But let us change the Old Testament perspective to the present. For the people of God today, what was external has become internal; the law of God is now inscribed on the heart; the heart of stone has been replaced by a new heart and new spirit; and the Spirit of God has come within, bringing new life. Truly this is a new people of God.

C. God Dwelling in and Among His People

Here we reach the climax. We have observed how the new people of God are people whose inner lives have been radically changed by the Spirit of God coming within. Now we view this event from the divine perspective: God Himself is fulfilling His intention to have a people in whom and among whom He can dwell. It is a new mode of God's presence with His people.

Paul uses the imagery of the temple to express this indwelling. He writes, "We are the temple of the living God; as God said, T will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people' " (2 Cor. 6:16). By these words Paul declares the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise in Leviticus: "I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people" (26:12). This Old Testament promise was predicated on the obedience of Israel ("If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments…" [v. 3]), an obedience that Israel never truly fulfilled. There are, to be sure, Old Testament statements such as Exodus 25:8, "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst," and Psalm 76:2, "His abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion"; and both tabernacle and temple were viewed as places of God's dwelling. However, this was not a direct and personal indwelling of God's people. Moreover, even the indwelling of the temple edifice in later years became a thing of the past when the temple was destroyed and Israel went into exile. Indeed, God promised through Ezekiel that after the Exile Israel and Judah would one day be reunited in their own land and truly be His people: "I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. My servant David shall be king[36] over them. My dwelling place shall be with them … my sanctuary is in the midst of them for evermore" (37:23–24, 27–28). The promise concerning God's "servant David" is fulfilled in Jesus Christ—"the Lord God will give to him [Jesus] the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:32)—and the "sanctuary" in the New Testament becomes not an outward building but God's new people, the church. This brings us back to Paul's words "We are the temple of the living God; as God said, I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.' "

The new people of God are uniquely His temple. There is no longer a need or place for an earthly and material sanctuary, no matter how beautiful it may be. Any such sanctuary is greatly limited; for, however close at hand it is, such a

temple remains external to God's people. Entrance into it does not include the inmost sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, except for the high priest once a year. Moreover, such a temple at any time may be removed or destroyed and God's people left bereft.[37] Now the limitations are totally done away as God lives and moves among His new people.

The church as God's dwelling place is also described by Paul in Ephesians 2. There Paul speaks of the church as "the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone … in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (vv. 19–22).[38] The household of God consists not only of believing Jews but also of Gentiles ("in whom you also"); they together make up the new people of God, the church. The church is the dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Let us for a moment reflect on the amazing fact that God dwells in and among His people. We may here recall the words of Solomon in his prayer at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem: "Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27).[39] But an extraordinary, almost unbelievable thing has happened. God Himself has come in Jesus Christ, indeed has "tabernacled[40] among us" (John 1:14). Christ was God's new tabernacle, His new temple[41] in a way that no ancient edifice could ever be; thus He was in a unique sense "among us." Now that Christ has returned to heaven, the temple has by no means disappeared. Rather, through His work of redemption and the consequent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, believers—the church—have become the very temple of the living God.

To repeat: it is an amazing fact! Wherever the church, the true believers in Christ, gather, God dwells in their midst. He moves among them. In the Book of Revelation where the seven churches of Asia Minor are depicted as seven golden lampstands, Christ is described as One "who walks among[42] the seven golden lampstands" (2:1) Thus God, who is also Christ, walks in and among His people wherever they are. His presence is there at all times. The God of the whole universe, whom "heaven and the highest heaven"—and surely, then, any earthly temple (be it as magnificent as that of Solomon's)— cannot contain, dwells in and among His people!

Perhaps the most fitting words to close this section are these:

God Himself is with us:
Let us now adore him,

And with awe appear before Him.
God is in His temple,
All within keep silence,
And before Him bow with reverence.
Him alone, God we own;
To our Lord and Saviour
Praises sing forever.[43]

II. THE BUILDING, BODY, AND BRIDE OF CHRIST

All description of the church centers in Jesus Christ. In order to better apprehend this, we will focus on the church as the building, body, and bride of Christ.

A. The Building of Christ

The first reference in the New Testament to the church is recorded in Matthew 16:18, where Jesus declares, “I will build my church.” This statement is similar to words spoken by God through Jeremiah the prophet: “I will bring them [Israel] back to this land. I will build them up, and not tear them down; I will plant them, and not uproot them” (Jer. 24:6).[44] In Matthew the words “I will build” now are spoken by Jesus:[45] He will be the builder.[46] Thus the words of Old Testament prophecy about Israel are fulfilled in Christ.

What, however, is distinctive in Matthew is the phrase “my church.” The word church, ekklēesia, to be sure, has an Old Testament background: Israel was the assembly of God (the “ekklēesia in the wilderness”—Acts 7:38), and there is undoubtedly an important connection between the ekklēesia in the Old Testament and the ekklēesia in the New Testament. However, Jesus’ words are testimony to an ekklēesia that will be peculiarly His: “I will build my church.” The church in a very special way will be His creation and will belong to Him.

In the previous discussion of the church as “the people of God,” we have observed a certain continuity of language. This expression occurs in both Old and New Testaments, even though “the people of God” takes on a broader and deeper meaning in the New. However, the church as the building of Christ (“my church”) is language unique to the New Testament and thus points more in the direction of discontinuity, indeed to the new reality that Christ brings about.

1. Foundation

Jesus said, “On this rock I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18). Earlier in Matthew’s gospel He had stated that to hear and do His teachings is to build on a rock: “Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock” (7:24). Hence, one important aspect of the foundation is to hear and do Jesus’ words faithfully. But in the context of Jesus’ words “on this rock I will build my church,” something further is being said. The immediate background is Simon Peter’s declaration about Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus responded, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” Then He added, “And I tell you, you are Peter and

on this rock[47] I will build my church" (Matt. 16:16–18). The rock was not simply Peter himself[48] but his confession that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God.[49] Then Jesus immediately declared, "And the gates of Hades[50] will not overcome[51] it" (v. 18 NIV). No matter what may come against the church —Christ's church—it will endure.

The church is to be founded upon more than hearing and doing Jesus' words, although to do and to hear is to build upon a rock. It must also believe and proclaim that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, indeed the very Son of God. A church that is shaky about this foundation or departs from it will be no match for the gates of Hades. If, for example, Jesus is viewed as anyone less than the divine Son of God, or only as one manifestation of God among many, the sure foundation is thereby undermined. It is urgent that this foundation be firm and secure. Paul, writing to the Corinthian church, speaks of them as "God's building" (1 Cor. 3:9). Shortly after that he adds, "No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (v. 11 NIV). Of Paul—even as of Peter—when he confessed Jesus as the Christ, Jesus could truly say, "On this rock—this foundation—I will build my church."

In regard to this latter point the New Testament also asserts the apostolic foundation of the church. Paul speaks in Ephesians of the church as "the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (2:19–20). Here the imagery is somewhat different: rather than portraying Christ as foundation, the picture is that of "apostles and prophets."[52] In one sense, as we have already observed, the apostle Peter himself as confessing was the rock or the foundation; Paul likewise in Ephesians implies the same about himself and the other apostles. The apostles were the original and foundational witnesses to the truth of Christ as the Son of God, and on their testimony the church is based. Peter was the first to proclaim this truth. Because of that initial testimony, Peter was the rock, the foundational witness at Pentecost and for some time after that event.[53] At Pentecost a complete apostolic witness had already been manifested prior to Paul and other apostles.[54] Thus apostles continued to be foundational in the church of Jesus Christ.[55]

It is worth noting again that "the holy city" in the Book of Revelation is described as having "a great, high wall," and "the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (21:12, 14). Since the holy city represents the glorified church ("new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God" [v. 2]), the apostles are depicted as its foundation. This picture again demonstrates the foundational role of the apostles and the apostolic witness.

Let me strongly emphasize the importance of the apostolic foundation of the church. The church must continuously remain under apostolic tutelage as set forth in the New Testament.[56] Whenever there is departure from their authority and teaching, the church forsakes its true foundation. No other writings are on the same level as theirs, no tradition can add anything to them, and no presumed fresh revelation can carry the church beyond their witness.

To conclude this section: It is apparent that no contradiction exists between Christ being laid as a foundation (recall Paul's words in 1 Cor. 3:11) and the apostles being called the foundation. Christ, the Son of God, is the foundational truth and the apostles were those who first declared it. As such, Peter was the primary "rock" or foundation, and the other apostles were additional foundations.

2. Cornerstone

Christ Himself is depicted in many Scriptures as the cornerstone of the building. As we will note, the imagery of the cornerstone has an Old Testament background.

Let us first observe the words of Isaiah 28:16: "Behold, I am laying in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: 'He who believes will not be in haste.' " These words, spoken while Israel relied on an alliance with Egypt for protection against Assyrian invasion, depict God laying in Jerusa lem a stone, variously described as "tested," "precious," and "sure." Those who believe in this stone will not hastily rely on foreign forces and thus will be secure.[57] On the contrary, those who do not believe will be swept away as by a storm (see v. 17). Earlier, Isaiah had spoken of God Himself as both a sanctuary and a stone: "The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy … and he will be a sanctuary ; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall…. Many of them will stumble; they will fall and be broken…" (8:13–15 NIV). This extraordinary double picture describes God as a rocklike sanctuary for those who believe (look to the Lord "as holy"); but for Israel who, despite imminent invasion,[58] does not rely on God, He will be a stone on which they will be crushed. A related Old Testament passage is Psalm 118:22–23: "The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes."[59] This rejection of the stone follows the same pattern as in Isaiah's prophecies. But here, in promise, the rejected

stone becomes head of the corner, that is, the cornerstone[60] or capstone[61] of the whole building.

As we move to the New Testament, it is apparent that these Old Testament prophecies are all fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Indeed Jesus himself quotes Psalm 118:22 in the context of His own rejection by Israel. He tells a parable about the owner of a vineyard who, after his servants and finally his own son have been killed by the tenants, puts the tenants to death and rents the vineyard to others. Then Jesus quotes the Psalm: "The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes" (Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; cf. Luke 20:17). In the Matthean account Jesus immediately adds, "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (v. 43 NIV). It is clear that this will be a new building for a new people. Christ Himself will be the head cornerstone.

In the Lukan account Jesus interestingly adds words drawn from Isaiah 8:13–15: "Every one who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but when it falls on any one it will crush[62] him" (Luke 20:18). Here the picture is that of unbelievers stumbling over the stone, namely, Christ Himself or, even worse, of the day of judgment yet to come when the terrible judgment of Christ will utterly crush them. Hence, while Christ is the chief cornerstone or capstone of the building for believers, the same stone is a cause of breaking, even of crushing, for those who will not believe.

The sad and tragic story is that Israel rejected "the stone." In the Book of Acts Peter, after speaking to the Jewish Sanhedrin of "Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom [they] crucified, whom God raised from the dead," added: "This is the stone that was rejected by you builders, but which has become the head of the corner" (4:10–11). Paul later comments, "They [the Jews] stumbled over the stumbling stone, just as it is written, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed' "[63] (Rom. 9:32–33 NASB).[64] However, for those who believe, there is no disappointment: Christ is the cornerstone in the building of faith.

Peter brings together in one passage all three of the Old Testament references. First, there is the positive word from Isaiah 28: "Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, and he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed" (1 Peter 2:6 NASB). Second, on the negative side, Peter continues the other two passages from Psalm 118 and Isaiah 8 thus: "For those who disbelieve, 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner stone,' and 'a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense' " (vv. 7–8 NASB). Christ

is the cornerstone, precious for believers, but a stumbling block and an offense for unbelievers.

There is one further New Testament passage about Christ as cornerstone, one that relates only to believers, indeed to the church. Writing to the believers in Ephesus, Paul declares, "Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone"[65] (2:19–20 KJV). We have previously discussed the foundation of apostles and prophets; now we observe that Christ is the chief cornerstone. Paul here seems to be saying that Christ is the cornerstone that brings together both Gentiles and Jews. He had spoken previously of how Christ had "broken down the dividing wall of hostility" (v. 14) that separated Jews and Gentiles. Now with that wall broken down and gone, Christ places Himself in the new building as the chief cornerstone that unites and holds together formerly divided peoples.[66] There is no longer a dividing wall; rather two former walls now meet in Christ and are one in Him.

It is important to realize how far this carries us beyond the Old Testament. There was indeed a dividing wall between Israel and the surrounding world, particularly shown in the sacred pre cincts of the temple from which Gentiles were totally excluded.[67] Through Christ's death on the cross those who "once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13). Christ in building His church is Himself the chief cornerstone that binds together and supports all. Just after his words about the chief cornerstone, Paul adds, "in whom [Christ] the whole structure is joined together" (v. 21). Christ as cornerstone unites all in Himself.

Surely this speaks also to any and all divisions of people. Paul writes elsewhere, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). This obviously does not mean that Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, males and females no longer exist, for they surely do. But in Christ—to use again the imagery of cornerstone—they all come together. As chief cornerstone He is also "the head of the corner," the top or pinnacle stone,[68] in whom believers, whatever their nationality, social status, or gender, are one.

The church indeed is the building of Christ, with Himself as the cornerstone.

3. Living Stones

Finally, the building of Christ is constructed of “living stones.” Here we turn primarily to 1 Peter and the relevant words “Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up[69] as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (2:4–5 NASB).

It is significant, first, that Christ Himself is addressed by Peter as a living stone. The same Peter, who once had confessed Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the living God” and thereby was called a rock by Jesus, now calls Jesus a living stone, a living rock![70] It is almost as if Peter were saying, “Whatever might be affirmed about me in regard to a rock, look now to Christ the living One, Son of the living God, for He is the living Rock.” Second, among all references to Christ as a rock or stone (head of the corner, cornerstone, etc.) the expression “living stone” exhibits most clearly that He is no inanimate reality holding the building together but is truly alive. Christ Himself is a living stone. Third, this same Christ, while rejected by men, is choice and precious in God’s sight, and is the One to whom we are invited to come. This is indeed a beautiful invitation to come to One so highly valued.

Now we arrive at the reality that we too are living stones. Because Christ is a living stone and we are alive through faith in Him, we are also living stones.

As such we are not simply stones that are stolid and fixed in place, but we are in the process of being built up in Him “as a spiritual house.” Moreover, this means that Christ’s building is by no means complete, for although the foundation of apostles and prophets has been laid and the cornerstone of Christ set in place, believers in Him continue to be built as living stones into the edifice. Christ’s building is ever alive and growing.

Paul’s words in Ephesians, immediately following those about the foundation of apostles and prophets with Christ as chief cornerstone, are relevant here: “in whom [Christ] the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit” (2:21–22 NASB). Although Paul, unlike Peter, does not speak of “living stones,” it is apparent that essentially the same thing is being said in speaking of “growing into a holy temple.” Growth means life, hence believers are growing, living stones. As such we are “being built together” into a place of God’s dwelling.

It is interesting that the architectural language of a building—with foundation, cornerstone, and other stones—shifts into the biological: life and growth. The reason is apparent: whereas the imagery of a building properly structured is basic to an understanding of Christ and His church, the very building must be seen as a

living reality. Stones being “fitted together’ ‘—the architectural figure—must also be viewed as “growing into”—the biological figure. “Living stones” expresses both figures and makes for a valuable understanding of the place of each member of the church in relation to Christ Himself, who is the Living Stone.

A concluding word: Christ the builder, who is Himself also cornerstone and capstone and has already laid the foundation stones of the apostles and prophets, is presently fitting together and building together all the other stones. Christ shapes the stones, knows exactly where each one fits, and sets it in its proper place. Since we are “living stones,” there is nothing mechanical about this process. Recall Peter’s words: “Coming to Him as to a living stone … you also, as living stones, are being built up.”[71] As we come to Him, we put ourselves at His disposal, and Christ places us properly in His church. He may, and probably will, need to shape us, polish us, and remove rough edges so that He can make precisely the right fitting. So we need to come, and come often, to Him that we may be a vital part of His great building plans.

“I will build my church.” His church includes all who truly belong to Him.

B. The Body of Christ

The church is also the body of Christ. This New Testament image is highly significant in setting forth the nature of the church. Although there are suggestions of this imagery elsewhere, it is the apostle Paul who specifically uses it. Let us observe several examples.

Writing to the church at Corinth, Paul says, “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Cor. 12:27). To the Romans Paul declares, “We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (12:5). In his letter to the Ephesians Paul states, “Christ is the head of the church, his body” (5:23). Paul writes similarly to the Colossian church: “He is the head of the body, the church” (1:18). Other examples could be cited.[72]

Before proceeding further, we should note that there are New Testament references to the body of Christ that are not directly related to the church. They relate to Christ Himself, both physically and figuratively. Physical reference is found in such words as “she saw … where the body of Jesus had lain” (John 20:12) and “you have died to the law through the body of Christ” (Rom. 7:4). Figurative usage is to be recognized in the words of Jesus Himself about the bread in the Last Supper, “This is my body” (Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19).[73] The body of Christ, as a description for the church, needs to be viewed separately.

What does it mean, then, to say that the church is the body of Christ?[74] Three observations may now be made as to what this signifies.

1. A Vital Relationship With Christ

Since Christ is the head and the church is His body, the church has no life outside of Jesus Christ. In an organic sense what is a body without a head but a corpse? The church’s whole life is vitally connected with Christ, or there is no life whatsoever.

The church, first of all, has been incorporated into Christ. The church may be described as “believers incorporate in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:1 NEB). Thus as a body of believers we are “in Christ.” Paul uses the expression “in Christ” (or “in Him”) five times in Ephesians 1:3–13 to express this incorporation. One such

statement refers to the fact that God “chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world” (v. 4), making clear that believers corporately have belonged to Christ from eternity. Indeed, there is such a close connection that Paul can later say, “To him [God] be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen” (Eph. 3:21). To Christ and His body, the church, glory may be attributed.

The church, accordingly, does not consist of individual believers who have collectively formed a body. The body of Christ in this sense preexists any individual or group efforts to form a body. From the moment of salvation we are incorporated with all other believers into Christ and together belong to Him.

The church as the body of Christ, next, is totally dependent on Christ. In one of His discourses Jesus uses the figure of vine and branches—“I am the vine, you are the branches.” Then He adds, “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Even as the branches totally depend on the vine, so the body totally depends on the head. Paul describes this dependence particularly in relation to the church’s growth. He speaks of “holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God” (Col. 2:19). All such growth depends on “holding fast to the Head,”[75] for without union with the Head there can be no life and growth. The church is wholly dependent on Christ the Head.

It is apparent from Paul’s words that the church’s incorporation into Christ does not mean automatic dependence. The head and body imagery could suggest such a physical and organic relationship that dependence necessarily follows. However, the physical body does not have to be told to “hold fast to the head”: it is permanently affixed. But in regard to the body of Christ there is no such physical and organic connection. It is not, so to speak, the torso of which Christ is the head, but the body that He has taken to Himself and that operates freely in relation to Him.

We must therefore avoid any idea of the church as the bodily extension of Christ. It is sometimes said that even as the human head cannot exist without the body, so Christ cannot exist without the church.[76] This is erroneous for many reasons. First, it overlooks the lordship of Christ who is over all things as well as over the church, thus clearly he is not dependent on the church.[77] Second, it confuses the imagery of Christ’s spiritual relationship to the church as His body with the fact that even now in heaven He has a glorified body without which He indeed does not exist. Third, the church, despite its spiritual relationship to Christ, is invariably sinful while on this earth.[78] It cannot be ontologically the body of Christ, which as such is pure and sinless. The church is not the bodily

extension of Christ; He is both over and beyond it. Hence, the church exists not organically in relation to Christ but in a dynamic relationship of free and glad dependence.

The church as the body of Christ, finally, is wholly subject to Jesus Christ. The body is totally subservient to the head, receiving all its direction from it. When the physical head directs, the hand or foot moves. In a well-functioning body every member moves in ready and instant action as the head determines. Paul, speaking about Christ as "head of the church, his body," adds that "the church is subject to Christ" (Eph. 5:23–24).[79] Subjection means to be fully at the service of Christ, doing constantly what He, the Head of the church, wills.

Thus to be "members of his body" (Eph. 5:30) suggests also that even as the physical body has many members, all of which are subject to the head and must move completely at its disposal, so must all members of the spiritual body of Christ. Indeed, there should be instantaneous response of the body to even the slightest direction from the head. If not, only confusion and disorientation will follow.

The church as the body of Christ exists to do the will of the Head. By each member being subject to Christ at every moment and in all things, the church fulfills its highest calling. Christ the Head is truly Christ the Lord!

2. Membership in One Another

Since Christ is the Head and the church His body, this also means that we are members of one another. Paul writes, "We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Rom. 12:5). Membership in one another follows from the church's being members of Christ's body.

This signifies, for one thing, an equality among all church members. If we are members of one another, no one can be higher than any other. In Ephesians Paul declares that "the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body" (3:6 NASB). Thus, as "fellow members," Gentiles and Jews, indeed all Christians, stand on the same ground. All belong to the same body. There are, to be sure, those who equip others in the body, but no one is higher, no one lower in rank. Indeed in the very passage where Paul speaks of those who give special service to "building up the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12), he adds that "we [equippers and all others] are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body … upbuilds itself in love" (vv. 15–16). Thus no one is superior, no one inferior: all grow together into Christ.

The matter of equality needs to be remembered constantly. The church has far too often departed from this by assigning a higher and more elevated place to some members. There is a diversity of gifts among the membership, but since all are members of one another—indeed since "each member belongs to all the others" (Rom. 12:5 NIV)—equality among all must be recognized. To be sure, some are called to be leaders to whom obedience is due.[80] But leadership is not lordship;[81] it is servant-hood: a way of serving others in the body. All Christians, accordingly, are equally brothers and sisters in the body of Christ.

Again, membership in one another signifies interdependence. All the members of the body depend on one another. In Paul's words, "The body does not consist of one member but of many" (1 Cor. 12:14). Following this statement Paul writes at some length (vv. 15–25) about the interdependence of hand and foot, of eye and ear, of "our unpresentable" and "presentable parts." For example, the foot should not say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," nor should the eye say to the hand, "I have no need of you." On the contrary each part, each member, fully belongs to the body and fully needs all the others. Indeed, all members are dependent on all the other members and must therefore work together to accomplish anything at all. Further, not only is there interdependence in activity; the same is true in regard to such human experiences as suffering and rejoicing. Therefore Paul adds, "If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it" (v. 26 NASB). In this we see the profound interdependence of all members of the body of Christ.

Here I need to speak out strongly against the common notion of privatized Christianity. Many acknowledge Christ as their Head, their Lord and Savior, and in that sense are members of Him, but they do not recognize that this also makes them members of one another. *To be a member of Christ's body is to be joined to other believers in the body*. There is no such thing as an isolated Christianity in which the prayer closet or garden[82] is the only vital concern of religious practice. Such individualism actually runs counter to the reality of Christian existence, for to be believers is to belong to Christ as Head and at the same time to belong to one another. Accordingly there is no bona fide Christian existence outside the church.[83]

It is not uncommon today to hear people say or imply: "Jesus, yes; the church, no."[84] This is quite understandable in view of the fact that the church often is, or seems to be, little more than some institutional form that is rather unattractive and even forbidding. However, "Jesus, yes; the church, no" is really an impossible and contradictory statement. There is simply no vertical relationship

to Christ that does not also contain the horizontal relation ko other Christians. Thus from the moment a person first comes to faith, he is also united to other believers; this is the true church. There is no option whether to join or not to join; a person is already placed in a situation of full interdependence with other believers. We not only need Christ as our Head, but we also need one another.

Let me be quite specific. This means that we must be involved with a local body of believers. It is surely not enough to say that one belongs to the universal church, for though this is true, the universal church must have local embodiment.[85] Any local body of Christians is quite likely to have some negative elements,[86] but if it is at all a church containing "called" people, true believers, we may rightly be a part of it. Staying out of a local church—and by that denying one's God-given relation to and need for other believers—is far worse than being an active member of the church, whatever its supposed or real negative aspects.

"Jesus, yes; church, yes!" How could it be otherwise when the church is a part of His body and every believer a member of it?

Still again, membership in one another makes for mutual responsibility. We began this section with these words of Paul: "We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Rom. 12:5). Preceding these words Paul points out that "in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function" (v. 4). Although there is differentiation in terms of function because of the variety of gifts, the ensuing responsibility in the body still remains to exercise these gifts for the benefit of one another. Thus he adds: "Since we have gifts[87] that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly" (v. 6 NASB).[88] Then Paul lists seven gifts—from prophecy through showing mercy (vv. 6–8)[89] —that are to be exercised in the body. Each member properly functioning in his gift fulfills his responsibility to a fellow believer.

Peter, without specifically using the body imagery, writes, "As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Peter 4:10). Since each member has received a gift, each is responsible to exercise it for the benefit of other members in the body. Similarly Paul, writing the Corinthians about "variety of gifts" of the Spirit, declares, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good"[90] (1 Cor. 12:7). "The common good" means "the common advantage," the "profit of others." Peter and Paul, therefore, are both expressing the responsibility of each believer to exercise his or her gifts for the good of other people.

Thus activity in the body is not only essential because each member needs the

others (as was earlier discussed), but also because each member has responsibility for the others in the body. The Lord furnishes gifts to members of His body, not primarily for personal blessing, but that each member may be a blessing to others. This further underscores the urgency of local body participation in which we exercise our God-given gifts for the benefit of other believers.

Truly when a body of Christians functions in terms of mutual responsibility, Christ the Head operates through each member to all others and blessings indeed abound.

3. Service to All Mankind

Since Christ is the Head and the church His body, this means finally that the church is to be the servant of all people. If the church is the body of Christ, her form must be that of a servant. Paul writes that Christ "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death" (Phil. 2:7–8). The "form of a servant" was His form on earth; hence His spiritual body, the church, must now continue to walk the way of sacrificial service.

On one occasion Jesus said to His disciples, "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27). On another, Jesus declared, "If any one serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also" (John 12:26). The servant Lord calls for a servant people. If Christ is the Head of the church and the church His body, then the church is to be a servant church in the world.

Throughout His time on earth Christ ministered to human need: physical, emotional, spiritual. He was the servant, the diakonos,[91] of all mankind. At the Last Supper Jesus declared about the bread, "This is My body which is given for you" (Luke 22:19 NASB). If Christ's body was "given" for all of us, must not the church, His spiritual body, be given constantly for the sake of the world?

Thus we arrive at the climax of the picture of the church as the body of Christ. The church truly has been incorporated into Christ and is fully dependent on and subject to Him; the members of His body function in total interdependence and mutual responsibility. But also the church as Christ's body must be turned away from itself to be the world's servant. The church is the world's diakonos—the world's "deacon"—and, like its "deacon" Lord, must constantly be giving itself for the sake of all mankind.

EPILOGUE: THE CHURCH AS THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST

One of the most remarkable statements about the church as the body of Christ is that found in Ephesians 1:22— 23. Paul declares, “He [God] put all things in subjection under His [Christ’s] feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (nasb). The background of these words is God’s raising Christ from the dead and placing Him at His right hand far above all rule and authority both in this and the coming age so that all forces are subject to Christ (vv. 20–21). Now note carefully in regard to Christ’s headship: He is not described first as head of the church but head over all things. Thus Christ is supreme above every power and authority, and as such a head, He is given by God to the church, His body. This signifies a double sphere of Christ’s dominion—world and church—with headship relating to both,[92] but the body relates only to the church. However, the church as His body is the fullness of Christ.

Now let me summarize two of these matters that are particularly relevant to the church. First, it is apparent that the headship of Christ extends far beyond the church to all the powers in the universe. It is not that Christ as head of the church is confronted by alien forces that need yet to be brought under His headship and dominion. No, God has already put them all under Him. This does not mean willing subjection; however, these powers are fully subject to Christ’s control. So as head of the church, Christ is already victor over every dominion and power; thus the church, His body, is assured of victory. This calls to mind Jesus’ own words about the church: “The gates of Hades shall not overpower it” (Matt. 16:18 NASB). Head of all things to the church (or, “for the church” RSV) means that nothing, absolutely nothing, can prevail against the church, Christ’s spiritual body.

Second, it is extraordinary that the church as Christ’s body is called “the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” Let us first note the latter phrase, “Him who fills all in all” (or, “fills everything in every way” NIV). Christ in His exaltation is not limited to any one sphere. Through the prophet Jeremiah God had already declared, “Do I not fill heaven and earth?” (Jer. 23:24). Now the glorified Christ, as God Himself, fills all things. Paul later refers to the same reality in saying that Christ “ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things” (Eph.

4:10). This adds further weight to the fact that Christ is “head over all things.” But there is also the startling expression that the church, Christ’s body, is the fullness of Christ. What can this mean?

The amazing answer to this question is that although the exalted Christ is head over all things and fills all things, His fullness, His pleroma,[93] is to be found only in the church. Christ has so associated Himself with the church that, in and through it all, the radiance and glory of deity is manifest. The wonder is not that Christ is related only to the church, for He is head over and fills all things, but that His fullness shines forth in and through the church. This indeed is a spiritual reality seen only by the eyes of faith, but it is present wherever the body of Christ is found.

The church, however, is not perfect, nor has it realized Christ’s ultimate intention.[94] The church is not divine either,[95] but it has become the arena in which the fullness of Christ’s glory is being manifest. Further, we as Christ’s body may more and more be filled with that fullness. Thus Paul later prays for the Ephesians that they “may be filled with all the fullness of God” (3:19). So the glory of God through Christ can be fully experienced in His body, the church.

How fitting as a climax are these words of Paul: “To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen” (Eph. 3:21).

C. The Bride of Christ

The church, finally, is the bride of Christ. The central New Testament passage containing this image is Ephesians 5:25–33. The key words are "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (v. 25). These words of Paul are set in the framework of Paul's injunction to husbands to love their wives, "as Christ loved the church… ." Christ's love for the church, His bride/wife,[96] was so great that He gave up His life for her. Truly this is the ultimate demonstration of love: sacrifice even unto death.

This description of the church has its Old Testament background in Israel, who is frequently depicted as the wife of the Lord. One of the more dramatic statements is found in Isaiah 54: "Your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name" (v. 5). In Jeremiah 2 the picture is drawn of a relationship between Israel and the Lord that goes back to the wilderness days: "I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert" (v. 2 NIV). This nuptial imagery is carried still further in Ezekiel 16 where God declares about Israel: "I plighted my troth to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord God, and you became mine" (v. 8). The covenant with Israel, accordingly, is depicted as a marriage covenant.

However, the sad matter in the Old Testament is that Israel invariably proved to be a faithless, adulterous wife. For example, shortly after the words quoted from Jeremiah, God de clares, "As a faithless wife leaves her husband, so you have been faithless to me" (3:20). Ezekiel 16 has a vivid picture of Israel committing repeated acts of harlotry: allying herself to foreign countries, bowing down to foreign idols, constantly turning from the Lord, with the result that God declares He will bring His fury against her. Israel was invariably the unrepentant, adulterous wife. Yet in all of this, God still loved her and promised her a different future. Through the prophet Hosea, God declares, "In that day … you will call me, 'My husband,' and no longer will you call me, 'My Baal.'[97] … And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy … in faithfulness" (2:16, 19–20). Thus the Old Testament climaxes with the hopeful note of a future God-Israel, husband-wife relationship that will not be broken.

Coming to the New Testament, we observe that all four gospels refer to Jesus as a bridegroom. In the Synoptic Gospels, responding to the question why His disciples did not fast, Jesus replies, "While the bridegroom is with them, the

attendants of the bridegroom[98] do not fast, do they?" (Mark 2:19 NASB; cf. Matt. 9:15; Luke 5:34). Jesus thus speaks of Himself as the bridegroom and His disciples as attendants at the wedding. In the Fourth Gospel John the Baptist declares, "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice; therefore this joy of mine is now full" (3:29). Here "the friend of the bridegroom"—the best man—is John himself, who makes preparations for the symbolic marriage between Christ the bridegroom and the bride. The bride is not, as such, designated; however, the implication is that the bride represents the community of disciples around Jesus, which in time will become the church. Drawing together the accounts in the four gospels, we behold Jesus as the bridegroom,[99] the disciples as attendants (and implicitly the bride), and John as the best man. This is an extraordinary picture indeed![100]

The nuptial imagery is carried forward in Jesus' parable about the wedding feast that a king gave for his son (Matt. 22:1–14). Significantly, all the people who first received an invitation declined, so the king invited people from the streets. The king in the parable unmistakably is God the Father, the son is Jesus, and the wedding guests first invited were the Jews who spurned participation in the feast. The street people are the disciples of Jesus who come to join His wedding party. So once again we have a depiction of Christ as the bridegroom and his disciples as a wedding group. While this is not yet the disciples as the bride of Christ,[101] the imagery more closely approximates it.

I also briefly mention the further nuptial scene of the bridegroom and the wise and foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1–13). The bridegroom is delayed in returning. However, the wise virgins are ready with oil in their lamps and go in with the bridegroom to the marriage feast; the foolish are not ready and so are shut out. The virgins doubtless represent more than mere bridesmaids or other female participants. Since this is a parable of warning—closing with the words, "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (v. 13)—it surely is a warning to all who follow Jesus, hence later the church, to be ready.[102]

In the Epistles, Paul further develops the bridal imagery in a letter to the Corinthian church: "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin" (2 Cor. 11:2 NASB). The church here is specifically identified as the bride.[103] Figuratively, Paul depicts himself as best man[104] who has implemented the betrothal between Christ and the Corinthian church. In Ephesians Paul moves beyond the local to the universal church when he says, "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (5:25). No longer does the apostle depict his role in

this marriage; the important matter here is Christ's total love for the bride/wife, His church.

The final New Testament pictures of the church as the bride of Christ are in the Book of Revelation. Here we arrive at the consummation in which the marriage feast occurs. A great multitude in heaven cry forth, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready" (19:6–7). Then an angel commands, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (v. 9). Later John beholds a new heaven and a new earth, and coming down from heaven "the holy city, new Jerusalem … prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (21:2). Shortly after that an angel speaks: "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb" (v. 9). The picture then shifts to the holy city "having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel" (v. 11), the bride adorned becoming one with the holy city bejeweled.[105] The glory of God radiates over all. Finally, as the Book of Revelation draws to a close, there are these memorable words: "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come'…. And let him who is thirsty … take the water of life without price" (22:17).

Now let us reflect on the significance of the church as the bride of Christ. A few points particularly stand out.

1. United in Love

The church as the bride of Christ is united to Him in love. The heart of all bridal imagery is the relationship of love between the bride and the groom, the wife and the husband. It is an intimate union, intended to be permanent.

From creation man and wife have "become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).[106] What is extraordinary about the relationship between man and wife is that, as Paul declares it, this unity refers primarily to the church. In the passage where Paul speaks of how "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25), he later adds (first quoting freely from Genesis): " Tor this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church" (vv. 31–32 NIV). The close union between Christ and the church is the pattern for the human relationship in marriage. Paul, in a different context, writing that union with a prostitute is to become one with her in body, also

quotes from Genesis: “ The two will become one flesh’ “ (1 Cor. 6:16 NIV). Then Paul adds, “But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit” (v. 17). Projecting this to the church at large (as in Ephesians), we recognize that the essential unity with Christ is not corporeal but spiritual. However, this does not lessen its intensity, or even intimacy, for nothing can exceed the closeness of being united in one spirit with Christ.

The unity is through love. This goes beyond that of an organic unity, of head and body,[107] into that of a relational unity. Christ is still the head as the husband is of the wife. But He is the head in relationship to another in whom the unity is freely given, freely reciprocated. This is covenantal love: a bonded unity of one to the other.

Moreover, this unity of love is grounded in the reality of sacrifice. In one of our hymns we sing: “From heaven He came and sought her to be His holy bride, With His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died.”[108] The bride is not only loved as by an earthly husband; she has also been redeemed through the bridegroom’s death. Nothing can compare with a love written in blood, nor can a greater response come than from those who love because of His incomparable self-giving.

In another context Paul writes, “He died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor. 5:15). The church, as bride of Christ, can only truly live for the Christ who died for her.

2. Summoned to Faithfulness and Purity

The church is summoned by Christ to be a holy and pure bride. Paul says, “Christ loved the church and gave himself for her” and adds, “that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25–27). The church has been cleansed already,[109] but is ever in need of further cleansing and continuing sanctification.

We have observed that in the Old Testament Israel was repeatedly faithless to God, who as a Husband had taken her as His wife. Spiritual adultery was her way of life. Yet God was always calling her back to purity and devotion to Himself. In the New Testament, Christ as the Bridegroom/Husband of the church is likewise ever concerned with her faithfulness and purity.

Such faithfulness and purity have several aspects. First, they entail a single-minded devotion to Christ. The church as the bride of Christ must have a devotion to no other husband than Christ. We have noted the words of Paul: "I betrothed you to one husband" (2 Cor. 11:2 NASB). There can be no masters other than Christ, no "Baals," to which the bride gives herself unreservedly. Whenever a church is more committed to a leader, a concern, or to varied causes than to Christ, devotion to Him is diluted and may fade away. Spiritual adultery in relation to Christ is by no means always obvious, but it is ultimately even more destructive than adultery in a human marriage. Christ has to be first of all or not at all: there must be pure and single-minded devotion to Him.

Second, faithfulness and purity involve holding fast to the truth in Christ. Let us continue with the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians: "I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (11:2–3 NASB). Then Paul speaks about some who come proclaiming "another Jesus," and about the Corinthians receiving a "different spirit … or a different gospel," and then he adds, "You submit to it readily enough" (v. 4). By their failure to hold firmly to the truth about Christ, by their openness to other spirits than the Holy Spirit, by their deviation from the gospel, the Corinthian church was slipping away from the purity of truth in Christ, and thereby forsaking Him. According to the Gospel of John, "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (1:17). Thus faithfulness to Christ means faithfulness not only to His person but also to the truth He came to bring. Whenever any church begins to depart, for example, from such facts about Christ as His incarnation and His resurrection, it is a departure from Christ. As the bride of Christ, the church is summoned to a continuing faithfulness and purity in the truth.

Third, these qualities involve a walking in holiness and righteousness. Since Christ Himself is holy and righteous, His bride should ever strive to emulate Him. In the Old Testament God declares, "I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice" (Hos. 2:19). Even more so, Christ has betrothed Himself to the church so that she might so walk. I have quoted the declaration in the Book of Revelation that "his Bride has made herself ready." Now we note the words that follow: "It was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints" (19:8). The fineness and purity of the bridal clothing at the marriage feast relates to the righteousness of the deeds and actions of the bride in the present life. Thus even as Christ Himself is ever seeking to purify His bride and to remove every spot and wrinkle, so the bride must constantly be devoted to a righteous and holy walk.

3. Living With Expectancy

One of the most significant features about the church as the bride of Christ is that the fulfillment of this relationship is yet to come. In a symbolic but real sense the situation in this present age is that of an absent bridegroom and a bride who ever looks forward to His return. Only at His return will the marriage actually occur and all things be complete.

The church now lives between the times of Jesus' physical absence from His disciples and the future consummation. There is joy even now, for the church is espoused to Christ and rejoices in His spiritual presence. However, all of this is but a small foregleam of the coming day when the heavens will ring with the cry, "Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come" (Rev. 19:7)!

So the church, the bride, even now looks forward with keen expectation to that future glorious day. To be sure, there should be watchfulness in waiting, for we do not know the hour of His coming for the bride. There should also be zeal for a purity worthy of this glorious occasion. But the transcendent note surely must always be that of expectancy. For what is yet to come is the ultimate in joy and blessedness. "Blessed are those"—blessed indeed—"who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:9).

Christ will then have His church "in splendor"—and all will be radiant with the glory of God.

III. THE COMMUNITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The church, finally, is depicted in the New Testament as the community of the Holy Spirit.

A. Enlivened by the Holy Spirit

The church owes its very existence to the enlivening action of the Holy Spirit. A people may seem to have life, but there is no spiritual life until the Spirit moves upon them. In the words of Jesus, “It is the Spirit who gives life” (John 6:63 NASB). He spoke these words to a people who could not comprehend spiritual truth about the bread from heaven because of their deadness to things of the Spirit.

For a picture of this let us turn back to the Old Testament to Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry and dead bones. The prophet was told by God to prophesy to Israel in exile, saying, “Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath[110] to enter you, and you shall live” (Ezek. 37:5). Ezekiel so prophesied, and the bones began to come together and flesh to form, but still there was no life. Again the prophet was told to speak: “Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live” (v. 9). When Ezekiel did so, “the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great host” (v. 10). Once more God addressed Israel: “I will put my Spirit within you,[111] and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land” (v. 14). Thus Ezekiel prophesied that one day the Spirit of God was to bring new life to the people of God.

Now let us return to the Gospel of John, where a fulfillment of this prophecy is depicted. Jesus, who had spoken about the Spirit giving life, now appears in His resurrection body to the gathered disciples. After Jesus had spoken a few words, He “breathed[112] on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ “ (20:22). This is the primary fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy: the risen Lord placed the Holy Spirit within the disciples and they spiritually came alive. Before this they had been like dead people, like Israel, with only a dead Jesus to remember; but now all was radically changed. Truly they were “born anew,”[113] for the Spirit had given them life!

This resurrection event inaugurated the establishment of the church.[114] Fifty days later at Pentecost, it rapidly expanded. But the original breakthrough of the life-giving and transforming Spirit occurred at Easter. Luke, in the opening chapter of Acts, depicts a community of believers prior to Pentecost:[115] first the apostles (1:1–11), next the apostles plus several others (vv. 12–14), then a company of some one hundred and twenty persons (vv. 15–26). That the Holy

Spirit was active already is suggested by the fact that the risen Jesus gave "instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles" (Acts 1:2 NIV). Thus we see in operation a community of the Holy Spirit between Easter and Pentecost.

At Pentecost the church leaped forward, for "there were added that day about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41)—"added" to the already existing community of believers. How had this happened? The Spirit had descended upon the community and under that spiritual anointing Peter had proclaimed the gospel. There was such profound conviction of sin that those who heard were "cut to the heart" (v. 37), and they entered into salvation. In John's Gospel Jesus had declared about the Holy Spirit that "He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin" (16:8 NASB). The Spirit had now come at Pentecost upon the waiting community of believers, and in His power thousands were convicted of sin and entered into a new life in Jesus Christ.

Thus the church from the beginning has been a community enlivened by the Holy Spirit. The church owes its very life to the breath of the Spirit. If the Spirit has not brought life to the members, what may be called the church is no more than an empty building or a gathering of people functioning on a purely human level. There may even be a multiplicity of activities and much energy expended, but without the Spirit as "the kiss of life,"[116] the church does not really exist.

Paul writes to the Thessalonians that the "gospel came to [them] not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" (1 Thess. 1:5). It was the Holy Spirit who wrought the conviction by which the church at Thessalonica was born. Things have not changed since then. Truly the church owes its life, its breath, its existence to the life-giving Spirit.

B. Fellowshipping in the Holy Spirit

One of the most striking features of the church is that it is a fellowship of the Holy Spirit. At the close of his second letter to the church in Corinth Paul writes, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit[117] be with you all" (13:14). The Greek word translated "fellowship," koinonia, expresses the idea of close relationship or communion,[118] also a participation or sharing in a profound manner. Such koinonia is made possible through the Holy Spirit.[119]

All that has been said about the church as the people of God and the building/body/bride of Christ is meaningless if the church is not also the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. For through the indwelling Spirit the church is united in a fellowship that transcends anything that is ordinarily known and experienced. Among all people today there is a paramount need for deep and abiding fellowship. Solitariness and loneliness are commonplace. Moreover, even where fellowship is sought, often an uneasy sense of isolation and disharmony still pervades. The only adequate answer to this prevailing situation is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

To elaborate further: The church is not a fellowship based on common human interests. It is not a psychical but a pneumatic community. The church is not a community of natural but of spiritual togetherness. It is the only place in the world where true fellowship can be found.

1. Fellowship With God

By the Holy Spirit there is fellowship with God. Paul writes concerning Gentiles and Jews: "Through him [Christ] we both have access to the Father by one Spirit" (Eph. 2:18 NIV). Shortly after that Paul adds, "In him [Christ] you too [Gentiles] are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (v. 22). By the Spirit the church, the household of God, becomes a dwelling in which God lives and fellowships with His people and they with Him. The barrier of sin, which long separated God and man, has been removed through Christ. Now by the indwelling Spirit there can be the ultimate fellowship, namely with God Himself.

Let me amplify this last statement. Man has been so made by God that his deepest need and final fulfillment rests in fellowshipping with his Creator. It is not, first of all, a matter of human fellowship, as important as that is, but of fellowship with God. Ever since man was driven out of Eden, he has been estranged from God. Now through the reconciliation in Christ and the presence of God's Spirit, fellowship has been restored.

John writes in his first letter: "Our fellowship [koinonia] is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1:3). Although John does not directly attribute this to the Holy Spirit,[120] it results from that fellowship made possible by the indwelling Spirit. However, the main point is that we can now have fellowship with God in a beautiful and intimate manner—indeed with Father and Son. Nothing can be richer or more meaningful than this! We should note that John, shortly after speaking of our fellowship with Father and Son, adds, "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth" (vv. 5–6 NASB). Hence there is no guarantee of continuing fellowship with God if we walk in darkness.

Another striking passage about koinonia is found in Paul's statement to the church in Corinth: "God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9 NASB). If one were to ask how this is possible, as Christ is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father, the answer is that He is with us through the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. This is the presence of Him who said, "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matt. 28:20), and with whom His disciples ever have fellowship. It is a joy to know that God has called us into this fellowship with his own Son and that, especially in the community of the Spirit, it can be an ongoing reality.

This leads me to make two final statements. First, the church is both the actuality of and the occasion for fellowship with God. Because the church is the community of the Spirit, the members must assemble in a proper spirit if there is to be true fellowship with God. For example, in regard to worship Jesus declares, "God is spirit … those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). Fellowship with God is a reality for those who are prepared to meet with Him. Second, there is no substitute for fellowship with God in the church. To be sure, there is private, personal fellowship with Him also, but since God has determined to have a people and to walk with and among them, the richest fellowship with God is in the community of those who belong to Him.

2. Fellowship With One Another

Through the Holy Spirit's creation of fellowship with Father and Son, He also creates for us a fellowship with one another. It is significant that in the same passage where John speaks about fellowship with God, he also speaks of "fellowship [koinonia] with one another" (1 John 1:7; also v. 3). Through the fellowship of the Spirit this may truly come about.

We do well to recall the situation in the early church. Prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), there were already evidences of the disciples' close fellowship. The Gospel of Luke records that after Jesus' ascension the disciples were "continually in the temple blessing God" (24:53). Clearly they were all together. According to the Book of Acts, the apostles, along with a number of women and Jesus' mother Mary and His brothers, "joined together constantly in prayer" (1:14 NIV). Later, the Scripture records that "the company of persons together[121] was in all about a hundred and twenty" (v. 15). So they remained in close fellowship until Pentecost. Then "when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together[122] in one place" (2:1) Accordingly, upon such a close knit fellowship of disciples the Holy Spirit was then poured out.

This does not mean that the Holy Spirit was absent prior to Pentecost. As we have noted, before Jesus ascended He gave "instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen" (Acts 1:2 niv). How this was done is by no means apparent; but the words clearly imply the active presence of the Holy Spirit. In that sense even during this transitional period while the risen Jesus was still with them, they were a community of the Spirit. Hence when Jesus says to the apostles (and by implication to the other waiting disciples after that): "Before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (v. 5), the Holy Spirit was already a known presence. Thus we may say that as a community of the Spirit the disciples received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

It is important to stress this matter because of a common misperception that the church did not exist until Pentecost and hence only then became a community of the Spirit. To be sure, the word "church" is not used in Acts 1, but neither is it used in Acts 2. The Holy Spirit is, however, active in both chapters. Further it is significant to note that the theme of togetherness occurs both before and after Pentecost. In regard to the latter, after some three thousand persons had come to salvation, the Book of Acts records that "all who believed were together"[123] (2:44). Thus they were a close fellowship, a community of the Spirit throughout.

What happened at Pentecost was a deepening of this fellowship.[124] The word koindonia is now used: the new believers "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship" (2:42). Further, the word "together" (in v. 46) is included in the statement that "all who believed were together and had all things in common" (v. 44). A number of results followed: selling and sharing possessions for needy persons, daily temple attendance together, breaking bread from house to house, praising God, and enjoying the favor of all people. The climax of this fellowship came as "the Lord added to their number [literally, 'together'][125] day by day those who were being saved" (v. 47). Thus togetherness, koinoniao, was intensified with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The church as the community of the Spirit is the bonding together of people with one another in the Spirit. Believers come together not because of common earthly interests or relationships but because of their union as brothers and sisters in Christ; they are thus united in common spiritual concerns. This fellowship in the Spirit is not, however, invariably operational, for various sins among the members may disrupt the spiritual unity. Here again John has a valuable word: "If we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7 NASB). Walking in His light, spurning the things of darkness, makes possible a continuing koinonia; however, if and when the blemish of sin comes in, we may be grateful that Jesus' blood can cleanse completely.

It is this fellowship with one another that makes the church so qualitatively different from all human societies. One aspect of our humanity is the desire and need for fellowship, with its most basic form being the nuclear or the extended family. From the beginning God declared, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18). But even the family at its best is interlaced with self-concerns, and therefore needs the correction and supplementation of a deeper spiritual relationship.[126] Going beyond the kinship of the family, people often form associations, clubs, and social groups to accommodate a desire for fellowship on many levels and with many interests. These often prove enriching and valuable indeed. But in the last analysis, only a fellowship in the Spirit can bring people together in a self-transcending unity.

C. The Communion of Saints

I add here a brief section on the phrase "the communion of saints" found in the Apostles' Creed.[127] The final sentence in the Creed begins, "I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints." The last phrase by its placement suggests a connection with both the Holy Spirit and the church. But what does "the communion of saints" mean?

There is no adequate biblical reference to be found. Since the words "communion" and "fellowship" are interchangeable (both are translations of koinonia), perhaps the closest is 2 Corinthian 13:14, "the fellowship [or 'communion' KJV] of the Holy Spirit." If that is the case, the affirmation in the Apostles' Creed refers broadly to believers' (saints') fellowship both with God and with one another.[128] In such a manner the Westminster Confession of Faith interprets the meaning of "the communion of saints":

> All saints that are united to Jesus Christ their head, by his Spirit and by faith have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory; and being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.[129]

This statement affirms a fellowship of believers with Christ of a very profound kind, including fellowship in His sufferings[130] and death, and it affirms a communion of believers with one another in which there is both a receiving from them (their gifts and graces) and a ministry to their total need (both inward and outward).

Another interpretation of "the communion of saints" is that it refers to the unity of believers both living and dead in the total church.[131] This stresses that we are one with those who have passed on into glory and that the church on earth and in heaven is truly one church. The difficulty with such an interpretation, however, is that it may imply that there is an ongoing communication between believers in heaven and believers on earth. Such presumed communication is not biblical, for though the saints above may be

aware of what is transpiring on earth,[132] no Scripture suggests that the saints on earth can communicate with them. The misapprehension of this has led to such an unbiblical practice as the invocation of the saints—that is, praying to the saints in heaven.[133]

It seems best to understand "the communion of saints" differently. For although there is a communion of saints that relates to heaven, it is communion with the glorified Christ (what more could one desire?), not with the saints in glory. In this case it is not communion with saints, but of saints. This communion is also with other saints, i.e., fellow believers, on earth and is of a very rich and meaningful kind. The word "communion" may be better than "fellowship" in both these instances—with Christ and other believers—because it implies intimate communication. Paul speaks of the Lord's Supper as "the koinonia of the blood of Christ" and "the koinonia of the body of Christ" (1 Cor. 10:16 KJV). Whether koinonia is translated "communion" (KJV), "participation in" (RSV and NIV), or "sharing in" (NASB), it means more than fellowship: it is very close communication. Fellowship suggests walking together, perhaps verbally communicating with one another; communion implies a deeper, more intimate relationship that may go beyond the ability of words to express. It is this that characterizes our communion, whether it is communion with Christ or with others who believe in Him.

One further thought about "the communion of saints": It may also refer in a less personal manner to a relationship to believers in all ages, an affirmation of the unity and community of the present church with those who have gone before. We stand together with the saints of the early church, of the Middle Ages, of the Reformation, and of the modern era. While we are not in communication with the saints in heaven, we do recognize within our community those who have preceded us. We draw on their witness of faith (often even to martyrdom), their creedal and confessional formulations, and frequently their hymns and liturgies. In so doing we have communion with the saints of all ages—a communion that also gives strength and encouragement to move ahead. Such a communion of the saints is well expressed in a stanza from the hymn "For All the Saints Who from Their Labors Rest":

> O blest communion, fellowship divine!
> We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
> Yet all are one in Thee,
> For all are Thine.

Alleluia! Alleluia!

It is a communion that will some day be gloriously fulfilled in heaven.

To conclude: The church is the community of the Holy Spirit. It has been enlivened by the Spirit, knows fellowship in the Spirit, and is the communion of saints. All of this is a given fact of the church's existence and not simply an idealized picture. If the church does not always live up to its true nature (and often it does not), it must always be challenged to become again what God intended it to be. The church functioning truly as a community of the Spirit can be a reality of incalculable significance.

[1]For a comprehensive presentation of the wide variety of images see Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*.

[2]Hans Kiing writes, "The idea of the people of God is the oldest and most fundamental concept underlying the self-interpretation of the *ekklēesia"* (*The Church*, 119).

[3]For more detail on this covenant see *Renewal Theology*, vol. 1, chapter 12.

[4]As, for example, one of the Moslem groups today calls itself "the party of God" (the Hezbollah). This is their self-designation, not something given by God (or Allah).

[5]Deuteronomy 7:7 continues, "It was not because you were more in number than any other people." Also Israel was scarcely more virtuous than other nations!

[6]In calling Israel "this people" rather than "my people, "God seems scarcely to recognize them as His people any longer.

[7]In Ephesians Paul speaks of Gentiles as formerly "separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (2:12). What a change has indeed come about!

[8]Quotation from Isaiah 10:22.

[9]See, for example, Exodus 19:6 and Isaiah 43:20-21.

[10]The word "race" (Gr. *genos*) might seem surprising. However, in the early church Christians were frequently referred to as a "third race" (in addition to Jews and Gentiles considered separately; cf. 1 Cor. 10:32, where Jews, Greeks, and "the church of God" are distinguished). Both

"race" and "nation" suggest the corporate nature of the Christian community of faith.

[11]The Greek is *laon periousian*, literally, "a people [for] possession." The kjv translation is "a peculiar people."

[12]The Greek word translated "iniquity" is from *anomia*. It is rendered "wickedness" in the niv.

[13]See also Deuteronomy 9:26; 13:5; 15:15; 24:18.

[14]Later references in the Old Testament speak of redemption in more spiritual terms. For example, Isaiah 44:22 reads, "I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like a mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you." Hence there is also a spiritual dimension in the Old Testament, but in many ways it is anticipatory of what is yet to come. For example, Isaiah 53:5 speaks of One who "*was* wounded for our transgressions … *was* bruised for our iniquities." Yet this surely refers to an event in the future. For only in and through Jesus Christ is there full redemption.

[15]Or "ransomed" (RSV). The Greek word *elutrothete* may be translated either "redeemed" or "ransomed" (see BAGD).

[16]Or "futile way" (NASB).

[17]Regarding Israel, God declared through Jeremiah: "They went far from Me and walked after emptiness and became empty" (Jer. 2:5 nasb). In regard to the Gentiles and their idol worship, Paul urges them to "turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heaven and the earth" (Acts 14:15).

[18]For example, Jeremiah the prophet, looking to a future deliverance of Israel from Babylonian captivity declares, "The LORD has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him" (Jer. 31:11; cf. 50:33-34).

[19]The KJV reads "hast redeemed." The Greek word *egorasas* may also be translated "purchased" (as in niv and NASB).

[20]Leviticus 11-15, for example, contains instructions for purification in regard to unclean animals, a woman's uncleanness after childbirth, uncleanness through contact with leprosy, and uncleanness from bodily secretions.

[21]This of course does not mean that after this initial purification there is no further need of cleansing. Quite the contrary, although the heart has been cleansed, there remains much of the desires of sinful flesh. Hence

ongoing purification is always needed. As John writes, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” However, “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9). The blood of Jesus has cleansed us from all sins and will continue to do so as we humbly make confession.

[22]On “the new covenant” see also *Renewal Theology*, vol. 1, chap. 12.

[23]In Hebrews 9:15 and 12:24 Jesus is described as “the mediator of a new covenant.”

[24]Christ as “mediator of a new covenant” relates to “those who are called” (Heb. 9:15).

[25]The church, accordingly, is sometimes called “spiritual Israel” (as over against ethnic Israel). While such nomenclature is warranted, we must be careful not to exclude ethnic Israel from God’s promise. For we must bear in mind that those of ethnic Israel who are “called” likewise, along with Gentiles, belong to “spiritual Israel.”

[26]Hebrews 8:10 states, “I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

[27]Before his declaration of the new covenant, Jeremiah, like Moses, had already called out to his people, “Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, remove the foreskin of your hearts” (4:4), and he declared, “All the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart” (9:26).

[28]The hard resistance of Judah (similarly Israel) is described thus in Jeremiah: “The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart” (17:1).

[29]“See also *Renewal Theology*, 2:50-52, “A Changed Heart.”

[30]The NIV translates this as “singleness of heart and action.”

[31]Although the background of these words in Jeremiah 32 is the return of Israel from Babylonian captivity and hence might seem to apply to Israel alone, they are words about “an everlasting covenant” and so correlate with the new covenant of Jeremiah 31. Furthermore, the words above, “they shall be my people, and I will be their God” (v. 38), clearly connect with 31:33, “I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” Hence, even as the new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31 is fulfilled in the New Testament people of God, so is the promise of Jeremiah 32.

[32]F. F. Bruce writes, “Although Ezekiel does not use the word ‘covenant’ here … the passage … is his counterpart to the ‘new covenant’ oracle of

Jer. 31:31-34, where God undertakes to put his law within his people and write it on their hearts" (Ezekiel, IBC, 819).

[33]"Paul's words referring back to Ezekiel 11 are another example of what appears to relate only to Israel, for the background is again foreign captivity and the people's return to the homeland (see vv. 16-18). This once more demonstrates how Paul-and the New Testament at large-sees such Old Testament words as fulfilled in the new people of God.

[34]G. R. Beasley-Murray writes, "This passage is Ezekiel's counterpart to the 'new covenant of Jeremiah' " (*Ezekiel*, NBC, rev. ed., 681). Hence, though the reference again in Ezekiel is only to Israel ("the whole house of Israel," v. 10)-as in Jeremiah-the fulfillment will be in the new people of God.

[35]The background for these words is the striking picture of Israel's being like dry and dead bones until they are breathed upon-then "breath came into them, and they lived" (v. 10).

[36]Ezekiel 34:23 states, "I will set up over them [Israel] one shepherd, my servant David.' Jesus speaks of Himself as "the good shepherd" in John 10:11, 14.

[37]One thinks of present-day orthodox Jews who constantly lament the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in a.d. 70. The "wailing wall"-a remnant of the destroyed temple- where Jews gather to weep over the loss of the temple and to pray for its rebuilding is a continuing symbol of their misplaced hope. Would that they knew and believed Paul's words that "we [believers in Christ] are the temple of the living God"!

[38]Recall the brief discussion of Ephesians 2:22 in the previous section.

[39]This is Stephen's same point as he spoke about the temple before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7:48-50.

[40]The Greek word is *eskendsen*, literally "tabernacled" (see Thayer). The customary English translation is "dwelt" (rsv and others).

[41]On one occasion Jesus declared to the Jews, " 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'… But he spoke of the temple of his body" (John 2:19, 21).

[42]This is the kjv translation of the Greek phrase is en meso, "in the midst of."

[43]From the hymn "God Himself Is With Us," by Gerhardt Tersteegen, 1729.

[44]Cf. also Jeremiah 31:4-"Again I will build you, and you shall belbuilt, O virgin Israel!"

[45]Some New Testament scholars have viewed Jesus' words here/and in 18:17 (see later) about the church as inauthentic, since they have no parallel in the other Gospels. However, all ancient Greek manuscripts contain these words. Moreover, the text unquestionably expresses a profound truth about Jesus' relation to the church.

[46]Christ is also called a builder in Hebrews 3:2-3: "Moses also was faithful in God's house. Yet Jesus has been counted worthy of as much more glory than Moses as the builder of a house has more honor than the house."

[47]The Greek words are *Petros* and *petra*, an obvious play on words. In the Aramaic, which Jesus spoke, the same form *képha'* would occur in both places.

[48]If so, Jesus could have made it much clearer by saying "on you" rather than "on this rock." In this regard see Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, 334. W. C. Allen on this passage writes, "The Church was to be built on the revealed truth that Jesus was the Messiah, the Divine Son" (*Gospel acc. to St. Matthew*, ICC, 177). Similarly A. H. McNeile declares, "The fact of the Lord's Messiahship was to be the immovable bed-rock on which His 'ecclesia' would stand secure" (*Gospel acc. to St. Matthew*, 241). Various other commentators hold that Peter himself was the rock, e.g., R. T. France, Matthew, TNTC, 254-55; D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, EBC, 368-69; H. N. Ridderbos, *Matthew*, BSC, 303. (See next footnote for fuller perspective.)

[49]Peter later fulfills this role as he preaches the gospel of Jesus Christ on the Day of Pentecost. In that sense Peter, as confessing, was the rock. As A. B. Bruce says, "Peter, believing that truth [that Jesus is the Christ] is the foundation, and the building is to be of a piece with the foundation" (EGT, 1:224-25). It is important not to conclude that Peter simply as a man was "this rock."

[50]The KJV reads "gates of hell." However, the Greek word is a form of *hades*, not *gehenna* (the ordinary Greek word for "hell"). Hades is "the underworld as the place of the dead" (BAGD), "the infernal regions" (Thayer). The rsv and neb translate the word as "powers of death." Whatever the translation, the picture is that the church cannot be overcome by any forces arrayed against it.

[51]The Greek word is *katischusousin*. Both kjv and rsv read "prevail against"; nasb has "overpower." BAGD translates the word in this

context "win a victory over." An alternative translation for *katischusousin* as "prove stronger than" (niv margin) gives a different picture. Rather than "the gates of Hades" being unable to win a victory over the church, the picture is one of "gates" being unable to hold out against the victorious church. This interpretation, despite its basic truthfulness, hardly seems to be Jesus' intent.

[52]"Prophets" most likely refers to Christian prophets who, prior to the formation of the New Testament Scriptures, were an inspired source of Christian truth. That these prophets were not Old Testament prophets seems apparent from further reference to them in Ephesians 3:4 as those who along with apostles had been given "insight into the mystery of Christ," or in Ephesians 4:11, again along with apostles, as gifts of Christ for the building up of the church. Note also that the order each time is apostles and prophets, not prophets and apostles. The latter would indeed suggest Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles. The conclusion follows that Paul is referring to Christian prophets. (On this matter the discussion in EGT [3:299-30] is especially helpful; also see my discussion infra about apostles and prophets in chap. 5, pp. 165-74)

[53]Acts 2 through 12 is largely a record of Peter's early leadership. Paul's missionary ministry begins with Acts 13.

[54]The text reads, "Peter, *standing with the eleven*, lifted up his voice and addressed them [the multitude assembled]" (Acts 2:14). It was a united apostolic witness.

[55]I refer here to their continuing witness as found in Scripture, not to some continuing lineal succession. Recall the previous discussion of one of the attributes of the church as "apostolic" (pp. 35-38).

[56]One of the historic norms of canonicity for any presumed Scripture in the New Testament is that it either be written by apostles or spring directly out of the apostolic circle (see, e.g., F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, "Apostolic Authority," 256-59). This might include Christian prophets also, as noted.

[57]As John D. W. Watts puts it, "The believer is affirmed in his patience, as he waits for God to complete his work" (*Isaiah* 1-33, WBC, 370).

[58]In Isaiah 8 the threat was likewise from Assyria (see especially v. 7).

[59]This verse probably refers to the "mountain" of difficulties confronting Zerubbabel in the rebuilding of the temple and the assurance by God that the "top stone" will be put in place: "What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain; and he shall bring forward

the top stone amid shouts of 'Grace, grace to it' " (Zech. 4:7). However, it is obvious that the words of Psalm 118:22 also reach forward into the New Testament (as will be seen later).

[60]So the nasb translates.

[61]So the niv translates.

[62]The kjv reads "grind him to powder." The Greek word is *likmesei*. Thayer translates the word for this verse, "crush to pieces, grind to powder."

[63]Rather than "put to shame" (RSV, NIV, similarly kjv). The Greek word is *katais- chunthesetai* (BAGD in relation to this verse translates it "be disappointed").

[64]Paul actually combines words from the two passages in Isaiah, already noted: 8:13-15 and 28:16. Some slight rewording is also apparent.

[65]The NASB reads "the cornerstone." The Greek word is *akrogoniaiou*, meaning simply "cornerstone" (see Thayer). BAGD has "cornerstone or capstone" (but not "chief' for either). "Chief," however, may suggest the idea of "capstone," a cornerstone that is at the same time above all the other stones. Bruce opts for "top stone": *"Akrogoniaios*, so far as it can be determined, does not mean a cornerstone but a stone which crowns the building, like the 'top stone' of Zerubbabel's temple, the last stone to be put in position" (*Ephesians*, NICNT, 306). "Top stone" or "capstone" would perhaps correspond more with "head of the corner" (see verses previously quoted). "Chief (= 'top') cornerstone" conveys the idea that Christ is both cornerstone and the pinnacle of all the other stones.

[66]Thayer, under *akrogoniaios*, states, "As the corner-stone holds together two walls, so Christ joins together as Christians, into one body dedicated to God, those who were formerly Jews and 'Gentiles.' "

[67]Posted along the stone balustrade of the temple at regular intervals were stone slabs inscribed in Latin and Greek that forbade Gentiles, on the penalty of death, from entering (see "Inscriptions," ISBE, 2:838, and "Temple," ISBE, 4:772.

[68]It is interesting to note that the neb in Ephesians 2:20 gives as an alternate translation "keystone." A keystone is a "wedge-shaped piece at the crown of an arch that locks the other pieces in place" (Webster). The imagery is slightly different from a cornerstone, which joins and supports two walls. We may say that Christ as "chief cornerstone" is both "chief," namely a keystone at the top locking and holding other pieces in place, and "corner" uniting and binding all together.

[69]The RSV translates this as an imperative: “Be yourselves built into” (similarly neb). The indicative above (also in kjv and niv) is more likely (cf. Eph. 2:22 and Col. 2:7).

[70]Rock” in Matthew 16:18 is *petra*; here in 1 Peter 2:4 “stone” is *lithon*. However, *petra* is also used for Jesus in 1 Peter 2:8-“a rock [*petra*] of offence” (kjv, likewise Paul in Rom. 9:33). In regard to the word “living,” the same Greek word (a form of zao) is used in both accounts.

[71]In Colossians Paul writes, “As you … have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him” (2:6-7 nasb). Note the challenge to “walk,” i.e., live, in Christ, the one in whom we have been firmly rooted. By our so walking, the process of “being built up” continues.

[72]See, in particular, 1 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4, 12; 5:30; Colossians 1:24; 2:19.

[73]“Figurative” may not be saying enough about the meaning of Jesus’ words (see later discussion in chap. 6, pp. 241-63, “The Lord’s Supper”). However, it is apparent that more is meant than just Jesus’ speaking of Himself as physical bread.

[74]Two extremes in reference to the church as the body of Christ must be guarded against. One is a literal sense that views the church as Christ’s actual body, which has replaced His former physical body. The other extreme is to view the church as Christ’s body as only a metaphor to express a gathered body similar, for example, to a political body, “the body politic,” etc. The church is neither Christ’s literal body nor is it simply a collective body of believers. It is the spiritual body of Christ.

[75]Paul in this passage actually speaks of those “not holding fast to the Head”; however, by implication those who do hold fast will have the bodily growth described.

[76]For example, Hans Kiing writes in his book *The Church*, in a chapter entitled “The Church as the Body of Christ,” that “Christ does not exist without the Church, the Church does not exist without Christ” (p. 234).

[77]A popular statement declares, “Christ has no hands but our hands … no feet but our feet to lead men in the way.” While this can be viewed as a challenge to the church to be about Christ’s business, this kind of statement surely exaggerates Christ’s dependence on the church.

[78]Some day the church will be “a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing” (Eph. 5:27 kjv). But this is the future

prospect (as the context shows), not the present reality. (For more on this see the section “The Bride of Christ,” pp. 72-77.)

[79]These words of Paul are set in the broader context of the subjection, or submission, that wives owe to their husbands. Paul here is shifting from the imagery of an organic relationship of head and body to that of a personal relationship of husband and wife. The latter picture contains more of the idea of a conscious and willing submission than does the former. Submission, or subjection, however, is the key to both images.

[80]E.g., in Hebrews 13:17 is the admonition “Obey your leaders and submit to them.”

[81]Peter reminds elders, “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care … not lording it over those entrusted to you” (1 Peter 5:2-3 NIV).

[82]I come to the garden alone…. And He walks with me, and He talks with me, And He tells me I am His own” are some words from a familiar hymn. While these words express a personal, even important act of devotion, they may represent for some people a private kind of faith in isolation from the body of Christ. In the church Christ tells us not only that we are “His own” but also that we belong to one another in total interdependence.

[83]I like the words of Claude Welch: “One is never alone in Christ. Membership in him is at the same time membership in one another. There is no purely private Christianity, for to be in Christ is to be in the church and to be in the church is to be in Christ” (*The Reality of the Church*, 165).

[84]See David Watson, *I Believe in the Church*, chapter 1, “Who Believes in the Church?” that begins, “JESUS-YES! CHURCH-NO!” pointing out a typical attitude of many people in our day.

[85]Recall the earlier discussion on the church as local (pp. 38-43).

[86]Recall that of the seven churches addressed in Revelation 2 and 3, five have words of criticism directed to them.

[87]The Greek word is *charismata*. For more on *charismata* see “Excursus on the Word Charisma,” *Renewal Theology*, 2:345-46 .

[88]Let each exercise them accordingly” is not in the Greek text. However, such an addition seems clearly implied. The rsv similarly adds, “Let us use them.”

[89]For a more detailed discussion of these *charismata* see pages 125-33.

[90]The Greek word translated “the common good” is *sympheron*-“advantage,

profit" (Thayer). The kjv reading "to profit withal," though archaic, is on target.

[91]The Greek word means "servant" (also in a more specialized way "deacon"-see infra, pp. 207-10).

[92]In Colossians this is particularly clear where Paul says in one place that Christ is "the head of the body, the church" (1:18) and another that He is "the head of all rule and authority" (2:10).

[93]The Greek word for "fullness," *pleroma*, is sometimes used as an English word. Pleroma may be defined as "the fullness of divine excellencies and powers" (*Webster's Third New International Dictionary*).

[94]A glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle" (Eph. 5:27 kjv) is Christ's ultimate purpose for the church.

[95]According to Colossians 2:9, "in him [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." "Bodily" in this case refers not to the church but to Christ's incarnation and present exaltation. Christ continues in heaven in His formerly physical, now glorified, body, which is indeed an aspect of His divinity. This distinction between Christ's glorified body and His spiritual body, the church, must be carefully maintained.

[96]As will be noticed, the New Testament imagery varies between the church as bride and the church as wife.

[97]"Baal" refers to any of numerous Canaanite deities that Israel turned to.

[98]"Attendants of the bridegroom" is probably a better translation than "wedding guests" (RSV). The Greek expression literally reads, "sons of the bridal chamber" [*the nymphonons*], which expresses a closer relation to the bridegroom [*the nymphios*] than simply wedding guests. BAGD reads under νvμΦων, "the bridegroom's attendants."

[99]The Old Testament nowhere depicts the Messiah to come as a bridegroom. In one account, however, God Himself is viewed as a bridegroom: "As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you" (Isa. 62:5).

[100]J. Jeremias puts it vividly: "The days of His earthly ministry were already wedding days for the disciples" (TDNT, 4:1105). I like this very much.

[101]It is interestingly that no bride is mentioned in any of the New Testament accounts above, thus making room for a later equation of the disciples of Christ, the church, as His bride.

[102]It is significant once again that no bride is mentioned; thus there is all the

more reason for seeing in the ten virgins a counterpart to the bride. On the ten virgins as the church, see R. H. Gundry: “The virgins represent the church” (*Matthew*, 498) and Jeremias who speaks of them allegorically as “the expectant Christian community” (*The Parables of Jesus*, 51).

[103],03So the rsv translates: “a pure bride.” The Greek word, *parthenon*, however, is literally “virgin.”

[104]Jeremias writes, “Paul compares the community with a bride, Christ with the bridegroom, and himself with the best man who has won the bride, who watches over her virginity, and who will lead her to the bridegroom at the wedding” (TDNT, 4:1104).

[105]See Isaiah 61:10 for interesting Old Testament background: the bride adorned with jewels as a depiction of the event of salvation.

[106]These words are reaffirmed by Jesus in Matthew 19:5.

[107]As discussed in the previous section.

[108]“The Church’s One Foundation,” a part of the second stanza.

[109]“By the washing of water with the word” probably refers to “the washing of regeneration” (Titus 3:5), which occurs in connection with the word of the gospel being appropriated.

[110]The Hebrew word is rûah; it also means “wind” or “spirit.”

[111]Recall the brief discussion of these words on pages 56-57.

[112]The Greek word is *enephysēsen*. In Ezekiel 37:9, quoted above, the Greek word in the Septuagint (lxx) for “breathe” is emphyseson, a form of the same word as *enephysēsen*. In Genesis 2:7, which reads, “the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being,” the lxx for “breathed” has *enephysēsen*. The breath of God, that is, the Spirit of God brings life, whether physically or spiritually.

[113]Along with John 6:63 and 20:22 (which we have noted), Jesus’ words in John 3:7, “You must be bora anew,” are quite relevant. Jesus immediately adds, “The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit” (v. 8).

[114]John Rea writes: “When the risen Lord Jesus breathed forth the Holy Spirit that first night after His resurrection, His creative work began transforming individual believers into a spiritual community. They became at that moment a new body, His body the church” (*The Holy*

Spirit in the Bible, 163).

[115]Hans Kting writes concerning Luke: “For Luke … Pentecost is not the moment of the Church’s birth: this is Easter, and for Luke too the community of Jesus Christ existed before Pentecost (Acts 1:15)” (*The Church*, 165). This is well said.

[116]David Watson uses this expression regarding the Holy Spirit and the church in his book, *I Believe in the Church*, 170.

[117]The Greek phrase is *hē koinōnia tou hagiou pneumatos*.

[118]The kjv renders *koinōnia* in 2 Corinthians 13:14 as “communion.”

[119]I am interpreting “the *koinōnia* of the Spirit” as the fellowship engendered by the Spirit (subjective genitive). The Greek text can also be interpreted as fellowship with the Spirit Himself (objective genitive). Since in this passage both “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ” and “the love of God” are unmistakably from God and from Christ (subjective genitives), “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” would more likely be that from the Spirit. Paul, also writing about the koittdnia pneumatos in Philippians 2:1, begins, “If there is any fellowship of the Spirit” (nasb, Similarly kjv). The rsv reads “any participation in the Spirit”; niv, “any fellowship with the Spirit” (objective genitives). While these latter translations are possible, I again am inclined to the view that it is a fellowship made possible by, hence from, the Holy Spirit. (This is also strongly suggested by the two preceding clauses in the niv: “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love.”)

[120]John later declares, “By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit” (4:13 NASB). Although this statement refers to knowledge (“we know”) of an abiding fellowship by virtue of the Holy Spirit rather than the actuality of the fellowship, a close connection with the Holy Spirit is apparent.

[121]I have added the word “together” to the RSV translation above since it is in the Greek text, *epi to auto.* F. F. Bruce translates this phrase as “altogether,” adding that it “seems to have acquired a semi-technical sense not unlike ἐν ἐκκλησία (’in church fellowship’)” (*Acts of the Apostles*, 75).

[122]The Greek phrase again is *epi to auto*.

[123]Once again *epi to auto*.

[124]For a fuller presentation of this theme see *Renewal Theology*, 2:314-19,

"Deepening of Fellowship."

[125]"To their number" is the translation above for *epi to auto*. "Together," however, is the basic meaning. Bruce again notes that " 'in church fellowship' makes good sense here" (*Acts of the Apostles*, 102).

[126]Remember that Jesus Himself reached beyond human family ties to the formulation of a spiritual family: "Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mark 3:35). The self-concern of Jesus' earthly family may be noted from the preceding verses (31-34).

[127]"The communion of saints" is a later Western addition to the Apostles' Creed. It is included in the statement of the Creed in Roman Catholic and Protestant churches.

[128]As described in the previous section.

[129]Chapter 26, "Of the Communion of Saints," section I.

[130]This calls to mind Paul's intense desire to "know … the fellowship [*koinōnia* of [Christ's] sufferings" (Phil. 3:10 kjv).

[131]Recall the discussion of the transcendent church in chapter 2, pages 41-43.

[132]The Book of Revelation may indicate this. The twenty-four elders, possibly representing the heavenly church, frequently express awareness of earthly events.

[133]For a brief summary of this practice see EDT, 568-69.

4
Functions

We will now consider the various functions of the church. These will be viewed under the headings of worship, upbuilding, and outreach.

I. WORSHIP

The word worship is a modern form of the old English word weorthscipe, meaning "worthiness, repute, respect" (Webster).[1] Accordingly, worship as directed to God signifies the activity of attributing to God the worthiness,[2] repute, respect—indeed, the reverence—due Him. The psalmist cries forth, "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name…. Worship the LORD in holy array" (96:8–9). The glory due God is recognized in the worship of Him.

Background: Worship in Israel

Throughout the Old Testament, worship occupies a highly important place. When, for example, Abraham at God's bidding left the city of Haran and came into the land of Canaan, Genesis records that "the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land.' So he built there an altar to the LORD" (12:7).

Shortly after doing so, Abraham moved to another place in the land of Canaan, and "there he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the Lord" (v. 8). Building these altars and calling on the name of the Lord were acts of worship in the earliest days of the sojourn of Abraham in Canaan.[3] Such acts were evidence of the priority this patriarch gave to God throughout his life.

When Moses was commissioned by the Lord at Mount Sinai to bring Israel out of the land of Egypt, God said to him, "You [plural] shall worship[4] God at this mountain" (Exod. 3:12 NASB). Following the institution of the Passover, "the people bowed their heads and worshiped" (Exod. 12:27). After the crossing of the Red Sea, Moses and all Israel sang forth, "The LORD is my strength and my song … this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him" (Exod. 15:2). Many years later, Moses declared to Israel, "He is your praise and He is your God, who has done these great and awesome things for you which your eyes have seen" (Deut. 10:21 NASB). All of these statements, particularly the last, highlight the importance of worship and praise in the life of early Israel.

In the reign of David worship stands out. When the ark of the covenant was brought up to Jerusalem, David "appointed certain of the Levites … to invoke, to thank, and to praise the LORD, the God of Israel" (1 Chron. 16:4). Asaph was given the chief position; he and his assistants were "to play harps and lyres … to sound the cymbals and … to blow trumpets continually" (vv. 5–6). Then, at the appropriate time, Asaph and the other Levites led Israel in singing, "O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples! Sing to him, sing praises to him, tell of all his wonderful works…. Worship the LORD in holy array ; tremble before him, all the earth" (1 Chron. 16:8–9, 29–30).[5] At the conclusion "all the people said 'Amen!' and praised the Lord" (v. 36). It is also significant that at the close of the singing "David left Asaph and his brethren there before the ark of the covenant of the LORD to minister continually" (v. 37). Thus worship and praise were to be an ongoing expression of the life of Israel.

Another high moment of worship occurred at the dedication of Solomon's temple. After the ark was brought into the temple, and prior to Solomon's address and prayer of dedication, Asaph and his company again led in praise. Then, "when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the LORD … the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God" (2 Chron. 5:13–14). Thus the praise of God immediately preceded God's filling the temple with His glory. After Solomon's prayer was ended, "fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offerings and sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD [again] filled the temple…. When all the children of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the LORD upon the temple, they … worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, 'For he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever' " (7:1, 3). Here worship immediately followed upon God's filling the temple with His glory.

In light of such examples in the reigns of David and Solomon, it is apparent that worship and praise had great significance in the life of Israel. This was the case even though idolatry set in before the end of Solomon's reign[6] and was manifest frequently in the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah also. When Hezekiah became king in Judah, there was a cleansing and reconsecration of the temple so that "the whole assembly worshiped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded … the king and all who were present with him bowed themselves and worshiped" (2 Chron. 29:28–29). Similar praise and worship occurred after captivity and exile when the temple was rebuilt and the people again offered "songs of praise and thanksgiving to God" (Neh. 12:46).

Unquestionably, worship continued throughout the life and experience of the Old Testament people of God.

The Book of Psalms, covering many centuries of Israel's history, is laden with praise and worship. Note a few examples: "Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name; worship the LORD in holy array" (29:2); "O come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!" (95:1); "Extol the LORD our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the LORD our God is holy!" (99:9); "Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool!" (132:7).

In addition to these psalms relating to Israel's own worship, there are many that look beyond. For example: "All the earth will worship Thee, And will sing praises to Thee; They will sing praises to Thy name"[7] (66:4 NASB); "All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and worship before Thee, O LORD; And they shall glorify Thy name" (86:9 NASB); "Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the LORD…. So the name of the LORD will be declared in Zion and his praise in Jerusalem when the peoples and the kingdoms assemble to worship the LORD" (102:18, 21–22 NIV). The universality of praise is declared in all these verses.

I conclude this background survey with one narrative that emphasizes in a special way the importance of worship in Israel. When Judah under King Jehoshaphat was threatened by an invasion of Moabites and Ammonites, a prophet arose to declare, "Fear not, and be not dismayed … for the battle is not yours but God's" (2 Chron. 20:15). The immediate reaction of Israel was to worship: "Jehoshaphat … and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the LORD, worshiping the Lord" (v. 18). Early the next morning Jehoshaphat appointed those "who were to sing to the LORD and praise him in holy array, as they went before the army…. And when they began to sing and praise, the LORD set an ambush" (vv. 21–22). The result was that the enemy was routed and destroyed. Here the high significance of worship and praise in ancient Israel is clearly set forth.[8]

A. The Primacy of Worship

The primary function of the church is the worship of God: to declare His worth and to offer Him praise. Peter's words are apropos: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9 NASB). The people of God, the church, has been "called out"[9] so as to pro claim God's "excellencies."[10] This indeed is the primary function of the church: to worship God.[11]

Let us turn to the account in Acts 2. Immediately after the waiting disciples had been filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to "speak in other tongues" (v. 4), declaring "the wonderful works of God" (v. 11 KJV). These disciples had truly been "called out of darkness into his marvelous light," and as their first community activity they praised God for His "excellencies," indeed His "wonderful works." The record in Acts does not specify the character of these works; however, since the disciples had so recently experienced God's redemption, they were doubtless praising Him for what He had done through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The point to observe is that before Peter proclaimed the gospel message (2:22—36) through which thousands came to salvation, he and the other disciples had been speaking forth the praises of God. Thus they were first of all a community of worship and praise. Moreover, after the church had been enlarged by some three thousand converts, Acts 2 climactically portrays it as "praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (v. 47). Again, the praise of God is mentioned immediately prior to the addition of others to the community.

An emphasis on the priority of worship—prayer and praise—is found scattered throughout Acts. Acts 3 opens with Peter and John going to the temple "at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour" (v. 1). They encountered a lame man at the temple gate and subsequently healed him; nonetheless, the fact that prayer and praise had priority in their ministry is clearly evident. For when the man was healed, he "entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God" (v. 8). Again, the note of praise stands out vividly. Shortly after this, Peter and John, being warned by the Jewish high council to speak no more in the name of Jesus, rejoined the other believers who "lifted their voices together to God and said, 'Sovereign Lord…'" (Acts 4:24). They prayed to the Lord as Creator of all

things and then asked for boldness to continue proclaiming the gospel (vv. 24–30). As a result of their prayers, “the place in which they were gathered was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness” (v. 31). Once again prayer and praise preceded further activity.

Acts 13 records the commissioning of Barnabas and Saul for missionary work by the assembled prophets and teachers: “While they were worshiping[12] the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off” (vv. 2–3). This was the first major missionary activity of the church, and it was undergirded by worshiping the Lord. One further noteworthy account in Acts relates to the conversion of the Philippian jailer. Paul and Silas were in prison at midnight “praying and singing hymns of praise to God” (16:25 NASB). An earthquake suddenly shook the prison’s foundations and broke loose the chains holding Paul, Silas, and other prisoners, causing the jailer to awaken and cry out to Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (v. 30 NASB). In this narrative prayer and praise is depicted as the background for the extraordinary prison events that climaxed in the salvation of the jailer.

The church as portrayed in Acts was primarily a worshiping and praising church. In that spirit the church carried forward all of its other activities. Most of all, it was the praise of God that served as a catalyst to bring many to salvation.

Now let us return to the words of Peter about the church’s being “a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9) and note that previously the apostle had declared to his readers (the scattered church): “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (v. 5 NIV). The people of God no longer have priests, as in the Old Testament, but they are priests—holy priests whose basic function is to offer not animal sacrifices but spiritual sacrifices. These sacrifices doubtless are primarily various acts of worship.[13] A passage in Hebrews echoes this thought: “Through him [Jesus] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name” (13:15). The sacrifice is worship and praise: this is the primary function of the New Testament priesthood, the people of God, the church.

In an extraordinary way the primacy of worship is also highlighted in the Book of Revelation. Before the exalted throne of God are four living creatures who day and night sing forth, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty” (4:8). As they sing, “the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever” (v. 10). In the

presence of the Lamb myriads of angels proclaim His praise: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” (5:12). Every creature in heaven, earth, and sea also cries out, “To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever! And the four living creatures said, ‘Amen!’ and the elders fell down and worshiped” (vv. 13–14).[14] Worship is the central and continuing act of all creatures in heaven and earth. Thus the Book of Revelation depicts the fullness of all that the church represents on earth; for in its worship there is the ongoing parallel to, and anticipation of, the continuing worship in heaven.[15] Worship indeed is and remains the primary activity of the living church.

It is apparent that the church’s worship, while primary in both the Old and New Testaments, takes on a far deeper significance in the latter. For it is not only worship of God but also of Christ (“God Almighty” and “the Lamb”). It is the worship and praise of Him who has called us “out of darkness into His marvelous light.” It is the exultant telling forth of the “wonderful works of God” that center in Jesus Christ, His life, death, and resurrection, and in the redemption wrought through Him.

Worship continues to be the primary function of the church. When, for example, a Christian community gathers together on the first day of the week for a service of worship, that community is fulfilling its basic reason for being. We may ordinarily think of service as an activity related to others; however, the primary service of God is worship. Even so, we speak of the occasion of worship as a “worship service”[16] —the chief service of God being not a matter of doing things for Him but of worshiping and praising His Name.

If it is true that “man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever,”[17] it surely follows that the glorifying, the worship of God, is the chief end of the church. A church may indeed be much concerned about such matters as education, fellowship,[18] sound teaching, evangelism, and missions. But unless the primary focus is worship, there will be little vitality in whatever else it does.[19] The worshiping church is both fulfilling its highest calling—its chief joy —and providing the dynamism for a significant impact on all other activities.

The worship of God is the highest activity of humankind.[20] The church of the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is prepared and privileged as no other people on earth to sing forth the praises of the eternal God.

B. The Character of Worship

We will next consider the character of worship. Our discussion will relate to various elements or components that constitute worship. While what follows will also relate to individual worship, the primary focus will be on the church's worship, with particular atten tion given to the total character of a service of worship.

1. Reverence and Awe

The true worship of God is suffused with a spirit of reverence and awe. Since God is supremely the Holy One, this spirit must characterize worship throughout. The writer to the Hebrews urges, "Let us offer to God acceptable worship,[21] with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire" (12:28—29). In worship we come spiritually "to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God" (v. 22), the God who is "a consuming fire"; thus we must come before Him with due reverence and awe. The worship of God should begin and continue in a truly reverential atmosphere.

The Old Testament highlights the relation of God's holiness to the human situation. Indeed, the words in Hebrews about God as a consuming fire are quoted from Deuteronomy 4:24; after Moses had warned against idolatry, he declared to Israel, "The LORD your God is a consuming fire" (niv, nasb). Moses himself, in his initial encounter at Mount Sinai with God, who had come to declare His intention to bring Israel out of Egypt, was first told at the burning bush: "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Exod. 3:5).[22] Against this background of His holiness, God told Moses that Israel would later worship Him at the same mountain.[23] Surely one of the most remarkable worship experiences in the Old Testament was that of Isaiah who in the temple beheld the exalted Lord and then immediately heard angelic voices crying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa. 6:3). Thrice holy is the Lord God! To worship this God truly calls for reverence and awe. Therefore the psalmists sing forth such words as "Worship the LORD with reverence" (2:11 nasb, neb);[24] "O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker"

(95:6); “You who revere the LORD, bless the LORD“ (135:20 NASB). The attitude of reverence, awe, and godly fear is the proper attitude of worship before the holy Lord.

In the New Testament we see this atmosphere of reverence and awe particularly in the Book of Revelation. We have earlier noted the words of the living creatures who constantly cry out, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD God Almighty” (4:8), and the response of the elders as they “fall down … and worship him” (v. 10). This very prostration signifies reverence and awe in the presence of the holy and mighty God. It is the beginning of true worship. Further on in the book we read that an angel calls to all who dwell on the earth: “Fear God and give him the glory, for the hour of his judgment has come ; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water” (14:7). Although these words are not directed to the church, they do express the element of reverence—“fear God and give him the glory”— called for in the worship of God.

The element of reverence and awe is vitally important in the true worship of God. It should never be thought that because God is a loving and gracious Father whose arms are ever open to receive His people there is no need for holy awe in His presence. Jesus taught us to pray, “Our Father who art in heaven,” thus affirming a warm familial relationship to God as Father, but He immediately added, “Hallowed be thy name” (Matt. 6:9). “Thy name” represents God Himself; so God is the holy Father and is always to be approached, even as Father, with reverence and awe.

Often in our churches we fail to stress the need for an attitude of deep reverence. Indeed, this should be the atmosphere in which we begin: not immediately with praise and thanksgiving but with waiting in silence before Him. The prophet Habakkuk declared: “The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him” (2:20). Surely this should be the attitude of that part of the earth, the church, that acknowledges His name. Then when praise and thanksgiving break forth out of silence, they will be all the more meaningful.

Protestant churches especially often lack a spirit of reverence in worship. The main gathering place for worship is frequently viewed as an auditorium (a place to hear) rather than a sanctuary (a holy meeting place). There is little or no room to kneel, and so the psalmist’s call “Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker!” (Ps. 95:6) is neither heeded nor practically possible. Moreover, the people often gather to talk first with one another rather than to look expectantly to God. How much many churches need to recover a sense of worship and awe!

The true beginning of worship is beautifully put in these words:

God Himself is with us: Let us now adore Him

And with awe appear before Him.
God is in His temple, All within keep silence,
And before Him bow with reverence.
Him alone, God we own;
To our God and Saviour
Praises sing forever.[25]

2. Praise and Thanksgiving

In the worship of God praise and thanksgiving occupy a place of special importance. Of the two, praise is primary because it is the worship of God for Himself. Psalm 150, which climaxes with the words "Let everything that breathes praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!" represents throughout the pure praise of God. In such praise the focus is totally off the self and wholly fixed on God. Because "the LORD is great" — that is, great in Himself—He is "greatly to be praised" (Ps. 96:4 KJV). This is the meaning of praise.

Surely our hearts and mouths should overflow with praise. After a time of reverent quietness, the first words spoken and perhaps sung should be words of praise. Since as Christians we more fully understand God as triune, our worship can be even more elevated than that of the psalmist, for it is the praise of the Lord God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. A hymn such as "Holy, Holy, Holy!" first focuses on God Himself with the words "Lord God Almighty!"; then it climaxes with the words "God in three persons, blessed Trinity." Through such a hymn God may be richly praised.

Praise should continue for a season. One hymn might lead to another, and various choruses of praise can be offered to the Lord. Paul writes to the Ephesians: "Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart" (5:18–19). "Psalms" prob ably refers to Old Testament psalms; "hymns," to various songs of praise known to all;[26] and "spiritual songs," to Spirit-inspired, spontaneous singing.[27] Such a variety of singing—psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs—with the congregation possibly moving from one expression of praise to another makes for rich and abundant praise. In any event, the congregation should not rush through praise, since this is the foundation and hallmark of true worship.[28]

Closely allied with praise is thanksgiving. The psalmist calls, "Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs

of praise!" (95:2). Two lengthy psalms—107 and 136—are expressions of thanksgiving in their entirety. Both begin with the call "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures for ever," and then proceed to give thanks for God's great goodness in creation and deliverance. This note of thanksgiving often sounds forth in the Old Testament.

Even more than ancient Israel, the church has reason to thank God. The deliverance for which the Old Testament people of God offered thanks was largely either from personal trials or national enemies.[29] With the New Testament era a far greater deliverance has come, namely from bondage to sin and death; hence there is much more to be thankful for. And it all centers in the gift of God's love in Jesus Christ. So Paul cries out, "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift" (2 Cor. 9:15), and in another place he speaks of "abounding in thanksgiving" (Col. 2:7). In connection with worship we have noted the words of Paul in Ephesians about psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. To these he adds, "always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father" (Eph. 5:20). Here "always" and "for everything" point to thanksgiving in worship that reaches out into the wide range of all the blessings that are ours in Christ.

Thus an occasion of worship should also be a time of joyful thanksgiving. This may of course be included in the expressions of praise, but thanksgiving may also be offered at special moments, perhaps through a congregational litany of thanksgiving or various free utter ances. One church that I am personally acquainted with often closes the time of morning worship by singing:

> Let the peace of Christ
> rule in your heart,
> And whatever you do, in word
> or deed
> Do it all in the name of the Lord,
> Giving thanks, giving thanks to God
> through Christ the Lord.

Thus the congregation is encouraged to move out with thanksgiving in the days ahead. Surely this is the character of Christian thanksgiving.

3. Humility and Contrition

In the prophecy of Isaiah the Lord says, “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit” (57:15). The God who is approached with reverence and awe and who is addressed with praise and thanksgiving does indeed dwell on high, but he also dwells with those who are humble and contrite in spirit. In a similar vein the psalmist declares, “The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (51:17). “Broken” refers to sorrow for sin, and “contrite” to repentance for sin. Where there is sorrow and repentance, God dwells among His people.

In the true worship of God there is recognition of the need for humility and contrition. For God is a holy God, and the more His awesome presence is realized, the more people sense their own sinfulness and need. The prophet Isaiah, as we noted, heard mighty angels calling out, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” Immediately after that the prophet cried out, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” (Isa. 6:5). This demonstrates that in the vivid presence of the holy God there is a deep sense of personal unholiness and uncleanness. But then something further happened to Isaiah: one of the angels reached down and with a burning coal from the altar touched the prophet’s lips, saying, “Your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven” (v. 7). Isaiah, broken and contrite, was fully cleansed and forgiven. In the presence of the holy and merciful God there is also the blessing of forgiveness.

Since no people who assemble for worship are without sin, there is need for contrition and cleansing. The psalmist in another place asks, “Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?” He then replies, “He who has clean hands and a pure heart” (24:3–4). But we know that none of us who worship—“ascend the hill of the Lord” and “stand in his holy place”—have sinless hands and hearts. Although we have been redeemed by Christ, we do continue to sin and thus need fresh forgiveness. Moreover, as a people we are sinners (as Isaiah came to recognize) and share this common need. In the New Testament a wonderfully reassuring promise to believers is that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Thus if our hearts are truly broken and contrite, and confession of sin is made and forgiveness received, we then are prepared further to worship God.

Therefore in a church worship service an opportunity should be extended for humble confession and receiving the Lord’s forgiveness. In some church traditions it may be helpful to use a common prayer of confession, such as the

one that begins, “Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep; we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts…. O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders”; it closes with the words “and grant, O most merciful Father, for His [Christ’s] sake, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of Thy holy Name. Amen.” In addition to making such a general confession of sin, the congregation may be given an opportunity in a time of silence and contrition to wait humbly before the Lord, to become more aware of personal shortcomings, and also to make individual confession of sin.[30] Both corporate and individual confession thus have an important place in worship. Following such confession the worship leader may verbally give an assurance of pardon such as, “Hear the good news: in the name of Jesus Christ we are forgiven!”[31] The exact procedure is not too important. Moreover the occasion of confession may be included in some other prayer,[32] or at some other time in the worship service;[33] however, the opportunity for confession and forgiveness is quite important.

A final note in regard to humility and contrition: There are many churches that in worship have a fine season of praise and thanksgiving—everything from psalms and hymns to spiritual songs—but almost totally lack in the matter of confession. This ought not to be. The God who is high and lifted up, indeed “enthroned upon the praises” of His people (Ps. 22:3 NASB), is a holy God, so that the more we become aware of His awesome presence, the more we must also sense a need for humility and contrition, confession and forgiveness. Furthermore, the experience of contrition and forgiveness helps prepare the way for the further expressions of worship (to which we next come). It is important indeed not to minimize the urgent need for humility and contrition.

4. Supplication and Intercession

Paul writes Timothy, “I urge that supplications,[34] prayers, intercessions,[35] and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high posi tions” (1 Tim. 2:1–2). While no sharp distinction can be drawn, “supplications” generally refers to a wide range of petitionary prayer, “intercessions” to prayers offered on behalf of others. It is Paul’s concern that all possible prayers be offered.

Surely such petitionary and intercessory prayers are integral to the church’s worship. For example, in the Lord’s Prayer, often said in communal worship,[36]

there are six basic petitions. The first three relate to God Himself—the hallowing of His name, praying for His kingdom to come, and expressing the desire for His will to be done (Matt. 6:9–10). These petitions regarding God—His holiness, His kingdom, and His will—emphasize that in such prayer the primary matter is not the needs of those praying but the fulfillment of God's glory and purpose. Indeed, such prayer is basically intercessory because it expresses the believers' desire for the coming of God's kingdom (with all that this signifies) and for God's will to be done everywhere on earth. The next three petitions relate to the needs of those praying—for daily bread, forgiveness of debts (sins), and deliverance from evil. Such supplications, while secondary, are likewise important, because God our Father wants His children to make known their needs to Him.

Following the example of the Lord's Prayer,[37] the petitions of the church may be, first, those of intercession for the concerns of God's kingdom. Rather than praying at the outset for the congregation's own needs, the church reaches out in prayer to the whole world. This means praying for the worldwide gospel proclamation, for the church's message in every land and nation, and for those serving in mission fields both at home and far away. It means praying as Jesus did, according to John 17,[38] for the unity of believers everywhere—"that they may all be one" (v. 21). It means praying for the peoples of all nations that righteousness may prevail and that evil will be cast down. Such intercessions should be primary in the worship of the church.

But surely there is also a place—and an important one—for focusing on the needs of the congregation. The simple words "Give us this day our daily bread"—however expressed—are an ongoing reminder that even the most elementary of our daily needs[39] depend totally on God's provision and should not therefore be taken for granted. Also, this petition suggests that we may go beyond physical necessities to pray for the many other blessings God has in store for His children. Jesus later says, "Your Father who is in heaven [will] give good things to those who ask him" (Matt. 7:11). God our Father delights to give to those who ask, and surely the congregational gathering for worship is a significant occasion for us to ask. God's "good things" are not limited. Whatever needs exist—healing for sickness, strength for weariness, peace for anxiety, direction for uncertainty, victory for defeat—God is ready to give. Such prayers may be said for the overall needs of the congregation, but it is important also to pray in particular. Later, Jesus declares, "Even the hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matt. 10:30; Luke 12:7), thus speaking of God the Father's individual concern. Therefore we should pray for particular needs, indeed insofar

as possible, even person by person.[40]

The other two petitions in the Lord's Prayer—"Forgive us our debts [or 'sins'],[41] as we also have forgiven our debtors" and "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (vv. 12- 13)—express concerns of all believers. The first request is for God to forgive us, since we have forgiven others and do now[42] forgive others.[43] This petition implies that before we seek again the Lord's continuing forgiveness we must forgive anyone who may have done us ill.[44] Thus in worship church members may properly be called upon to consider their own attitude toward others before praying for God's ongoing mercy. The second request is concerned that the heavenly Father not allow us to be led into temptation,[45] but that we be delivered from evil, or the evil one.[46] This prayer is much needed by all Christians since temptations abound, and Satan is always seeking to entrap believers. This last of the six petitions in the Lord's Prayer therefore needs to be asked frequently because the church is again and again tempted to succumb to the lures and seductions of the world.

To sum up: The worship activity of the church includes prayers of supplication and intercession. Intercession may be given the priority so that the assembled congregation first prays for others. This is good, because people can easily become so preoccupied with their own needs that they scarcely reach out beyond themselves. Nonetheless, it is entirely proper and indeed necessary that people express their own needs—collectively as well as individually. God is always ready to hear the supplications of His people. So may we as a church be all the more encouraged to offer up continuing intercessions and supplications to the heavenly Father.

5. Consecration and Dedication

Finally, a congregational worship service also offers opportunity for consecration and dedication on the part of all the members.[47] This includes both one's earthly possessions and oneself.

Let us first consider the matter of earthly possessions. In the Old Testa ment there is particular stress on bring the psalmist calls out, "Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts!" (96:8). In another psalm are these words: "With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to thee; I will give thanks to thy name, O LORD, for it is good" (54:6). There were offerings of many varieties, some voluntary, some required. In the latter category was the tithe, the bringing of one-tenth of a person's property to the Lord.[48] The

Old Testament closes with these words of the Lord regarding the tithe: “Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house; and thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing” (Mai. 3:10). Tithes and offerings of many kinds were regularly presented in the temple worship.

In New Testament worship the stress is almost wholly on voluntary offerings. Jesus Himself praises a poor widow who dropped two copper coins (her whole livelihood) into the temple treasury (Luke 21:1–4), and Paul stresses the value of abundant giving. Paul writes, “He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:6–7).[49]

Jesus mentions the tithe twice. First, he does sp in connection with a vigorous denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees: Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others” (Matt. 23:23; cf. Luke 11:42). Jesus did not deny the lightness of their tithing[50] but deplored their neglect of justice, mercy, and faith, the weightier, or more important, matters of the law. Jesus’ other reference to tithing is in a parable that includes the boastful statement of the Pharisee: “I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all I get” (Luke 18:12). The Pharisee was condemned by Jesus not for his fasting and tithing but for his pride: “Every one who exalts himself will be humbled” (v. 14). The only other New Testament reference to tithing is in Hebrews 7 where the writer relates that Abraham gave Melchizedek tithes and that the Levites according to the law took tithes from their brethren (vv. 4–10). There is no reference, however, in Hebrews to Christians continuing this practice. Paul never refers to tithing in any of his letters. Thus tithing in the New Testament occupies a very marginal place. Even Jesus, who does not deny the validity of tithing, never gives positive instruction to His disciples in this regard.

Jesus does, however, without referring to any particular amount, speak quite positively of giving alms: “When you give alms …” (Matt. 6:2). Here He warns His disciples against the hypocrisy of those who make a public show of their giving. Then Jesus adds, “But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (vv. 3–4). The important matter is not giving a specific amount (e.g., a tithe), but giving quietly and secretly. In regard

to the amount, there is no limit (recall the widow who gave all she had). Later Jesus instructs a rich young ruler: Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven" (Luke 18:22).[51] The stress by Jesus in another place is on open-hearted giving: "Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put[52] into your lap" (Luke 6:38). This does not mean giving in order to receive—a kind of calculated giving. But when one freely gives without seeking a return, abundant blessings will surely come in.

What does all of this say concerning church giving today? By New Testament principles, the emphasis should be on voluntary and joyous giving. If tithing is mentioned, it should be understood not as a New Testament command but as a minimal amount to give (should the Christian do less than the Old Testament Jew?) in the context of the larger call for free and voluntary giving. It is questionable to quote such an Old Testament command as "Bring the full tithes into the storehouse" when the New Testament places almost total emphasis on voluntary giving. Also, there is need to stress thought-fulness in giving—each person "to do as he has made up his mind"—in order to particularize giving in light of one's own available resources. This calls for stewardship, namely, to make the best possible use of the means God has provided. Anonymity in giving is also important: there should be no broadcasting or announcing of one's giving either by the church or by the individual who gives. The blessings of voluntary giving may properly be stressed: the Father will reward, and good measure, even "running over," will be returned. Giving is not done in order to receive a reward from God or man; however, those who give abundantly will be abundantly blessed.

Finally, for the church the main stress in giving should be against the background of God's own total giving of His Son: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16 KJV). The ultimate question for the recipients of God's gift is not How much should we give? but How much can we hold back in light of what God has done for us?

This leads to the other emphasis in giving—the dedication of the self. A worship service affords opportunity for the giving of material possessions; it also, and climactically, should lead to a further consecration of the worshipers themselves.

Here let us note two passages in Scripture, the first in Isaiah 6. We have already recalled that Isaiah's experience in the temple of the thrice-holy God resulted in the prophet's profound confession of sin and his being forgiven by God. Following this, we now note, Isaiah heard the Lord saying, "Whom shall I

send, and who will go for us?" and thereupon Isaiah replied, "Here I am! Send me" (v. 8). He neither asked where he would be sent nor what he would be doing. It was simply an act of total self-dedication.

The second passage is in Romans 12. The chapter begins with these stirring words of Paul: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship"[53] (v. 1 NIV). Against the background of what God has done in Christ—"God's mercy"— we are urged to present our bodies, our selves,[54] as living sacrifices. Paul's words of course apply to more than a particular worship service, because we are called upon to be "living sacrifices" daily throughout life. However, it is also fitting that this "spiritual act of worship"—total self-dedication—oc cur at the close of a community gathering for worship. Such an act of dedication carries the members of the church out into the world to be continual living sacrifices.

The final dedication may be in the form of a hymn such as "Take My Life and Let It Be Consecrated, Lord, to Thee" and/or a prayer. The opportunity may also be given for people to come forward and kneel in self-offering to the Lord. The important thing, however, is not the exact method but the act of renewed commitment to serve the Lord faithfully in the days ahead.

C. The Way of Worship

Now that we have considered the character of worship in terms of its various components, let us reflect briefly on the way of worship.

3. Trinitarian

Christian worship is essentially Trinitarian: it involves the worship of the one God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[55]

a. One God. The worship of one God is basic to the witness of both the Old Testament and the New. Israel, in the midst of surrounding nations that worshiped many gods, was a people called to faith in and worship of one God. In the Ten Commandments we find these words: "You shall have no other gods before me…. You shall not bow down to them or worship them" (Deut. 5:7–9 NIV).[56] Shortly after that Moses calls to Israel, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deut. 6:4 NIV). The one and only Lord God was to be worshiped by the people of Israel. Likewise in the New Testament Jesus Himself reaffirmed the oneness of God by quoting the words "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Mark 12:29). Paul does the same in such words as "God is one" (Gal. 3:20) and in an ascription of worship: "To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Tim. 1:17). Israel and the church, Jewish faith and Christian faith, affirm the oneness of God and the worship of no other gods.

Christian worship, it is important to emphasize, centers in the one and only God. Whatever is said about the worship of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit must not in any sense derogate from the focus of worship on the one God. If Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are worshiped, it is not as if three deities are being recognized, for each person is wholly God. For example, in the Book of Revelation, although there is the heavenly worship of "the Lord God Almighty" on the throne in chapter 4 and of "the Lamb" standing near Him in chapter 5 and of the two in conjunction in 5:13—"To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!"—there is still only one God being worshiped. For Christ the Lamb of God also occupies the throne—"I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne"

(Rev. 3:21), and both use the same language of "Alpha and Omega"[57] in referring to themselves. In Revelation 1:8 the words are " 'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty"; in Revelation 22:12–13 the text reads, "Behold, I [Christ] am coming soon…. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the begin ning and the end."[58] There is only one throne of God, only one Alpha and Omega—even if there are two persons—and thus the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are to be worshiped as the one and only true God.

Accordingly, the church in its worship is centrally fixed upon the one God. If the Son is worshiped, it is not a worship of one other than God, less than God, or second to God: it is a worship of God in His entirety. Thus in worship there is no need to feel that by lifting our praise to Christ we are focusing on less than the holy God, or that perhaps we need to balance our worship of Christ by turning to the Father. Whenever the Son or the Father is worshiped, God is being extolled in His totality.

Quite often in worship, the church uses the Old Testament psalms as readily as did Israel, or as Jews do to the present day. In so doing we praise the one God with no less intensity than Israel did. The church has no hesitation in affirming the first commandment about "no other gods," or saying, "the Lord our God, the Lord is one." The church in its worship is as vigorously opposed to polytheism as was Israel.[59] Among the people of many religions that claim multiple deities we worship the one Lord God.

b. Three Persons. In Christian faith the worship of God also involves three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Here we definitely go beyond Israel by declaring that in the one God there is a unity of persons. These three persons are not separate beings (as in polytheism) nor merely attributes of the one God: they are each fully the one God yet each a distinct person.[60]

This means, first, that each person may be worshiped separately.[61] In regard to God as Father, Jesus declares, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him" (John 4:23). God the Father is to be worshiped. Jesus Himself also received worship while on earth; for example, the wise men "fell down and worshiped him" (Matt. 2:11); "those in the boat worshiped him" (Matt. 14:33); "they [the women at the tomb] … took hold of his feet and worshiped him" (Matt. 28:9). In heaven, as we have noted, both God (the Father) and the Lamb (the Son) are praised—"to him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb"— and the scene climaxes with the statement that "the elders fell down and worshiped"

(Rev. 5:14). Father and Son are equally worshiped. There seems to be no direct biblical reference to the Holy Spirit being Worshiped;[62] however, His activity in worship may be suggested by Paul's words when he said, "It is we who are the [true][63] circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God"[64] (Phil. 3:3 NIV). However, since the Holy Spirit is fully God, there is ample reason for worshiping Him even as we worship the Father and the Son.[65] We do this in many of our prayers and hymns.[66]

Second, each person may also fill a distinct role in worship. In Ephesians 5 Paul writes, "Be filled with the Spirit … always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father" (vv. 18, 20). In these words referring to all persons in the Trinity, Paul is declaring a worship procedure. God the Father is the ultimate person to whom thanks (hence worship) is directed, but it is to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the second person, and by the filling of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. Although all the persons are God, the procedure outlined is from third to second to first.

Being "filled with the Spirit" is the basis and ground for rich worship of God. This is similar to Paul's words cited regarding worship "by the Spirit of God." This is distinctive of Christian worship (beyond that of Jewish), namely, that the Holy Spirit inspires the worship,[67] and the more that inspiration is present, the more fully God is glorified. Thus it is by no means only that our human spirits are raised in worship to God; rather, we are lifted by the Holy Spirit into the heights of praise and worship.

By "giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," we worship God the Father through the medium of the Son who has opened up for us the way to the Father. Jesus Himself declares, "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6 NIV). According to Hebrews, "we have confidence to enter the sanctuary [hence to worship] by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh" (10:19–20). Because of what Christ has done in the Atonement, there is "the new and living way." Since "we have a great priest over the house of God" (v. 21), we can now "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (v. 22). So again Christian worship goes beyond Old Testament possibilities because of the atoning blood of Jesus Christ and His continuing priestly ministry. Thus we have total assurance of entering into the very presence of God.

To summarize, although each person of the Trinity may be worshiped separately, they also have distinctive roles. In this latter case, we come to God the Father through Jesus Christ the Son by the activity of the Holy Spirit.[68] This

is uniquely Christian worship. We may not in every act of worship mention the name of Jesus (for example, when we pray the words of the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father …") or be consciously aware of the Holy Spirit's activity. However, in true Christian worship there is always the sense that we come not in our own name (which is far too inadequate) or in our own power (which is far too impotent), but we come through the name (i.e., the person) of Jesus and by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

2. Freedom and Order

The worship of God involves freedom and order. Spontaneity and orderliness should characterize all that is done.

a. Freedom. Paul writes that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor. 3:17). Hence, if the Holy Spirit is active in worship, genuine freedom is present. This means that freedom, liberty, and spontaneity should mark the spiritual worship of God. We have previously noted Paul's words about "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all [our] heart" (Eph. 5:19). These "spiritual songs" are songs inspired by the Holy Spirit, that is, spontaneous songs in which both the melody and the words are given by the Spirit.[69] Such spiritual singing may well follow the singing of various psalms and hymns and thus be the overflowing occasion of "making melody to the Lord with all [our] heart." This, however, is an act of free and spontaneous worship that cannot be programed ahead of time, nor can its contents be previously known.

There should be newness in worship. In the Old Testament the psalmist declares, "He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God" (40:3), and, again, "O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things!" (98:l).[70] God has done so much for us, both past and present, that only a new song can declare it. Unfortunately, the church has often—and totally contrary to the psalmist's intention—simply repeated again and again the psalmist's words, so that they become an old, old song. But if the Lord has done marvelous things, even new things in the present, should we not sing them forth spontaneously and freely? Sometimes in our churches we sing the Magnificat, the song of Mary, that begins, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46–47). This is a beautiful song and well worth repeating, but we render the Lord a disservice if we simply continue to repeat what was for

Mary a new song. Rather, as we likewise magnify the Lord, we should sing our own new and spontaneous expressions. One further word on “a new song”: heaven, not just earth, is a place where new songs are heard! According to Revelation 5, the elders “sang a new song” (v. 9) about the Lamb, and in Revelation 14 the multitude of redeemed saints “sing a new song before the throne” (v. 3). Surely this suggests that similar new songs should be a part of our worship on earth.

How can this occur in the church at worship? If someone has a new song, he or she should be offered the opportunity to sing it. This could mean loosening up the regular order of worship to make room for free expressions. Also the “spiritual songs,” earlier referred to, can be congregation-wide singing in the Spirit in which praise and blessing are offered to Almighty God. Through such singing the Holy Spirit weaves together the melodies in the hearts of God’s people into a beautiful and harmonious offering of praise and thanksgiving.

This freedom in the Spirit should mark all aspects of worship. I have previously listed various components of worship from opening reverence and awe to a concluding time of consecration and dedication. What is important is the components of worship, not necessarily the order. The Holy Spirit, for example, may lead to an early expression of humility and contrition or a later one of praise and thanksgiving. The urgent matter is that we be flexible in the Lord, who is beyond all rigid programing and thus free to move through worship as He wills.

A final word on freedom in worship: This must always be safeguarded because of the human tendency to lapse into form and ritual. This began to happen early in the history of the church when, along with the diminution of vital faith in many quarters, formalism and ritualism set in. When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire early in the fourth century, form and ceremony became all the more dominant. Despite the sixteenth-century reformation in doctrine, there was—and still is—a lack of emphasis on freedom in worship in the historic churches. We may be grateful indeed for the “free” churches that have sought to break the gridlock on worship, and particularly for the charismatic renewal that has brought fresh emphasis on neglected elements in vital worship. However, the renewal itself is by no means free of form and ritual, for many participating churches and fellowships slip into patterns of ritual and repetition.

“For freedom Christ has set us free,” Paul writes in Galatians 5:1. Surely this great act of emancipation not only relates to the bondage of sin but also to the bondage of forms and traditions in worship. Let us therefore worship in freedom!

b. Order. There should also be orderliness in worship. Freedom is basic, but there is also need for order. At the close of a lengthy discussion of worship practices relating to the operation of spiritual gifts in the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 12–14), Paul declares, "But let all things be done properly[71] and in an orderly manner"[72] (1 Cor. 14:40 NASB). These words conclude Paul's discussion that begins, "When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification" (v. 26 NASB).[73] It is apparent from Paul's further presentation that the Corinthians were especially disorderly in their practice of speaking in tongues and prophesying, and thereby provoked a rebuke from the apostle: "God is not a God of disorder[74] but of peace" (v. 33 NIV). Freedom in worship should not degenerate into confusion and disorderliness.

Let us reflect for a moment on the fact that God is not a God of disorder. God is surely a God of freedom, but in His own being He Himself is a God of order: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (in that order); and the universe, including man, while evidencing a definite freedom and spontaneity, represents structure and order. Cosmos, not chaos, is the reality in which we exist, and so it should be in our worship. God Himself as the ground of all things is also both Word (structure) and Spirit (freedom), so that in Himself, in the universe and man He has made, and in our worship there should be the reflection of both structure and freedom.[75] Freedom must not be at the expense of order.

This is why a certain order in worship is essential. Accordingly, in a previous section we have discussed certain elements in worship that also generally make up a worship sequence. Some such order, if not so binding as to eliminate spontaneity and freedom, is valuable because we are creatures who must have order in our daily lives—eating, sleeping, working, and so on—if we are to function properly. So when we gather together, some order is needed whereby we worship and glorify God.

Thus liturgy, to some degree, is invaluable. A printed outline of worship, a book of common prayers, the use of such confessions of faith as the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed—and other traditional forms[76] —help to bring order into the service of worship. Some prescribed forms for such rites as baptism, confirmation, and the Lord's Supper are also helpful. Great hymns of the church have a proper place and should not be neglected. Recall again that Paul speaks of "psalms and hymns" along with "Spirit-inspired songs." Liturgy is important in worshiping the God of order Himself.

The danger, I must quickly add, is that order and structure will stifle freedom and spontaneity. Thus room must be made for both order and freedom. It is a

false polarization that sets liberty against liturgy, freedom against order. True worship of God, who Himself is the God of both liberty and order, contains both elements.

In regard to the true worship of God we may now refer again to the words of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel: “The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him” (John 4:23). Then Jesus adds, “God is spirit,[77] and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (v. 24). Jesus is teaching two important things about worship.

First, His statements are against the background of the question about where people should worship and Jesus’ reply that “the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father” (v. 21). Since God is spirit, and thus everywhere present, worship will be no longer fixed to a certain location or building, but can occur anywhere. Jesus’ words, accordingly, are a strong reminder to the church that the worship of God’s people is by no means tied to a presumed holy place or sanctuary. The very idea of a special consecrated building, where alone God can be truly worshiped, is foreign to the essence of Christian faith. True worship may be in a home, a storefront, a stadium, anywhere; for God as spirit is present wherever His people worship Him. Sec ond, true worship is “in spirit[78] and in truth.” “In spirit” means that genuine worship is a matter deeply of the human spirit, the inmost essence of a person, reaching out to God. True worship is more than words repeated or mental exercises; it is profoundly spiritual whether offered in free expression or traditional form. “In truth” means that our worship must in every way reflect the truth about God in His self-revelation, particularly in regard to Christ Himself, who is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). The church is properly concerned about doctrinal truth; an equal or greater concern needs to be expressed about truth in worship—hymns, prayers, sermon, sacraments, and whatever else;[79] for in worship God is not being talked about (as in theology or doctrine), He is being talked to. To worship in spirit and truth is the nature of genuine worship—and indeed, as Jesus declares, those who so worship, “the Father seeks to worship him.” If that is what God seeks, namely a people who worship from the depths of their being and in the truth that He has given, should not God’s desire be all the more ours?

3. Total Participation

Finally, there should be total participation in worship. All should fully share in worship, and we should worship with all our being.

a. All Participating. In the Old Testament there is a frequent call for all creation to worship and praise the Lord. For example, "Praise the LORD! … Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his host! Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars … kings of the earth and all peoples…. Let them praise the name of the Lord" (Ps. 148:1–3, 11, 13). All of God's people likewise are called upon to praise the Lord: "Let all the people [in Israel] say, 'Amen!' Praise the LORD!" (Ps. 106:48). In the book of Revelation, a voice from the throne cries forth, "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him" (19:5). All creation, all people, all God's servants are summoned to praise and worship God.

Hence when the people of God gather for worship and praise it is quite important that everyone takes part. This should be the case, as much as possible, in all aspects of the worship service. People who gather for worship are not an audience simply to listen but a congregation to participate. For example, it is far better for those worshiping to share in prayers of thanksgiving and confession and supplication than to have a prayer said for the whole congregation. Occasionally it may be better, rather than having a worship leader announce songs and lead in the singing, to allow the congregation to break forth into singing spontaneously (remember again Paul's words "addressing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs"). It is even possible to forgo the sermon at times, if the Holy Spirit should so lead, in order that teachings and testimonies may take place. I am not suggesting disorder—surely such must be guarded against—but fuller participation by all the church in the service of worship.

We may also use the word each: not only all participating but each one taking his part. I earlier quoted these words of Paul: "When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation"[80] (1 Cor. 14:26 NASB). This clearly states that each person who gathers in worship has something to offer; it does not necessarily mean that all will do so. Obviously, even in a fairly small congregation, there would not be time and opportunity for each person to contribute. But the point is that each person has something to give, and should be prepared to make his particular contribution.[81] Paul's words to the church in Corinth may seem to be a far distance from where most of our churches are; perhaps we are not even sure of their relevance for today. I would, however, urge that we examine Paul's words afresh with an openness to practice more of what he prescribes by way of individual participation in the service of

worship.[82]

The basic point is that there should be full participation of God's people in the act of worship. Let all God's people praise and magnify His holy name!

b. All Our Being. Another cry from the psalmist rings forth: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name!" (103:1). God's people are called upon to worship Him with their whole inner being: all that is within. Quoting the "great and first commandment," Jesus declares, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37). Such total love calls for total worship with all our inner spiritual being: the heart, the soul, and the mind. True worship includes all our faculties uplifted in the praise and glorifying of God. The heart feels deeply, the soul is stirred up, and the mind reaches out in worship to ponder and meditate on the things of God. It should be the yearning of all who worship God to do so with their total selves.

As an act of the whole person, worship also includes outward expression. We have talked about singing in various ways—and indeed this singing should be with all one's being through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. In addition to using the voice, there is an important place for other bodily activities, such as clapping and dancing. The psalmist cries out, "Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!" (47:1). We often clap, for example, upon hearing an outstanding speaker or a fine musical performance. How much more should God's people clap in honor of Him; yes, even shout to the Lord! We do not hesitate to shout loudly at a sports event where the players perform well; how much more should God's people shout out their acclaim for Him and His far more wonderful deeds. Clapping, shouting—but also dancing. The psalmist exhorts the people of Israel: "Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp" (149:3 NIV). In the final psalm the call rings out: "Praise God in the sanctuary … praise him with tambourine and dancing…. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD" (150:1, 4, 6 NIV). It is a sad commentary on our contemporary situation that dancing is so largely a secular activity and so little occurs in the worship of the church. Thankfully, dancing to the Lord is being restored in many churches, even if it is largely performed by a select group (usually of women). However, as with other worship activities, such as singing and praying, we may hope for the day when all God's people generally will join in dancing before the Lord.[83]

The worship of God with our entire being—heart, soul, mind, and strength—is the worship that truly honors the Lord. Let us offer Him our total selves!

II. UPBUILDING

The second function of the church is upbuilding, or edification. The church is not only a worshiping community; it is also a people who are growing in faith and love. The church that truly exists under the leadership of Christ is a growing, maturing church; hence, its central function is that of enabling its members to be built up in their faith and Christian walk.

Let us look into some words of Paul in Ephesians. Following his designation of various gifts of Christ to the church—namely apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (4:11)—he adds that these gifts are "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge[84] of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (4:12–13 NASB). The goal, in addition to equipping, is to build up the body so that it may attain unity in faith and fuller knowledge of Jesus Christ. This is the way to maturity ("a mature man")—even a growing up into Christ. This means further that in this process of growing up, we will no longer be children "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (v. 14); "rather, speaking the truth in love," we will "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (v. 15). To speak the truth in love is the mark of Christian maturity. Knowing the truth and acting in love produces proper body functioning and a continuing growth and upbuilding of one another.

We may make this concrete by viewing upbuilding in terms of word and deed.

A. Word

The central function of the church from its earliest days has been that of building up by the word. Here we focus on the word in teaching. In the Great Commission Jesus told His disciples, “Go … and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. (Matt. 28:19–20).[85] Teaching was to be an integral part of the evangelistic commission: evangelize, baptize, then teach!

On the Day of Pentecost this happened precisely. Following Peter’s gospel message, some three thousand persons were baptized, and “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42). The apostles, accordingly, made teaching the first priority of the newly founded church in Jerusalem. Moreover, the word “devoted” here strongly suggests that this teaching was an ongoing matter. If the apostles were to fulfill Jesus’ commission to teach “all” He had scommanded them, this would surely take much time and effort. In this way the early Christians were built up in their faith.

Throughout the Book of Acts the preaching and teaching of the word is shown. For example, “every day in the temple and at home they [the apostles] did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (5:42). Again, “Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord” (15:35). Later in Corinth Paul “stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them” (18:11). After that Paul went on to Ephesus, where, with his disciples present, he had daily discussions “for two years, so that all the Jews and the Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord” (19:10 NIV). Having developed a strong church in Ephesus, Paul later summoned the elders of the church and said to them, “I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house…. I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God” (20:20, 27). The Book of Acts ends with Paul in Rome for “two whole years … preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered” (28:30–31).

The critical point is that the word has power to build up. Paul, in his message to the Ephesian elders, also declared, “I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32). “The word of his grace” is

particularly the message about Jesus, but surely includes all things related to the grace of God. It is the word of grace that builds up believers in their faith. Further, this word that edifies includes, in Paul's language, "the whole counsel of God," hence the full range of God's revealed truth. This indeed is the word that fully builds up.

If Paul's letter to the Ephesians is the essence of what he taught in Ephesus for two years, particularly to the Ephesian elders, we have in that letter a vivid portrayal of something of "the whole counsel of God." Ephesians 1:3–14, for example, magnificently sets forth God's activity in election "before the foundation of the world" (v. 4), redemption in time through the blood of Christ (v. 7), and sealing for the world to come (v. 14).[86] Paul's other letters also express many aspects of this "whole counsel."

The importance Paul attached to teaching is especially shown in his letters to Timothy and Titus. For example, he wrote to Timothy, "Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching…. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching" (1 Tim. 4:13, 16 NASB). Again, "What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). Still again, "Be unfailing in patience and in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2–3). To Titus he wrote, "As for you, teach what befits sound doctrine" (2:1).[87] Sound teaching is essen tial to the life and upbuilding of the church.

Now let us pause to reflect on this in light of the church's ongoing teaching function. The church must continually be involved in teaching the Word of God to build up its membership. Of course, we cannot share the apostles' experience of personally hearing what Christ commanded, nor do we have the apostles actually present to instruct us, but we do have apostolic teaching in the New Testament. Beyond Jesus Himself and His teachings set forth in the four gospels are the writings not only of Paul but also of Peter, John, James, and Jude.[88] The church recognizes those writings as having apostolic authority,[89] and thus establishes them along with the Gospels as the source of all true doctrine.

A further word needs to be added about the whole of Scripture being the source of doctrine. Paul explained to Timothy, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16–17). Thus the Old Testament Scriptures are definitely included,[90] and by extension Paul's words refer to the New Testament canon, which at that time was still growing.[91] The Scriptures of the Old and New

Testaments are God's inspired Word and are the ongoing revelation of God's truth that "the man of God"— and here we may substitute the word "Christian"—"may be complete."

Having said all this, I must now emphasize the necessity of the church's always keeping as its central function the teaching of the Word of God. This means scripture by scripture, book by book, Old Testament and New Testament; indeed, in Paul's terminology to teach "the whole counsel of God."[92] Among Christ's gifts to the church, as we have noted, the last listed are those of "pastors and teachers"[93] —those who may be said particularly to serve "that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine [or 'teaching']." This means that pastors and teachers must themselves be thoroughly grounded in the whole of Scripture and able to impart God's truth to others also.[94] This must be their primary task: to impart the truths of God's Word.

The goal in the church's teaching is maturation, hence the maturity of Christian believers. Believers, of neces sity, begin as babes in Christ who need to mature. In this connection Peter addresses his readers, saying, "Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk,[95] that by it you may grow up to salvation" (1 Peter 2:2). What, then, if pastors and teachers do not supply the "pure spiritual milk" that believers must have to grow? The sad truth is that many people come to church hungry but receive either no milk at all or impure milk, that is, milk adulterated by false, impure, human-biased ingredients. The pure milk, the "sincere milk,"[96] must be wholly drawn from Scripture and everything said and taught in consonance with it. Milk, of course, is not enough; believers need to go on to solid food, in which the deeper things of faith are imparted and digested. It is not enough to continue to teach and learn only the bare essentials of faith. People need to move on to maturity[97] and experience the excitement and joy of fuller understanding.

If there is a failure to mature in understanding, the fault may not always lie with the teachers. Paul himself, teacher par excellence, once referred to the Corinthians as continuing to be "babes in Christ": "I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh?" (1 Cor. 3:1–3). Significantly, the problem in Corinth was not intellectual but moral—jealousy and strife, which inhibited their ability to receive "solid food." A similar situation is presented by the author of Hebrews: "About this[98] we have much to say which is hard to explain, since you

have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need some one to teach you again the first principles of God's word. You need milk, not solid food" (5:11–12.) A little later he adds, "Solid food is for the mature, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil" (v. 14). It is the mature in moral discernment who are able to receive solid food, i.e., the weightier matters in God's Word.

This emphasizes an important point in Christian knowledge. It is possible that the chief block to receiving further enlightenment from God's Word lies with impediments in the hearers. As just illustrated, a congregation laden with strife and division and demonstrating little moral principle is not really capable of receiving deeper knowledge of the things of God. The teaching may be good (even apostolic!), but in such hearers there can be little or no reception.

This may be further illustrated from Jesus Himself. In one of His parables Jesus speaks of the sower who sows seed, some of which falls on shallow, some on rocky, some on thorny, and some on good soil. Only with the last, the good soil, is an abundance of grain produced. The sower did his job, the seed was good seed, but the nature of the soil—its receptivity—made the crucial difference. Accordingly, even with the best of teaching (and what could be superior to that of Jesus Himself?), there may be little receptivity, little growth, little maturity because of impediments and obstacles on the side of those hearing.

If similar situations exist in a given church—and often they do—it is very difficult for people to mature in their understanding of God's Word. Pastors and teachers (and others in leadership) may need to deal with schismatic and/or moral breaches that hinder further Christian growth."[99]

Before proceeding further we should note that the task of teaching the Word should not be limited to official pastors and teachers. While it is true that congregational leaders have the basic responsibility, others should share in it. In this connection we may first recall what Paul says to the Colossians: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom…" (3:16). Notice that the emphasis is on teaching one another[100] — mutual teaching. But first the background is essential: the rich indwelling of Christ's word. This portrays a church maturing (beyond the "milk" stage) in the word of Christ[101] by its rich presence in their lives. Because of this, the Colossians were able to teach one another.[102] Second, John declares to his readers, "You have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know[103] …. You have no need that any one should teach you … his anointing teaches you about everything" (1 John 2:20, 27). Here the emphasis lies on the anointing of the

Holy Spirit—the Spirit whom Jesus had said "will teach you all things" (John 14:26)—who is the basic teacher. By implication anointed believers can teach one another.[104] When we view the words of Paul and John together, it is apparent that both the rich indwelling of Christ's word and the anointing of the Holy Spirit make a fellowship of believers into a community of those who can truly teach one another.

This means that the more a congregation matures through Word and Spirit, the better qualified its members are for mutual teaching. Consequently, increased opportunities should be made available for such teaching to occur. The importance of small groups is apparent. In the large congregational gath ering (the regular worship service) official pastors and teachers properly function; mutual teaching is inappropriate and impractical. This may be true also in the usual Sunday school classes where ordinarily one person occupies the significant role of teaching all the others. Capable pastors and Sunday school teachers are urgently needed to deliver sermons and lessons—let me first emphasize that fact. But it is only as a congregation moves into smaller fellowships in which mutual teaching can occur that it exercises its fullest opportunity to know and understand God's Word.[105]

Now we move on to observe the critical point about knowing and teaching the Word: the focus must be on Jesus Christ, the Word. I have previously referred to Paul's injunction about "the word of Christ" richly indwelling. The word of Christ—both from Him and about Him—should be at the center of the church's teaching. All Scripture is God's inspired Word—and thus should be studied in its entirety—but particularly those Scriptures that relate to Christ.

This does not mean the New Testament only, for, as Jesus Himself said about the Scriptures of the Old Testament, "It is they that bear witness to me" (John 5:39). In the account of the risen Christ speaking to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, "Beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27 NASB). Later in talking to the larger gathering of disciples, Jesus declared, "All things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (v. 44 NASB). In the early church, Philip the evangelist proclaimed the word about Christ to the Ethiopian eunuch who was reading Isaiah 53:7–8: "Beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him" (Acts 8:35 NASB). Hence we may properly, indeed needfully, recognize and study the Old Testament witness to Christ.

In regard to the New Testament, the word of Christ is not found in the Gospels only, for Acts, the Epistles, and the Book of Revelation all relate to Him.[106]

They are all words about Christ or (in the case of Revelation) words from Him: in both cases, the word of Christ. The more the church studies these books and understands them in their multifaceted truth, the more fully the church grows and matures.

The Gospels, of course, must be the center of all study. For in them is the record of Jesus Christ Himself who is the Word of God. As the Fourth Gospel declares, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (1:14). Since Christ Himself is the living Word to whom the written Word bears recurring testimony, what He says and does as recorded in the four gospels affords the most direct knowledge of the word of truth. Paul’s words in Ephesians about the gifts of Christian leaders “for building up the body of Christ” refer particularly to the goal of “the knowledge of the Son of God”[107] (4:13). This knowledge is more than intellectual: it contains a deeply personal commitment; and this must be the essence of all teaching. Paul states this vividly to the Colossians: “As ... you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him, rooted and built up in him and established ,in the faith, just as you were taught” (2:6-7). True teaching makes for a life rooted in Christ-s-a life that is constantly being built up and established in Him.

All in all, it is the word, about the grace of God in Christ Jesus that most builds people up. In this connection Paul’s final words to the Ephesian elders are memorable: “I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32). The more truly and fully that word of grace is made known and received, the more fully people are built up in the Lord.

I will now add a few matters of practical importance. First, there needs to be a program of total teaching in which the Word of God is central. This includes both children and adults. The “lambs” need feeding and nurturing as well as the “sheep.”[108] Of course, there may be adjustments for various age levels, but the “food” is the same: the Word of God. There maybe more emphasis on Bible stories for children than for adults. Such stories need to be truly taught, but with a minimum of imaginative embellishments. Portraying biblical narratives through visual means[109] or through dramatic forms can also prove pedagogically valuable for both children and adults-if again there is faithfulness to the Scriptures.

Second, it is important that the church membership be taught how best to study and know the Bible. This means at first the use of various translations (the teacher explaining how they range from paraphrase to literal rendering of the original languages); the relevance of historical and cultural setting; the

recognition of literary forms such as history, poetry, parable, and apocalypse; the intention of a given book;u' and the significance of progressive reveIation.?[110] Also-even as fundamental in importance-there is the need for Spiritguided reading and study. The Bible is inspired as no other book is-it is "God-breathed"[111] or "God-Spirited"- and thus can be adequately understood only through the illumination of the Word by that same Spirit of God. This means that both the teaching of the Word and its reading must be under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Third, the church needs to work closely with the home. This is true first of all in regard to children, for whom the home is the basic place of nurture. In the New Testament, Timothy is an outstanding example of a young man who came from a Christian home. Paul speaks of Timothy's "sincere faith" and then adds, "… a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you" (2 Tim. 1:5). Later Paul adds, "From infancy[112] you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (3:15 NIV). Children who are raised in godly homes and from their earliest days are trained in the faith find their later church experience all the more meaningful. Christian parents, not church pastors and teachers, have the primary responsibility. Another word from Paul, directed to fathers, is quite relevant: "Fathers, do not exasperate[113] your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4 NIV). Here is laid upon fathers the primary responsibility for home training and instruction. This needs emphasis today, for although both parents are important for child nurture, it is the father who should give the leadership.[114] How can a child truly learn about God as heavenly Father if his own father fails to demonstrate Him? All in all, the home must be the primary center of Christian nurture and teaching. When that is the case, the church through its various programs of Christian education can build more effectively on a solid and continuing foundation.

In conclusion, I will mention three reasons why it is so important for the church to build up people in the Word of God.

First, the Word of God alone can satisfy deep spiritual hunger. On one occasion Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4, quoting from Deut. 8:3). Material bread is necessary to physical life, but it is only the Word of God that can feed and sustain the life of faith.[115] The church's function to provide the teaching and hearing of the Word cannot be overestimated. The sad thing is that in many churches largely current events are discussed from the pulpit, classroom teaching

is not biblically based, and groups meet only to discuss secular matters. Thus because the Word of God is not the main source and staple of the people's lives the church suffers malnutrition. The hungry "sheep" and "lambs" are simply not fed, and the result is bleak indeed.

Second, the Word of God is needed to offset and counteract false doctrines. Unfortunately false teaching often comes into the church. Jesus Himself spoke of "false prophets" who would arise (Matt. 24:24); Paul, of "false apostles … disguising themselves as apostles of Christ" (2 Cor. 11:13); Peter, of "false teachers … who will secretly bring in destructive heresies" (2 Peter 2:1). Unless a congregation is maturing in the Word of God, it can be torn and divided in many directions. This doubtless is why Paul speaks of "mature manhood" in terms of not being "children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles" (Eph. 4:13–14). The surest way to prevent falsity and deceit from coming into a church is to have a congregation growing and maturing in the truth of God's Word. They will perceive the untruth and expel it from their midst.

Third, the Word of God is essential as a guide to daily living. The psalmist declared, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (119:105). This is all the more true now that we have the additional word of the New Testament: the "lamp" and "light" shine even more brightly. Truly, Christian believers need to live and walk by God's holy Word.

B. Deed

The church is also built up by deeds. As believers do for one another the things they have been taught in the Word, they are together built up. This means primarily an upbuilding through love. The climactic words in Paul's picture of Christ's giving gifts for the church (apostles, prophets, etc.) is that in this way the church "upbuilds itself in love" (Eph. 4:16). Love in this connection refers to the Christians' walk in love for one another.[116] By such a walk the body of Christ is built up. Now let us examine some of the particular deeds by which this upbuilding occurs.

1. Seeking to Maintain Unity

Paul urges the Ephesians to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). There should always be an eagerness in the church to maintain[117] the unity of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, by uniting us to Christ, has also bonded us in love to one another; so we should be eager to maintain that unity.

The Christian community is described early in Acts thus: "Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul" (4:32). Later when this unity was threatened by murmurings about some neglect of widows in the daily distribution of food, the apostles quickly arranged for the selection of seven men to handle this problem (6:1–6). Thus the unity of the Spirit was maintained, "and the word of God increased; and the number of disciples multiplied greatly" (v. 7). A united body of believers has great internal strength and also makes a strong impact on the surrounding world.

The chief problem that Paul had with the Corinthian church was divisiveness. Paul appealed to the people to put aside dissensions and be "united in the same mind and the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). The Corinthians were dividing along party lines: "I belong to Paul" … "I belong to Apollos" … "I belong to Cephas [Peter]" … "I belong to Christ" (v. 12), so that schism was about to occur. Paul later speaks of that church's inner "jealousy and strife" (3:3) as the root of the problem. Thus the Corinthians were not really "spiritual" (the Spirit makes for unity); they were "behaving like ordinary men" (vv. 1 and 3). The church, given birth by the Holy Spirit, must find ways to overcome all

dissension and be built up in love.

"The bond of peace" needs to be recognized and maintained by all believers. We are bound together by the Holy Spirit in Christ and must not be separated from one another. As Paul says elsewhere, "Let us … pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (Rom. 14:19). To "pursue" peace means more than to contemplate or talk about it; it means doing everything possible to preserve the bond of peace.

Since in any body of believers problems will arise, one way to maintain unity is through forbearance. Immediately before Paul mentions the bond of peace, he speaks of "forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4:2). To forbear means to endure, bear with, or put up with[118] —and sometimes a Christian community needs all of these aspects of *forbearance*! Disagreements on various matters, differences of opinion, and even diverse ways of doing things often occur. Some of these may lead to serious division and disruption in the body. Forbearance is much needed to maintain unity—and it can happen only when the members have genuine love for one another.

The situation in a church at a given time may call for a further step, namely, forgiveness. Paul later in Ephesians 4 enjoins, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, *forgiving* one another" (v. 32). Although it is not easy to forbear, forbearance is a relatively simple matter compared with forgiveness. Forgiveness pertains to something beyond outward disagreements; it relates deeply to personal matters in which a member or members in the community have been wrongly dealt with, and there is every natural reason to retaliate. If such a wrong occurs, unity is seriously jeopardized. Hence forgiveness is urgent, even in the midst of bitter attacks. But is forgiveness really possible? The answer: only if we bear in mind Paul's further words in Ephesians 4:32 … "as God in Christ forgave you." God in Christ has forgiven all our sins, all our wrongdoing, all our offenses against Him. Knowing that, and letting it freshly grip our hearts, we can forgive one another.

Unity means dwelling together in harmony. Through *harmony* the community of believers is steadily built up and together can glorify God. Paul's prayer for this is beautifully spoken to the Romans: "May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (15:5–6). Amen indeed!

2. Showing Brotherly Love

Paul enjoins the Romans to "be devoted to one another in brotherly love"[119] (12:10 niv, nasb). The thought in this admonition is that of reciprocal affection.[120] There should be a responsive love of brothers and sisters to one another. By such mutuality the community is built up together. Let us note a number of ways this can be expressed.

First, we may mention hospitality. Paul continues in Romans 12 by saying, "Practice hospitality"[121] (v. 13). Peter makes a similar statement in a slightly different context: "Above all hold un failing your love for one another … practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another" (1 Peter 4:8–9). Hospitality is a clear mark of brotherly affection and love. Indeed, in Hebrews 13 just after the statement "Let brotherly love continue" (v. 1), the text reads, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,[122] for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (v. 2). Hospitality—glad, ungrudging, warm—is a sign of brotherly love and surely makes for upbuilding the community of faith.

Second, *encouragement* is important for upbuilding. Paul writes to the Thessalonians, "Encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing"[123] (1 Thess. 5:11). Mutual encouragement builds up believers in their life and faith. Three verses later Paul adds, "Encourage the fainthearted"[124] (v. 14). Often there are the fainthearted in the Christian fellowship who need encouragement, perhaps by merely a word or a smile.

Paul writes also to the Romans about mutual encouragement: "For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine" (1:11–12). It is quite significant that the great apostle senses the need not only for encouragement of the believers in Rome but also for his own encouragement through them. This need exists today also; for example, pastors who devote much time to encouraging their parishioners may often be in real need of encouragement themselves.

There are many other New Testament statements about encouragement;[125] however, I will quote only one more that may be particularly relevant to our time: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering … and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb. 10:23–25). As the day of Christ's coming approaches, we all the more need to meet together, to stir up one another to love and good works, and to encourage one another in every possible way.

Third, brotherly love includes *compassion*. Peter writes, "Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be

compassionate and humble" (1 Peter 3:8 NIV). Sympathy and compassion are closely related,[126] both suggesting deep feeling and concern. In regard to compassion, some other words of Paul stand out: "As those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (Col. 3:12 NASB). A heart of compassion is a heart that reaches out to the deepest need and situation of someone else. Such compassion goes far beyond superficial human relationships and shares the burden and the pain that weigh heavily. Surely, this is an aspect of brotherly love that is much needed in every Christian community.

Still another of Paul's exhortations comes to mind: "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15). This means that we must have a vital empathy with other persons, identifying with their joys as well as their sorrows. When we do so, joys are multiplied and sorrows diminished—and the fellowship of believers is truly edified.

This leads to a further injunction of Paul that calls for compassion: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). Family members often are called upon to bear the burden of another member because of a family situation; even more so is this the case for those who belong to the body of Christ as spiritual family. Christ Himself is the great burden-bearer who has borne our sins and transgressions and to whom we may turn at any time —"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). However, there are times when believers also need fellow believers who in compassion will spiritually enter in and vicariously bear their burdens. To do this is to "fulfill the law of Christ," which is none other than the law of love.[127] Incidentally, to bear one another's burdens is not to add to any one person's load (it might seem that way), but it is to live in a situation of mutual burden sharing and bearing. In a true community of brotherly love, believers gladly and freely participate in and bear the burdens of one another.

3. Exercising Discipline

According to the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:15–17, the church has an important role in hearing the case of one brother who sins against another, and in possibly exercising discipline. The case cited by Jesus comes before the church only if the sinning brother has not admitted his fault when personally confronted first by the other brother and after that by additional witnesses. In regard to the latter, Jesus says, "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he

refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you[128] as a Gentile and a tax collector." From what is said in this passage, the church has a critical role in a situation where one brother so adamantly refuses to admit his fault to another and to witnesses that he must be personally ostracized. Then Jesus adds the striking words addressed to the church: "Truly, I say to you,[129] whatever you bind on earth shall be bound[130] in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed[131] in heaven" (v. 18). To bind and loose most likely refers to the church's given authority to exclude as well as to reinstate[132] —or to impose (bind) and remove (loose) the ban.[133] Thus the church in this case stands behind the member who has been forced to ostracize his unrepentant brother. However, there is the additional picture of a possible reinstatement through unbinding the offender in the community of believers.

All of this is important for the upbuilding of the church. While the community of believers is a place of unity and brotherly love, that very setting can be seriously damaged by a member (or members) who is recalcitrant and unrepentant. The church is not a place where "anything goes." Rather, at times severe action must be taken internally to preserve the peace and unity of the body. Even exclusion may be called for. However, the goal is not negative but positive, that is, ultimately to bring about restoration.

Discipline, therefore, is necessary to the edification of the body of believers. We have earlier discussed the importance of the church's being a forgiving community, but forgiveness does not mean toleration of sin. Forgiveness, as loosing the sinner, is always the goal of discipline, but it cannot come about until repentance has occurred. If there has to be a ban from the community, the hope is that the unrepentant one will come to realize his isolated condition and the gravity of his sin and in penitence seek restoration.

Looking briefly beyond Matthew 18, we note that Paul on occasion speaks about *admonition* among believers. For example, he writes to the Colossians, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish[134] one another in all wisdom" (3:16). In addition to mutual teaching of the Word, which builds up the body,[135] mutual admonition is also a part of the community life. Warnings about the dangers of sin and evil should especially occur within the fellowship of believers. Friendly admonition, although ordinarily not easy to give or to receive, is an essential deterrent against evil disrupting the church.

Earlier we observed that Paul said to the Thessalonians, "Encourage the fainthearted." However, just prior to this are the words "We exhort you, brethren, admonish the unruly"[136] (1 Thess. 5:14 NASB), the disorderly. Admonition, a

mild form of rebuke, may be essential to prevent serious problems from breaking out.

Admonition may also call for *avoidance*. In his second letter to the Thessalonians Paul writes, “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life” (3:6 NASB). Paul later adds, “If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame” (v. 14 NASB). This avoidance of a brother by the church, while seemingly harsh, is meant to bring him to shame and repentance. However, the unruly person does not cease to be a brother, for Paul says, “And yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (v. 15 NASB). This is the delicate balance the church must maintain: admonish, even avoid, but do not view an unruly brother as an enemy. So brotherly love—even in this adverse situation—may continue.

However, there is a third stage, be yond admonition and avoidance, namely, *exclusion*. We have discovered this matter already in connection with Matthew 18. Now we turn to the church in Corinth where, concerning the very serious situation of incest, Paul urges both avoidance and exclusion. The Corinthians were arrogantly disregarding the evil of a brother in their midst. Paul writes, “Shouldn’t you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?” (1 Cor. 5:2 NIV). Indeed, says Paul in strong language, “You are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (v. 5). This implies an act of total exclusion whereby the church was to deliver the gross sinner to Satan[137] for his bodily destruction.[138] The purpose, however, was not the believer’s damnation but, beyond the penalty of bodily destruction, his ultimate salvation.

Throughout this chapter Paul is much concerned about evil being allowed to continue and thus permeate the church. He asks, “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” Then he adds, “Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened” (1 Cor. 5:6–7). A little later he urges the Corinthians “not to associate with any one who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of [sexual] immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber—not even to eat with such a one” (v. 11). In these words Paul again (as in 2 Thessalonians) calls the church to avoid all internal church association[139] with perpetrators of evil. This is not a call to a “holier than thou” attitude in the church, nor is it a call to try to remove each obvious sinner, but it is a summons to be what “you really are” in Christ, an “unleavened” people.

To conclude: When a sin is as heinous as incest, not only should there be dissociation but also expulsion. Paul's final word in 1 Corinthians 5 is "Expel the wicked man from among you" (v. 13 NIV).

All of this may seem somewhat strange to the church in our time. Admonition —perhaps. Avoidance—not so sure; isn't that judging other people? Exclusion—ought the church really to go that far? This process may seem hardly like upbuilding, unity, and brotherly love (already discussed). Yet—and this is the basic point—there can be no solid upbuilding if there is rot that is allowed to remain and grow. It is necessary for every church to "cleanse out the old rot" (to change the figure slightly) if there is to be healthy growth and upbuilding in the Lord.

The goal, however, of the whole process is not negative but positive: even exclusion points to final salvation. When sins are less heinous and call for admonition and avoidance (not final exclusion), then the church should be deeply concerned about the reclamation of the sinner. In Galatians Paul writes, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin,[140] you who are spiritual should restore him gently" (6:1 NIV). Surely there must be repentance on the part of the sinner, but the deep concern of Christians must always be the forgiveness and restoration of the sinning person. In so doing the church is being built up as a fully functioning body of Christ.

4. Serving One Another

The upbuilding of the church also happens as its members truly serve one another. Paul writes to the Galatians, "Through love serve one another" (5:13 NASB). Jesus had stressed the servant role in His own ministry : "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27), and accordingly He calls all His disciples to a similar servanthood. Let us observe how serving relates to the community of faith.

We may begin with the challenge of *helping one another*. Since the Holy Spirit is "the Helper, "i[141] and He is at work in the believing community, then our helping—sharing, giving—truly makes for the upbuilding of the church.

In the earliest gatherings believers were continually helping and sharing with one another. The believers "sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:45). Again, the record reads, "Great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them…. Distribution

was made to each as any had need" (4:33–35). Later the first "deacons"[142] were elected for the given purpose of helping widows who were neglected in "the daily distribution" of food (6:1–6). Paul in his letters similarly stresses this; he writes, for example, "Contribute to the needs of the saints" (Rom. 12:13). Moreover Paul, along with his busy missionary activity, was much concerned that the churches contribute financially to the impoverished Christians in Jerusalem,[143] and on occasion he carried the offerings himself to that city.

The church is built up when its members, help those who are in need. Paul writes to the Thessalonians, just after his injunction about encouraging the fainthearted: "Help the weak" (1 Thess. 5:14). This probably refers to those who are weak in faith (see Rom. 14:1), members who need the encouragement and support of stronger, more mature believers.[144] Such spiritual help is surely the primary need. However, the material needs of the saints must not be overlooked. James writes, "If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit?" (2:15–16).[145] The answer surely is that it profits nothing; indeed it damages the Christian community if material help is not provided.

Let me add a further word about helping. Earlier I wrote about the sacrifice of praise to God—"the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name" (Heb. 13:15). It is now important to note the next words: "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (v. 16). Helping and sharing, in addition to praise, are pleasing sacrifices to God.

Next, serving one another means always seeking the best interests of others. This means, on the negative side, doing no harm to a brother. For example, the church is being built up when no stumbling blocks are put in the way of a neighbor. Paul declares in Romans 14: "It is right not to eat meat[146] or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother stumble" (v. 21). Eating meat and drinking wine may in principle be all right, but to do such things in the presence of those who cannot conscientiously partake may cause serious injury to a brother. Earlier Paul wrote, "If your brother is being injured by what you eat [or 'drink'], you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died" (v. 15). Therefore, one should try to avoid all possible harm to fellow believers.

This means, on the positive side, that believers are to give priority to the best interests of others. Paul continues in Romans 15: "Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him. For Christ did not please himself" (vv. 2–3). This is not a call to be "men-pleasers"—for one's own ends,[147] but to please the

neighbor, the fellow believer, for his own edification. It means always to seek the best for him, even to put his best interest before one's own.

This leads to a recognition of the importance of humility in serving one another. Paul writes to the Philippians: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than[148] yourselves" (2:3 NIV).[149] This statement undoubtedly strikes against all our natural inclinations to self-centered orientation. It also runs counter to the possible objection that what people need basically is to build their own self-esteem rather than esteeming others as superior to themselves. However, all such natural (indeed sinful) thinking is reversed in the community of believers. We are called upon always, and in a humble attitude, to regard our neighbor, even the most lowly, as better and more important than ourselves. When this is done and natural egos are transcended, the community truly is greatly blessed and edified!

5. Loving With the Love of Christ

We now arrive at the climax in the upbuilding of the church: It happens supremely when its members love as Christ loved. Jesus Himself declares, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34). The new commandment is not just to love one another; that had long been declared in the command "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."[150] It is rather for the followers of Christ, now the church, to love one another with the same love Christ showed His disciples. This love was vividly demonstrated shortly before Jesus gave the "new commandment" when He washed His own disciples' feet. The record of Christ's action is prefaced by the statement "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (John 13:1). Thus the church that belongs to Christ is one in which the members willingly serve one another even in the most menial of tasks and never weary of doing so. Moreover, for Jesus, "to the end" meant loving even to death. Later, after saying similarly, "This is my commandment that you love one another just as I have loved you," Jesus adds, "Greater love has no man than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13 NASB). Correspondingly, the Christian community that truly emulates its Lord will always be willing to pay the utmost price, even the sacrifice of life itself.[151] As John himself later wrote, "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16). This is the ultimate test of a community of believers.

However, whether or not a situation occurs that calls for the ultimate in self-sacrifice, there continues to be the new commandment of Christ: to love one another even as He loved. This love always contains the element of sacrifice, namely reaching beyond oneself—for example, in the self-giving of time, energy, and means. Such commodities as these are precious: a person has only so much time, so much energy and strength, and so much in worldly possessions. Hence, to reach out in love in any of these ways can be a personal sacrifice. But this was the way of Christ—and it must be the way of those who truly follow Him.

Our final point is that all such sacrificial love is the ultimate in the upbuilding of the church. For through such love Christ Himself is spiritually present among His people. Christ declared, “I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18)—and there is no surer way of building than the way of His own sacrificial love.

C. Word and Deed

In this closing section we focus on the *gifts* of word and deed. The whole church is involved, with each member of the congregation having special gifts for ministering to others in the body of Christ.

Peter writes, "As each has received a gift,[152] employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace; whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 4:10–11). Each believer, then, has a special gift of God's grace to be used not for himself or herself but for others. These can be called gifts of word and deed, or, in Peter's language, gifts of speech and service. All those so gifted by God's grace must be good stewards of their gifts, both to build up one another and to glorify God. Further, these gifts of word and deed should be so much from God's grace that the words will be as if they are the oracles, the very utterances, of God, and the deeds as wholly performed by God's strength.

What the apostle Peter says underscores the particularization of God's grace. Because each member has received a special gift, he or she is called upon to be a good steward and to exercise that gift faithfully for the benefit of other members of the fellowship. Thus, although all members should say and do whatever is needed in a given situation, for example, a word of instruction or a deed of love,[153] there are also those members who by God's grace and gift have particular abilities to speak and act—thus, in the example mentioned, to teach and show mercy.

Paul spells this out in more detail in Romans 12: "Since we have gifts[154] that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation;[155] he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." (vv. 6–8 NASB). This list of seven gifts of grace covers both speaking and serving (the two gifts to which Peter refers), that is, word and deed. The gifts may be divided thus: word—prophecy, teaching, and exhorting; deed—serving, giving, leading, showing mercy.[156]

Before examining these gifts let us note several matters. First, since these are all gifts of God's grace (according to both Peter and Paul), *they are not natural*

talents or achieved abilities. A person may of course have certain proclivities or training in a given area such as teaching or leading, and God may surely use such; however, basically these are divine gifts, not human achievements.[157] Thus Peter said we should use our gifts in such way "that in everything God [not we ourselves] may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 4:11). Second, these are all *functional gifts*. Prior to Paul's listing these seven gifts, he writes, "For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function,[158] so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Rom. 12:4–5). As each member of the human body has a particular function to fulfill, so it is with each member of the body of Christ. Third, these are gifts that need *appropriate expression*: prophecy according to the proportion of faith; serving, teaching, and exhortation in their corresponding activity; and giving, leading, and showing mercy with particular attitudes of liberality, diligence, and cheerfulness. It is not so much a matter of what gift a person possesses, but of its adequate and appropriate expression.

A further word may be said on this last point. Since the seven gifts listed by Paul are quite concrete—from prophecy to showing mercy—and are important to the full functioning of the body of Christ, we may ask, How are we to recognize and identify these gifts? Paul, however, does not make a point that members should seek to know what their gifts are. He simply mentions them one by one and urges the person who possesses a particular gift to make use of it. The important matter is that a gift of grace becomes concrete only in the doing, whether in terms of a spoken word or a performed deed. The issue, then, is not so much what your gift is but how you are functioning in using and expressing it. *The gift is seen in the action*.[159]

Many of the gifts listed by Paul in Romans 12 have already been discussed as general functions of the whole congregation. Teaching, for example, as we have observed, may be done by all ("as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom"); but there is also a special grace gift of teaching that a particular individual should practice. How then does one know if he has the special gift of teaching? The answer may best be found in the use of the gift; that is, when one who has the gift does teach, God brings results. The individual knows, and others know, that the gift of teaching is present and in operation.

We will now look briefly at the seven functional gifts. Definition will scarcely be needed in some cases because of our previous discussions.

1. Prophecy—"if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith"

Prophecy is that gift of grace through which God speaks directly to His people. It is referred to also among the spiritual gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:10, "to another prophecy," and is given a place of special prominence: "Earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy" (14:1). In Romans 12 Paul gives prophecy prominence by speaking of it first among the functional gifts. Why is this gift so important? The answer is found in 1 Corinthians 14:3: "He who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation." Prophecy, I should add, is not words spoken through a person's natural capacities but those spoken through a supernatural activity of God's Spirit of grace.[160]

In Romans Paul says that one should prophesy "according to the proportion of his faith" (Rom. 12:6 NASB). Earlier Paul said, "God has allotted to each a measure of faith" (v. 3 NASB); thus out of such measure—not to exceed or fall below—one who has the gift of prophecy is to speak.[161] It is interesting to note that this corresponds to Paul's listing of the gift of faith prior to that of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 12:10[162] — though there the gift of faith may be given to a person other than the one prophesying. In any event, faith and prophesying have a vital connection with each other.

How does someone know if he or she has the gift of prophecy? Certainly it cannot be known by even the closest examination of one's natural abilities and tendencies, or even one's spiritual inclinations,[163] but only by the exercise of prophesying itself.

Further, the gift of prophecy is not to be identified with the ministry of a prophet.[164] All prophets, by definition, prophesy, but not all who prophesy are prophets. Prophesying occurred on the Day of Pentecost (in fulfillment of the words of Joel that "in the last days … your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" [Acts 2:17]); the Ephesians "spoke with tongues and prophesied" (Acts 19:6); and there were the daughters of Philip the evangelist "who prophesied"[165] (Acts 21:9).[166] All such activity represents the gift of prophecy.

2. Service—"if service, in his serving"

All Christians are called upon to be servants of Jesus Christ and of one another. I have previously discussed at some length[167] what is involved in serving one another—a service to which all believers are called. What Paul is saying here is that some persons may have a special gift of service that is concretized in the very activity of service. This is why Paul says "if service, in

his serving." How does one know if he or she has the functional gift of service? Again, the answer is found in the action[168] —by the very quality and effectiveness of the deeds of service.

It is possible that Paul has in mind the particular service associated with the office of deacon. The Greek word *diakonos* (broadly, "servant") is the corresponding term to *diakonia* ("service"). But *diakonos* has also the more limited meaning of *deacon*,[169] and thus there could be reference to the diaconate.[170] However, I think it more likely that Paul is referring to a particular gift of serving by one who may or may not be a designated "deacon." Such gifted actions could surely prepare the way for official service as a deacon. But here, I believe, it is more accurate to understand the gift in Romans as functional rather than official, and to view it as any kind of service, including the most menial, to which a person may be called.

3. Teaching—"he who teaches, in his teaching"

I have already discussed how teaching is both an official activity of pastors and teachers and a mutual responsibility of all members of the church. But in Romans 12 Paul is referring to a particular gift of teaching that operates through some in the congregation, a gift that will be demonstrated in the very act of teaching. Such teaching represents a kind of intermediate level between official teaching and congregation-wide mutual sharing in the Word.

Paul is likely referring to such teaching in this statement to the Corinthians: "When you assemble each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation" (1 Cor. 14:26 NASB). "Has a teaching" hardly seems to refer to an official teacher; it also implies more than congregational mutual instruction.[171] The teaching here may well be by gifted (i.e., charismatic) teachers.[172]

In a practical way this says to a congregation that by God's grace there may be some who will amply demonstrate this in their teaching. They are not necessarily trained as teachers (although they may be), but they are supernaturally gifted with knowledge and insight into the word of truth and have a way of getting this truth across to people.[173] Such people should be encouraged to teach often in the church's educational program. For by their teaching—"in" their teaching—they have demonstrated that by God's grace they possess the gift that can bless many.

4. Exhortation—"he who exhorts, in his exhortation"

This may also be translated "he who encourages, in his encouragement."[174] Whatever the translation, Paul is stating that by the grace of God some are so gifted.

Paul himself was surely an exhorter, for the opening words of Romans 12 read, "I urge[175] you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice" (nasb). Hence, Paul is likely saying later (in v. 18) that one of the gifts of grace is experienced by those who similarly urge or exhort in regard to a particular matter. In a letter to Timothy Paul combines teaching and exhorting: "These things teach and exhort" (1 Tim. 6:2 KJV).[176] He also writes to Titus, "These things speak and exhort and reprove" (Titus 2:15 NASB).[177] "Exhort" contains the idea of urging strongly and thus goes beyond teaching. Whereas teaching is directed to the mind primarily, exhortation is to the heart and will. In a local congregation the gift of exhortation operates through one who is granted by God's grace the special ability to urge people to action.

If the basic idea is encouragement, Paul surely also stresses this. He refers early in Romans to mutual encouragement—"that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith" (1:12)—and later speaks of God as "the God of steadfastness and encouragement" (15:5). We have previously observed many references to encouragement as an activity of the whole body.[178] However, particular persons may also have this gift. In the New Testament Barnabas is called "the Son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36) and on many occasions demonstrated that gift.[179] Paul writes the Ephesians about Tychicus "the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord": "I have sent him to you … that he may encourage your hearts" (6:21–22).[180] Correspondingly, by the grace of God there continues to be the special gift of encouragement for some "Barnabases" and "Tychichuses" in the Christian body through whom many will be blessed.

Whether it is called exhortation or encouragement, it is a valuable gift to be recognized and activated in the body of Christ. The same persons may very well be both exhorters and encouragers. In any event, a congregation is surely enriched by those who function in this gift of grace.

We move now to consider various gifts that Paul describes with an accompanying disposition of heart and will—"with liberality," "with diligence," "with cheerfulness."

5. Giving—"he who gives,[181] with liberality"[182]

In regard to giving, Paul has much to say in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 about liberality and generosity on the part of the whole congregation. He states, for example, that he who "sows bountifully" will "reap bountifully" (2 Cor. 9:6). Surely all churches do well to heed Paul's words about generosity of giving on the part of everyone.

However, in addition, a special *charisma* of God's grace is that of giving or sharing. Moreover, this reference in Romans 12 does not imply that because it is to be done "with liberality" this gift is possible only for the wealthy. Probably the most liberal act of giving in the Bible was that of the poor widow who put two coins into the temple treasury. Jesus declared, "This poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living" (Mark 12:43–44). Out of abundance many gave, some probably large amounts, but this was little as compared with the widow's total gift. Thus it is apparent that one who gives may be materially poor but still give with great liberality.[183] But whether poor or rich, what counts is the spirit of the giving. This is to "give with all your heart."[184]

Paul's point in the statement "he who gives, with liberality" is that this is a special gift of God's grace. Whereas all believers are called upon to be liberal in their giving, a particular person or persons may be so graced with liberality that they find generous giving to be their main function in the community. Blessed indeed is the church that has people functioning in this gift!

6. Leading—"he who leads,[185] with diligence"[186] (NASB)

Another of the gifts of grace is leading, and doing so with diligence. Paul writes to the Thessalonians, "We beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labor among you and are over you [literally, "taking the lead"][187] in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work" (1 Thess. 5:12–13). Also, Paul speaks of a bishop (or overseer) as one who must be able "to manage[188] his own household" (1 Tim. 3:1, 5), and of deacons as being able to do the same: to "manage[189] their children and their households well" (v. 12). Thus leaders in the church are to be both highly regarded and able to lead or manage their own households.

In the next chapter we will consider the important roles of overseers and deacons. However, it is not likely that in Romans 12 Paul is referring to any official position in the church; rather, he refers to those who are granted by God

gifts of grace to exercise leadership in various ways. There is probably a close parallel to what Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 calls "administrations"[190] (v. 28 NASB), which could refer to those in less than the higher official positions. Those with the grace of leadership may serve well in the administration of the affairs of the church.

Once again, however, this role of leadership is not a position stemming from natural capacities or training but is a gift of God's grace. It is of course possible that leadership ability in other fields may be used by God in the church; however, as with all the other gifts of grace, Paul is referring to a supernatural gift. Some leaders and administrators, known for their secular abilities, may not do so well in the church because of the very nature of the church and God's way of working spiritually. A church in some sense is a business and surely accountable to the community at large and its own membership for proper procedures. But it must have a style of leadership that is very different from that of worldly authority. Jesus declared, "Let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves" (Luke 22:26). Christian leadership —church leadership—is the leadership of those who seek nothing for themselves and are willing to be the servants of all others.

7. Showing mercy—"he who shows mercy,[191] with cheerfulness"

This final gift of God's grace is also the climactic one. For God Himself is a God of mercy ;[192] thus, showing mercy is a God-given grace. In this verse Paul is referring to acts of mercy,[193] most likely in regard to the physical and material needs of people.

Two New Testament examples may be mentioned. The first is that of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29–37), who, unlike the priest and Levite, bound up the wounds of a man who had been stripped and beaten by robbers. Then the Samaritan placed the battered man in an inn and provided means for his care. In reply to Jesus' question as to who proved to be neighbor, the proper answer was given: "The one who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus added, "Go and do likewise" (v. 37). One who "shows mercy" is one who acts like the Good Samaritan.

Another example is that of Dorcas (Tabitha, in Aramaic). She is described in the Book of Acts as a woman "full of good works and acts of charity"[194] (9:36). Dorcas became sick and died. Peter was summoned and went to the room where widows whom she had helped were weeping and "showing coats and garments

which Dorcas made while she was with them" (v. 39). Shortly thereafter God in mercy through Peter raised Dorcas from the dead. She had already, through her sewing, shown mercy to widows in need.

Now to return to Romans 12: Paul is here saying that the showing of mercy, the act of mercy (Samaritanlike or Dorcaslike), is a particular gift of God's grace. All Christians should show mercy to those who are needy and afflicted, but now and again God especially gives some people the *charisma* of mercy. It is more than mercy in general or even acts of mercy; it is a supernatural gift enabling one to perform certain acts in relation to specific persons in need.

Then Paul adds the crowning touch—"with cheerfulness."[195] Showing mercy ought not to be a grim duty but a joyful one. Paul declares elsewhere that "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7)— one who gives "not reluctantly or under compulsion." If that is true about monetary giving, which can be impersonal,[196] it is surely also true that God loves the one who shows mercy cheerfully to particular persons—those afflicted, disabled, aged, or poor (whatever the situation). Furthermore, an act of mercy cheerfully done can bring added pleasure to the one who receives it. Showing mercy in a cheerful and joyful[197] manner is a delight to both God and man.

It is likely that the note of cheerfulness in showing mercy is the clearest identifiable mark of a person who has this special God-given *charisma*.[198] Accordingly, the church does not need to seek out this gift or to ask its members to check their own characteristics to see if they qualify. Rather, the important thing for the church is to recognize and perhaps encourage those who are already using the gift. And one of the surest evidences of the presence of the gift is the spirit of cheerfulness that surrounds a person who does acts of mercy. May the Lord grant us more people like that!

III. OUTREACH

The church is also the community for the world. It exists not only for the worship and glorifying of God and for the upbuilding of its membership in faith and love, but also for communicating the gospel to the whole world. Indeed, the function of outreach is essential to the life and vitality of the church.

A. The Great Commission

The church stands constantly under the Great Commission of the risen Christ, who declared, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matt. 28:18–20). This commission concludes the Gospel of Matthew.

The Great Commission is variously stated in the other three gospels. In Mark 16 the words of Jesus were “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (vv. 15- 16).[199] In Luke 24, Jesus’ words read: “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (vv. 46–47). According to John, the risen Jesus declared, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you…. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (20:21, 23).

In all four gospels those addressed were primarily His eleven disciples,[200] who now represent the incipient church.[201] Thus the Great Commission was given by Christ not only to the original eleven apostles, but also by implication to all who follow Him.[202]

Now let us examine more closely some of the components of the Great Commission in its various formulations.

1. Christ the Commissioner

The One who commissions is the risen Christ, to whom “all authority in heaven and on earth” has been given. It is He who suffered death on the cross, rose triumphant on the third day, and is now invested with total authority. Thus the Great Commission is from the victorious Christ who has defeated the forces of sin and evil and therefore now has all power and authority.

The Commissioner is both Savior and Lord. He speaks to those who have received His peace—“Peace be with you”—and now sends them forth to proclaim His salvation to all mankind. He speaks as Lord of their lives and does

so with authority both in heaven and on earth.

Surely no other commission has ever been given that is invested with such total power and authority.

2. The Commission

The disciples were told, "Go therefore." "Therefore" stresses the authority that lies behind the Commission; "Go"[203] signifies that they were to move out beyond their own group. The disciples, and therefore the church, could not simply remain in their own experience of Christ's blessings.

The going is also a sending. As was noted, according to the Fourth Gospel, Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (John 20:21).[204] The church is a "sent" people—"into all the world" (Mark 16) and "to all nations" (Matt. 28 and Luke 24). There is no limit to the Great Commission: it encompasses the whole earth.

3. Content of the Commission

Now let us examine the content of the Commission in detail.[205]

a. Make *Disciples*[206] —*"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations."* The making of disciples implies such a proclamation of the gospel that people receive it and thereby become disciples. The means of making disciples of all nations is to "preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16). This occurs through proclaiming "repentance and forgiveness of sins … to all nations" (Luke 24). By this proclamation of the Good News, peoples and nations may turn to Christ and become His disciples.

It is important to recognize that the purpose of the Great Commission is to "make disciples." The church from its beginning has stood under the command of the risen Christ to proclaim the Good News of repentance and forgiveness, the message of salvation. The Commission totally applies to the desperate plight of the world—nations, peoples—dominated by evil and on the way to destruction, and it declares that there is a glorious redemption through Jesus Christ. Thus anything else the church may do in relation to the world—for example, in terms of bodily needs and social ills—is secondary to the Great Commission, which focuses on the spiritual plight of mankind.

A further word of clarification may be in order. True disciples of Christ should be concerned, as was their Master, with the whole human condition.[207] Jesus ministered to the poor, the hungry, the sick, the outcast, and the demon-possessed; so must the church. However, His fundamental task was the preaching of the gospel: “Jesus came … preaching the gospel of God … repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:14–15). This was His basic commission; so it must be for the church that stands under the Great Commission. Indeed, shortly after the events quoted from Mark 1, Jesus called out to the fishermen Simon (Peter) and Andrew: “Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men” (v. 17). Fishing for people: to bring them out of the sea of darkness and death and into the presence of God’s light and love is the concern of the Great Commission.

There is surely no other challenge of like importance. Since all people outside of Christ are forever lost, the only ultimate imperative for the church, the community of born-again believers, is the proclamation of the gospel, the way of salvation. Incidentally, a few ancient New Testament manuscripts end the Gospel of Mark with these words: “And … Jesus himself sent out by means of them [His disciples], from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.” Al though the authenticity of these words is questionable, they nonetheless do express the purpose of the Great Commission: the universal proclamation of eternal salvation. This remains the church’s high challenge and task.

What is urgently important is, as Jesus said at the beginning of His ministry, that people “repent and believe in the gospel.” This is why Jesus also told the disciples in some of His final words that “repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations.” By such repentance and faith there is forgiveness of sins, and its result: eternal salvation.

b. Baptizing—“baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” Following the Commission in Mark 16, the text reads, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” Thus baptism in both Matthew and Mark is found in close conjunction with making disciples and preaching the gospel. Now a number of comments.

First, baptism is a vital part of the Great Commission. It is just as much a part of it as are both the preceding “Go … and make disciples of all nations” and the ensuing “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” Thus on the Day of Pentecost “those who received his [Peter’s] word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). Throughout

the Book of Acts, baptism regularly followed receiving the word (i.e., through faith and repentance).[208]

Second, baptism relates primarily to the forgiveness of sins. As was noted, the Commission in Luke speaks of "repentance and forgiveness of sins"; hence subsequent baptism is in connection with these realities. So also Peter at Pentecost proclaimed, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you … for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38). The word "for" here does not mean to obtain forgiveness but to serve as channel or medium through which forgiveness is received.[209] Thus there is a close connection between baptism and forgiveness of sins. Through repentance and forgiveness the heart—the inner person—is cleansed from sin; and, in connection with this, by baptism in water, the body—the outer person—is symbolically cleansed.

Salvation, which stems from repentance and forgiveness and thus is essentially of the soul, relates also to the body. Therefore the making of disciples includes their being baptized.[210] The shortened form of Mark 16 states simply, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." Baptism obviously is not the cause of salvation, for without faith baptism is ineffectual. Indeed, the basic stress must remain on faith. The subsequent words in Mark 16 are "He who does not believe will be condemned"—and no mention is made of baptism. It is unbelief that condemns, not a lack of baptism. Still baptism remains important as the ordinary outward means of the receiving of forgiveness and of salvation.[211] Thus the Great Commission contains a close connection between making disciples and baptism.

Third, baptism as portrayed in the Great Commission is vitally related to the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This wording "in the name" suggests that baptism is related to the triune God, and that in His triune name people are to be baptized. That this is not an absolute baptismal formula is shown by the fact that in the Book of Acts baptism is stated as being done only in the name of Jesus.[212] For example, Peter's first sermon climaxed with these words: "Repent, and be baptized … in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." However, Peter does also refer to the Holy Spirit by adding, "and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (2:38). How then are we to understand the wording in the Great Commission?

To answer: the comprehensive triune formula depicts the nature of full discipleship. While at the heart of this is Jesus Christ, and therefore the forgiveness of sins in His name, there is also the role of the Father and the Holy Spirit. This suggests two things. First, the triune God—not Jesus Christ alone—is involved in salvation. The Father is the source, the Son the mediator, the Holy

Spirit the enabler of salvation. Hence baptism, while done in the name of Jesus Christ (as Acts depicts it), is actually in the name of all three persons in the Godhead.

Second, full discipleship is a baptism *into*[213] the reality of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, which includes (as Acts depicts it) not only forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus Christ but also the gift of the Holy Spirit. Although no triune baptism is depicted in Acts on the Day of Pentecost, there is (as noted) immediate mention of the gift of the Holy Spirit pursuant to the forgiveness of sins. Moreover, on two occasions, following baptism in the name of Jesus, those who were baptized received the Holy Spirit. The Samaritans were baptized by Philip (Acts 8:12), and later through the ministry of Peter and John "they received the Holy Spirit" (v. 17). The Ephesians were baptized by Paul (Acts 19:5), and afterward through the laying on of Paul's hands the Holy Spirit "came on them" (v. 6). Thus—it is possible to say—their Christian initiation was complete: they had become full disciples.

Now we may see more clearly that "making disciples" includes a vital relationship with the triune God. At the heart of this relationship is forgiveness of sins through the Son, and therein is salvation. The background is God the Father, the Creator, whom Christ reveals totally; the foreground is God the Holy Spirit, whom Christ promises. Immediately after saying, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit," Peter added, "For the promise[214] is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him" (Acts 2:39). It is only when the promise of the Spirit is received that discipleship is fully entered into.

Thus the Great Commission to "go and make disciples," while centrally relating to the forgiveness of sins, also includes the gift of the Holy Spirit. Since the primary purpose of the gift of the Holy Spirit is to enable believers to minister effectively for Christ,[215] fully equipped disciples are those who have received both salvation and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Thus when Peter and John and Paul led people into the forgiveness of their sins and the reception of the Holy Spirit, they were leading them into full discipleship and thereby fulfilling Christ's command in the Great Commission.

When this more comprehensive picture of the Great Commission is realized, the church today should likewise follow their example. The task of evangelizing is of course central, for until people have received forgiveness of their sins there can be no gift of the Spirit. But the church ought not to stop with the message and reality of salvation; it should also proclaim the promise and reality of the gift

of the Holy Spirit. For only when this gift is received is there a complete entrance into Christian discipleship. In this area the church often fails in the making of disciples. Actually the last phrase in the triune baptismal formula —"of the Holy Spirit"—underscores this further ministry, but too often this additional experience to which triune baptism points is overlooked. The church needs to act again as Peter and John and Paul did in enabling converts to complete their baptism in the name of the Holy Spirit.

I must say something further about baptismal formulas. There is basically no difference between Christ's triune baptismal command in Matthew 28 and the early church's practice in Acts of baptizing only in the name of Jesus, because after baptizing with water they proceeded to minister the gift (or baptism) of the Holy Spirit. What Acts dramatizes is that triune baptism is more than a formula, more even than an aspect of salvation: it also includes the gift of the Holy Spirit for ministry and mission. Thus in seeming contradiction to Jesus' words in Matthew 28, the triune formula in Acts becomes singular—Jesus only—but not without recognition of the additional dimension of Holy Spirit empowerment. Hence what is signified in the triune formula is acted out in the Book of Acts![216]

What baptismal formula should be used today—that in Matthew or in Acts? Traditionally the church has utilized the triune formula as stated in the Great Commission. Since this is declared in Matthew to be an utterance of Christ, the church is surely acting properly in this regard. Since, as stated, triune baptism points to entrance into full discipleship, such baptism is wholly in order. However, because the early church in Acts practiced baptism only in the name of Jesus Christ, this can hardly be ruled out. Indeed, since Peter and John were surely among those who heard the Great Commission but obviously did not feel obligated to practice triune baptism, neither should the church today. In fact, by the apostles' very practice of baptism in Jesus' name and the additional emphasis on the ministry of the gift of the Holy Spirit, they may be calling us afresh to a fuller realization of what discipleship is all about. One could say that the apostles were following out the practical implications of the trinitarian formula (by no means foregoing it), and being sure that the dimension of the Holy Spirit was fully recognized. Hence, there might be a significant gain in the ministry of the church today if, like the early church in Acts, we were to practice both baptism in the single name of Jesus[217] and the laying on of hands for the reception of the Holy Spirit. However, even with retention of the triune baptismal formula—as practiced in most churches—there could still be an additional occasion and opportunity for ministering the Holy Spirit.[218]

This all basically relates to Christian initiation or to Christian beginnings.

Whether viewed from the aspect of the Gospel of Matthew or the Book of Acts, what is at stake is the proper undergirding of Christian life and ministry. Moreover, the gift of the Holy Spirit is not some further or higher step beyond the forgiveness of sins but is the implementation of Christ's ministry in and through believers. Christian initiation into full discipleship includes both baptism and the imparting of the gift of the Holy Spirit as belonging to the beginnings of the Christian walk.

c. Teaching—"teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." The climax in making disciples is teaching those who have come to faith and been baptized to observe all—literally, "all things whatever"[219] —that Christ has commanded. Thus, although discipleship has been entered into (initiation has been completed), "making disciples" includes teaching believers to observe—keep, obey[220] —all that Christ commanded His original disciples.

The apostles who received the Great Commission from Jesus were soon to begin teaching the new converts at Pentecost. For after the apostles baptized some three thousand people, these new believers "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42). This teaching was surely none other than what Christ had given the apostles. Now they were passing it on in the making of other disciples.

It is apparent from what Jesus said that making disciples also includes teaching all His commandments as well as calling for their observance. It is not a matter of some of His commandments but all, indeed "all things whatever" Jesus had commanded. The church today must likewise carefully and thoroughly teach every word of Christ as contained in the Scriptures so that those being discipled can observe and do what He commanded.

Such teaching should include as a minimum Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7).[221] Because the Gospel of Matthew closes with the Great Commission's emphasis on Jesus' teaching, and because the Sermon on the Mount is an early summary of that teaching, attention may first be focused there. We must heed not just some commands but all of them; again, it is a matter of "all things whatever." Hence when Jesus gives commandments about such things as anger, lust, divorce, swearing, resisting evil, loving one's enemies (chap. 5), almsgiving, prayer, fasting, mammon, anxiety (chap. 6), judging others, throwing pearls before swine, the Golden Rule, the narrow gate, and fruitbearing (chap. 7), the church needs to teach both substantively and in detail what Jesus commanded. Indeed, the climax of the Sermon on the Mount goes beyond learning what Jesus commanded. It also includes practicing: "Every one … who

hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock" (7:24; see also vv. 25–27). Those who practice Jesus' commands are truly His disciples.

The church in its outreach, accordingly, has the great responsibility not only to initiate people into the Christian life and ministry but also immediately and continuously to instruct them in all the matters that Christ commanded. Since such persons have entered into a new life through forgiveness in Christ, it is not as if His commandments are foreign to their new nature. However, instruction is much needed so that they may see more clearly the way of Christ and walk in it.

Thus Christian discipleship clearly involves specific obedience to Jesus' commands. The believer whose burden of sins and guilt has been lifted through the marvel of divine forgiveness is not left on his own in regard to basic steps in living. To be sure, in and through Christ a person is free of his sinful past, but this does not mean that henceforth he should pursue his own will and purpose. No, he is free at last to do the things Christ commanded! For the person outside of Christ, the Sermon on the Mount is an impossible set of commands contrary to sinful human nature, but for one in Christ that same Sermon becomes the guidepost of a new way of living.

Further, Jesus also teaches, especially in the Fourth Gospel, that our duty to obey all His commands should flow out of our love for Him: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Christ is no stern commander who simply, even coldly, lays down laws, and to whom we must, perhaps out of fear, give obedience. Rather, it is He who has first loved us, and out of our responsive love and gratitude to Him we should gladly seek to fulfill His every command.

One additional word: Doing whatever Christ has commanded, whether in the Sermon on the Mount or elsewhere, is not necessarily easy or simple. Thus the church must continuously instruct people in the ways and commandments of Christ, interpreting their meaning, their relevance for the present-day situation, and the way they are to be fulfilled. The challenge is great indeed!

Finally, we note the climax of Jesus' words in the Great Commission: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." These words are addressed to those who are actively carrying forward Christ's Commission. Two things stand out.

First, the church is not on her own. The Great Commission was not given by One who spoke and then left His disciples alone to fulfill His commands. Rather, as the church seeks to carry out the Great Commission, Christ's presence will accompany His people—"I am with you." What a huge difference that makes!

Second, Christ will be with His church through all the years ahead. Since

making disciples of all nations will surely take much time, it is a further joy to know that Christ will be with His people “always,” even “to the close of the age.” Such an assurance can sustain the church in times of darkness—persecution, seeming defeat—as well as in times of great success. It is Christ with His people all the way!

B. The Enabling of the Holy Spirit

The church can carry forward its outreach only through the enabling of the Holy Spirit.[222] Jesus closed the Great Commission with the promise that He would always be with the church. Now we find this spelled out in reference to the Holy Spirit. In the Fourth Gospel Jesus declares, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, [the Holy Spirit] to be with you for ever” (14:15–16). The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, will be with God’s people to the end of the age —“for ever.” He will be the enabler of the church’s mission to carry the gospel to its final goal.

Let us now examine this enabling of the Holy Spirit in three aspects: power, direction, and supernatural manifestations.

1. Power

According to Luke 24, immediately following Jesus’ words to His disciples about repentance and forgiveness of sins being “preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem,” He added, “You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high” (vv. 48–49). That this “power from on high” is the power of the Holy Spirit is apparent from Jesus’ words in Acts 1:8: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end[223] of the earth.” The enabling power of the Holy Spirit is essential to the witness of Jesus and the outreach of the church.

In the Great Commission Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit in connection with Father and Son. But this reference was to the ongoing activity of the church in making disciples—“baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The words of Jesus in Luke 24 and Acts 1 relate rather to what is prior, namely, the necessity that those who carry forward the Commission do so in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is highly important since there was, and is, no way that the Commission can be fulfilled through human strength and power.

The apostles were to begin in Jerusalem. It would be hard to imagine a more

difficult place to bear witness to Jesus. Only a few weeks earlier Jesus had been crucified by the combined forces of Romans and Jews in Jerusalem. Hatred and antagonism against Him had run very deep. Now His disciples were to begin preaching and witnessing in that same city. Humanly speaking, the task would be impossible. They would need all possible "power from on high."

Further, the apostles knew by now how utterly incapable they were of accomplishing anything in their own strength. At Christ's recent crucifixion they had all lacked courage and deserted Him out of fear for their own safety. Peter had boasted, " Tf I must die with you, I will not deny you.' And they all said the same" (Mark 14:31). But they had all deserted Him and fled. Surely they needed much spiritual reinforcement.

But even more, the apostles had been commissioned by Jesus to proclaim the gospel with such effectiveness that it would bring about life-transforming repentance and faith. The words they spoke would need to probe deeper than had any human words that had ever been spoken before; indeed they had to go to the very hearts of people and bring about a real life-change. Since the fall of the human race, human hearts had been hardened to the things of God. Even Israel, God's ancient covenant people, proved to be people "uncircumcised in heart" (Jer. 9:26). No word of Old Testament prophets had ever been able to cut deep enough to bring about radical repentance and faith. Now at last through the redemption wrought by Christ and the promised enabling power of the Holy Spirit it could take place! There was utterly no way the apostles could have proceeded without this spiritual investment of power.

Then on the Day of Pentecost it first happened: "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4). The Spirit came "like the rush of a mighty wind" and like "tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them" (vv. 2–3). Immediately by this transcendent power they did the hitherto unimaginable —"they … began to speak in other tongues" (v. 4) through the Spirit's enabling. A multitude of "Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven" (v. 5), came together at this sound, and to their utter amazement "each one heard them speaking in his own language" (v. 6). Not long after that Peter stood with the other apostles ("Peter, standing with the eleven," v. 14) and proclaimed the gospel with such power that some three thousand of these Jews were "cut to the heart" (v. 37) and came to salvation (v. 41). These were Jews who had crucified Christ (Peter's words in v. 36: "this Jesus whom you crucified"), so it would be hard to imagine an audience more hardened against anything that had to do with Jesus Christ. But when the power of the Holy Spirit broke through their animosity and hatred, they repented, believed, and were baptized.

The point for today is unmistakable: the church in its outreach to the world—

including countless adherents of Judaism, Islam, and other religions—can still break down the barriers of prejudice and antagonism against the gospel of Christ only by the power "from on high," the anointing of the Holy Spirit. That power is still available. It did not simply come at Pentecost once and for all so that the church can presume that somehow she possesses it already. No, the power of the Holy Spirit is a gift from God—"the gift of the Holy Spirit"—and is an ongoing promise to believers of all generations. We recall again Peter's words regarding the gift of the Holy Spirit: "For the promise [of the Spirit] is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him" (Acts 2:38–39). The promise is to all believers—those "called to him"—down through the ages. It remains valid for the church in every day and generation.

Now we come to the truly critical point. The promised gift of the Holy Spirit must be received if the church is to move with maximum effectiveness in the power of that same Spirit. The fact that the true church is composed of people who have come to salvation is no guarantee of the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit and its transcendent power for outreach to all nations. This does not mean that the church is without the Holy Spirit, for truly He dwells in all believers; nor does it mean that no outreach is possible, for His very inner presence can have far-reaching effects. However, there is the further Pentecostal gift of the Holy Spirit. This outpouring of the Spirit, which is possible for all believers, can endow the church with additional supernatural power. The urgent question remains: Has the church—in general and in particular—as it seeks to reach the world with the gospel received that power?

Returning to Acts, we need to recognize afresh that the outreach of the church was carried forward by Spirit-empowered people. A short time after Pentecost, following Jewish threats against Peter and John, the believers prayed, "Grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness…. When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:29, 31). Thus the church at large received a powerful anointing of the Spirit for its witness. A little later we read, "With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (v. 33). Thus the apostles continued in the power they had received at Pentecost for their testimony to Christ. The next two outstanding witnesses were Stephen (Acts 6 and 7) and Philip (Acts 8)—neither of them apostles. Both men were "full of the Spirit" (Acts 6:3, 5) and proclaimed the gospel mightily. The next, and most outstanding of all, was Saul of Tarsus (Paul). He was called by Christ—"he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons

of Israel”—and for that purpose was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:15, 17). Thus, to repeat, the total missionary thrust of the church in the Book of Acts was carried forward by Spirit-en-do wed people.

Moreover, as was discussed in the previous section on the Great Commission, Peter, John, and Paul were particularly concerned that newly formed bodies of believers receive the same endowment of the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, the church—whether in Jerusalem, Samaria, Ephesus, or elsewhere—was endowed with power for the outreach of the gospel to the surrounding world.

So we return again to the essential and urgent question for the church in our time: Are we endowed with the missionary power that alone can mightily energize the church—any body of true believers—for the vital task ahead? Paul later asked some disciples at Ephesus, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” (Acts 19:2). Only if that question is answered affirmatively is it possible to make a powerful witness to the world.

Thus we come back to foundational matters. Whether the outreach of the church is local or far away, the all-essential matter is the endowment of the Holy Spirit. This was true for Jesus Himself, some years prior to His commissioning of the church, when at the Jordan River the Holy Spirit came upon Him and He then “returned in the power of the Spirit” (Luke 4:14) to preach the gospel. Incidentally, Peter made reference to this in his sermon to the Gentiles in Caesarea—“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power” (Acts 10:38). Jesus was anointed with the power of the Spirit; the early church in Acts was likewise so anointed. Can there be any less the need for this power in our own day?

As we face the near future hoping to carry the gospel to all the peoples of earth—a truly noble desire—we must reassess our own potential. It will not be enough to muster forces and dedicate full energy for the task: there must be, in addition, a baptism of the Holy Spirit from on high. Those who go forth must go as Spirit-empowered people; if they are not Spirit-empowered, they should receive the Spirit’s anointing before any further endeavor occurs.[224] This must be the primary concern for the outreach of the church in these critical days.

2. Direction

By the enabling of the Holy Spirit the church is also given direction. In the Book of Acts the direction came from either the Holy Spirit or an angel of God; in either event the church experienced supernatural direction. At a number of

critical points this direction was given. Let us note some of these instances.

In the early days the apostles were arrested and imprisoned. During the night, however, an angel of the Lord set them free, saying, “Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life” (Acts 5:20). Following this direction, “they entered the temple at daybreak and taught” (v. 21). On another occasion an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza” (8:26). Philip obeyed, and when he arrived at the road, there was an Ethiopian eunuch seated in his chariot. Then “the Spirit said to Philip, [225]Go up and join this chariot’ “ (v. 29). After he did so, the conversion and baptism of the Ethiopian occurred. Peter later was guided by the Holy Spirit to carry the gospel to the Gentiles in Caesarea. After Peter received a vision of a sheet from heaven containing unclean food, a voice spoke to him: “Rise, Peter; kill and eat” (10:13). While Peter was still pondering the vision, “the Spirit said to him … ‘Rise and go down and accompany them’ “ to Caesarea (vv. 19–20). Peter would never have gone to “unclean” Gentiles of his own volition, but at the Spirit’s command he went. As Peter later said, “The Spirit told me to go … making no distinction” (11:12).

At a gathering of prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch, “the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’” (13:2). Immediately after that they were “sent out by the Holy Spirit” (v. 4), and Paul’s first missionary journey began. Significantly, in his second missionary tour, Paul and his companions “went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia” (16:6). They obviously had planned to go into the province of Asia, but the Holy Spirit said no and set them on a different path. This occurred again when they made plans to go into Bithynia. Arriving at Mysia, “they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas” (vv. 7–8). After the Holy Spirit twice changed his itinerary,[226] Paul finally arrived at Troas and had a vision of a man from Macedonia crying out, “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (v. 9). As a result of this vision, Paul sailed across the Aegean Sea into what is now Europe and carried forward his missionary outreach.

This brief review of certain events in Acts should amply demonstrate the supernatural direction of outreach activity.[227] Whether the direction is designated as coming from an angel of God or the Holy Spirit (or the Spirit of Jesus), it is all of a piece: the Lord was in charge of the outreach of His church, and at one critical juncture after another, He specified the direction. Moreover, the Lord Himself had laid out a broad plan at the outset. Let us recall Acts 1:8: “You shall

be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." And surely this general plan did unfold as the church first reached out into Jerusalem (Acts 1–7), Judea and Samaria (Acts 8–12, including Antioch of Syria), and then throughout the Roman Empire (Acts 13–28). However, the particulars—as we have noted—were directed by His Holy Spirit.

How much, then, did human planning affect the outreach of the church? Perhaps the best way of answering this is to look briefly at the apostles and elders in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15) when they discussed the issue of whether Gentile converts had to be circumcised if they were to receive salvation. There was "much debate" (v. 7) by the apostles and elders. Afterward Peter testified how uncircumcised Gentiles in Caesarea had received the gospel (vv. 7–11), and then Barnabas and Paul, making no reference to circumcision, spoke of their missionary work among the Gentiles (v. 12). James, the moderator of the meeting, then gave his judgment that circumcision should not be required of the Gentiles; rather, they should abstain from certain pagan activities. To this all the other apostles and elders agreed. They then chose certain leading men to take a letter to the Gentiles. The letter began, "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us…" (v. 28). Thus there was debate, testimony, decision making—all quite legitimate and important—but in the final analysis it was not they but the Holy Spirit who provided the basic answer and the direction. It was not "to us and the Holy Spirit" but "to the Holy Spirit and to us."

Although the event just described does not relate specifically to the outreach of the church (it dealt more with handling a critical problem within the Gentile churches), it demonstrates that being directed by the Holy Spirit does not exclude human discussion and decision making. Indeed, these are valuable in developing missionary strategy, in seeking to work together with other churches, in planning for the planting of churches among unreached people, in recognizing and seeking to deal with cross-cultural differences, and so on. It is exciting that there is an unparalleled effort today by many churches, missionary organizations, and parachurch bodies to carry the gospel "to the end of the earth." However, in the midst of all planning and action, it is urgent that the Holy Spirit be continually relied on for direction of the whole missionary enterprise. Whether it be leaders of the church at large or of a local body of Christians, they must constantly look to the Holy Spirit so that when decisions are made, those involved can say truly, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us… ." The Holy Spirit is the director of genuine missionary enterprises. Much time must be spent in listening to Him; and as we concur with His direction, the way ahead becomes increasingly clear.

There should always be a certain spontaneity about acting under the direction

of the Spirit. We must never forget that even our best-laid missionary plans can be radically altered by the Holy Spirit. Remember that Paul and his company were prevented by the Holy Spirit from preaching in the province of Asia. Paul doubtless had planned to go there next to evangelize this important area with its large city of Ephesus. Strategically this made much sense, for after Ephesus on the coast of Asia had been evangelized, Paul could from there launch a missionary effort across the Aegean Sea into Greece. But the Holy Spirit said no—for His plan, contrary to the best human strategizing, was to reach Europe first with the gospel, then Ephesus and the province of Asia. So indeed it did work out. Paul returned from Greece by way of Ephesus, and still later in Ephesus he preached for two years "so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10). The Holy Spirit had His own strategy, and by Paul's readiness to hear and act with spontaneous obedience, the cause of Christ went forward mightily.

The critically important matter for the church is to be so sensitive to the presence of the Holy Spirit that His guidance will be constantly recognized. This by no means derogates from our planning—indeed, we will give even more assiduous effort in that connection. But all that we do must be under the immediate direction of the Holy Spirit. He alone knows what steps should next be taken, how the many unreached peoples are to be reached, and when the task of evangelization will be completed. Let us then look with renewed zeal to the leading of the Spirit of the Lord.

3. Supernatural Manifestations

The outreach of the church should be accompanied by spiritual manifestations: miracles, signs, wonders. These manifestations are attestations to the validity of the gospel proclamation. They often awaken interest and make for receptiveness to the gospel.[228]

This was doubtless the case on the Day of Pentecost. Among the extraordinary signs was the activity of one hundred and twenty persons speaking in other tongues. Before Peter preached the message that resulted in the salvation of three thousand people, the multitude had assembled as a result of this strange phenomenon: "At this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language" (Acts 2:6). They heard the disciples declaring in their own tongues "the mighty works of God" (v. 11). This then prepared the way for Peter's proclamation of the

gospel and for the coming of many to salvation. So it was that the phenomenon of tongues gave supernatural attestation to the validity of what was to take place after that.

It is also significant that Peter, after explaining the miracle of tongues as the fulfillment of a prophecy by Joel, spoke immediately of Jesus: "Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested[229] to you by God with mighty works [i.e., miracles] and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know.. (Acts 2:22). The attestation, the accreditation, of Jesus was His miracles. Many refused to believe in spite of His miraculous signs; however, many others were led by them to a vital faith. So it was with the miracle of tongues on the Day of Pentecost: the way was prepared for the good news of salvation.

The next recorded event in Acts was the healing through Peter and John of a man born lame. The lame man was known by people because he was daily carried to the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms. The healing was unmistakably a miracle, so that people "were filled with wonder and amazement" (Acts 3:10). A large audience gathered around Peter and John, and the healed man who clung to them. After declaring that Jesus had performed this miracle, Peter again preached the gospel; "Repent therefore," he urged them, "and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out" (v. 19). The result was that "many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of men came to about five thousand" (4:4). A miracle of supernatural healing had made way for the hearing and believing of the gospel!

But it was not only apostles who were used by the Lord in supernatural manifestations. After Peter and John had been threatened by the Sanhedrin and ordered to desist from preaching, the company of disciples prayed, "Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, while thou stretchest out thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant Jesus" (Acts 4:29–30). Their prayer was indeed heard, for "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness" (v. 31), and signs and wonders were performed through the apostles (5:12) and various other members of the church.

This latter point becomes apparent in the later narratives about Stephen and Philip. Stephen was soon preaching the gospel and, "full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8). Philip—later called "the evangelist" (Acts 21:8)—went to a city in Samaria and proclaimed Christ. But first Philip got a hearing through his preaching and working of miracles: "The multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs which he did. For unclean spirits came out of many … and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed" (Acts 8:6–7). Many of

these Samaritans came to believe and were baptized (v. 12). Thus two "table servers" (!)—definitely not apostles—likewise proclaimed the gospel with accompanying spiritual manifestations.[230]

So it is that all Christians—apostles and others alike—are called to proclaim the gospel in the context of supernatural manifestations. According to Mark 16—as earlier noted in part—Jesus had commanded His disciples to preach the gospel. Then He added, "And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them;[231] they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover" (vv. 17–18). Then the climax: "And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it" (v. 20). The supernatural manifestations were—and are—confirmations of and attestations to the validity of the gospel message.

We should note one further passage in Acts relating to this matter. Paul and Barnabas preached in Iconium with the result that many Jews and Greeks came to the Lord (Acts 14:1). Later the Scripture reads, "So they [Paul and Barnabas] remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands" (v. 3). The Lord Himself "bore witness"—confirmed, attested—the message of saving grace by supernatural manifestations.

All that has been said above about supernatural manifestations has vital relevance for the ongoing church. Too often one hears it said that miracles—signs and wonders—belonged only to the ministry of the apostles, that miracles were apostolic credentials, so that with the passing of the apostles signs and wonders also passed away. In this connection Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 12:12 are sometimes quoted: "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works." However, Paul is not here saying that only an apostle can perform miracles; it is rather that in comparison with certain "super-apostles"[232] (v. 11 NIV), probably false apostles,[233] the miracles performed were validations of his genuine apostleship. Indeed, Paul could not possibly have meant that only an apostle could perform miracles, for in 1 Corinthians he had earlier spoken of miracles as being one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that any member of the body might manifest: "to another [person] the working of miracles" (12:10). In his letter to the Galatians Paul also refers to Christ as "he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you" (3:5). So the working of miracles surely occurred beyond

the apostolic period.[234] We have earlier observed in the brief survey of supernatural manifestations in Acts that Stephen and Philip worked miracles and that indeed members of the whole church prayed for miracles to be wrought through themselves. We also have recalled the words in Mark 16 that refer to believers in general (not just apostles) as working miracles and that wherever they went in proclaiming the gospel, signs and wonders attended the proclamation.

So let us again emphasize (it would be hard to do so too strongly) that we should expect supernatural manifestations still to accompany the proclamation of the gospel. This is not to say that people are unable to hear and believe without such manifestations, for surely countless numbers have come to Christ by the preaching of the Word (the Spirit applying the message) without any outward evidence of signs and wonders. However, the quite visible fact, for example, of a supernatural healing lends concrete credibility to the message, namely, that even as the body has been healed, so likewise the spirit can be or has been.[235] Surely the same Lord who has healed a diseased body can save a sin-sick soul.

Why, we may ask, is the church so often lacking in the realm of signs and wonders? For one thing, it may be that the church is first of all lacking in the power of the Spirit. This power was discussed earlier in this section. If the enabling power is minimal or not present, we can hardly expect that the message will be accompanied by signs and wonders. In this connection a statement of Paul about his worldwide ministry is relevant. He says to the Christians in Rome: “Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit,[236] so that from Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ” (Rom. 15:18–19). “The power of signs and wonders” is set next to “the power of the Holy Spirit,” for surely there is a vital connection. If the church truly operates in the power of the Spirit, there should be supernatural manifestations.

As we have just noted, Paul speaks about winning “obedience from the Gentiles”—and this in part by “the power of signs and wonders.” Surely it is no less true today that the secular world needs not only to hear the word of the gospel but also to see its supernatural manifestations. It is often said that if the proclamation of the church is to be truly heard, the church should do a better job of accompanying the word by deeds of love and concern for the poor, the downtrodden, the alienated in society. However true it is that the world needs to see the church active in word and deed (and who can deny the importance of

both?), the gospel is fully evidenced only when also accompanied by "signs and wonders." There are many humanitarian agencies that can serve the physical, economic, and social needs of people, *but none outside the church* that can accompany word and deed with signs and wonders. If, and when, that happens—a supernatural healing, a demon cast out, even a raising of someone from the dead (all of which occurred in the New Testament church)—people are bound to take notice. When they begin to ask, How did this happen? it is a quick step to proclaim the living Christ, and as a result many come to faith in Him.[237]

As we contemplate the yet uncompleted missionary task of the church, the importance of signs and wonders looms increasingly large. For example, in reaching out to the Muslim world that is adamantly opposed to any proclamation of the Christian gospel, there can be no surer way to break through hostility and opposition than for a miracle of healing, or some other, to occur in the name of Jesus. In many animistic cultures where shamans and witch doctors often demonstrate demonic magical powers, our Christian witness must go beyond words of faith and deeds of love into the power dimension of the Holy Spirit who alone can offset demonic forces and demonstrate the validity of Christ and the Christian faith. In our own secular society, people need to see churches whose proclamation of Christ is in "demonstration of the Spirit's power,"[238] so that by this very demonstration in "signs and wonders" they will be aware that something more than pious words and deeds is taking place. Thus there is critical need today for "power evangelism"[239] whether at home or abroad.

Let me conclude by commenting on three matters. First, signs and wonders are not only visible attestations of the validity of the gospel proclamation, but they are also vitally connected with the gospel itself. For example, Jesus came both proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing the sick: "He went about all Galilee … preaching the gospel of the kingdom[240] and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people" (Matt. 4:23). The conjunction "and" is quite important, for it signifies that Jesus' ministry included both preaching and healing. Both are aspects of God's love and concern.[241] Hence true evangelism (gospel preaching) that results in the salvation of people should be accompanied by healings wherever needed. It is surely not enough (Jesus being our example) to bring a person to salvation and leave him or her in bodily misery.[242] Thus while "signs and wonders" are not the gospel itself, true evangelism should lead directly to a ministry to people's needs occurring through supernatural acts of healing, deliverance, and the like.

Second, signs and wonders are essential in the warfare against Satan and his

powers. I have earlier mentioned animistic cultures where demonic powers operate; however, these powers are by no means limited to certain "dark" parts of the world: they are everywhere present. Occult practices, magic rituals, satanic activities—many of which include supernatural manifestations—seem to be increasingly prevalent. Indeed, such manifestations could be preparing the way for "the man of lawlessness,"[243] whose coming will be "in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders" (2 Thess. 2:9 NIV). "Counterfeit miracles," literally "miracles of a lie,"[244] do occur through Satan and can be counteracted only by genuine miracles that come from God through the Holy Spirit. Only the *Holy* Spirit can overcome *unholy* spirits, and bring genuine—not counterfeit—healing and deliverance to people in bondage. Signs and wonders, representing the power of God, will surely be more and more needed in the end times to stand against Satan and his demonic forces.

Third, signs and wonders are also signs of the coming age. Every time a body is healed, a demon cast out, or another miracle wrought, this is a pointer to the coming age when bodies are perfected, demons totally abolished, and God's power everywhere manifested. Miracles may be described as "powers of the age to come" (Heb. 6:5), which break in on our present age and signify the totality and perfection of what is yet to come. As that future age draws nearer and nearer, we may by God's power and grace see a multiplying of signs and wonders. It will not be our doing but God's as He works through His people, the church, moving mightily to consummate His kingdom. To God be the glory!

C. The Whole Human Condition

Thus far in relation to outreach we have concentrated on the Great Commission and its fulfillment through the enabling of the Holy Spirit. The focus has been on the human spiritual condition to which the gospel is primarily addressed. Finally, we need to recognize that the outreach of the church should also include other aspects of life: the whole human condition.

A key statement in this regard is found in Peter's words about Jesus in Acts 10:38: "He went about doing good." The primary matter for Jesus was the proclamation of the gospel, the good news of salvation, but He also reached out to all human need. "Doing good" often included supernatural acts of healing[245] and other miracles. However, He ministered to the whole human condition: to the spiritual primarily but also to the physical and emotional needs of people. So it should be with those who belong to Christ: not only proclaiming the gospel in the power of His miracle-working Spirit but also doing good, in His name, to all in need.

God Himself is One who does good to all people. At one time Paul addressed a Gentile audience, saying, "He [God] did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17). This recalls Jesus' words about the Father in heaven: "He makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). It follows that if God our Father does good to Gentile unbelievers and to both evil and good, just and unjust people, then the people of God, the church, should do the same. Jesus went about doing good; the Father constantly does good. Can Christians act otherwise?

The theme of doing good, or good deeds, is frequently found in the New Testament. For example, Paul writes to the church in Corinth: "Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others" (1 Cor. 10:24 niv). To the Thessalonians Paul says, "See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all [people]" (1 Thess. 5:15). Paul tells Titus "to be ready to do whatever is good" so that "those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone" (3:1, 8 NIV). In his first letter Peter urges his readers, "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God" (2:12 NIV).[246] In summary, instead of seeking one's own good, or repaying evil

for evil, always strive to do good to others; for good deeds are profitable to people. Even unbelievers, often critical of Christians, when they see their deeds, will glorify God.

Good deeds thus represent an important outreach of the church. Even if such deeds are not aimed directly at fulfilling the Great Commission, they are an expression of the goodness of God the Father and Christ the Son in relation to all mankind. Hence, there is no human need that should be outside the concern of the church.

This last statement may call for further clarification. I do not mean that the church should become a humanitarian agency whose focus is on bodily needs and social ills. Always its priority must remain with the far deeper spiritual problems of people. However, even as human beings are corporeal entities set within a social context, the church must also be concerned for people in their total human condition. Doing good, then, means to reach out beyond ministering the gospel of salvation to all aspects of human life.

Here we may recall Jesus' own concern for doing good as set forth in His words about the Day of Judgment: "The King [Christ] will say to those at his right hand 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me' " (Matt. 25:34–36). Then remember also His further words: " 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me' " (v. 40). "Brethren" may refer to other disciples of Christ, hence believers, or, by extension, to any who are in need: the starving, the outcasts of society, the destitute and the miserable, the sick and abandoned, those isolated in prison.[247] The importance of doing good could hardly be more highlighted than in this Judgment-Day scene; for every such good activity is actually directed to Christ Himself. Further, those who do such good are "the righteous" who will "go away into eternal life"[248] (v. 46). This last statement adds a note of ultimate urgency to the importance of doing good.

Thus there can be no excuse for the church to minimize or overlook the need for doing good deeds. However true that the primary outreach of the church must always be evangelistic, it cannot, dare not, neglect doing good to all people, whatever their situation of need. Such neglect cannot be found in a church that truly follows the example of Jesus both in His ministry and His teaching.

The church is always in danger of going to one extreme or another—evangelism or social action. Some so-called evangelical churches have so

emphasized the call to salvation as to play down, or perhaps be antagonistic to, any stress on other human needs. Even the emphasis on evangelism with miraculous signs accompanying[249] can be an evasion of helping to alleviate broader human needs.[250] Other so-called liberal churches have tilted so strongly in the direction of humanitarian concerns as practically to identify the gospel with ministry to the poor and neglected. Thereby they leave out, even forsake, the primary need of all people for salvation. The church must maintain both. This does not mean an equality between the gospel of salvation and the "social gospel,"[251] for the gospel is the message of salvation and must have priority. However, the meeting of other human, social needs must not be neglected.[252]

The proper concern of the church for human needs does not mean that it is to act as a political force to secure the meeting of these needs. The civil gov ernment, not the church, exists for the express purpose of securing and enforcing justice for all people.[253] The church may, and should, speak out against societal evil;[254] however, the church's role is best fulfilled when it operates in a positive and personal manner to help the needy and distressed.

The church is to *do* good. Thereby it will follow the example of God in Christ and be a blessing to all people.

EXCURSUS: THE SALT OF THE EARTH

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus declared to His disciples: “You are the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13). By such words Jesus propounds a vital aspect of outreach: those who follow Him, thus the church, are to be salt to the world.[255]

Preceding these words are the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3–12), in which Jesus speaks a number of blessings on His disciples. Those blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek (or gentle), those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake. Next Jesus declares that those who are so blessed are the salt of the earth. In saying this, Jesus is not referring to the evangelization of the world (as later in the Great Commission) but to the positive effect that His disciples who are poor in spirit, mourn, etc., have on other people. Embodying such characteristics, Jesus’ disciples are the salt of the earth.

The use of the word “salt” suggests three things. First, salt is a seasoning agent. In the Old Testament salt was used to season incense[256] and other offerings.[257] Salt is also valuable for the taste of food: “Can that which is tasteless be eaten without salt?” (Job 6:6). In the New Testament Paul writes believers, “Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person” (Col. 4:5–6 NASB). Salt is not depicted here as material salt but as a special flavor of gracious speech to “outsiders,” that is, to unbelievers.

In reaching out to those who are not Christians, much wisdom is needed not only in what one says but also in how one says it. Unbelievers may have questions, perhaps objections, even angry opposition. This, however, is an open opportunity for wise and gracious speech. Jesus Himself said to His disciples, “I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict” (Luke 21:15). Such inspired wisdom is all the more enhanced when it is spoken “with grace … seasoned with salt.” This suggests speech that is flavored with graciousness, pleasantness,[258] even winsomeness.[259] Such speech is not easy, for the temptation to respond irascibly and unpleasantly is always at hand. Peter, incidentally, adds the note of gentleness and respect:

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15 NIV). Speech, both pleasant and gentle, is sure to be effective.

“You are the salt of the earth” refers, in part at least, to the fact that Jesus’ disciples in their speech and behavior are to add flavor to a world that is rather bland and often dull. Sophisticated and witty speech is presumably a mark of the highly civilized, but such speech cannot compare with that of a Christian whose conversation is gracious and pleasant and wholly directed to bless others. In regard to manner of life, there is nothing in the world, or in worldly ways, that can withstand one who embodies such Beatitudes as humility, gentleness, peaceableness, and mercy. Without those who salt the earth with such manner of speech and life, the earth can be a barren and insipid place in which to live.

Second, salt also suggests *preservation*. The preservative character of salt has long been recognized. Indeed in biblical times, and until recently, salt was an absolute necessity for preserving food. In the Old Testament apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus is this statement: “Basic to all the needs of man’s life are water and fire and iron and salt” (39:26). Salt alone could keep food from putrefying, and so it was essential to life itself.

It is interesting that there is also reference in the Old Testament to a “covenant of salt.” This is spoken of in relation to God’s continuing covenant with Israel[260] and in regard to the house of Aaron[261] and to David’s kingship.[262] The enduring character of these various covenants was confirmed by the sprinkling and mixing of salt.[263] Salt thus symbolized preservation of the covenant through all the years ahead.

Now we return to Jesus’ words “You are the salt of the earth.” This statement suggests salt not only as a seasoning (previously discussed) but also as a preservative. The disciples of Jesus are to be a preserving force throughout the earth. They are not to withdraw into an ascetic lifestyle (what good is salt in an isolated pile?) but are to act as salt in the preservation of the world from putrefaction and corruption. Such preservation can occur only as Christian believers, the people of God, mix in with the surrounding world and by their moral and spiritual vigor counteract evil and strengthen the good.

In another statement Jesus says, “Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another” (Mark 9:50). Here, then, is a connection between salt and peace that, by implication, may refer to the preservation of peace (cf. “Blessed are the peacemakers”) and stability in the world around. Christians by being salt are an essential preserva tive force in an earth always tending to degenerate and

disintegrate.[264]

Third, salt also serves for *purification*. Here we may note the Old Testament account of the prophet Elisha and the men of Jericho who complained about the bad water there. Elisha said to them, “Bring me a new bowl, and put salt in it” (2 Kings 2:20). After they brought it to him, Elisha threw salt into the city’s polluted spring, with the result that, as the writer puts it, “the water has been wholesome to this day” (v. 22). There are also the words in Ezekiel relating to a newborn infant being “rubbed with salt” (16:4), probably referring to the medicinal and antiseptic properties of salt.

Again, we hear the words of Jesus to His disciples when He said, “You are the salt of the earth.” His followers are to be a kind of moral disinfectant in a dirty and polluted world. Two of the Beatitudes are particularly relevant in this regard: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” and “Blessed are the pure in heart.” Believers who truly hunger and thirst for righteousness and whose hearts are pure will have a pervasive influence on an unrighteous and impure world. They are like salt that is totally unlike the medium into which it is put, but which serves to cleanse and purify by its very presence.

All of this means that Christians whose lives evidence cleanness and purity have a salutary effect on the surrounding world. Without their salt sprinkled on an evil world, things can only become worse. Christians as the people of God have a great responsibility by their manner of speech and life to bring some measure of purity and wholesomeness across the face of the earth.

Unfortunately we cannot stop at this point with all the favorable things said about Christians being the salt of the earth. It is surely true that as salt they serve to season, preserve, and purify the earth. But what if believers lose their saltiness? Here we must listen to Jesus’ further words. After He said, “You are the salt of the earth,” He added, “But if the salt loses its saltiness,[265] how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men” (Matt. 5:13 NIV). The parallel words in Luke read, “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile;[266] it is thrown out” (14:34–35 NIV). In the Markan account, after asking, “How can you make it salty again?” Jesus adds, “Have salt in yourselves” (9:50 NIV). This stresses the urgency of believers’ having and therefore keeping salt in their lives.

Jesus’ words point up two things. First, there is the real danger of Christians losing their saltiness. There is no automatic continuance in such virtues as humility, gentleness, hunger for righteousness, mercifulness, purity of heart, and

peacemaking; these can be lost amid the pressures of life in the world. Pride, harshness, materialism, an unforgiving spirit, impure desires, quarrelsomeness, and the like may gradually set in. No longer do such believers know personal beatitude, but, even worse, they are no more a blessing to others. In this way the salt has lost its savor, and the earth is missing its vital seasoning, preserving, and purifying properties. What a loss to the earth when this happens! Second, not only may Christians lose their salt, but also—and this is a very sobering fact—since they are no longer a blessing to others, the opposite may occur. They may be "thrown out and trampled," that is, disregarded and trodden underfoot by the people of earth. They are "no longer good for anything" in terms of being a blessing to the world and thus deserve only to be cast aside.

Little wonder that Jesus said, "Have salt in yourselves." Thus, do not lose your saltiness, but constantly serve to season, preserve, and purify the earth. Remember too—and finally—salt is of no use by itself; its only worth is that of being spread abroad. When believers truly salt the earth, the earth is a far better place in which to live.[267]

[1]"Worship" is sometimes used, especially in England, in reference to a person of dignity, as, for example, "His Worship the Mayor."

[2]"Thus, the English word 'worship' clearly indicates an essential element in that approach to God; it is the recognition of the absolute worth of God, and it is thus an end in itself' (A. S. Herbert, *Worship in Ancient Israel*, 10).

[3]See also Genesis 13:18, which relates a third time that Abraham built an altar in Canaan. Isaac and Jacob similarly built altars; see Genesis 26:25 (Isaac) and 35:1, 3, 7 (Jacob).

[4]The rsv and kjv read "serve." The Hebrew word 'abad, while basically meaning "serve," may also signify "worship" (as also niv translates). "Worship" seems the better translation in this context. The more common Hebrew term for worship, shaha (occurring more than one hundred times in Scripture), comes from the primitive root "to bow down."

[5]For the complete song see 1 Chronicles 16:8-36. Verses 8-22 are also contained in Psalm 105:1-15; verses 23-33, in Psalm 96; and verses 34-36, in Psalm 106:1, 47-48.

[6]See 1 Kings 11:1-8.

[7]The rsv and niv translate this in the present tense. The rsv reads, "All the earth worships thee; they sing praises to thee, sing praises to thy name." As D. Kidner says, "The tenses allow a present tense but prefer a future one … the future also does more justice to the facts: it is a promise which is yet to materialize" (*Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC, 234).

[8]"Summarizing worship in the Old Testament, Herbert says truly: "No one can read the Old Testament without recognizing that worship is the primary obligation upon the people of God" (*Worship in Ancient Israel*, 13).

[9]Recall our earlier discussion of these words on pages 17-18.

[10]The Greek word is *aretas*, translated "wonderful deeds" in rsv, "praises" in kjv and niv. "Excellencies" seems most adequate (Thayer defines the word as "excellencies, perfections"). However, "marvelous deeds" may be implied (see infra on Acts 2), and "praises" is possible (in the lxx *aretas* undoubtedly means "praises" in Isa. 42:12; 43:21; 63:7).

[11]The Greek conjunction in the phrase "that you may proclaim" is hopôs,

which is used here "to indicate purpose" (BAGD). Hence the church is God's people for the purpose of proclaiming His excellencies. Ralph P. Martin puts it well: "The raison d'être of the church's life is to show forth the praises of God who has called the redeemed to himself' (*The Worship of God*, 23).

[12]The Greek word is leitourgountôn, translated "ministering [to the Lord]" in NASB (cf. KJV). Leitourgeô basically means "to serve" or "to minister" (see Rom. 15:27; Heb. 10:11). However, in this context since the word relates to an activity directed to the Lord and also is connected with fasting, "worshiping" (as also in the niv, cf. neb) is preferable. The more common word for "worship" in the New Testament is proskyneö (59 times): "to prostrate oneself before," "do obeisance to," "fall down and worship" (see BAGD, Thayer).

[13]"That the 'spiritual sacrifices' are 'acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' supports the view that they are above all acts of worship." So writes J. Ramsey Michaels (1 *Peter*, WBC, 102).

[14]For other references in Revelation to the worship of God see 7:11; 11:1, 16; 14:7; 15:4; 19:4, 10; 22:3, 9.

[15]Gerhardt Delling speaks of "the heavenly worship" as "a parallel to the earthly" and that "they stand in relation to each other of anticipation and consummation" (*Worship in the New Testament*, 6). What was earlier said about the "transcendent church" (pp. 41-43) may here be viewed as parallel to, and the consummation of, the church's worship on earth.

[16]It is interesting that the Greek noun *latreia* may be translated either "worship" or "service" (see John 16:2; Rom. 9:4; 12:1; Heb. 9:1, 6 in various translations); see likewise the Greek verb latreuo (e.g., Luke 2:37; Acts 7:7; 24:14; Phil. 3:3; 2 Tim. 1:3; Heb. 9:9; Rev. 22:3). Also the Greek word leitourgia may be translated "service" or "worship" (see Heb. 9:21).

[17]This is the answer given to the first question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism: "What is the chief end of man?"

[18]In regard to fellowship, T. S. Eliot has said it well: "What life have you if you have not life together? There is no life that is not in community, And no community not lived in praise of God" ("Choruses from The Rock,' "*The Complete Poems and Plays*, 1909-1950, 101). The praise of God is foundational to genuine fellowship or community.

[19]As E. R. Micklem writes about the church: "Her life depends on her worship" (*Our Approach to God*, 11).

[20]"Christian worship is the most momentous, the most urgent, the most glorious action that can take place in human life" (Karl Barth as quoted by *Martin in The Worship of God*, 1).

[21]The Greek word is *latreudmen*, a verb, hence "let us worship." *Latreud*, as previously noted, may also be translated "serve" (so kjv; cf. nasb). "Worship" is the better translation here (cf. Heb. 9:9; 10:2).

[22]Cf. also the later words to Joshua in Joshua 5:15.

[23]Recall these words quoted earlier: "You shall worship God at this mountain."

[24]"Serve the Lord with fear" (kjv, rsv, niv) is a possible translation. "Fear" may, however, too strongly suggest the idea of "being afraid of' rather that "having reverence for." A translation such as "reverential" or "godly" fear might best carry the full idea.

[25]The first stanza of a hymn by Joachim Neander, 1680, "God Himself Is with Us.'

[26]The New Testament itself contains a number of songs, or canticles, of praise such as the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55), the *Benedictus* (Luke 1:68-79), and the *Nunc Dimittis* (Luke 2:29-32) that have been sung through the centuries. Other possible songs, or fragments of songs, may be found, for example, in Ephesians 5:14; Colossians 1:15-20; Philippians 2:611; 1 Timothy 1:17; 3:16; 2 Timothy 2:11-13; Revelation 4:11; 5:13; 7:12. "Hymns," or songs of praise, also suggests the many musical expressions both in stately anthems and popular choruses that originated later in the life and worship of the church.

[27]"*Spiritual songs*"-odais pneumatikais-probably refers to charismatic singing in the Spirit, or singing in tongues. James Dunn writes that "the word 'spiritual' … characterizes the song so described as prompted by the Spirit and manifesting the Spirit," and refers to "spontaneous singing in tongues" (*Jesus and the Spirit*, 238-39). (For more on "spiritual songs" see *Renewal Theology*, 2:218, esp. nn. 40-43.)

[28]Another word frequently used for praise is *adoration*. For example, the church often sings, "O come, let us adore Him, Christ, the Lord." Adoration, like praise, is totally directed away from self to the worship of God. Hence adoration is a possible word to use. It is not, however, a biblical term. The reason may be that adoration suggests a fixed kind of admiration, whereas praise is a more active and outspoken expression of worship. The latter is the basic biblical orientation.

[29]Psalm 107 expresses thanksgiving for deliverance from such personal trials as hunger and thirst, the affliction of prison, sickness and distress, and storms at sea. Psalm 136, after thanksgiving to God for His goodness in creation (vv. 4-9), moves on to gratitude for deliverance from Egypt (vv. 10-22).

[30]Outstanding biblical prayers of individual confession are those of Daniel (Dan. 9:3-19) and Nehemiah (Neh. 1:4-11). However, it is significant that these prayers also represent corporate confessions of and for the people.

[31]"In churches that have a priestly orientation, this pardon is declared by an officiating priest who, while standing, may say, "The Almighty and merciful Lord grant you absolution and remission of all your sins, true repentance, amendment of life, and the peace and consolation of the Holy Spirit" (as stated in *The Book of Common Prayer*, Episcopal Church, U.S.A.). Interestingly, if a lay person offers such a prayer, he is instructed (in *The Book of Common Prayer*) to remain kneeling and to substitute "us" for "you," and "our" for "your"! In the Roman Catholic church the priest alone may offer absolution, and he does so by saying, "I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit." "Absolution," because it suggests priestly authority, is less commonly used in Protestant churches.

[32]Such as the "pastoral prayer" in many churches. However, since this prayer often comprehends many elements, confession may be little, or not at all, emphasized.

[33]"Confession of sin may, for example, occur immediately after a time of reverent silence in which God is sensed in His exaltation and holiness, or immediately following praise and thanksgiving. In the case of Isaiah, as we have noted, the prophet's contrition followed immediately upon his vision of the holy God.

[34]The Greek word is deéseis. The kjv likewise reads "supplications"; niv has "requests"; nasb, "entreaties," neb, "petitions." All are helpful translations of deésis, which occurs seventeen times in the New Testament.

[35]The Greek word is enteuxeis. The kjv and neb likewise read "intercessions"; niv has "intercession"; nasb, "petitions." "Intercessions" is probably the best translation. Enteuxis and entygchanó (the verbal form) occur seven times in the New Testament.

[36]The Lord's Prayer (more strictly, "the disciples' prayer," which the Lord taught them) in Matthew 6:8-13 begins with "Our Father"; hence it

relates basically to community worship and prayer.

[37]Jesus prefaced this prayer with the words “Pray then like this”; hence do not simply quote these words (He had just warned: “do not heap up empty phrases” [v. 7]), but let them be an example. This needs to be remembered when in some churches the Lord’s Prayer recited regularly becomes so many “empty phrases” (or “vain repetitions” kjv). The other extreme, however, is not to use the prayer at all and thus overlook its basic guidance.

[38]This is literally “the Lord’s prayer”; Jesus Himself was praying to the Father.

[39]Later in Matthew 6 Jesus, in addition to talking about food, talks about clothing and shelter. Hence prayer for daily bread includes all other basic physical necessities.

[40]This is obviously difficult in the gathering of a large congregation. However, it may be helpful during the time of petitionary prayer to pray for a few individual needs and thus particularize the prayers. Or there can be a pause in the congregational prayers to divide for a few minutes into smaller groups to offer individual prayers. If the congregation also has home fellowship meetings, these give the members an excellent opportunity for individual prayer ministry to one another.

[41]The parallel passage in Luke reads, “Forgive us our sins” (11:4).

[42]The Lord’s Prayer, as recorded in Luke 11, reads at this point: “Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive every one who is indebted to us” (v. 4). Note the present tense.

[43]This petition does not imply that God’s forgiveness of us is based on our forgiveness of others; rather, it is a recognition that His forgiveness will be discontinued if we do not forgive others. Jesus clarifies this later in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt. 18:23-35) who, though forgiven a huge debt (= sin) by his master, refuses to forgive a paltry amount owed him by a fellow servant and, as a result, the master reinstates the huge debt and throws the unforgiving servant into jail. The parable ends with these sobering words: “So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart” (v. 35).

[44]It is striking that Jesus, in an earlier statement preceding the Lord’s Prayer, declares, “If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matt. 5:23-24). This means that if, while at

church (where one brings his gift to "the altar"), you recall that a brother has something against you and you have not yet become reconciled to that brother, you must then go and take care of the matter before proceeding further in worship. This means actually to go, request his forgiveness, and forgive him; then you can pray from the heart, "Forgive me my sins, as I have forgiven one who has sinned against me." This is also in line with Jesus' further words, at the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:14-15). In regard to saying the Lord's Prayer, it means quite bluntly that before praying the petition about our heavenly Father forgiving us, if we have not personally taken proper care to forgive an unreconciled brother, God will totally disregard our request. I am afraid that too few people realize what a serious matter it is to say the Lord's Prayer.

[45]"Lead us not into temptation" does not mean that God tempts His children. "God … tempts no one" (James 1:13).

[46]So NIV and NEB read. The Greek phrase apo tou ponerou can be translated "from the evil one," implying Satan. Jesus' words may be reminiscent of His earlier experience of being "led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matt. 4:1). Jesus was not led by the Holy Spirit into temptation but to the place where Satan tempted Him.

[47]This may occur before or after a proclamation of the word or a sacramental celebration. (I am not here including a discussion of either the preaching of the word or the celebration of the sacraments, though of course they both are vital parts of many worship services. See this chapter, pp. 109–17 for a discussion of the Word; chap. 5, pp. 181–96, "Ministry of the Word"; and chap. 6 on the sacraments or ordinances.

[48]According to Deuteronomy 14:22-29, the specified tithe was grain, wine, and oil. On the tithe in the Old Testament see also Genesis 14:17-20; 28:20-22; Lev. 27:30-33; Num. 18:21-32; Deut. 12:5-19; 26:12-15; 2 Chron. 31:4-12; Neh. 10:36-39; 12:44; 13:5, 12; Amos 4:4; Mal. 3:8, 10. There are two or three different tithes mentioned in these passages.

[49]Paul is writing about a special "offering for the saints" (v. 1) in Jerusalem; his words, however, are surely applicable to all Christian giving.

[50]The scribes and Pharisees, however, went beyond the Old Testament requirements in tithing. They added to grain, wine, and oil all kinds of spices, even the most insignificant such as mint, dill, and cummin. In

Luke 11:42 the words of Jesus include “every herb” (“all manner of herbs” kjv).

[51]Neither the widow’s giving all nor Jesus’ injunction to the rich young ruler to do the same is a necessary example or command for Jesus’ disciples. The widow was commended in contrast to the rich who gave to the treasury out of their abundance much more than she did, and the rich young ruler was allowing his riches to block the way to eternal life. Although Jesus did not command his disciples to give all, limitless giving surely has His blessing.

[52]Literally, “they will put,” or “give” (dôsousin). Hence the reference in this case is to abounding blessings coming from one’s fellow man.

[53]“Spiritual act of worship” in the Greek text is logiken *latreian*. The kjv reads “reasonable service.” This is a possible translation, since logiken can also mean “rational,” and *latreian* can mean “service.” However, *latreian* is a cultic term and refers to the “service or worship of God” (BAGD); hence there is less ambiguity in translating the word here as “worship” (also as in Rom. 9:4; cf. Heb. 9:1, 6). Paul’s thought is that the presentation of ourselves as living sacrifices is a reasonable/spiritual act of worship. Based on the great sweep of God’s atoning work in Christ (propounded variously in Romans 1-11), it is both rational and spiritual to respond in this fashion.

[54]By his reference to “bodies” Paul is contrasting animal bodies, which are given up to death in sacrifices, with human bodies, which are to be “living sacrifices.” Since Paul is not speaking of the human body separate from the spirit or soul, but of the body as our way of earthly existence, “selves” can well convey the meaning. (See also Romans 6:13 where Paul shifts from the “members” [of the body] to “yourselves,” thus demonstrating the identity of the two.)

[55]For more detailed background on the one God in three persons, see *Renewal Theology*, 1:83-94 (chap. 4, “The Holy Trinity”).

[56]The same words are found in Exodus 20:3-4.

[57]The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, hence, symbolically, “the beginning and the end.”

[58]Other texts in Revelation show the language of Alpha and Omega, or of “first and last,” being applied both to God (the Father) in 21:6 and tb Christ in 1:17 and 2:8.

[59]The same may also be said about Islam. The beginning of the Muslim

daily watchword, “There is no God but Allah,” is likewise a declaration of the oneness of God. Whatever the great differences about the Trinity, Jews, Muslims, and Christians are united in affirming the worship of only one God.

[60]““See *Renewal Theology*, 1:84-90, the section entitled “In Three Persons,” for further discussion how “each is a person” and “each person is God.”

[61]Yet in so worshiping the Trinity of persons we recognize God’s essential unity. In the words of the Athanasian Creed (c. a.d. 400), “We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity.”

[62]But see also note 64 below.

[63]“True” (rsv, nasb), over against Jewish circumcision in the flesh, is implied.

[64]Another grammatical possibility is “who worship the Spirit of God.” The Greek phrase is *pneumati theou latreuontes*. If this is the proper translation, here would be a specific reference to worshiping the Holy Spirit. However, it is probably best to follow the niv reading “by the Spirit” and view the *pneumati* as a dative of agency (as in Rom. 8:14 and Gal. 5:18).

[65]The Nicene Creed (a.d. 325) contains this statement: “And [we believe] in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father [and the Son], who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified.” This ancient creed, affirmed today across a wide spectrum of the Christian church, rightly confesses the propriety of the worship of the Holy Spirit.

[66]E.g., in the Doxology we sing, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him, all creatures here below; Praise Him above, ye heavenly host; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.” The church joyously praises, therefore worships, along with Father and Son, the Holy Spirit.

[67]Peter Brunner writes, “It *is the Spirit Himself who performs the [worship] service in the presence of God” (Worship in the Name of Jesus, 21, italics his*).

[68]“By” may also be used in regard to Jesus, as in Hebrews 10, “by the blood of Jesus”; however, the basic idea is instrumentality (“*through me*”), not agency (expressed in the language of “by the Holy Spirit”).

[69]The Jerusalem Bible, in a note on the comparable passage in Colossians 3:16, says that “these ‘inspired songs’ could be charismatic

improvisations suggested by the Spirit during liturgical assembly." (See also previous note 27.)

[70]See also Psalms 33:3; 96:1; 149:1; Isaiah 42:10.

[71]The Greek word is *euschemonous*-"decently" (kjv, rsv, neb), "in a fitting way" (niv).

[72]The Greek phrase is *kata taxin*-"in order" (kjv, rsv, neb), "in an orderly way" (niv).

[73]For further discussion on this verse see the next section, "Total Participation."

[74]The Greek word is *akatastasias*; kjv, rsv, and nasb translate it as "confusion."

[75]On Logos and structure see *Renewal Theology*, 1:103-4. We have already noted the words relating the Spirit to freedom in 2 Corinthians 3:17.

[76]Including perhaps congregational prayers of thanksgiving and confession.

[77]Rather than "a Spirit" (kjv). Such a translation suggests that God as "a Spirit" is one spirit among many.

[78]Not here "in the Holy Spirit" (though the Holy Spirit does operate through the human spirit).

[79]Much needs to be explored here because often foreign elements come in; for example, superficiality in some of our hymns and choruses, prayers that are either "vain repetitions" or careless utterances, sermons that forsake the truth of God's Word, and sacramental practices that distort Christ's intention. Truth must be sought in every area of worship.

[80]I referred to these words in a discussion about how the Corinthians were not functioning in such matters in an orderly manner. However, Paul is by no means discounting the place and importance of any of these worship activities.

[81]In this regard smaller meetings ("house church," prayer cells, etc.) are valuable in affording greater opportunity for all to participate.

[82]See my fuller discussion of 1 Corinthians 14:26 on individual participation in *Renewal Theology*, 2:336-38.

[83]The Old Testament version of the great commandment contains "might" (or "strength"): "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5). "Might" or "strength" doubtless includes such bodily activities as singing, playing instruments, clapping, shouting, even dancing. It was said of King David that he "danced before the Lord with all his might" (2 Sam. 6:14).

Dancing surely involves the most strength of all worship activities!

[84]The Greek words is *epignoseds*. According to Thayer, this is "precise and correct knowledge."

[85]For more on the Great Commission see Section III, infra.

[86]In this same passage Paul speaks of God as one "who accomplishes all things according to the counsel [boulén] of his will" (v. 11). The same Greek word (boulën, from boulé) is used in both Acts and Ephesians.

[87]See also 1 Timothy 1:10; 6:3; Titus 1:9.

[88]The authorship of Hebrews is uncertain.

[89]Apostolic authority does not necessarily mean apostolic authorship (recall p. 61, n.56).

[90]The preceding verse makes this clear: "From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (v. 15 niv). Timothy, of course, had only the Old Testament Scriptures.

[91]Paul himself speaks at one place of his own written words as not his own but the word of God: "We also thank God … that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God" (1 Thess. 2:13). Peter refers to Paul's letters as Scripture: "His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16 niv).

[92]This study needs to be done with due regard for progressive revelation. The Scriptures contain a gradual unfolding of God's truth with the climax being in the New Testament. On progressive revelation see also note 112 infra.

[93]Later we will be discussing "pastors and teachers" as one basic equipping ministry with a twofold responsibility (chap. 5, pp. 178-81). Here our focus will be on the teaching area.

[94]One of the requirements for one who holds the office of elder is that he be "an apt teacher" (1 Tim. 3:2; cf. Titus 1:9). Later we will observe the New Testament identification of pastor with "teaching elder." See infra chap. 5.

[95]The Greek phrase is to *logikon adolan gala*. The word *logikon* means either "rational" or "spiritual" (see BAGD). The root is logos, "word," hence "the pure spiritual milk" is doubtless the Word of God. This also may be seen from Peter's reference to the "word" in Peter 1:23-25.

[96]The kjv translation.

[97]Even to some of the “things that are hard to understand” (Peter’s words in 2 Peter 3:16) in Paul’s letters!

[98]The writer had just begun to discuss Jesus as “high priest after the order of Melchizedek” (v. 10).

[99]“Paul does this many times in his Corinthian correspondence (even to the point of calling for excommunication of one especially immoral person [1 Cor. 5:1-5]). The writer of Hebrews, after speaking of his readers’ immaturity (recall: “you need milk not solid food”), proceeds to say, “Let us leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on to maturity” (6:1). Nonetheless the author first feels constrained to name these doctrines (vv. 1-2), and then (surprisingly perhaps), rather than moving on to more comprehensive teaching, he inteijects an urgent warning against apostasy (vv. 4-8). Only later (beginning with v. 13) does he discuss matters that belong to Christian maturity.

[100]See infra on the matter of admonition (pp. 120-23).

[101]Paul had earlier spoken to the Colossians of “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Then he added, “And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete [or ‘mature’] in Christ” (Col. 1:27-29 nasb). Because-we may assume-the Colossians had faithfully received Paul’s wise admonition and teaching, they could now “teach and admonish one another in all wisdom.”

[102]This is just the opposite of the situation in Hebrews. Recall the words “By this time you ought to be teachers.” They still needed “milk.”

[103]Or “ye know all things” (kjv). See comments on this verse in *Renewal Theology*, 2:239, n.15.

[104]This of course does not rule out the need for pastors and teachers (John himself is teaching in this letter!). But it does say that the Spirit’s anointing makes for essential understanding.

[105]We will reserve for later study (p. 129) two further relevant matters: first, the gift (or charisma) of teaching (as specifically mentioned by Paul in Rom. 12:7) and the way this relates to both the office and congregational practice of teaching; second, the admonition of James, “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren” (3:1) and how this relates to the emphasis (above) on the importance of mutual teaching.

[106]Note, for example, the name of Jesus in the opening verses of Acts,

Romans, and Revelation.

[107]This precedes Paul's reference to not being "carried about with every wind of doctrine"

[108]"peter is commanded by the risen Christ: "Feed my lambs" and "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15, 17). These commands of Jesus surely devolve upon the whole church.

[109]Through pictures, video presentations, and the like.

[110]Through acted parables, passion plays, and the like.

[111]As, for example, Luke 1:3, where the author states his intention to "write an orderly account" of gospel events; John 20:31 where the author, looking back on the many miraculous signs of Jesus, says, "These [words] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." In most cases, however, the intention of a book can be gained only from its internal content.

[112]That is, the recognition that the New Testament fulfills the Old so that not everything said in the Old Testament is God's final word. E.g., we cannot take as a final word the Old Testament command "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" (Exod. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21) because of Jesus' words, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil" (Matt. 5:38-39). The New does not abolish the Old but fulfills it.

[113]The literal rendering of "inspired" in 2 Timothy 3:16. "All Scripture is God-breathed" (niv).

[114]Or "early childhood" (neb). The Greek word is brephous.

[115]The Greek word is parorgizete-"to rouse to wrath, to provoke, exasperate, anger" (Thayer). F. F. Bruce writes that in this text (as well as Col. 3:21) "fathers (or parents) are urged not to assert their authority over children in a manner more calculated to provoke resentment than ready obedience" (The Epistle to the Ephesians, NICNT, 398).

[116]Timothy's father was a nonbelieving Greek (this is implied in Acts 16:1). The responsibility perforce fell upon his mother Eunice, a Jewish believer (with obvious encouragement from Timothy's grandmother Lois). Often it is the case today that the father is not a believer; thus the responsibility for training in faith must fall upon the mother. A Christian father, however, should not relegate this basic paternal responsibility to his wife. (Of course, if there has been divorce, or one parent is deceased,

the religious responsibility must fall upon the other parent. This, to be sure, is not an easy situation: it takes all the more reliance upon God's strength and direction.)

[117]There is no worse famine than that of a lack of the Word of God. In the prophecy of Amos, God declares, "Behold, the days are coming … when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (8:11). Such a famine in the church is a tragic situation.

[118]In Ephesians 4:2 Paul speaks about "forbearing one another in love"; similarly he writes about believers' concern for one another in 4:16.

[119]The niv reads "keep"; nasb, "preserve." The Greek word is terein.

[120]The Greek word is *anechomenoi*. See BAGD.

[121]The Greek word is *Philadelphia*.

[122]The neb reads, "Let love for our brotherhood breed warmth of mutual affection."

[123]The Greek phrase is *ten philoxenian diakontes*, literally, "pursuing hospitality."

[124]" Strangers" probably does not refer to non-Christians but to believers visiting a local fellowship. Incidentally, the wording about "angels unawares" is reminiscent of the Old Testament narrative about Abraham's hospitality to those strangers who (at least two of them) later turned out to be angels (see Gen. 18-19).

[125]This is said by Paul in the context of teaching "that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (v. 2).

[126]The kjv reads "comfort the feebleminded" (!). Obviously a contemporary, and better, translation is much needed!

[127]See, e.g., Acts 4:36 (re: Barnabas, "Son of encouragement"); 15:32; 16:40; 18:27; Romans 12:8; 15:5; Ephesians 6:22; Philippians 2:19; Colossians 2:2; 4:8; 4:11; 1 Thessalo- nians 2:11; 3:2; Hebrews 3:13. In some cases the English translation may be "exhort" or "comfort."

[128]The Greek words are *sympatheis* and *eusplangchoi*.

[129]John 13:34-"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." Paul had earlier in Galatians declared that "the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself " (5:14). On the "new commandment" see infra (sec. 5, pp. 124-25).

[130]"You" is singular in the Greek: soi.

[131]"You" is plural in the Greek: hymin.

[132]Literally, "shall have been bound."

[133]Literally, "shall have been loosed." The action of the church in both loosing and binding is auxiliary to what has already happened in heaven.

[134]See article "Binding and Loosing" in EDT, 152.

[135]See article on ded, "bind," in TDNT, 2:60-61.

[136]The Greek word is a form of noutheted-"admonish," "warn," "instruct" (BAGD). "Admonish" and "warn" are the preferred meanings in this context.

[137]Recall our earlier discussion of upbuilding by the teaching of the Word.

[138]The Greek word is *ataktous*-"disorderly" (*Thayer*). The rsv and niv translation, "idle," is also possible. Bruce translates it "disorderly" and adds that the *ataktoi* "are those who are undisciplined, not maintaining proper order (*taxis*) but playing the truant; more particularly in this context they are the loafers' (Moffatt) who neglect their daily duty and live in idleness, at the expense of others" (1 & 2 *Thessalonians*, WBC, 122).

[139]Satan is described by Paul in 2 Corinthians as "the god of this world" (4:4).

[140]Some commentators interpret "the destruction of the flesh" as referring to carnal flesh, i.e., man's sinful nature; however, it is hard to see how Satan would destroy what he delights in! It is preferable to understand Paul as referring to physical flesh, its harassment and destruction. (E.g., as illustration of a similar penal sentence in the physical sphere, see Acts 5:1-10 where Ananias and Sapphira committed an even worse sin than that of the incestuous man: they, although believers, "lie to the Holy Spirit" [v. 3] and "tempt the Spirit of the Lord" [v. 9]; they were consequently struck dead. "Satan" had "filled" [v. 3] Ananias's heart [and presumably Sapphira's also]. Peter, who uncovered the lie, delivered them both over to physical death, for which Satan was accountable.) Possibly the harassment and destruction that Paul spoke of would occur over a period of time, e.g., like the destruction by cancer that is sure but often lengthy. The sexual perversion would lead to increasing deterioration of the body until Satan had completed the destruction.

[141]Paul earlier made it clear that he is not referring to external association with the immoral of the world "since then you would need to go out of the world" (v. 10)-a practical impossibility!

[142]The Greek word is *paraptdmati*-"fault" (kjv), "trespass" (rsv, nasb). According to Thayer, it is "a lapse or deviation from truth and righteousness." Such a deviation would not, for example, be as severe as that of incest.

[143]Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit as the *parakletos*, which may be translated "the Helper" (so the nasb in John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7).

[144]Certain men were elected "to serve [*diakonein*] tables" (Acts 6:2).

[145]See especially 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, where Paul appeals to the church in Corinth to join other churches in the relief of the saints.

[146]In Romans 15:1 Paul writes, "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves."

[147]James is discussing this matter in the context of faith and works. Immediately following that, he writes, "So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (v. 17). (For a statement similar to James 2:15-16, see 1 John 3:17-18).

[148]This refers in the larger context possibly to three groups: vegetarians (Rom. 14:2), Jewish believers who would still have trouble eating some formerly "unclean" foods (14:14), and meat offered in sacrifice to idols (see 1 Cor. 8).

[149]Paul speaks frequently against self-oriented men-pleasing: see Galatians 1:10; Ephesians 6:6; Colossians 3:22; 1 Thessalonians 2:4.

[150]Or "more important than" (nasb). The Greek word *hyperechontas* literally means "surpassing."

[151]Note also Peter's words: "Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another" (1 Peter 5:5).

[152]See Leviticus 19:18; cf. Matthew 19:19; Mark 12:31.

[153]The church father Tertullian, writing about a century later, reported that the pagans of his day marveled at the Christian community: "See how they love one another! … how ready are they to die for one another!" (Apology 39.7). May this continue to be true!

[154]The Greek word is *charisma*. A charisma is a particular gift of God's grace.

[155]Recall our prior discussion in sections A and B (pp. 109-25).

[156]The Greek word is *charismata*.

[157]Or "he who encourages, in his encouragement." The Greek words used are forms of *parakaleo* and *paraklesis*, both with a wide range of meanings. The niv translates, "if it is encouraging, let him encourage."

[158]In *Renewal Theology*, 2:347-409, I discussed the *manifestation* gifts of 1 Corinthians 12: 7-10.1 will be treating the *equipping* gifts of Ephesians 4:11 -12 in the next chapter. The manifestation gifts-or the gifts of the Holy Spirit-are similar to the gifts of Romans 12 in that they are likewise called *charismata* (see 1 Cor. 12:4) and operate through all the church membership. The equipping gifts-or the gifts of the exalted Christ-are called domata (Eph. 4:8) and are limited to certain persons.

[159]E. F. Harrison writes, "Paul is not referring to gifts in the natural realm, but to those functions made possible by a specific enablement of the Holy Spirit granted to believers. The gift does not contradict what God has bestowed in the natural order and, though it may even build on the natural gift, it must not be confused with the latter…. These new capacities for service are not native to those who exercise them but come from divine grace" (EBC, 10:130). This is well said.

[160]The Greek word is *praxin*, a form of praxis ("acting, activity, function"-BAGD). Compare our English word *praxis*. The kjv translation "office" is less adequate than "function" or "activity."

[161]In this sense there is gift recognition both by the person functioning in the gift and by others in the body. Furthermore, there may also be encouragement to continue more fully in the exercise of the gift. Such recognition and encouragement can be valuable aids in the functioning of a particular gift.

[162]For more detail on prophecy see *Renewal Theology*, 2:380-88.

[163]Some commentators refer to "the proportion of faith" (there is no "his" here or throughout this passage in the Greek text) as a kind of external norm of the truth of the gospel as found in "liturgical and … catechetical instruction" (E. Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 341). However, I agree with James Dunn that "the faith is the faith exercised by the one who prophesies" (*Romans* 9-16, WBC, 728). Similarly, TDNT 1:347-48.

[164]Actually the gift of faith there is listed prior to gifts of healing, working of miracles, and prophecy-in that order.

[165]I have recently read a listing of five characteristics of one who may have the function gift of prophesying: (1) urgency to speak plainly and persuasively; (2) ability to discern people's character and motives; (3) capacity to identify, define, and hate evil; (4) willingness to experience and prompt brokenness; and (5) dependence on scriptural truth and authority. My response is that one may score high on all these points and yet by no means be any closer to the function of prophesying. I repeat:

the only way to know that one has this particular gift, or any other, is by *experiencing* its occurrence and knowing that it is totally a gift of grace.

[166]On the ministry of a prophet, see pages 170-74.

[167]The nasb errs in translating "who were prophetesses." The Greek word is *propheteuousai*, literally "prophesying."

[168]Also see especially 1 Corinthians 11:4-5, and 1 Thessalonians 5:20.

[169]On pages 123-24.

[170]As Dunn puts it, "The focus is wholly on the act and not on the actor" (*Romans* 9-16, WBC, 729).

[171]As in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

[172]Kasemann writes, "Something like a definite 'office' has emerged at this point" (*Commentary on Romans*, 342). John Murray, after weighing various alternatives, says, "There does not … appear to be any conclusive reason for rejecting the view that this reference is to the diaconate" (Epistle to the Romans, NICNT, 124). To the contrary, Leon Morris writes that "this is surely to make too specific a very general word [namely, 'serving']" (Epistle to the Romans, 441). Similarly, Dunn (*Romans* 9-16, 728-29). I concur with Morris and Dunn.

[173]Recall also these words in Hebrews 5:12: "By this time you ought to be teachers." James writes, "Let not many of you become teachers … for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness" (3:1). Both of these statements suggest an intermediate level of instruction.

[174]Dunn writes about 1 Corinthians 14:26: "*Teaching was not limited to the group of teachers* [italics his] … any member might be given a charismatic interpretation for the benefit of the whole assembly" (*Jesus and the Spirit*, 284).

[175]This is where "the word [or utterance] of knowledge" (1 Cor. 12:8) and the gift of "teaching" largely coincide. If the word of knowledge may be described as "an inspired word of teaching" and "a special impartation of teaching that is given by the Holy Spirit through a particular person" (*Renewal Theology*, 2:356), then the parallel is close. The only difference may lie in the intensity of the anointing of the one teaching.

[176]The niv translates, "if it is encouraging, let him encourage."

[177]The Greek word is *parakalo*.

[178]Cf. 1 Timothy 4:13.

[179]"79Cf. Titus 1:9.

[180]In the section “Showing Brotherly Love,” pages 118-20.

[181]““See Acts 9:27; 11:22-23; 15:37.

[182]Cf. Colossians 4:7-8.

[183]Or “shares.” The Greek word is *metadidous*, a form of *metadidomi*. See, e.g., Luke 3:11 and 1 Thessalonians 2:8 where “share” seems the likely translation; however, in Romans 1:11 and Ephesians 4:28, “give” or “impart” seems better. Dunn writes that *metadidous* “means not just ‘giving,’ but giving a share of, sharing” ([Romans] 9-16, 730). BAGD translates this word as “gives” in our passage.

[184]Or “simplicity” (KJV). The Greek word is *haploteti*, a form of *haplotes. Haplotes* is best translated “simplicity” in 2 Corinthians 11:3—“simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” ([NASB]); as “singleness” in Ephesians 6:5 and Colossians 3:22-“singleness of heart.” However, in other passages that have to do with giving, “liberality” or “generosity” is the better translation: 2 Corinthians 8:2-“a wealth of liberality”; 9:11 - “great generosity”; 9:13-“generosity.” The cognate adverb haplds is rendered “generously” in James 1:5- “God, who gives to all men generously.”

[185]A parallel to the poor widow’s giving was that of the churches in Macedonia. Paul writes that “in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part” (2 Cor. 8:1-2). Note: “extreme poverty” but “wealth of liberality.”

[186]The neb translation of Romans 12:8.

[187]The Greek word is *proistamenos*, a *participial* form of proistemi. The kjv translates it “he that ruleth”; niv, “if it is leadership”; neb, “if you are a leader”; rsv, “he who gives aid.” This last translation is possible in light of the use of a form of *proistemi* in Titus 3:8- speaking of believers as being “careful to apply [proistasthai] themselves to good deeds” (also see Titus 3:14). However, “leading” is probably a better translation in Romans 12:8 (incidentally the nrsv translates this word as “the leader” [instead of “he who gives aid”]) in light of other passages that will be noted in the first paragraph below. “Managing” or “taking care” is another possible translation.

[188]Or “zeal”-“zeal in matters of religion” (BAGD). “What is meant is the ‘holy zeal’ which demands full dedication to serving the community” (TDNT 7:566).

[189]The Greek word is *proistamenous*.

[190]The Greek word is *prostēnai*.

[191]The Greek word is *proistamenoi*.

[192]The Greek word is kyberneseis-“administrators” (Rsv), “gifts of administration” (niv), “governments” (kjv).

[193]The Greek word is eleon, “showing mercy,” from the verb eleed.

[194]This is shown throughout the Scriptures. For example, “The Lord your God is a merciful God” (Deut. 4:31); “The Lord is merciful and gracious” (Ps. 103:8); “God, who is rich in mercy” (Eph. 2:4); “By his great mercy we have been born anew” (1 Peter 1:3). Shortly before our passage in Romans 12, Paul had spoken of God as having “mercy upon all” (Rom. 11:32).

[195]The rsv translates the words in Romans 12:8 as “he who does acts of mercy.” This conveys the dynamic sense of doing merciful deeds.

[196]The Greek word for “acts of charity” is eleemosunon, from the same root as eleed, to “show mercy.” (Note our English word eleemosynary, which refers to charity or charitable deeds [such as “a person given to eleemosynary activities”].) Mercy and charity are closely related.

[197]The Greek word is hilaroteti, from hilarotes. This is the origin of our English word “hilarity.”

[198]Paul, in 2 Corinthians, is referring to an offering he was taking for the believers in Jerusalem who were not likely known by the people in Corinth.

[199]Even hilarious!

[200]C. E. B. Cranfield writes that “a particularly cheerful and agreeable disposition may well be evidence of the special gift that marks a person out for this particular service” (*Romans: A Shorter Commentary*, 307).

[201]This form of the Great Commission in Mark 16 occurs in the so-called long ending, verses 9-20. These verses are not found in a number of ancient New Testament manuscripts, hence often are relegated to marginal status (see rsv, niv, nasb). This, however, should not be thought to deny their being valid Scripture. As Stephen S. Short puts it, “From the fact that verses 9-20 are relegated … to the margin, it is not to be deduced that they are no part of the inspired word of God. The reason for their being relegated to the margin is that it is unlikely that they were written by Mark himself…” (IBC, 1180). (See *Renewal Theology* 2:150, n.36, 388, n.18.)

[202]Matthew refers to “the eleven disciples” (28:16); Mark, “the eleven” (16:14); Luke, “the eleven … and those who were with them” (24:33); John simply, “the disciples” (20:19). Thus the Great Commission, while addressed first to the eleven apostles, extends to the larger group of disciples.

[203]The word *church* is not used here nor for that matter later in Acts 2 at Pentecost. However, as those who now know the risen Christ, they are His new spiritual community.

[204]It would be a mistake therefore to limit the Great Commission to the original apostles. That such is incorrect is apparent from the stress upon the worldwide extension of the Commission-“all nations,” “into all the world,” “to all nations.”

[205]The Greek word translated “go” in both Matthew 28 and Mark 16 is literally “going,” *poreuthentes*.

[206]Jesus had earlier said in prayer to the Father: “As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18).

[207]I will follow the wording in Matthew 28 but also note further details in the other gospels.

[208]Or “disciple” (as a verb). The Greek word is an imperative verb: matheteusate.

[209]For more on this see section C, “The Whole Human Condition,” pages 151-53.

[210]See also Acts 8:12, 38; 9:18; 10:48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5.

[211]See *Renewal Theology*, 2:283-85 for a fuller presentation of the relation of water baptism to forgiveness of sins. Also there will be further discussion later, in chapter 6.

[212]This of course does not mean “baptismal regeneration.” Water can serve as a channel of forgiveness, of cleansing from sin, but it is not the cause.

[213]It would be too much to say that baptism is the necessary means of salvation. It is significant that in Peter’s second proclamation of the gospel he declared, “Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19). He made no reference to baptism, for the crux of salvation is repentance and faith. However, baptism surely would have followed. Cf. Acts 10:43-48 where Peter preached faith in Christ for forgiveness of sins (v. 43), simultaneously the Holy Spirit fell on his audience (v. 44)-a sure sign of their salvation, and after that they were

baptized (vv. 47-48).

[214]For more on the baptismal formula see *Renewal Theology*, 2:286-87, and chapter 6 infra, pages 222-23.

[215]The Greek word usually translated "in" ("in the name of') is eis, ordinarily meaning "into."

[216]"The promise" relates only to the gift of the Spirit. Note also Acts 1:4-5 and 2:33. Cf. Luke 24:49.

[217]See the next section: "The Enabling of the Spirit." (Also for a more comprehensive study see *Renewal Theology*, 2:243-63, "Power for Ministry.")

[218]The first part of the formula-"in the name of the Father"-might, however, seem to be experientially missing. The apostles outwardly seemed to be concerned only about the Son (baptism in His name) and the Holy Spirit (the gift of the Holy Spirit). However, one should recognize that much of their preaching presupposed some recognition of God the Father as the background for their ministry. For example, the centurion Cornelius, who was later to receive forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43) and the gift of the Holy Spirit (v. 45), was earlier described as "a devout man who feared God with all his household … and prayed constantly to God" (v. 2). Already a "God-fearing" Gentile, he needed only to receive forgiveness in Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[219]This is done by "oneness" or "Jesus only" Pentecostals, such as the United Pentecostal Church. However, these Pentecostals unfortunately deny the triune basis of Christian faith by viewing the triune statement of Matthew 28 as referring to Jesus only, the terms "Father" and "Holy Spirit" being understood as various aspects of Christ's nature. This is a modern form of unitarianism focusing on the second person of the Trinity. (See *Renewal Theology*, 1:92.)

[220]In some sense this is done in the Roman Catholic Church, which practices both triune baptism and confirmation through the laying on of hands. However, both the acts of baptism and confirmation are viewed as in themselves (*ex opere operato*) conferring grace. (For more on confirmation see *Renewal Theology*, 2:289, esp. n.58.) What is needed is to lead people into the experiences to which these two practices point.

[221]The Greek phrase is *panta hosa eneteilamen*. The kjv well translates it as "all things whatsoever."

[222]The Greek word is terein. The niv translates it "obey."

[223]I said “as a minimum” because there is much else of Jesus’ teachings in Matthew as well as in the other gospels. However, Matthew 5-7 in itself is quite comprehensive.

[224]See also *Renewal Theology*, 2:177-79, 243-63.

[225]The Greek word is *eschatou*-“remotest part” (NASB), “ends” (NIV and NEB), “uttermost part” (KJV).

[226]See *Renewal Theology*, 2:271-306, chapter 11, entitled “The Reception of the Holy Spirit” for a discussion of how this reception occurs. Especially note pages 293-306, section III, “Context,” for particular details.

[227]The Scripture does not say how the Holy Spirit prevented Paul and Barnabas from going into the province of Asia and into Bithynia. Perhaps it was by a prophetic utterance, as was likely the case earlier in Antioch. On a later occasion Paul declared that “the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me” (Acts 20:23 nasb). This could have been in a time of personal prayer, such as on a still later occasion when “the following night the Lord stood by him” (Acts 23:11) and gave encouragement and direction. However these occasions occurred, Paul was obviously very sensitive to the Spirit of the Lord.

[228]We could continue with Paul’s intended journey to Rome and the frequent direction and intervention of the Holy Spirit (e.g., Acts 19:21; 20:22-23; 21:4, 11). It is not fully clear in these passages how much the Holy Spirit was determining all of Paul’s actions; however, it is certain that Paul sought to rely on supernatural directions. In any event Paul was assured finally by an angel of the Lord: “You must stand before Caesar” (Acts 27:24).

[229]For what follows see also *Renewal Theology*, 2:250-63.

[230]“Accredited” (niv). The Greek word is *apodedeigmenon*.

[231]The result of Stephen’s preaching, unlike that of Philip, was not that a multitude received the gospel; rather, Stephen was stoned to death by the Jewish high council. Nonetheless his miracles prepared the way for the preaching of Christ.

[232]In regard to picking up serpents and drinking something deadly: this does not mean that believers should actively seek to do such things to prove the validity of the gospel. These are protectional statements, e.g., in the case of Paul who accidentally picked up a serpent but was not harmed by it (Acts 28:1-6). (For a fuller comment see *Renewal Theology*,

2:377, n. 142.)

[233]Paul is using irony in speaking about others who arrogantly regarded themselves as apostles.

[234]Note also 2 Corinthians 11:5 and 13, where Paul may be drawing a connection between “super-apostles” and “false apostles.” On this matter see Philip E. Hughes, The Second *Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, 378-80, 454-56.

[235]Another argument, sometimes heard, is that, in addition to the apostles themselves, only those on whom they laid hands, the so-called apostolic circle, could perform miracles. This argument cannot stand up in light of 1 Corinthians 12 and Galatians 3. (For further discussion of this matter see *Renewal Theology*, 1:162-68.)

[236]Supernatural manifestations may precede or follow a spiritual conversion. In the former case the way is prepared for the reception of salvation; in the latter, salvation is visibly confirmed.

[237]There seems to be a crescendo here: Paul moves from word and deed to signs and wonders and then to the power of the Holy Spirit.

[238]It is sometimes said that a faith based on miracles is superficial faith. E.g., in the Gospel of John we read that “many believed in his [Christ’s] name when they saw the signs which he did; but Jesus did not trust himself to them … for he himself knew what was in man” (2:23–25). However, this same Gospel includes many miracles, and near the end the author writes, “Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples … but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name” (20:30-31). If such signs continue today (and Jesus promised they would), then the world has the living demonstration of the reality of Jesus Christ. We may proclaim the biblical miracles of Jesus, and many indeed will believe; but even more compelling to faith is the occurrence of miracles in our own time.

[239]Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 2:4: “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power” (niv). The Greek word for “demonstration,” *apodeixis*, may also be translated “proof’ (see BAGD). Gordon Fee writes that “the ‘proof’ lies not in compelling rhetoric, but in the accompanying visible airodeUjeL of the Spirit’s power” (*First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, 95, n.28). The visible “demonstration” or “proof’ suggests Paul’s reference in Romans 15 to “signs and wonders.”

[240]John Wimber writes, “Most evangelism practiced in the West lacks the power seen in New Testament evangelism” (*Power Evangelism*, 38-39). See also “Appendix B: Signs and Wonders in the Twentieth Century.”

[241]This gospel relates to salvation through repentance and faith. According to the Gospel of Mark, “Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God [= the kingdom], and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel’ “ (1:14-15).

[242]In a later place in the gospel of Matthew, just after the same statement about preaching the gospel and healing every disease, the text reads, “When he [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (9:36). Jesus’ compassion for these “harassed and helpless” ones was for their distress of both soul and body.

[243]We may recall the incident in Jesus’ ministry when he first forgave a person, saying, “Man, your sins are forgiven you” and then healed his physical paralysis, saying, “Rise, take up your bed and go home” (Luke 5:20, 24).

[244]For more on “the man of lawlessness [or ‘sin’]” see pages 334-39.

[245]The Greek phrase is *terasin pseudous*.

[246]Peter continues by adding, “and healing all who were oppressed by the devil.”

[247]For other scriptures on doing good, or good deeds, see especially Romans 12:21; Galatians 6:10; 2 Thessalonians 2:17; 1 Timothy 2:10; 5:10; Titus 2:7, 14; 3:14; Hebrews 10:24; 13:16.

[248]According to EGT, “The brethren are the Christian poor and needy and suffering, in the first place, but ultimately and inferentially any suffering people anywhere … the brethren of the Son of man are the insignificant of mankind, those likely to be overlooked, despised, neglected” (1:306).

[249]This does not mean salvation by works; it is rather that the righteous (the *dikaioi*) give evidence of their righteousness (or salvation) by the good works they perform. This is in line with what Jesus had said earlier: “The tree is known by its fruit” (Matt. 12:33). Paul later declared that God “will render to every man according to his deeds, to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life” (Rom. 2:6-7 nasb).

[250]Recall the previous discussion of “Supernatural Manifestations” regarding miraculous signs.

[251]In the discussion of supernatural signs, I talked about many miracles that relate to human needs. However, the main point there was the attestation of such supernatural manifestations to the validity of the gospel. Now I am concerned to emphasize the importance of reaching out to all human needs.

[252]The "social gospel" is a term often applied to a movement in theologically liberal Protestant thought of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that tended to replace the gospel of salvation with concern for the transformation of society. A leading exponent of this movement was Walter Rauschenbusch. See especially his books Christianity and the Social Crisis (1907) and A Theology for the Social Gospel (1917).

[253]The "Manila Manifesto" of 1989, a statement of evangelicals from some 170 countries, declares, "Evangelism is primary because our chief concern is with the gospel, that all people may have the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. … In a spirit of humility we are to preach and teach, minister to the sick, feed the hungry, care for prisoners, help the disadvantaged and handicapped, and deliver the oppressed … good news and good works are inseparable" (from the section entitled "The Gospel and Social Responsibility").

[254]See infra chapter 7, "The Church and Civil Government."

[255]Such evils as racial discrimination, sexual immorality, drug abuse, abortion, and violence.

[256]The neb reads "salt to the world." The Greek text has halas tes ges, literally "salt of the earth"; however, the meaning of the phrase is well captured by the neb translation.

[257]Exodus 30:34-35-"The Lord said to Moses … make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt."

[258]Leviticus 2:13-"You shall season all your cereal [or 'grain1] offerings with salt … with all your offerings you shall offer salt." For the salting of bloody offerings, see Ezekiel 43:23-24.

[259]The NEB translates: "Let your conversation be always gracious, and never insipid"! Insipid speech is never very engaging.

[260]The saying "Christianity to win must be winsome" carries much truth.

[261]Leviticus 2:13: "the salt of the covenant with your God."

[262]Numbers 18:19: God said to Aaron, "It is a covenant of salt for ever before the Lord for you and for your offspring with you." (This was in

reference to the “holy offerings” given to Aaron’s house “as a perpetual due.”)

[263]Chronicles 13:5-“Ought you not to know that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingship over Israel for ever to David and his sons by a covenant of salt?”

[264]Possibly in a special covenantal ceremony of shared food.

[265]In connection with Mark 9:50 Alan Cole writes, “Christians are to be the moral preservative of the world; they are to savour life, to season it, and also to stop it from becoming utterly corrupt” (*The Gospel According to St. Mark*, TNTC, 154).

[266]Is this literally possible, since salt, sodium chloride, is a stable compound? R. T. France makes a helpful comment: “Strictly, pure salt cannot lose its salinity, but the impure ‘salt’ dug from the shores of the Dead Sea could gradually become unsalty as the active sodium chloride dissolved” (*Matthew*, TNTC, 112). France wisely adds, “In any case Jesus was not teaching chemistry, but using a powerful biblical image.”

[267]Thus useless as a fertilizer: “Tasteless salt has no immediate or future use as a fertilizer” (S. M. Gilmour, *Luke*, IB, 263). Hence Jesus’ words may mean that “it is useless to put it [salt] on the land forthwith or to keep it on the manure-heap for future use” (N. Geldenhuys, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT, 400).

5
Ministry

We come now to a study of the ministry of the church. Our concern will be with those who carry forward the purposes of worship, upbuilding, and outreach. Let us proceed by considering ministry in terms of the whole church, various equipping ministries, and church government.

I. THE WHOLE CHURCH

A. All Christians Are Ministers

It is important at the outset to stress the common ministry of the church. Jesus declared about Himself: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister" (Mark 10:45 KJV). To minister is to serve.[1] Hence all who follow Jesus in His church are called upon to serve, to minister in His name.

Thus whatever the particular place people occupy in the church of Jesus Christ, all are called upon to be ministers. The apostle Paul speaks of himself as "a minister": "the gospel … of which I, Paul, became a minister"[2] (Col. 1:23). But he also speaks of "the work of ministry"[3] (Eph. 4:12) as that in which all believers are involved.[4] We are all called to be ministers of Jesus Christ.

Further, whatever may be said about church leaders as occupying seemingly higher or more important positions, all are ministers, that is, servants. Paul writes about Apollos and himself: "What then is Apollos? What is Paul?

Servants[5] through whom you believed" (1 Cor. 3:5). Servants—by no means masters or lords! Indeed, Paul goes so far as to call himself a "bond-servant" or "slave" in regard to the Corinthians: "We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants [or 'slaves'][6] for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5 NASB). Christ is the only Lord, so that Christians in high positions are still servants, even slaves, of all others. They, like all believers, are ministers of Christ.

Accordingly, it is a mistake to regard only certain persons in the church as ministers. In some churches the pastor is frequently referred to as "the minister," implying that other persons do not minister at all. It is significant historically that whereas the Reformation stressed the priesthood of all believers,[7] there was not the same emphasis on the ministry of all believers. The Second Helvetic Confession (1566), for example, declared: "The ministry … and the priesthood are things far different one from the other. For the priesthood is common to all Christians; not so is the ministry."[8] Surely there is a difference between the ordained ministry of the word[9] and other forms of ministry; however, "the ministry" *is* common to all Christians.

It is important to recognize this common ministry. When we realize afresh that all Christians are ministers, it helps to close the gap between those who think too highly of their ministry ("I am *the minister*") and those who think too lowly ("I am *no minister* at all"). We need to emphasize that all Christians by their very

identification with Christ are ministers. *Together* we are ministers, that is, servants of Him who "came to minister." Ministry through servant-hood must be the way of all who truly belong to Jesus Christ.

B. All Christians Are Priests

We must also emphasize that all Christians are priests by virtue of what is commonly known as “the priesthood of all believers.”

Peter in his first letter writes, “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood…” (2:9). He is addressing “the exiles of the Dispersion” (1:1), scattered Christians who compose a priesthood. In the Old Testament covenant with Israel God said, “If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant … you shall be to me a kingdom of priests” (Exod. 19:5–6). Because of Israel’s failure to keep the covenant, the new people of God—the church—through the sacrifice of Christ, have inherited the blessing of being “a kingdom of priests,” “a royal priesthood.”

This means that all Christians are priests. In the Old Testament the promised priesthood was limited to the tribe of Levi, with Aaron as its first priest. Accordingly, the priesthood, which was given the primary responsibility of offering sacrifices, was the province of a few. But now since Christ has come as the “great high priest” (Heb. 4:14) and offered Himself as the supreme sacrifice, He has made unnecessary the offering of further sacrifice, annulled any special order of priesthood, and made all believers into priests able to offer spiritual sacrifices to God. Earlier in his letter Peter puts it like this: “You … are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5 NASB).

All Christians together form a new order of priesthood. They do not look to priests to offer up material sacrifices on their behalf; rather, they themselves offer up spiritual sacrifices. What are those sacrifices? The best answer is found in Hebrews 13:15–16: “Through Jesus … let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (NIV). The sacrifices of course are not for sin but are offerings of the self in praise to God[10] through doing good and sharing with other people.

Since all Christians are priests, the word *priest* is never applied in the New Testament to any individual believer or group of believers. The word is used many times in relation to the Jews—their priests, the high priest, etc.—but *never* in regard to a Christian believer. Moreover, in the list of Christ’s gifts to the church—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Eph. 4:11)—and God’s appointments—apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in tongues (1 Cor. 12:28)—there is absolutely

no mention of priests. There is also reference to bishops (or overseers) and deacons (Phil. 1:1), elders that rule and teach (1 Tim. 5:17), the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4)—but again no mention of priests. Priesthood now belongs to *all* the people of God.

Hence, there is serious irregularity in any church that has a separate order of priests. If the New Testament never speaks of priests in this distinctive sense, even more if Christ as "great high priest" has abolished and fulfilled the Old Testament Levitical priesthood, how can a continuing office of priests be justified?[11] Unfortunately, in some churches the office of priest is considered essential because of the view that the sacrifice of Christ needs continual offering, and that only one who is ordained as a priest is qualified to offer it.[12] Also he alone is qualified to remit sins.[13] Such a view is grievously in error, for it detracts from the singular priestly role of Christ, gives to men unwarranted authority, and effectively denies the priesthood of all believers.

It is urgent that we fully understand all Christians to be "a royal priesthood." Thus as the congregation gathers for worship and the praises of God sound forth, the people of God are acting as priests: they are offering up to God "a sacrifice of praise." The congregation (not some persons who may be ministering at the altar) is therefore "a holy priesthood." The people of Christ are offering up sacrifices, not *of* Christ, but spiritual sacrifices *through* Christ. Further, no priestly absolution of sin is required, because in Christ's name his holy priests, the people of God, can together receive afresh His forgiveness of sins. Moreover, as the people of God go forth to minister as living sacrifices,[14] they continue their function as the priests of God.

I will close this section with two further quotations, one in prediction, one in fulfillment: "You shall be called the priests of the LORD, men shall speak of you as the ministers of our God" (Isa. 61:6), and "To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever" (Rev. 1:5–6). Priests of the Lord, priests to God the Father—all of God's people. What a high, even amazing, calling!

C. All Christians Are Clergy

If it sounds strange to say that all Christians are clergy, it is doubtless because of the clergy/laity distinction that is prevalent in many churches. However, such a distinction is quite artificial and unbiblical.

First, the word *clergy*, or *clergyman*, as understood today is not found in the New Testament. "Clergy" derives originally from the Greek word *kleros*, which may be translated "lot," "portion," "share," or "inheritance."[15] Paul quotes Jesus as commissioning him to serve and bear witness so that people "may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance *[kleron]* among those who have been sanctified by faith in [Him]" (Acts 26:18 NASB). In one of his letters Paul speaks of "giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance *[klerou]* of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12). Since all Christians have received and thereby share in this inheritance, to them all belongs the *kleros* of God. Peter exhorts "the elders" that they should not be "lords over God's heritage[16] *[kleron]*, but… examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:1, 3 KJV). The people for whom the elders are responsible are God's heritage, God's *kleroi*,[17] even God's "clergy." This statement of Peter reverses the customary idea of clergy being the ones over the flock, because the flock are here called "clergy"!

Second, the word *laity* refers likewise to all Christians. "Laity" derives from *laos*, which means simply "people." In the same statement about "a royal priesthood" Peter writes, "You are … God's own people *[laos]*, … Once you were no people *[laos]* but now you are God's people *[laos]*[18]' (1 Peter 2:9–10). Thus all Christians, the church, compose the laity of God.

Historically, a distinction between clergy and laity appeared at a very early date. In regard to laity, already in 1 Clement (ca. A.D. 96) we find these words: "The layman is bound by the layman's rules. Let each of you, brothers, in his proper order [or 'rank'] give thanks to God … not overstepping the designated rule of his ministry" (40:5; 41:1).[19] After this, Clement discusses the role of apostles, bishops, and deacons (42). The laity should not overstep their bounds. From about A.D. 200, "laity" became the common term to designate nonclergy. They were viewed as having little more to do in ministry than to hear and obey those above them. "Clergy," on the other hand, became increasingly the privileged class in the church with numerous benefits and often increasing titles to designate their high position.[20]

To say that all Christians are clergy is definitely to run counter to most popular and ecclesiastical understanding. It is far easier, in Protestant circles at least, to speak of all Christians being priests than all being clergy. However, if we can say that all the church is a royal priesthood as it offers up spiritual sacrifices, it is also true that all God's people are His inheritance, His *kleroi*, His "clergy." Of course, the important thing is not to have God's people called either priests or clergy (neither is likely to happen), but to recognize that all Christians, whatever their position, are alike servants of Jesus Christ. In Him we are all brothers and sisters of one another.

When we reflect on this matter, we become all the more aware of the fact that the church is essentially people worshiping together, building up one another, and unitedly reaching out to the world. Whatever our position in the church, in these various ways we are servants of Jesus Christ.

Now this does not mean that all Christians do the same thing. For not only is the whole church a ministering body; there are also individual ministries. Previously I have discussed ministry in the church through the gifts of the Holy Spirit by which various persons fulfill distinctive roles,[21] and I have also pointed out the several gifts of God's grace whereby believers exercise a number of functions[22] in the body. Hence, it is appropriate to say both that *the church is ministry* and that *the church has ministries*. Each person fulfilling his own ministry in the context of overall ministry is the way whereby the church is truly the church of Jesus Christ.

Moreover, there are some ministries that serve to equip others for ministry. By no means are all believers adequately prepared for their ministry. There is continuing need for the equipping of believers. How equipping takes place will be considered in the pages that follow.

II. EQUIPPING MINISTRIES

We now turn to the various *equipping* ministries. Paul writes of Christ, "'When He ascended on high, he led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts [*domata*] to men'… .[23] And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping[24] of the saints[25] for the work of service [or 'ministry']" (Eph. 4:8, 11–12 NASB). Thus apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are equipping ministries for the body of Christ.

We should note several things. First, these ministries are *sovereign grants* from the ascended and reigning Christ for the equipping of His church. They are not the result of individual choices but come about through divine action.[26] Second, the gifts are *persons*—apostles, prophets, etc. (and not activities such as prophesying, evangelizing, teaching)—who are given by Christ to the church for the equipping of the body of believers. The personal, exalted Christ provides persons for this critical task. Third, these gifts are *limited in number*, not every Christian shares in them. Unlike *charismata* gifts, in which all believers participate,[27] these *domata* gifts are of the few (note the recurring word "some"). Fourth, these equipping ministries are *necessary to the continuing life of the church.* The fact that Christ "gave" cannot refer only to the past, because the gifts are for the ongoing work of equipping the saints of all times and places for their work of ministry. Fifth, pastors and teachers are *more closely linked* than the other gifts. "Some" each time precedes apostles, prophets, and evangelists, but does not do so in regard to teachers: "some pastors and teachers." It is likely that Paul is describing basically a single equipping ministry;[28] however, the fact that he lists in Ephesians both pastors and teachers suggests that this ministry is composed of two closely related functions.[29]

Now let us turn to a consideration of each of the equippers in Ephesians 4.

A. Apostles—"some as apostles"

We begin with *apostles* as the first of the equipping ministries. Not only are apostles mentioned first; they are also specified as first of the divine appointments in 1 Corinthians 12:28—"God has appointed ['set' KJV] in the church first apostles." Even as Jesus in His earthly ministry early chose apostles to be associated with Him, so from heaven the exalted Lord continues that ministry first of all through apostolic activity. Whether the language is "some as apostles" or "first apostles," the truth is the same: the apostles occupy the primary place among the equipping ministries.

One further preliminary word: Christ Himself is the supreme apostle. In Hebrews He is called "the apostle and high priest of our confession" (3:1). Since Jesus is "*the* apostle," all others who are called apostles derive their position and authority from Him.

Now we observe that the word "apostles" in the New Testament has a twofold usage. It refers, first, and primarily, to the original twelve apostles[30] plus Paul, and, second, to a larger group of apostles, both named and unnamed. So before dealing further with Ephesians 4, let us briefly examine this twofold usage.

1. The Twelve Plus Paul

We recognize first that the word "apostles" refers most often to the Twelve whom Jesus chose out of all His disciples. The Gospel of Luke records, "He called his disciples, and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles" (6:13).[31] After Judas's defection and after Jesus had returned to heaven, the disciples prayed for the Lord to choose another. They set forward two men and prayed, "Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two thou hast chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship[32] …. And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was enrolled with the eleven apostles" (Acts 1:24–26). Thus the number of apostles chosen by Jesus was again complete. The Book of Acts has many other references to the apostles, understood with one exception to be the Twelve.[33] "The Twelve" is also Paul's language in 1 Corinthians 15:5.

In regard to the Twelve, two things stand out. First, they were all specially

chosen by Jesus. As we have noted, even Matthias, whom Jesus had not chosen during His ministry on earth, was chosen later by Him from heaven. Second, they had all been with Jesus from the beginning of His ministry and had seen Him in His resurrection. This is illustrated by the fact that when the time came to replace Judas, Peter declared that only one who had been with them "from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us … must become with us a witness to his resurrection" (Acts 1:22). Matthias was one who fulfilled both requirements and became the new twelfth apostle.

It is apparent, from their having been chosen by Jesus and having lived together with Him throughout His ministry, that these twelve apostles occupied a uniquely important position of authority. They had known Jesus intimately, they had been under His immediate direction as they ministered in His name, they had heard all His teaching and had been given private explanations of matters hidden to others, and they had seen Him in His resurrection. Thus they were fully prepared to proclaim the gospel, establish the church, and pass on His truth to all generations to come. The twelve apostles accordingly had a unique, indispensable, and unrepeatable place in the body of Jesus Christ.

But what of Paul? He was the one who, more than any other, carried the gospel to many peoples. Moreover, he wrote more of the New Testament than any of the Twelve. How does he meet apostolic qualifications? The answer is that he was likewise chosen by Jesus and by special revelation had seen Jesus and was given the gospel to write down. First, Paul over and over again declares himself to be an apostle by Jesus' call. For example, he begins Galatians by saying, "Paul an apostle—not from man nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father" (1:1).[34] Indeed, at the time of Paul's conversion Jesus had declared through Ananias: "He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and sons of Israel" (Acts 9:15). Second, in addition to being specially chosen, as were the Twelve, Paul had also seen Jesus. Paul writes, "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1). The answer is yes, for Paul later explains, "As to one untimely born, he appeared also to me" (1 Cor. 15:8). This appearance, Paul insists, was not just a vision but as much a real encounter with the risen Jesus as any of the Twelve had experienced. Elsewhere Paul says simply, "[God] was pleased to reveal his Son to me" (Gal. 1:16). Thus Paul qualified with the Twelve both as being specially chosen by Jesus and as a witness to His resurrection. But what about the gospel the Twelve had learned from Jesus during their years with Him? Again, and in the third place, Paul was in no way inferior to the original Twelve, for he also declares, "The gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of

Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:11–12). Paul in an extraordinary manner received from the exalted Lord what the Twelve had received during Christ's earthly ministry!

It is clear, then, that Paul, even though he spoke of himself as "the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because [he] persecuted the church of God" (1 Cor. 15:9), has equal standing with the Twelve. It follows that what he has written in the New Testament is truly God's Word, and is authoritative for the church through the ages.

Thus the Twelve plus Paul are apostles who occupy a unique and authoritative place in the life and history of the church.

Here the word *apostleship* may appropriately be used: it refers to this original group. We have observed how Peter in Acts 1:24–25 used the word apostleship in reference to the position Judas had vacated and now needed to be filled: "Lord … show which one of these two thou hast chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship." Paul speaks of how God "effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised" (Gal. 2:8 NASB). Paul twice speaks of his own apostleship: "Jesus Christ … through whom we have received grace and apostleship" (Rom. 1:4–5), and "you [Corinthians] are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord" (1 Cor. 9:2). These are all the uses of this word in the New Testament, and they apply only to the Twelve plus Paul.

This means that there can be neither succession nor restoration of the apostleship. Succession is out of the question[35] not only because these apostles appointed no successors[36] but also because of the unique and unrepeatable character of their apostleship. Restoration is likewise impossible[37] because these apostles fulfilled their role, and continue their ministry through the apostolic writings of the New Testament. Any idea of perpetuating or restoring apostleship as an official office is totally foreign to the New Testament and to Christ's intention for His church.

2. Others Called Apostles

Now we proceed to observe that in addition to the twelve apostles and Paul, a number of others are mentioned as apostles in the New Testament. First, we may note Barnabas who often traveled with Paul. In Acts 14:14 the two are called "the apostles Barnabas and Paul." It is interesting that Barnabas's original name was Joseph, but because of his ways he was early "surnamed by the apostles [the Twelve] Barnabas (which means, Son of encouragement)" (Acts 4:36). Second, there was James, the brother of Jesus, who presided at the council in Jerusalem

(Acts 15). In Acts he is not called an apostle; however, in Galatians Paul so designates James: "I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas [Peter]…. But I saw none of the other apostles except[38] James the Lord's brother" (1:18–19). Third, Paul, in his letter to the Romans, refers to Andronicus and Junias as apostles: "Greet Andronicus and Junias,[39] my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding[40] among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was" (16:7 NIV). Nothing more is known about Andronicus and Junias. Fourth, Paul seems to include Silas and Timothy with himself as apostles in 1 Thessalonians. The letter begins, "Paul, Silvanus [Silas], and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians" (111).[41] Later Paul says, "We might have made demands [upon you] as apostles[42] of Christ" (2:6). Fifth, and quite strikingly, in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul speaks of Christ's appearances to "the twelve" and thereafter to "all the apostles." The text reads, "He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time…. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me" (vv. 5–8). By this statement, "all the apostles" goes beyond "the twelve."

There are two other references in Paul's letters to "apostles," although there the word is usually translated "messengers" or "messenger." He refers, in one case, to two unnamed brothers (2 Cor. 8:18 and 22) whom he speaks of as "messengers[43] [*apostoloi]* of the churches" (v. 23). Both brothers were being sent[44] by Paul and Titus to the church in Corinth to help collect an offering for the poor Christians in Jerusalem. The first brother was said to be "famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel" and, Paul writes, "He has been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work" (vv. 18–19); Paul describes the second as "our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters" (v. 22). The other case is that of Epaphroditus, who had been very ill and nearly died in bringing gifts from Corinth to Paul during his imprisonment (Phil. 2:25–30). Paul planned to send[45] Epaphroditus back to Philippi; he describes him as "my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger *[apostolon*] and minister to my need" (v. 25). In both instances, the unnamed brothers and Epaphroditus are "apostles" of the churches sent by Paul and by the churches to fulfill particular needs. The word *apostolos* thus is used broadly to refer to a messenger, or perhaps a delegate or envoy, from particular churches to serve a larger need.[46] From the broadest perspective apostles in the New Testament are those *sent* by God for whatever mission is required of them. *Apostolos* is derived from the word *apostello*, which means to

"send" or "send out." Jesus Himself is *the* apostleTTecause He was the one sent by God the Father[47] to perform His mission on earth. Incidentally, the single use of the word *apostolos* in the Gospel of John is found in this statement of Jesus: "Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent[48] *[apostolos]* greater than he who sent him" (13:16). The apostle, whatever his identity, is one sent by the Lord to carry forward His mission.

To summarize thus far: In the New Testament there is both a narrow and a broad use of the word "apostles." The narrow relates to the Twelve plus Paul; the broad, to many other disciples both named and unnamed. All who are called apostles have been sent out in the cause of the gospel.

Now in returning to Ephesians 4 we observe that the gift of apostles—"He gave some as apostles"—refers to the exalted Lord's donation: "When he ascended on high … he gave gifts." Hence, this goes beyond the original apostles and reaches out to encompass others.[49] Paul earlier in Ephesians does refer twice to apostles, along with prophets, "apostles and prophets" (2:20 and 3:5), in the more restricted sense;[50] however, here apostles needs to be understood in a broader way as Christ's *continuing* gift to His church.

Our earlier review of the New Testament clearly shows that beyond the Twelve and Paul, who were uniquely apostles, many others were designated as apostles. They did not have the authority of the Twelve or of Paul but often functioned in relation to them. Barnabas worked hand in hand with Paul on missionary travels; so did Timothy and Silas. Andronicus and Junias at some time were imprisoned with Paul. Epaphroditus was Paul's fellow worker and an *apostolos* sent out from the Philippian church. One of the unnamed *apostolos* brothers was, as noted, "famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel" and had been appointed by the churches to accompany Paul. There were many in the New Testament church who preached widely, functioned as missionaries, and represented the churches in different ways. These were also apostles—and leaders like these are surely needed at all times in the life of the church.

A distinction may be made between the foundational ministry of apostle, that is, the apostleship, and the ongoing ministry[51] of others who are called apostles. In this broader sense an apostle is one *sent*, *commissioned*, and therefore is not affixed to a particular location or church. He does not have the authority of a foundational apostle nor are his words equally inspired. Such an apostle operates in translocal manner, but does not operate independently. He is church-based,

representing a particular church, but ministering largely in a field beyond.[52] *Such apostles are always essential to the life of a church that realizes its call to reach out beyond itself in the mission of the gospel.*

Finally, in addition to the words in Ephesians 4 about Christ's gift of apostles, we recall that when Paul speaks of God's appointments in 1 Corinthians 12, he mentions the appointment of apostles as being first of all: "God has appointed in the church first apostles…" (v. 28). Such appointment must refer to more than an act or acts of past history—especially since Paul continues with other appointments that indicate an ongoing occurrence.[53] Hence, whether apostles are spoken of as Christ's gift or God's appointment, they do have vital significance for the life of the church at all times in history.

B. Prophets—"some as prophets"

The second of the equipping ministries is that of *prophets.* For immediately following the words "He [Christ] gave some as apostles," Paul adds, "and some as prophets." This is the same pattern as in 1 Corinthians 12:28: "God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets." Prophets are Christ's gift, God's appointment, and second only to apostles.

It should be clear at the outset that Paul is *not* referring to Old Testament prophets. Because Paul speaks earlier of the church as "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets," one might think this refers to the Old Testament prophets and to New Testament apostles. However, such an idea is out of the question. First, both apostles and prophets are called gifts of the exalted Christ; second, prophets in all three cases where they are mentioned in Ephesians *follow* apostles;[54] and, third, they together with apostles have received special revelation concerning "the mystery of Christ, which was not made known … in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Eph. 3:4–5). "Prophets" in this context thus refers only to the New Testament period.

Before proceeding further, we must recognize Jesus Himself as "*the* prophet" (even as He is "*the* apostle"). According to Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses had declared, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren—him you shall heed." When John the Baptist appeared on the scene, he was asked by many, "Are you the prophet?" to which John answered, "No!" (John 1:21). Later the people declared about Jesus, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!" (John 6:14).* In the Book of Acts both Peter and Stephen interpret the words of Moses as referring to Christ (see Acts 3:22; 7:37). Jesus of course was more than a prophet; but that he was a prophet[55] and, beyond all others, *the* prophet is the New Testament witness.

Now let us turn to a consideration of Christian[56] prophets. Here we look primarily to the record in Acts. The first reference reads, "Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world; and this took place in the days of Claudius" (11:27–28). Antioch was again the locale for later prophetic activity, this time in the church:

“Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers…. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’” (13:1–2). The statement that “the Holy Spirit said” probably occurred through one of the prophets. Following the decision of the church in Jerusalem about the circumcision issue, a letter was sent to the Gentile churches, including Antioch, by the hands of Judas Barsabbas and Silas (15:22), who were called prophets: “Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers” (v. 32 NIV). Finally, Agabus appeared once more, this time to inform Paul in Caesarea of what would happen to him in Jerusalem: “Agabus came down from Judea…. He took Paul’s belt, tied his own hands and feet with it, and said, ‘The Holy Spirit says, “In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles’” (21:10–11 NIV). Thus the prophets mentioned in Acts consisted of Agabus, the prophets in the church at Antioch, and Judas Barsabbas and Silas.

From the record in Acts several things regarding prophets are noteworthy. First, foretelling occurred through Christian prophets. Agabus twice foretold events to come—in the second incident his prophecy was accompanied by acted symbolism using Paul’s belt. In both instances the Holy Spirit was directly involved: Agabus “foretold by the Spirit” and declared, “Thus says the Holy Spirit.” Second, the choosing of Barnabas and Saul for missionary work stemmed from a gathering of prophets and teachers and doubtless occurred through prophetic utterance. Again, “the Holy Spirit said… .” Third, Judas and Silas as prophets fulfilled the important spiritual role of encouraging and strengthening[57] the people of the church in Antioch. Fourth, these prophets functioned in both a translocal and a local manner.

Agabus, Judas, and Silas came from Jerusalem (or Judea) to carry out their prophetic ministry, whereas it was local prophets at the church in Antioch through whom the Holy Spirit spoke. Fifth, Silas may be viewed as both an apostle[58] and a prophet. Hence there seems to be some overlap between the two roles.

We look next to the Book of Revelation. It is declared to be a book of prophecy—“Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy” (1:3). Moreover, the author John himself is included among the prophets by an angel: “you and your brethren the prophets” (22:9). Within the Book of Revelation is the statement that “the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets” (10:7 NIV). In another place, as Babylon is being destroyed, the cry goes forth, “Rejoice over her, O heaven, O saints and

apostles and prophets,[59] for God has given judgment for you against her!" (18:20). Several times John is said to be "in the Spirit,"[60] and the Lord is said to be "the God of the spirits of the prophets" (22:6).

Several comments may be made. First, in the Book of Revelation prophecy contains much foretelling. John is told, "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later" (1:19 NIV). The "later" events and visions occupy most of the book. Second, the prophets speak out concerning "the mystery of God" in relation to the consummation of all things. God announces this to "his servants the prophets." Thus they bear a close relation to the apostles.[61] Third, many of the revelations come to the prophet while he is "in the Spirit." He sees supernaturally with spiritual vision.

What has been said about the prophets in Acts and Revelation enables us to perceive their role. In the early life of the church, prophets clearly were special persons, second only to the apostles. However, although second, they shared a foundational role in the formation of the church. As we have observed, Paul speaks of "the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2:20) and associates them with the apostles in receiving the revelation of "the mystery of Christ" (3:5). They were involved in laying the original foundations of the church and often spoke with the special revelation that was given them by the Holy Spirit. In that respect such prophets have fulfilled their task—even as have the original apostles—and no longer continue as persons in the life of the church.

Now let us return to Ephesians 4 and consider the phrase "some as prophets." Here, as in the case of "some as apostles," reference is made to those who have this ministry *in and beyond the New Testament record*. This is apparent from the fact, first of all, that they are depicted along with apostles, evangelists, pastors and teachers as being given by the exalted Christ for the equipping of believers. There is no suggestion that the church at any time needs only certain ones of these ministries for such equipping to occur. The same is true in 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul speaks of God's having appointed in the church prophets along with apostles, teachers, workers of miracles, healers, helpers, administrators, and speakers in tongues (v. 28). Surely we cannot declare that some (or all) of these appointments are for today and then say that prophets (and apostles) belong only to past history. We must rather affirm vigorously that prophets represent important continuing gifts, or appointments, in the church.

It is important, however, as in the case of apostles, to differentiate between original and continuing prophets. Even as there is a foundational and a continuing apostolic ministry, so there is a foundational and a continuing prophetic ministry. Such continuing ministry likewise is a gift of Christ that

serves for the equipping of the church.

The question may now be put: How does the ministry of a prophet relate to the activity of prophesying? In regard to activity, we recall that Paul speaks in Romans 12:4–8 of prophecy as one among several functional gifts for the upbuilding of the body of Christ, and in 1 Corinthians 12:7–10 of prophecy as a manifestation gift to serve the common good.[62] Persons who so prophesy are not necessarily prophets in the sense of having a prophetic ministry. Nonetheless, quite possibly some are fulfilling a prophetic calling. If so, while their messages may not differ essentially from others who prophesy, upon them a prophetic mantle will be increasingly apparent. They not only prophesy: they have a prophetic ministry. Furthermore, because of this special ministry, these special prophets may serve the church at large.[63]

The purpose of prophetic ministry may be defined by Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 14:3—"He who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation."[64] This sounds, incidentally, much like what the prophets Judas and Silas did "to encourage and strengthen the brothers" (Acts 15:22, 27, 32). Prophets who fulfill such a role can be a blessing to both the local and the larger church.

Prophets likewise are persons who speak particular words regarding what God is saying to His people in any given situation. Their messages may speak significantly to the church and afford special insight into God's present way and purpose. Such prophetic utterances may also relate to the future and thus enable the people of God to move ahead with more assurance and direction. The chief burden of the continuing prophets, however, is the present; further, their words may relate both to individuals as well as to the church at large. Prophets uniquely speak for God to God's people.[65]

But now, immediately, we need to recognize one major and critical differ ence between prophets today and the original New Testament prophets. Those original prophets, along with the original apostles, received the special revelation of "the mystery of Christ" (recall Eph. 3:4–5; cf. also John in the Book of Revelation)). Continuing prophets, while speaking out of revelation,[66] do not receive special or new revelation. If they did receive and speak that type of prophecy, their words would be equivalent to Holy Scripture. The church, accordingly, must always be on guard against presumed prophetic messages that claim equal or superior authority to God's written words in Scripture. True prophecy is thoroughly grounded in Scripture and, based upon it, speaks forth God's particular word for the contemporary scene.

A final word on “some as apostles, and some as prophets.” We have observed that the original apostles and prophets were foundational to the life of the church. They received special revelation from God, and they have completed their ministry. However, apostles and prophets, along with evangelists, pastors, and teachers, are gifts of the exalted Christ and continue to be available to the church through all ages.[67] Doubtless we need today to give fresh recognition to these ministries that are essential to the life of the church.

C. Evangelists—"some as evangelists"

We arrive at a consideration of the third of the equipping ministries, namely, that of *evangelists.* The exalted Lord has also given evangelists to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

Evangelists are those who proclaim the gospel. The gospel is the *evangellion*—"the good news," to preach good news is *evangelizó*—"to evangelize," and the evangelist is the *evangelistés*—the proclaimer or preacher of the good news.

Jesus Himself, accordingly, is *the* evangelist.[68] The Gospel of Mark opens with the declaration that "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God" (1:14). Jesus thus was an evangelist from the beginning of His ministry. In His hometown of Nazareth Jesus, quoting from Isaiah, declared, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18). A short time later in Capernaum, when the people tried to keep Him from leaving them, Jesus replied, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose" (Luke 4:43). Jesus had a strong and compelling sense that He had been sent for the great purpose of proclaiming the gospel. As such, Jesus was the original evangelist and the example for all who share the same compulsion and dedication. This is particularly true for those whom the Lord especially calls to this ministry. It is they that receive this gift from the exalted Lord: He "gave … some as evangelists."

Before considering this statement, two preliminary remarks are in order. First, there is a real sense in which all Christians are called to be evangelists. To proclaim the word in every way possible is not some addition to Christian faith; this belongs to its essence. In the Book of Acts it is apparent that members of the early church were strongly aware of this. For example, on one occasion the whole community prayed, "Lord … grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness" (4:29). As a result, "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness" (v. 31). On a later occasion when great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem and all the believers except the twelve apostles were scattered abroad, Luke records, "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went" (8:4 NIV). Thus in a broad sense all the believers were evangelists.

Second, the apostles themselves were also proclaimers of the good news. One verse in Acts stands out: "Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to

house, they [the apostles] never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ" (5:42 NIV). Paul and Barnabas "preached the gospel" (14:7, 21) in various cities; and Luke writes about what occurred after Paul had received a vision calling them over to Macedonia: "Immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them" (16:10). Many times in his letters Paul speaks of his call to preach the gospel.[69] Peter writes, "That word is the good news which was preached to you" (1 Peter 1:25). Thus, to sum up, proclaiming the gospel, evangelizing, belongs to the ongoing life and mission of the whole church.

But also some persons have a special calling to be evangelists—"some as evangelists." The clearest New Testament illustration of this is Philip, not Philip the apostle, but "Philip the evangelist."[70] Luke writes "We … came to Caesarea; and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven" (Acts 21:8). "One of the seven" refers to earlier days when Philip, along with six others, was selected to handle the distribution of food in the community of believers (6:1–6). Some time later, after the persecution and scattering of believers, "Philip went down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed[71] to them the Christ" (8:5). Later after Philip had also done many signs—"unclean spirits came out of many … and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed" (v. 7) — "they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (v. 12). Philip then baptized those who believed. Thus he did the work of an evangelist: he not only preached the good news but also through his proclamation the Samaritans came to faith and baptism.

Philip the evangelist is next seen on a desert road between Jerusalem and Gaza ministering to an Ethiopian eunuch, a highly placed court official. Philip "preached Jesus to him" (8:35 NASB). Then after the Ethiopian came to faith and was baptized, "the Spirit of the Lord caught up Philip" (v. 39). After that "Philip was found at Azotus, and passing on he preached the gospel to all the towns till he came to Caesarea" (v. 40)[72] . Truly he was "Philip the evangelist."

Evangelism, as Philip demonstrated it, involves both proclaiming the gospel and bringing people to a saving faith. When Jesus called Peter and Andrew, He said, "I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19; cf. Mark 1:17)—and fishing means not only casting the net but also bringing in the fish. Philip the evangelist preached the gospel and brought people in—into the kingdom.

This brings us to Paul's charge to Timothy: "Do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4:5). This is in the context of Paul's fuller statement "Always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." Unlike

Philip, Timothy is not called an evangelist; rather, Paul seems to be speaking of evangelism as one aspect of Timothy's total ministry. Timothy of course had preached the gospel with Paul in numerous places;[73] thus he had engaged in evangelistic work; but Timothy's main calling was probably elsewhere.[74] However, the fact that Paul links Timothy's doing the work of an evangelist with fulfilling his ministry suggests that evangelism is an essential part of a complete ministry.

Now a word concerning the relevance of Paul's injunction for today. Sometimes one hears pastors[75] say that since their calling is to shepherd the flock, to build up a congregation by word and deed, they cannot also do the work of an evangelist. In response, let me say that pastors may not be called to be evangelists, but they can scarcely avoid doing the work of an evangelist since any congregation (unless it is totally sealed off from the world) will also include unbelievers who need to hear and believe the gospel. Moreover, there should be times and occasions for preaching and witnessing outside the confines of the local congregation. Thus to be an evangelist may not be a pastor's gift but, in line with Paul's word, evangelism surely has a vital place in fulfilling pastoral ministry.

Now let us return to Philip the evangelist and summarize some points that may have particular relevance for those likewise gifted by Christ for this task.

1. He was a man "full of the Spirit" (see Acts 6:3, 5) and moved under the direction of the Holy Spirit. In regard to the Ethiopian eunuch, "the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go up and join this chariot' " (8:29). After his experience with the Ethiopian, as we have noted, "the Spirit of the Lord caught up Philip … [and] Philip was found at Azotus." Fullness of the Spirit, direction by the Spirit, even being transported by the Spirit: what a divine enablement for the task of evangelism!

2. As Philip proclaimed Christ, he also performed "miraculous signs" (Acts 8:6 NIV) such as casting out evil spirits and healing the lame and paralyzed. By such miracles not only were many people blessed, but also by experiencing and seeing the power of God in action they were all the more ready to receive the good news of salvation. Surely today there is need for power evangelism that heals body, soul, and spirit.

3. Philip made effective use of the Scriptures. The Ethiopian eunuch was reading Isaiah 53:7–8 when Philip joined his chariot, and "beginning from this Scripture he [Philip] preached Jesus to him" (Acts 8:35 NASB). What the miraculous signs had been to the Samaritans, the opening up of Scripture was to

the eunuch. Philip knew the Scriptures thoroughly—and so must one who today is to be a truly effective evangelist.

4. Philip's words and actions brought about decision and commitment. The Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch believed and were immediately baptized. It continues to be urgent that faith and baptism—the inward belief and outward confirmation—be closely joined.

5. Philip's work of evangelism also prepared the way for the reception of the Holy Spirit. Some days after the Samaritans had believed and been baptized, Peter and John came from Jerusalem and enabled the Samaritans to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit: "They [Peter and John] laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:17). This suggests that, although the evangelist's work may not always include the converts' receiving the Holy Spirit, his bringing people to salvation is essential background for this reception to occur. In regard to the Ethiopian eunuch, the text ordinarily used in Acts says nothing about such a reception of the Spirit on his part; however, some versions of Acts 8:39 read immediately following the report of the Ethiopian's baptism: "The Holy Spirit fell upon the eunuch."[76] Whether or not this belongs in the original text, the later words, "the eunuch … went on his way rejoicing" (v. 39), may imply as much.[77] In any event, the evangelist's work should prepare the way for those who believe to receive the Holy Spirit. This matter needs much emphasis in our time lest the evangelist fail to recognize God's intention that people both believe in Christ and receive the Holy Spirit.

To conclude on "some as evangelists": This is unquestionably a ministry both in the New Testament and throughout the history of the church. In regard to "apostles and prophets," if there is any question about their continuation, there can surely be none about evangelists. For the preaching of the gospel is at the heart of the church's life and mission.

Christ still gives "some as evangelists." Indeed, today we need to see more and more evangelists raised up by the Lord who are full of the Holy Spirit, know the Scriptures thoroughly, move in "signs and wonders," bring about life-changing faith and commitment, and prepare people for receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. May the gracious Lord give many such evangelists to proclaim the gospel in our time!

D. Pastors and Teachers—"some as pastors and teachers"

As we begin this study, we will be viewing pastors and teachers as those who are called to an equipping ministry basically for the local church. Let us consider this ministry in its twofold function.[78]

1. The Twofold Function

a. Shepherding. In regard to the word "pastors," it is important to recognize that this is simply another word for "shepherds."[79] The basic responsibility of pastors is to tend their congregation, the "sheep" God has committed to their care.

First of all, we observe that Christ Himself is *the* shepherd. Even as Christ is *the* apostle, *the* prophet, and *the* evangelist, He is also *the* pastor or shepherd. He is the *good* shepherd. In the Gospel of John, Jesus declares, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (10:11); again, "I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me" (v. 14). He is the *great* shepherd. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of "the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep" (13:20). He is the *chief* shepherd. Peter first refers to Christ as "the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Pet. 2:25 NIV) and later speaks of the day "when the Chief Shepherd appears" (5:4 NIV).

Truly, as good, great, and chief, Christ is *the* shepherd.[80]

The gift of the exalted Christ in giving "some as pastors" accordingly means that He gives gifts to certain ones to share in His shepherding ministry. Significantly, the primary reference to this is in the Gospel of John. The One who calls Himself "the good shepherd" summoned His first apostle, Peter, to fulfill a shepherding role. Three times Jesus asked about Peter's love for Him, and after Peter's threefold affirmative reply, Jesus said in sequence: "Feed my lambs" (21:15); "Tend[81] my sheep" (v. 16); and "Feed my sheep" (v. 17). Jesus was therefore saying something like this: "Peter, you will demonstrate your love for Me as you take care of the flock that belongs to Me. I have laid down My life for the sheep; now it is up to you to take care of those for whom I died. Feed My lambs, My little ones. Guard My sheep, My grown ones. Feed them too, that

they may truly live." Simon Peter was commanded by Christ the Good Shepherd to shepherd His total flock.

Peter was by no means the only one so commanded, for Christ gave "some as pastors." The task of shepherding is also given to others. Peter himself makes this clear in his first letter when he writes to the elders, "I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder … shepherd[82] the flock of God among you, exercising oversight.. (5:1–2 NASB). Then Peter adds three sets of contrasts: "not under compulsion, but voluntarily … not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock" (vv. 2–3 NASB). And then he gives this glorious promise: "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory" (v. 4 NASB).

It is noteworthy that the elders are immediately told to shepherd. They are not as such called pastors or shepherds (as in Ephesians 4), but in the discharge of their responsibility they are enjoined to shepherd or pastor God's flock. The elders in that sense are shepherds.[83]

This brings us to some words of Paul likewise addressed to elders. Paul sent to Ephesus for "the elders of the church" (Acts 20:17), and in his farewell address to them he said, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd[84] the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (v. 28 NASB). Hence Paul, even as Peter did, enjoins the elders to shepherd the flock, the people of the church. Thus the elders fulfill a pastoral function.

The pastoral role, according to both Peter and Paul, is first of all one of *oversight.* Pastors are to oversee the activities of the flock. They are to perform this function willingly and freely—not because it is required of their position, or because anyone is forcing them. They are to serve as pastors with eagerness and enthusiasm, not for monetary gain. Moreover, they are to be examples of humble service to the flock, not domineering or lording it over those committed to their care.[85] If pastors thus serve willingly and eagerly, with no desire for "sordid gain," and do not use their positions to domineer their flock, but walk humbly among those in their charge, they will be good pastors. When the Chief Shepherd appears, they will receive an "unfading crown of glory." The Chief Shepherd will gloriously reward His faithful undershepherds.

Beyond overseeing the activities of the flock, pastors have a particular concern for the spiritual lives of their people. As we noted, Peter says that Christ is "the Shepherd and Overseer of [our] souls." Pastors are given by Christ to

exercise special oversight of the souls of those He has redeemed and who thereafter need to be nourished so as to grow more and more like Him. This is indeed a high and grave responsibility that pastors have—to be overseers of souls!

Further, recall the example of Christ Himself as "the good shepherd." Good pastors know their sheep, and their sheep know them; hence there is a close personal relationship between them. Good pastors reach out to their sheep at any point of need, and the sheep in return trust them. Indeed, good pastors are ready and willing to give themselves totally and sacrificially for the sake of their flock. Christ laid down His life for His sheep: this is the ultimate test of pastoral devotion.

The pastoral role is also that of *guarding.* Paul refers to this in his words to the elders from Ephesus: "Be on guard[86] for yourselves and for all the flock." The brunt of Paul's words is related to dangers both from without and within, for shortly following his injunction to the elders, Paul says, "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29–30). Even as shepherds must always be on guard against fierce wolves that would ravage and devour the flock, so must pastors constantly guard against those who bring in false and destructive teaching. Such teaching may arise even from within the church; it may seem true but actually be deceptive. By this means people are led away from others in the flock. Pastors must always be on guard, for the souls of their people are at stake.

Here we may return to Ephesians and recall Paul's statement that one of the purposes of the equipping ministries is "that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles" (4:14). The "cunning of men" may well refer to those both outside and inside the church who cause havoc to believers. "Pastors and teachers," whose work is the climax of the equipping ministries, occupy an urgent and important role in constantly guarding against such disturbances.

One thing for which pastors must be on the alert is any teaching that does not center in Christ as the only way of salvation. In regard to this, Jesus not only speaks of Himself as "the good shepherd" but also as "the door" of the sheep (John 10:9). Earlier He referred to "thieves and robbers," who seek to come in some other way than through the door (see vv. 1,8); then He adds, "I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture" (v. 9). There is no other way to salvation but through Christ, who is "the

way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Thus any teaching from without or within that would weaken or distort this fact must be guarded against by vigilant shepherds.

b. Teaching. This brings us to a more direct consideration of the importance of the teaching function: "some as pastors and *teachers."*

Before examining this further, let us remember that Jesus was not only *the* pastor or shepherd, but He was *the* teacher (even as He was *the* apostle, *the* prophet, and *the* evangelist). Throughout the Gospels Jesus is many times addressed as "Teacher,"[87] and He also refers to Himself as "the Teacher." For example, "the Teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, where I am to eat the passover with my disciples?" (Luke 22:11; cf. Matt. 26:18; Mark 14:14). In the Fourth Gospel Jesus says, "You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am" (13:13). As the Teacher, "Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues" (Matt. 9:35); He "taught the people from the boat" (Luke 5:3); in "the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan … as his custom was, he taught them" (Mark 10:1); He "taught in the temple" (John 7:28) —on and on. His teaching was the life-giving word of God. Early in His ministry, in response to a temptation by Satan, Jesus declared, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4).[88] Hence, His teaching of the word of God brought life—"the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:63).

Thus the primary purpose of all Christian teaching is to feed people with the same life-giving word. I have spoken of the role of pastors in overseeing and guarding the sheep; now let us view this from the aspect of *feeding* and *nourishing* the sheep. Recall that Peter was commanded by Jesus not only to tend His sheep—referring essentially to overseeing and guarding—but also to feed His lambs and feed His sheep. This feeding can occur only through "every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"—and it is the teacher's responsibility to enable people to understand and receive this word.[89]

2. Ministry of the Word

We come now to a consideration of the role of those whose primary task is the ministry of the word. In doing so we will note Paul's instructions to Timothy in relation to the church in Ephesus.[90] 1 will also refer to Paul's words to Titus in Crete.[91] Let us observe some of the directions Paul gave Timothy and Titus,

especially in regard to preaching and teaching,[92] that is, the ministry of the word. We will be concerned also to observe the relevance of this for the local church today.

We note first that preaching and teaching stand in close connection. Paul tells Timothy, "[Give] attention to the public reading[93] of scripture, to preaching,[94] to teaching" (1 Tim. 4:13). Paul's references to both preaching and teaching relate to the public function of speaking to the local congregation. Preaching, or exhortation, is speech that appeals basically to heart and will; teaching is directed more to the mind. In a certain sense the two are inseparable, because preaching also speaks to the mind and teaching to the heart and will. However, there are times and occasions when preaching or teaching is the principal thrust and may occur on separate occasions.[95] Together the two may be called "the ministry of the word."[96]

The background for such a ministry of preaching and teaching, Paul enjoins, is the public reading of Scripture. This continues to be of signal importance in regard to all who speak officially because it is their responsibility to ground all that is said in the revealed Word of God. Reading the Scriptures aloud is important because the Bible is more than a silent document; it is God speaking to people, and therefore is best received if people hear the spoken word.[97] The Book of Revelation states, "Blessed is he who reads aloud[98] the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear" (1:3). Public reading, or reading aloud, is important background for preaching and teaching the word.

As we examine Paul's words to Timothy, we now observe that Paul emphasizes the need to "give attention."[99] To "give attention" is far more than a casual thing; it calls for devotion to these matters. "Devote yourself to"[100] (NIV) is what Paul is urging Timothy. The public reading of Scripture, preaching, and teaching must be a matter of applying oneself in a total kind of way.

a. Soundness of Doctrine. The minister of the word is called upon to teach sound doctrine. Throughout his letters to Timothy Paul emphasizes sound words, teaching, or doctrine. For example, he speaks of "the sound[101] words of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Tim. 6:3); and "the sound words which you have heard from me" (2 Tim. 1:13). He also urges Titus to "teach what befits sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1). Soundness of doctrine must be the primary concern of the teacher of the word.

The importance and urgency of sound teaching was accentuated by the fact that much was being taught and practiced "contrary to sound doctrine" (1 Tim. 1:10). But also, says Paul, "the time is coming when people will not endure

sound teaching, but having itching ears will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings" (2 Tim. 4:3). The responsibility of the minister of the word is great: he must find ways of bringing people back to the truths of Christian faith.

Sound doctrine was Paul's primary concern. This clearly emerges from the exhortation after his opening salutation in 1 Timothy: "I urged you … [to] remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine"[102] (1:3). Then Paul mentions "myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations" (v. 4) and thus lead many from the truth. Later, after speaking of "good doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:6), Paul urges Timothy to "have nothing to do with godless and silly[103] myths" (v. 7). In his letter to Titus, Paul speaks of those "giving heed to Jewish myths" (Tit. 1:14), and tells Titus to "rebuke them sharply" (v. 13).[104] Sound doctrine has no place for godless myths and speculations that pervert faith. If rebuke is called for, it must be given.

In addition, Paul speaks of those who, totally contrary to sound doctrine, teach that "the resurrection has already taken place" and thereby "destroy the faith of some" (2 Tim. 2:18 NIV). In this case—even more than speculation about myths and genealogies—both sound doctrine and action[105] are needed. The true minister of the word must on every possible occasion stand firm on such pivotal doctrines as the resurrection and firmly resist any contrary teaching lest the faith of people be destroyed.

In regard to the future, Paul also says[106] that "in later times some will abandon[107] the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons" (1 Tim. 4:1 NIV). He adds, "Such teachings come through hypocritical liars" (v. 2 NIV). As evidence of this, he says, "they forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods" (v. 3 NIV). Although these may not at first sound like the worst things that could be taught, they are demonically inspired. For such teachers actually deny God's good creation, including marriage as His blessed ordinance (Gen. 2:22–24) and food of all kinds as His gracious provision (Gen. 1:12, 29–30). So Paul adds, "Everything created by God is good" (1 Tim. 4:4). Thus the teaching about forbidding marriage and abstaining from certain foods —which might seem only to emphasize bodily rigor and asceticism—is actually extremely dangerous because it is an outright denial of God's Word and God's good creation. The tragedy is that one who embraces such a doctrine is on the slippery slope that leads to destruction. Paul adds truly: "If you [Timothy] point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus" (v. 6 NIV).

Pointing such things out remains the task of the true minister of the word.

Indeed, if it is true that we live "in later times," we must expect an even greater increase in teachings that are inspired by demonic spirits. So again sound doctrine and teaching are desperately needed lest people abandon the faith and be spiritually destroyed. How important is Paul's word: "Teach (and keep on teaching) what befits sound doctrine!"

b. The Importance of Scripture. I earlier referred to the public reading of Scripture as the background for the ministry of the word. Now I comment on Scripture as the *basis* for everything the minister of the word says. Public reading is valuable, but even more important is the continued reliance on it in the speaking of God's truth. To read Scripture aloud and then to pass on to other unrelated things in preaching and teaching is not to be a true minister of the word. Scripture is background, but also, and primarily, it is the substance and norm of what is to be said. Scripture alone contains the basic truth to be set forth.

Let us note several things Paul said to Timothy about the truth of God's Word. First, Paul says, "Retain the standard[108] of sound words which you have heard from me…. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure[109] which has been entrusted to you" (2 Tim. 1:13–14 NASB). Of course, there were no New Testament Scriptures when Paul wrote Timothy, but Timothy had been taught the "sound words" of the apostle Paul. These were to be the standard of Timothy's teaching and a treasure to be carefully guarded. "O Timothy," Paul cries in another place, "guard what has been entrusted to you" (1 Tim. 6:20).

Since Timothy's time, the church has been blessed to have Paul's words and other apostolic writings in the New Testament. They are the standard, the norm of all teaching, and must be carefully guarded as a treasure. "O church, O teacher, guard what has been entrusted to you!" Paul's words are words of truth so that Timothy, the church, and all teachers of the word must be careful to guard and explicate faithfully the apostolic teaching.

It is significant that Paul also stresses the importance of the indwelling Holy Spirit for guarding the entrusted treasure. This counsel to guard implies that there will be persons who treat the treasure lightly, perhaps some will even disregard or distort it. Their standard will no longer be scripturally sound words but their own judgments and reflections. Whatever the case, it is urgent that ministers of the word rely on the Holy Spirit who dwells within to guard and protect this holy treasure of God's truth.

Since the Holy Spirit is the final Author of Scripture, and every true believer has the Spirit dwelling in him, there is strong inner resistance to any abuse of God's word. Only by the indwelling Spirit's wisdom and power can the teacher stand firm in protection and explication of the treasure of Holy Scripture.

Second, Paul says to Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately[110] the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15 NASB). It is one thing to have the treasure of God's word in Scripture; it is another to handle accurately and rightly that word of truth. This does not come easily. There is the call for diligence—"be diligent"—in study,[111] so that the one who ministers the word is first of all taught by God's Word. A teacher is a workman, and, like any other good workman, he must come forth with a good and approved product. In the case of the teacher, the approval is not from men but from God, the One whose Word is being studied and will be expounded. The accountability is *extremely* high.

Thus the minister of the word must accurately handle the word of God's truth. This means to avoid wrangling and quibbling about words,[112] disputing their truth. As one illustration of this, Paul later cites those who have "wandered away from the truth" by saying that "the resurrection has already taken place" (2 Tim. 2:18 NIV).[113] God's Word clearly teaches a future resurrection,[114] and those who quibble and argue about it can be destructive of people's faith. "Godless chatter"—which is what this amounts to—"will eat its way like gangrene" (vv. 16–17). This is the fatal damage wrought by godless teaching.

What is called for is *not* wrangling or disputing about words but rightly and accurately setting forth God's truth. This means careful study of each word in a given text of Scripture, recognizing the words in their larger context and being aware of the broader range of Scriptures that will help clarify the meaning of a given passage.[115] Then—and surely with the help of the indwelling Spirit—the minister of the word will set forth the truth of Scripture in such a way that listeners will be strengthened and blessed.

Third, Paul writes Timothy, "All scripture is inspired by God[116] and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16–17). Prior to these words, Paul reminded Timothy that from childhood he had been acquainted with "the sacred writings" (v. 15), that is, the Old Testament Scriptures. Then Paul adds the emphasis that all Scripture is inspired by God: it is basically not man's word but God's Word. "All scripture" now goes beyond the Old Testament. Paul himself speaks elsewhere of accepting his message "not as the word of men but as … the word of God" (1 Thess. 2:13), and Peter refers to Paul's letters as Scripture.[117] The Gospels, the Epistles, and the Book of Revelation are recognized to be the New Testament canon, and thus, along with the Old Testament, constitute "all scripture" that is divinely inspired.

Since all Scripture is given by divine inspiration, it is therefore "profitable[118]

for teaching." The minister of the word may fully depend on Scripture for everything that Paul next mentions—reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. Scripture thus makes him, as "a man of God,"[119] one who is "complete,[120] equipped for every good work." The complete teacher has his life and teaching thoroughly grounded in the inspired Word of God. Further, such a teacher has no need for other sources than the Scriptures:[121] by the Scriptures alone he is "complete" and thus "equipped for every good work."

c. Quality of Life. Next we consider the quality of life expected of one who is a minister of the word. Paul speaks at one point of Timothy being "a good minister[122] of Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 4:6). Let us observe some qualifications.

1. *Sincere faith.* Paul says to Timothy, "The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith" (1 Tim. 1:5). This is Paul's aim in all his teaching, and he charges Timothy to keep this same goal before him as he instructs others.[123] If the teacher is to inculcate this in others, he must likewise embody what he is teaching.

We look first at "sincere faith." Paul speaks highly of this quality in Timothy : "I am reminded of your sincere[124] faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you" (2 Tim. 1:5). Timothy had a genuine faith. He had been blessed by both a mother and a grandmother of faith. Indeed, as we have previously noted, Paul later refers to the fact that Timothy "from childhood" had been acquainted with "the sacred writings" of the Old Testament. Faith dwelt in those who instructed young Timothy, and now the faith was likewise *in* him.[125] Thus when it came to teaching about Christian faith, Timothy could speak as one who deeply and sincerely believed: faith was in him.

Paul also mentions "the faith" a number of times. He speaks of Timothy's being "constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:6 NASB). Faith refers here not so much to believing as it does to the body of faith of Christian truth (analogous to "the sound doctrine"). This is important also: not only to have faith dwelling within but also to be nourished constantly by the words, the truths of faith. By them one who teaches the faith will himself continue to grow and be strengthened.

The priority, however, lies with the minister of the word being himself a person of sincere, genuine faith. It is a faith in Christ, not simply of the mind but of the heart, a faith that comes from Christ Himself and is the inner reality of one's life. Without such an inward anchor of heart and soul, there is a lack of sincerity and genuineness in one who ministers the word of God. He may mouth

the words of faith, but they have no life-giving quality.

2. *A good conscience*. I have already quoted Paul's words about "a good conscience and sincere faith" (1 Tim. 1:5). He again links these two in a charge to Timothy about waging "the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience"[126] (1 Tim. 1:18–19). Faith is primary, but there is also the importance of a good conscience.

Paul spoke of himself as having a clear conscience: "I thank God whom I serve with a clear conscience" (2 Tim. 1:3). In his trial before the governor Felix, Paul declared, "I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man" (Act 24:16 NIV). Thus Paul speaks of what he personally knows by emphasizing to Timothy the importance of a clear, or good, conscience. It is interesting that Peter similarly writes, "Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are abused, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame" (1 Peter 3:16). A good conscience and good behavior are closely associated.

Conscience, according to Paul, exists in all people as an inward moral sense of right and wrong. Paul says elsewhere that the Gentiles have "the requirements of the law … written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them" (Rom. 2:15 NIV). Hence conscience is a kind of inner monitor, bearing witness to the rightfulness or wrongfulness of any action. The writer to the Hebrews says, "Let us draw near … with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience" (10:22). This has happened through "the blood of Jesus" (v. 19). Now the critical matter is to keep the conscience clear—that monitor of right and wrong—by walking in all good conscience.

It is urgent that one who teaches others maintain a good and clear conscience. This does not mean that the minister of the word will never do wrong (there is no complete sanctification in this life), but it does mean that he will be constantly striving to turn from evil and walk in the truth. If this is his continuing concern, even if there are failures now and then, the teacher will maintain a good conscience.

There is always the danger that min isters of the word will become involved in acts of moral turpitude that harm their ministry. Paul warns Timothy about the teachings of "hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron" (1 Tim. 4:2 NIV). Such people hardly recognize their own wrongdoing and can only mislead those they teach. A teacher's conscience may not have been that severely "seared," but his moral actions may constantly belie the truth of what he says.

Paul also speaks of some who have actually gone so far as to *reject*

conscience. Immediately following his words about "holding faith and a good conscience," Paul adds, "By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith" (1 Tim. 1:19). Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander (v. 20), the former being one who caused much trouble by teaching a past resurrection only.[127] It is significant that as the call of conscience was rejected, false teaching made its headway. Indeed, false teaching is frequently more the result of rejecting the call of conscience than of simply erring intellectually.

We much need to hear Paul today on the importance of a good and clear conscience. Far too many who are involved in preaching and teaching the word are walking in immorality. Sexual promiscuity needs particularly to be warned against, for many slip into it even though God's Word and their consciences testify against it. Before long their consciences are "seared," and gradually they "shipwreck" their own faith. Whatever the words they may continue to speak—however fervently, even sanctimoniously—they are bearers of death, not of life. If the ministers of the word do not keep a good conscience, there is little hope for them or for their people.

3. *Godliness.* What has been said about a good conscience leads to the importance of godliness in the teacher's life. Paul speaks of "the teaching which accords with godliness"[128] (1 Tim. 6:3), or "godly teaching" (NIV). It is teaching that springs from and promotes godly living.

Godliness is much to be desired. Paul speaks of it first in terms of all believers. He urges that prayer be offered for governing authorities "that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness" (1 Tim. 2:2 NIV). Paul next declares that "the mystery of godliness[129] is great" (1 Tim. 3:16 NIV), and then proceeds to outline a statement about the Incarnation: "He was manifested in the flesh … taken up in glory" (v. 16). Again, Paul says, "There is great gain in godliness with contentment" (6:6). In writing to Titus, Paul enjoins that believers "say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and … live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age" (Titus 2:12 NIV). Godliness is of signal importance for all Christians.

Now focusing on teaching, we observe Paul's emphasis that it be godly, hence coming from one who is living a godly life. This, however, does not come easily: it calls for exercise and training. Paul writes to Timothy, "Train[130] yourself in godliness" (1 Tim. 4:7). Then he adds, "While bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come" (v. 8). Paul does not discount bodily exercise and training. It is "of some value,"[131] but what is really important is training in

godliness. Paul later adds, “To this end we toil and strive” (v. 10).

Paul does not elaborate much on what this training is. However, after he speaks of “godliness with contentment,” Paul talks about “hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction” (1 Tim. 6:9), immediately adding, “For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil,[132] and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang” (v. 10 NASB). Although Paul includes all people in declaring that evil and ruin can follow from the love of money, it is particularly true of the minister of the word. Such craving for money may lead not only to his own destruction but also to that of many who sit under his instruction. Paul’s statement to Titus (previously quoted) in this context is now quite relevant: “Say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions.” Training in godliness demands a constant turning away from the worldly yearning for money and all other ungodly passions.

Paul also warns against spurious godliness. He speaks of false teachers “who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain” (1 Tim. 6:5). This is not a true godliness but an affected one, a kind of public piety that serves only to mask another end: personal gain. Paul also speaks about people “holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power” (2 Tim. 3:5 NASB). The form remains—a shell of godliness—but the power is far gone.

It is urgent that those who minister God’s word manifest a genuine godliness. This is not easy: the teacher, like an athlete, should be in daily training for strengthening and development. There will be difficulties, including attacks, from many. “Indeed,” says Paul, “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). Still, it is abundantly worth all effort, for in so living both the teacher and those who are taught by him will be richly blessed.

4. *Purity.* I have earlier quoted this statement of Paul: “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:5). Let us now give consideration to Paul’s stress on purity.[133]

Shortly after talking about training in godliness, Paul says to Timothy, “Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity”[134] (1 Tim. 4:12). In regard to purity, Paul later speaks of this concerning younger women: “Treat … younger women like sisters, in all purity” (1 Tim. 5:2). Both of these injunctions of Paul are addressed to Timothy as a young man, but they surely apply to all who lead and teach others. Exemplary speech and behavior, as well as total purity in relation to the opposite sex, are imperative for the minister of the word.

Next, in regard to purity, Paul charges Timothy, “Do not … participate in another man’s sins; keep yourself pure” (1 Tim. 5:22). There is always the danger of sharing in, and thus giving consent to, another person’s sinful actions, and thus forsaking personal purity. The minister of the word perhaps would not himself commit the sinful deed, but he feels less guilty if he simply goes along with another’s action. Paul’s charge: Don’t do it. Keep yourself pure!

In 2 Timothy, Paul speaks of purifying oneself. “If any one purifies[135] himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work. So shun [or ‘flee from’ NASB] youthful passions and aim at righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart” (2:21–22). Timothy, a man of God, is called upon to purify himself so that he will be ready for any good work that the Master of the house may assign him. Then Timothy with others can call upon the Lord with a pure heart and aim at, or pursue, righteousness, faith, love, and peace. Shun, flee from, youthful passions! Once again, although Paul is addressing Timothy as a young man, his words are applicable to all who minister the word. There is always the need to purify oneself, to flee every evil passion, and thus to be a consecrated and holy vessel for the Lord’s use.

It remains critically important that the minister of the word represent in himself a life that shows faith, purity of heart, and righteousness of action. The teacher must be an example before those whom he teaches. To be sure, like all believers, he will make mistakes at times, but this does not relieve him of the necessity of being a role model for others. The teacher must be truly a man of God.

5. *Love.* Now we arrive at the climax: love. Recall that Paul said, “The aim[136] of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith.” We have already discussed, in reverse order, sincere faith, a good conscience, and purity. If those virtues, along with godliness, are present in the minister of the word, genuine love can then issue forth.

Faith and love are closely connected. Paul says that, even though he had blasphemed and persecuted Christ, he received mercy: “The grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 1:14). The grace and mercy of Christ brought about in Paul both faith and love rooted in Christ. In 2 Timothy, Paul again refers to faith and love: “Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus” (1:13). Faith in Christ is primary, and out of the continuing realization of His mercy and grace, love for others should flow.

Love is the constant goal. Sincere faith, a good conscience, godliness of life, and purity of heart are all important attributes in the minister of the word. But the aim, the goal, must always be love. Indeed, without love the other qualities of life avail little. They come to fruition only in the expression of love.

This needs to be emphasized because there are some fine ministers of the word who exemplify the virtues mentioned, but have a certain coldness, even aloofness, in their teaching. They are godly and moral persons, but there is not a genuine outreach in love to other people. Perhaps they need to reflect again and again, as Paul did, upon "the grace of our Lord" that "overflowed" for them also and yearn to express something of that love to those they teach.

The end of our charge is love; it can never be anything else.

d. Ordination. Ordination means appointing and setting apart for a special ministry. In the New Testament Jesus Himself is described as "appointed" by God: "He [Jesus] was faithful to him who appointed him" (Heb. 3:2). In turn, Jesus appointed, or ordained, twelve disciples: "He appointed ['ordained' KJV) twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons" (Mark 3:14–15). Later "the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him" (Luke 10:1). Toward the end of His ministry Jesus said to His apostles, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed ['ordained' KJV] you that you should go and bear fruit" (John 15:16). In all of these cases the appointment (or ordination) was both the setting apart and giving authority to perform some special ministry.

Paul speaks of himself as appointed by Christ. In one of his conversion accounts, Paul quotes Jesus as saying, "I have appeared to you … to appoint you to serve and bear witness" (Acts 26:16). Similarly Paul writes to Timothy, "I was appointed ['ordained' KJV] a preacher and apostle … a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth" (1 Tim. 2:7). Paul's appointment, or ordination, was mediated through the laying on of hands by Ananias, who was told by the Lord in a vision to go to Paul ("Saul" at the time), "for he is a chosen instrument of mine" (Acts 9:15). After Ananias laid his hands on him (v. 17), Paul was as surely ordained for his ministry as any of the other apostles.[137]

Next we observe that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in the churches where they had been ministering: "They … appointed ['ordained' KJV] elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting" (Acts 14:23). Titus was asked by Paul to do the same thing in Crete. In his letter to Titus, Paul says, "The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint ['ordain' KJV] elders in every town, as I directed you" (1:5 NIV). It is clear, then, that elders were also ordained for their particular service in the

church.[138]

Now we come to Timothy and his ordination. This is particularly important because of his teaching office; it therefore has vital relevance for the practice of such ordination in church history as well as today.

The clearest reference to Timothy's ordination is in 1 Timothy 4:14, where Paul says, "Do not neglect your gift,[139] which was given you[140] through a prophetic message when the body of el ders[141] laid hands on you" (NIV). Although the word "appointed" or "ordained" is not used regarding Timothy here, this seems clearly to be his "ordination."[142] Let us observe several points.

First, there was the impartation of a "special gift," or *charisma.* A *charisma* is a gift of grace,[143] not a natural talent or achievement. Such a gift therefore had been received by Timothy. What then was its nature? The answer seems clearly to be the gift of preaching and teaching. For immediately prior to the admonition "Do not neglect your gift," Paul had said, "Attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, to teaching" (1 Tim. 4:13). Also a little after that Paul writes, "Take heed to yourself and to your teaching" (v. 16). Thus, the gift bestowed was the ministry of the word.[144]

Accordingly, there is some parallel to the gift Timothy received in his ordination with the gifts or *charismata* of teaching and exhortation in Romans 12:7–8. Those gifts are linked even as preaching and teaching are in 1 Timothy. Actually "exhortation" and "preaching" are both translations of the same Greek word *paraklesis*; thus Timothy's gift might also be translated "exhortation and teaching." Therefore, what Timothy received in his ordination was the combination of two gifts of grace, which are also one, the gift of preaching/teaching, that is, the ministry of the word.

Now looking again at Timothy's ordination, we observe that the first and altogether essential point is that the office of ministry of the word, indeed the whole preaching/teaching office, is *a gift of God's grace.* A person may surely prepare for it—indeed there could be years of preparation—but ultimately the office comes as a gift of grace. This means that there can be no claim to have earned it or merited it: it is wholly the gracious gift of God.

Second, the gift was bestowed on Timothy through *prophetic utterance.* Such utterance was doubtless inspired by the Holy Spirit and occurred while Timothy was being ordained.

A significant parallel to this event may be found in the commissioning of Paul and Barnabas[145] for missionary work. According to Acts 13, in the church at Antioch "there were prophets and teachers" (v. 1), including Paul and Barnabas,

and “while they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’” (v. 2). After further fasting and praying, “they laid their hands on them and sent them off” (v. 3). What “the Holy Spirit said” was probably an utterance by one of the prophets present, and as such it clearly stated that the Holy Spirit was calling Paul and Barnabas to be set apart for missionary activity. It was not that Paul and Barnabas were unaware of this call on their lives, but this was the moment when through prophecy the Holy Spirit commissioned them for their upcoming work. In a similar manner the Holy Spirit undoubtedly spoke through prophecy concerning the work to which Timothy was being called.

Actually there seems to have been more than one prophecy in Timothy’s case. Earlier in his letter to Timothy, Paul writes, “This command [or ‘charge’] I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience” (1 Tim. 1:18–19 NASB). These prophecies in all likelihood refer to the occasion of Timothy’s ordination when there was prophetic utterance. Moreover, the prophecies at that time were of such significance that Paul could call them to Timothy’s remembrance as background for the charge he was delivering to him.

Now let us try to view more clearly the scene at Timothy’s ordination. Probably, as in the commissioning of Paul and Barnabas, there was worshiping and fasting. If so, this could have meant some extended time of preparation by both Timothy and those who were to ordain him. Then when the moment came for the “setting apart” to occur, various prophecies came forth. They may have included words relating to the responsibilities in Ephesus that Paul was later to assign him. Those prophesying may even have said something like this, in Paul’s own words: “Fight the good fight” (1 Tim. 6:12); thus, be bold and courageous. In his second letter to Timothy, just after speaking again about “the gift [*charisma*] of God” that was within Timothy, Paul adds, “God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control” (1:6–7). Perhaps, therefore, prophetic utterance reminded Timothy at his ordination that, whatever his natural inclinations,[146] God’s *charisma* woyld be manifest in these various graces of the Holy Spirit: power, love, and self-control. Such prophecies as these would have so much significance that, as we have observed, Paul later refers to them in his own words to Timothy.

All of this has much relevance for us today. At the ordination of a minister of the word there should be opportunity for prophetic utterance. There may be preparation through prayer and fasting, perhaps also a solemn charge to the candidate; but when the actual moment of ordination is at hand, prophecies may

be freely given. For it is through prophecy that God speaks directly in human words. For the one being ordained such words can have memorable significance for years to come. Unfortunately, many churches have almost totally overlooked, or looked down upon,[147] prophesying, and have allowed other ordination procedures to take its place.

How much we need to recover the vital significance of prophetic utterance that Paul and Timothy knew and experienced!

Third, the climactic moment in ordination was the *laying on of hands by the body of elders.* The body of elders, or the presbytery,[148] acted as a unit.

Paul apparently functioned alongside the elders in laying hands on Timothy, for he says in 2 Timothy 1:6: "I remind you to rekindle the gift *[charisma]* of God that is within you through[149] the laying on of my hands." There was surely only one occasion of laying hands on Timothy, and the same word *charisma* is used in both 1 Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 1:6. Hence it must have been Paul *with* the elders[150] —in Peter's language as a "fellow elder" (recall the phrase in 1 Peter 5:1)—although in 2 Timothy 1:6 Paul mentions only himself.[151] Paul by no means suggests that Timothy's ordination required his apostolic authority and presence, because he makes no reference to himself in 1 Timothy 4:14. It was the local body of elders who did the ordaining. Timothy was ordained "when the body of elders laid their hands on [him]" (NIV). To sum up: his ordination occurred *through* and *with* the laying on of hands.

Next we need to recognize the importance of the laying on of hands. In both accounts of Timothy's ordination, the laying on, or imposition, of hands is stated. Prophecy is not mentioned by Paul in referring to his own participation, as if to say that while prophecies are indeed valuable, the critical action is the imposition of hands. Prophetic utterance assured Timothy of his call to the ministry of the word, but it was by the laying on of hands that Timothy was placed in office.

We may ask, Did the laying on of hands automatically convey the gift of ministerial office to Timothy? The answer must be no. Three other factors need to be borne in mind. The first is *faith.* Timothy was a man of genuine faith. Immediately before Paul wrote to Timothy about rekindling the gift of God that was in him through the laying on of Paul's hands, he wrote the words earlier quoted, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you" (2 Tim. 1:5). A sincere faith dwelling in Timothy was the human context for the *charisma* of special ministry to be received. Recall that the statements in both 1 Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 1:6 speak of the charismatic gift as being within

Timothy. Because Timothy was a man of sincere inward faith, the gift could likewise be received within. Second, there was the activity of a *valid ordaining body*, namely the elders of the church. The elders themselves had been ordained to office,[152] and because of this they could convey the gift of special ministry to others. This does not mean that other members of the congregation were not present for the ordination—indeed, some of the nonelders may have been the very ones who spoke prophecies—but the ordination itself occurred only through previously ordained elders. Third, there was the all-important *operation of the Holy Spirit.* That prophetic utterance occurred was in itself evidence of the Spirit's presence, for prophecy is one of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit.[153] Remember that in the commissioning of Paul and Barnabas the Holy Spirit spoke through prophecy; doubtless the same thing occurred in Timothy's ordination. But the critical matter was not so much prophetic utterance itself but what this utterance implied, namely, that the Holy Spirit, the inspirer of prophecy, was Himself actively on the scene. The ultimate validation of Timothy's ordination was the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

Let us briefly reflect on the three matters just mentioned. For a valid ordination to occur the candidate must be an individual of sincere faith. Without such faith the whole procedure is null and void. One might speak of objective efficacy (through hands and the Spirit), but there could be no subjective appropriation. It would be ordination in name and rite only. Again, there must be the proper ordaining authority, namely, the body of elders, the presbytery. Whereas the presence of the congregation is important because it is the members whom the ordinand will serve, they do not participate in the laying on of hands. It is the body of elders[154] that has this particular responsibility. Finally, the action of the Holy Spirit is essential. While prayer and fasting may be needed for requesting God's grace in the Holy Spirit to be manifest,[155] we must recognize throughout that the Holy Spirit alone can confer the spiritual gift that makes ordination a valid and living experience. Come, Holy Spirit!

Let us note three additional points. First, while ordination occurs within the setting of a local church, and the one being ordained is usually installed there as minister of the word, the ordination is at the same time an action of and for the whole church of Jesus Christ. Thus he becomes an ordained minister of the word to serve the whole body of Jesus Christ. Timothy himself may have been ordained earlier in his home church at Lystra (see Acts 16:1),[156] but he is called by Paul later to serve the church in Ephesus. Second, in ordination a real conferring of grace occurs: there is a definite impartation of a gift, a *charisma*. It

is a "gift … given" (1 Tim. 4:14), namely, a gift for teaching, or ministering the word. Third, there is no need for further ordination. If it has been a valid ordination,[157] repetition is unwarranted and unnecessary. Ordination is for one's whole future ministry in the church.

On this last point, there is, however, the possibility of *neglecting* this gift of ministry. Paul writes, as we have noted, "Do not neglect your gift." Then he adds, "Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them" (1 Tim. 4:15 NIV). The ministerial office, while a definite *charisma* from God, is no guarantee of automatic success. Rather it is an office of high and sober responsibility that needs constant diligence and unremitting devotion. Neglect can—and often unfortunately does—happen, to the great detriment of both the minister of the gospel and his people.[158]

One further word: a *rekindling* of the gift may be needed. Even to Timothy, a man with rich indwelling faith, Paul felt constrained to write (as we have noted), "I remind you to rekindle[159] the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Tim. 1:6). Timothy had received the gift several years before,[160] but now it needed to be freshly stirred up and fanned into flame. The gift was not gone, but it was like embers burning low that needed to be rekindled into a fresh flame of ardor and zeal for his high calling. Paul's words are surely relevant to many ordained ministers today, who may feel that they are accomplishing little for the kingdom and wonder if their ordination means anything. Paul's word is very timely: "The gift, the *charisma*, is within you"; you need only to "rekindle the gift," the charismatic fire. Truly, the challenge of ordained ministry of the gospel can shine with renewed brightness and zeal.

3. Eldership

We move now to a consideration of the role of elders in the ministry of the church. The main scriptural references are 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9.

a. Background. 1. Old Testament elders. Elders are referred to over a hundred times in the Old Testament. In almost every instance the term "elders" is used in regard to Israel,[161] such as "the elders of Israel," the "elders of the people," the "elders of the city."[162] The elders were representatives of the people. Moses frequently called the elders together to hear God's word so that they could pass it on to their fellow Israelites.[163] On one occasion Moses gathered seventy of Israel's elders to share the burden of leading the people

(Num. 11:16–17). At first the elders had little or no governing power, but in time they were given authority as local magistrates.[164] The elders later also became involved in national affairs.[165] After the Exile the elders were active in rebuilding the temple and in local administration.[166] Throughout the Old Testament the elders played an important role in the life of Israel.

2. *Jewish elders.* In the New Testament Jewish elders are mentioned thirty-two times. The Gospels alone have twenty-four such references, and the Book of Acts has eight. The elders are frequently referred to as "the elders of the people"[167] —terminology similar to that of the Old Testament. Often the elders are spoken of in connection with the chief priests; for example, "the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to [Jesus]" (Matt. 21:23). The scribes are also often included; for example, "the chief priests and the scribes with the elders" (Luke 20:1), "the people and the elders and the scribes" (Acts 6:12). Together the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders composed the Sanhedrin, the high council of the Jewish nation.[168]

The Sanhedrin in some instances is referred to as "the assembly, or council, of the elders," with the chief priest and scribes as its two constituent parts: "the assembly of the elders[169] of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes; and they led him away to their council [*synedrion]"* (Luke 22:66). Paul speaks at one point of "the high priest and the whole council of elders"[170] (Acts 22:5).

In summary, on the national level Jewish elders are to be viewed from two perspectives. On the one hand, the entire high council, the Sanhedrin, is called the council of the elders. This probably had its origins in Moses' council of seventy elders, for the Sanhedrin was composed likewise of seventy members. On the other hand, the elders are depicted along with the chief priests and the scribes and are usually mentioned third. It was the priestly aristocracy first, the Pharisaic teachers of the law [the scribes] second, and the elders third. In all likelihood the elders represented influential lay families among the Jews.

Also the local synagogue had its own council of elders. It exercised general administrative oversight of the community. Such elders of the synagogue are mentioned in Luke 7:3–5. From this eldership the head of the synagogue was chosen. He was called "the ruler of the synagogue"[171] (Luke 13:14), not in the sense of having authoritative headship but of supervising the services, maintaining order, and so on.[172] Leadership often rotated among the elders without any one elder having superior authority. Moreover, the local council of elders was not hierarchically related to the high council of the Sanhedrin.

b. Biblical Data. There is no reference to church elders in the Gospels. For information on them we must turn to the Book of Acts and the Epistles.[173]

1. *Acts.* There are ten references in Acts to church elders.[174] Eight of these relate to elders in the Jerusalem church. They are first mentioned in connection with a famine in Judea: "The disciples [in Antioch] determined … to send relief to the brethren who lived in Judea; and they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul" (11:29–30). Evidently the elders formed an official church group that was responsible for handling this financial relief throughout Judea. It is interesting that no reference is here made to the apostles, though they were still in Jerusalem.[175] The elders seemingly constituted a distinct body with authority to act.

The apostles and elders, however, are linked together later at the Jerusalem council to debate and decide the circumcision issue. "Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question" (Acts 15:2). "The apostles and the elders," in that order, are mentioned together six times,[176] and seem to function in complete unity. For example, "the apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter" (v. 6); "it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas" (v. 22); "they[177] delivered to them [believers in various cities] for observance the decisions which had been reached by the apostles and elders who were at Jerusalem" (16:4). The apostles and elders not only worked in unity but also "the whole church" in Jerusalem participated in the choice of men to deliver the decision reached.

A further note of interest about the Jerusalem meeting: James, the brother of Jesus, presided. Peter, Barnabas, and Paul reported on their experiences among the Gentiles, after which James gave the deciding argument, beginning, "My judgment is…"[178] (Acts 15:19). A statement follows about "the apostles and the elders, with the whole church" (v. 22). James not only presided at the Jerusalem council but was already recognized as the leader in the Jerusalem church.[179]

The church elders are mentioned again later in Acts. Luke, discussing Paul's final trip to Jerusalem, states, "When we[180] had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James; and all the elders were present" (21:17–18). The apostles are not mentioned—only James and the elders. The apostles had by this time largely, if not altogether, departed from Jerusalem.[181]

Indeed, after Paul spoke to the elders about how God had blessed his ministry,

"they glorified God" (v. 20) and then advised Paul on his next steps (vv. 20–25). It is clear from this passage that the elders, with James as their leader, were fully in charge of the Jerusalem church.

The data in Acts make it clear that the elders, with James, constituted the governing body of the church in Jerusalem. The apostles, though functioning closely with the elders at the Jerusalem conference, were not the continuing church authorities. James is elsewhere called an apostle,[182] but he was not one of the Twelve. James did *not* function as an authority over the elders but worked in close relationship with them. He could be called a "first among equals,"[183] perhaps even a "fellow elder."[184] As at the Jerusalem council he undoubtedly presided at the regular meetings of the elders and often made decisions when fully supported by them. The elders, however, were the official governing body.

We may ask, How did certain people in Jerusalem become elders? The Book of Acts gives no answer. They are first mentioned in Acts 11:30, but there is no word about their origin. Of course there was the Old Testament record of the elders of Israel who likewise appear in the accounts of Moses without any detail of their background or service: they simply represent the people. Even closer at hand, in New Testament times every local synagogue had its council of elders, or presbytery, from whom (as we have noted) the head of the synagogue was chosen. These elders of the synagogue, I might add, were elected by co-optation–i.e., by action of the synagogue members—and then ordained by prayer and the laying on of hands. Although nothing is directly said about the procedure in regard to church eldership, it is possible that the same thing occurred in the church at Jerusalem.

A parallel to this could be the way in which the "deacons"[185] in Acts 6:1–6 came into office. They were first of all selected by the Christian community, and then appointed, or ordained, by the apostles with prayer and laying on of hands. This quite possibly was the procedure followed in the selection of the Jerusalem elders.

Now we proceed beyond the Jerusalem elders to consider the two other places in Acts where elders are mentioned. The first is particularly relevant to the previous question regarding the origin of elders. Paul and Barnabas had returned to their recently established churches in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to strengthen them and to appoint elders. In regard to the latter, "when they had appointed ['ordained' KJV] elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed" (Acts 14:23 NASB). The churches already existed, but so that proper leadership might continue, elders were appointed. Probably, as in the case of the "deacons," there

was congregational selection prior to the apostles' appointment.[186] In any event the elders became the acknowledged leaders of the local churches.

The other mention of elders in Acts outside the Jerusalem church is in regard to already-appointed elders in the church at Ephesus. Paul was on his final journey to Jerusalem and stopped at the port of Miletus, a short distance from Ephesus. "And from Miletus he [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church" (Acts 20:17). Upon their arrival Paul gave a farewell address, recommitting the elders to their guardianship of the church. Afterward he knelt and prayed with them. Then they wept and embraced him (vv. 18–38). These men had doubtless been elders for many years, but nothing is said in the text about the time and nature of their appointment. What stands out is Paul's faith in them and their deeply shared love.

2. *The Epistles*. Elders are mentioned ten times in the New Testament letters.[187] First to be noted are the Pastoral Epistles, Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus.

As we have earlier observed, Paul writes in 1 Timothy 4:14 about "the body of elders" or "the presbytery"[188] that laid their hands upon Timothy in his ordination.[189] Next Paul writes in 1 Timothy 5:17: "Let the elders who rule well[190] be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching." It is of particular interest that Paul depicts among the ruling elders a second group whose work is preaching and teaching. Hence there are elders who give general oversight[191] of the church as well as those who fulfill a preaching and teaching role. Next Paul writes, "Never admit any charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses" (v. 19). However, Paul instructs Timothy, "As for those [elders] who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear" (v. 20). Thus elders are not to be lightly charged with wrongdoing; two or three witnesses are needed to verify the allegation. On the other hand, because of their leading position in the congregation, any elder proved continuing in sin must be severely rebuked.

Paul writes to Titus about the need to appoint elders: "I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint ['ordain' KJV] elders in every city as I directed you" (Titus 1:5 NASB). Obviously churches already existed in these various cities, but there remained the need for elders. Appointing elders was necessary to set in order the church's life and activity. Thus the situation in regard to Titus was different from that of Timothy in Ephesus where elders were already appointed: The churches in Crete were still without elders, and Titus was

charged with the task of moving ahead with their appointment. Incidentally, nothing is said here directly about the method of their appointment;[192] the stress is on getting the job done.

The letter of James[193] refers to elders in regard to one who is sick: "Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up" (5:14–15).[194] Reference here is clearly to elders of the local church and their pastoral responsibility to visit and pray for the sick.[195]

Next, we turn to Peter, who refers to elders in his first letter: "I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder" (5:1). Peter is writing to "the exiles of the Dispersion" (1:1) in a number of provinces of Asia Minor, and at this point addresses the elders in their churches.[196] Note that, as mentioned earlier, the elders are not addressed as "*over* them" but "*among* them." It is also important to bear in mind that Peter, although an apostle, calls himself "a fellow elder."[197] Thus Peter the apostle does not view himself as occupying a position of ecclesiastical authority above the local church eldership.

Finally, we move on to John's second letter, which begins, "The elder to the elect lady and her children," and the third, which begins, "The elder to the beloved Gaius." "The elder" is not identified, but probably refers to John the apostle,[198] who may be calling himself "the elder" because of advanced years.[199] However, as earlier noted, Peter calls himself a "fellow elder" in relation to other elders. John may be doing the same in relation to his audience. Having said that, we are not able to gain any particular information from 2 and 3 John regarding the office of elder.

c. Nomenclature. Before proceeding further, let us summarize three basic names in the New Testament for the office of elder.

1. Elders are presbyters. Wherever "elders" are mentioned, the Greek word is *presbyteroi.* Moreover, the body of elders is the presbytery, the *presbyterion.*

2. Elders are overseers. The Greek word is *episkopoi.* When Paul charges Titus to "appoint elders" (Titus 1:5), he immediately adds the qualification that elders must be "above reproach" (v. 6 NASB). In the next verse Paul says, "The overseer[200] must be above reproach as God's steward" (v. 7 NASB). Paul is not here talking about another office; he is describing an elder from the perspective of his function as an overseer. The elder (or overseer) must be "above reproach."

That the elder and overseer are the same person is likewise apparent from these words of Paul to Timothy: “If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task” (1 Tim. 3:1 NIV). Then Paul immediately adds, “Now the overseer must be above reproach” (v. 2), the same language as used about the elder and overseer in Titus. The overseer is an elder.

This does not mean that elders function solely as overseers, for there is also the preaching/teaching function. We recall that in 1 Timothy Paul writes, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching” (5:17). *All* elders “rule,” that is, supervise and oversee, but some overseers have the additional responsibility of preaching and teaching.

This overseeing function of elders is pointed to in Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:1–2. We have earlier observed that Paul called to himself the elders of the Ephesian church and spoke to them about “the flock, among which the Holy Spirit [had] made [them] overseers” (NASB). The Greek word here for “overseers” is *episkopous.* Similarly, as we have noted, Peter speaks of the elders’ task as “exercising oversight” (1 Peter 5:2 NASB). The Greek word for “exercising oversight” is *episkopountes.* Elders, according to Paul and Peter, clearly have an episcopal function: they are overseers of God’s people.

3. *Elders are shepherds*. In the two passages just quoted from Acts 20 and 1 Peter 5, the shepherding function of elders is also stated. Following the words “has made you overseers,” Paul adds, “to shepherd the church of God.” The Greek word, as previously noted, for “to shepherd” is *poimainein*, from the noun *poimen.* Peter, before mentioning “exercising oversight,” exhorts the elders to “shepherd the flock of God among [them].” The Greek word is *poimanate.* Recall that Peter, who calls himself a “fellow elder,” had been commanded by Christ, “Shepherd My sheep” (John 21:16 NASB). Elders unmistakably are shepherds of the flock.

This brings us back to the gifts of the exalted Christ, which include “some as pastors” (Eph. 4:11). Since “pastors,” *poimenas*, is simply another form of *poimesn*, the words in Ephesians may equally well be read “some as shepherds.” Thus elders are shepherds or pastors, and the words signify the same function.

Here we must guard against any idea that pastors are other than elders. *Elders are shepherds, and shepherds are pastors.* Hence what has been said earlier about pastors as exercising oversight and guarding refers to the role of elders. Pastors are elders in the New Testament: whatever their name, they are shepherds of God’s people.

But now—lest there be confusion—we need again to make a *functional* distinction. Although all elders are overseers and shepherds, some among them also labor especially in preaching and teaching. Hence they may be designated as "preaching elders" or "teaching elders," or simply "ministers of the word." Moreover, because of this distinctive function within eldership, there may also be a particular ordination to the ministry of the word.[201] However, this does not place the minister of the word on a higher level than elders in general, because his very ordination is to eldership—a preaching/teaching eldership. Indeed, we may here recall that Timothy's ordination was by the body of elders, thus for specialized ministry within the office of eldership. All elders are ordained—not just teaching elders—but the latter ordination is for the more specific work of ministry of the word.

Thus we may speak of the eldership as serving on the one hand in an overseeing and shepherding, or pastoral, role, and on the other hand in a preaching and teaching, or ministry of the word, role. All are elders, whatever their function, and compose the one body of leaders that Christ has placed over and among His people.

d. Qualifications. In this section on qualifications of an elder we will focus primarily on those named by Paul in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9. It will be apparent that the emphasis lies on the elder's role as an *overseer.*[202] For 1 Timothy 3 begins, "If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task" (NIV); Titus 1:5 speaks first of appointing elders and then refers to one so appointed as "an overseer" in verse 7.

1. Character. In the two lists of qualifications one character trait heads both, namely, being *irreproachable:* "An overseer … must be above reproach"[203] (1 Tim. 3:2 NASB); "the overseer must be above reproach[204] as God's steward" (Titus 1:7 NASB).[205] This surely does not mean "sinless" (then who could qualify?), but it does mean solid in character so that reproach or censure cannot be brought against him. This is *the* basic character qualification of the overseeing elders.

2. *Domestic*. Next in importance is that the elder, or overseer, "must be … the husband of one wife" (1 Tim. 3:2, NASB; Titus 1:6). This statement by Paul may imply a number of things. First, the elder is to be *a married man*, so that with experience in family responsibilities he can better care for the church. Second, the elder should *not be a polygamist*, that is, having more than one wife. The NIV translation "the husband of but one wife" suggests this. Third, the elder must be

faithful to his wife throughout marriage, never indulging in extramarital affairs or sexual promiscuity of any kind. He is to be a "one-woman man." Fourth, the elder should *not be a divorced person*, who has remarried and thus been the husband of more than one wife. Fifth, the elder must be a man who has *not married again* after his wife's death; hence he must have been married only once. He is the husband of one wife for life.[206] Whether all of these are implied by Paul's statement "the husband of one wife" may be debatable,[207] but the main thing Paul is stressing is the irreproachable ("above reproach") quality of the elder's married ltfe. If the elder is off base here, whatever else may be said about his personal qualities (as described by Paul after that) has been undermined already. "The husband of one wife" is critical to all else.

Also, the elder's children must be "believers and not open to the charge of being profligate[208] or insubordinate"[209] (Titus 1:6). His children must have genuine faith, and there must be no charge of gross wildness and rebellion against them, for this would also bring reproach against the elder and his position in the church. Thus the elder "must manage[210] his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way" (1 Tim. 3:4). The reason is that "if a man does not know how to manage[211] his own household, how can he care for God's church?" (v. 5).

In summary, the domestic side—the elder and his wife, the elder and his children—must be in order if the elder is properly to serve the household of God.

3. *Personal*. In regard to the elder, I will list a number of both *positive* and *negative* qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy and Titus.[212]

Positive—1 Timothy 3:2, 7: temperate, sensible (or prudent), dignified (or respectable), hospitable, an apt teacher,[213] well-regarded by outsiders; Titus 1:8–9—a lover of goodness, upright, holy (or devout), self-controlled, holding firm the sure word as taught.[214]

Negative—1 Timothy 3:3: not addicted to wine (or any intoxicant), not violent (or pugnacious) but gentle, not quarrelsome (or contentious), not a lover of money, not a recent convert; Titus 1:7: not arrogant (or self-willed, overbearing), not quick-tempered, not greedy for gain.

Paul thus mentions eleven[215] personal qualities to be present in, and eight to be absent from, an elder. Each quality should be carefully pondered by the person who, in Paul's language, "sets his heart" on being an elder. Also, these qualities need to be carefully considered by those who are responsible for elders' selection and subsequent ordination.

One further word: all that has been said about qualifications for the elder who

is an overseer apply also to the elder whose primary responsibility is preaching and teaching. I have already discussed the quality of life that especially befits a person who is involved in the ministry of the word. Now I am emphasizing that all the qualifications for the overseeing elder must also be present in the teaching elder's life. For truly it is a high and noble calling to be a minister of the word of God.

e. Ordination. In regard to the ordination of overseeing elders, it is good to bear in mind a word of Paul to Timothy: "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands" (1 Tim. 5:22). That Paul is here speaking of elders is apparent from the context;[216] further, we have earlier observed Paul and Barnabas ordaining elders by the laying on of hands. Thus the warning is against moving too hastily to ordain elders. It is far better to delay ordination until there is assurance that the qualifications have been met.[217]

Who, then, does the ordaining, and what procedure is to be followed? We have earlier observed that Paul and Barnabas ordained the elders in various churches of Asia Minor and that Titus was instructed to ordain elders in Crete. Paul and Barnabas were apostles, and Titus was a kind of apostolic delegate carrying out Paul's charge. However, as we have previously observed, there was probably congregational participation in all these cases.[218] But now that Paul, Barnabas, and Titus have long departed the scene, do we need to look for apostles or some other outside authority to come into a local church today and, perhaps with congregational assent, ordain elders?

It is interesting that in turning from the New Testament to the document known as the *Didache* (or *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles)* that one of its last injunctions reads, "Appoint for yourselves bishops [i.e., overseers] and deacons[219] worthy of the Lord, men who are humble and not avaricious and true and approved" (15: l).[220] Since this document may date around A.D. 70,[221] it was written shortly after Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus.[222] What the *Didache* implies is that it was the responsibility of the various congregations to appoint, or ordain, their own overseeing elders. Apostles are also mentioned in the *Didache*,[223] but there is no suggestion that they were to do the ordaining. If churches today follow the example of the *Didache*, then the congregation itself may ordain.[224]

But in the event that a church already has elders, would it not be in order for them to ordain other elders?[225] This is surely possible, because elders represent the people. If nothing else, since there should be the laying on of hands, a smaller group would need to be involved. Another early church document, *First*

Clement, usually dated around A.D. 96, speaks about "the bishops and deacons" as appointed first by the apostles—the "bishops and deacons … were appointed by them" and later by others—"later on, by other reputable men with the consent of the whole church."[226] "Reputable men," however, does not necessarily mean elders—although they surely could have been such.

In summary, the ordination of overseeing elders is basically a local church function: "Appoint for yourselves." Elders already in office may surely participate in the ordination; however, other "reputable" persons may also be involved. Indeed, since the ordination of elders is done by the local church, the whole congregation (if not too large) could share in the laying on of hands. If this is done, there may be a heightened sense of the elders representing the whole community of God's people.

4. Auxiliary

In addition to those who serve as elders, we next consider the role of deacons and the ministry of women.

a. Deacons. 1. *Background.* The word "deacon" in Greek is *diakonos.* It basically means "servant." As such, Jesus Himself could be called *the* deacon. Jesus declared, "I am among you as one who serves"[227] (Luke 22:27); Paul writes, "Christ became a servant"[228] (Rom. 15:8). Paul describes himself and Apollos as "servants"[229] through whom the Corinthians came to believe (1 Cor. 3:5), and he speaks frequently of his fellow workmen as servants. For example, he refers to Timothy as "God's servant in the gospel of Christ" (1 Thess. 3:2), to Tychicus as "faithful servant[230] in the Lord" (Eph. 6:21 NIV), and to Epaphras as "a faithful servant[231] of Christ" (Col. 1:7 NASB). Indeed, in the broadest sense all Christians are servants. Jesus said about all who are His disciples: "If any one serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant[232] be also" (John 12:26). Further, the purpose of Christ's gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, is "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service"[233] (Eph. 4:12 NASB). It is apparent from all of these scriptures (and many more could be cited) that the theme of *diakonos* as servant pervades the Christian life.

2. *Scriptures relating to the office of deacon.* The two clearest references to the diaconate as a special office in the New Testament are Philippians 1:1 and 1

Timothy 3:8–10, 12–13.[234] In Philippians Paul writes, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons"[235] (NIV). Even though the same Greek word is used here that is usually translated "servants" elsewhere, it is apparent that the deacons are a different group from both "the saints" (the congregation at large) and "the overseers." In 1 Timothy Paul has just described the office of overseer, or elder, (3:1–7) and then continues, "Deacons[236] likewise…" (v. 8). Obviously deacons, again, are a separate category from overseers. The fact that deacons are addressed immediately after overseers in both passages suggests that they also have an important role to fulfill.

The commencement of the office of deacon is ordinarily viewed as occurring in Acts 6:1–6. Some of the church widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food; therefore, the twelve apostles called together the body of believers and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables" (v. 2). "To serve tables" is literally "to deacon[237] tables." The congregation, accordingly, was told to choose seven men whom the apostles would "appoint to this duty"[238] (v. 3). After the seven had been selected (Luke does not say how), they were set before the apostles who "prayed and laid their hands upon them" (v. 6). Although these men are not directly called deacons, their task was the serving, or "deaconing" of tables, thus the assistance of the apostles in a practical matter of the young church's life.

Two other texts in the New Testament may have a broader reference to deacons: Romans 12:7 and 1 Corinthians 12:28. In regard to Romans I have previously discussed the charismatic gifts of Romans 12, which include service —"if service, in his serving"[239] (v. 7 NASB)—and noted that such a gift is basically functional rather than official.[240] However, it is quite possible that the operation of this gift of grace might prepare someone for an appointment to the office of deacon. In 1 Corinthians 12:28 Paul lists various appointments including "helps": "God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps,[241] administrations, various kinds of tongues" (NASB). The word "helps" set in the context of appointments, while not ceasing to be a gift, may refer more largely to the office of a deacon,[242] or the diaconate.

3. *Responsibility.* Taking Acts 6:1–6 as our guide, we may say that the basic responsibility of deacons is practical affairs. The deacons were elected to the duty of providing assistance to neglected widows, thus to practical ministry. Such ministry doubtless included both wise handling of food distribution and the monetary matters involved. In the language of 1 Corinthians 12:28, we may call

this the ministry of "helps"— helps that reach out in loving assistance to meet various kinds of practical needs.

It may be that Paul greets the deacons along with the overseers in his letter to the Philippians because of his later statement about the church's partnership in giving and receiving: "When I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only; for even in Thessalonica you sent me help once and again" (4:15–16). This financial help was likely due to the work of the deacons.

The office of deacon, the diaconate, is closely associated with that of overseer, or elder. It is not an office of oversight or teaching but of practical service. Accordingly, it is an auxiliary office to that of elder, carrying forward the practical side of the overall responsibility of the eldership.

4. *Qualifications*. We may first note that, according to Acts 6:3, deacons are to be "men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom." Their reputation should be good because they deal with practical matters, including monetary. Also, they should be Spirit-filled men who likewise are full of wisdom. The practical affairs of the church call for the Spirit's anointing so that the deacons' wisdom is more than worldly. What they do should be under the wise direction of the Holy Spirit.[243]

Next we turn to 1 Timothy 3:8–10 and 12–13. Here, as was done in the case of the overseers, we will list the given qualifications for deacons.

1 Timothy 3:8–10: serious (or worthy of respect), not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for gain, holding fast the mystery of the faith (the deep truths of faith) with a clear conscience, irreproachable (having so proved themselves).

1 Timothy 3:12–13: the husband of one wife, good managers of their children and household.

Observe that the same high character qualification required of elders—of being irreproachable—must likewise belong to deacons. However, as the Scripture reads, candidates for the office must "first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach" (1 Tim. 3:10 NASB). Such testing was not mentioned in regard to an overseer (elder) perhaps because he was not to be "a recent convert" (recall v. 6). Deacons, however, might be newer Christians and their character less well known, thus they need further testing or proving.[244]

In their domestic life there is the same requirement for deacons as for elders—that they be "the husband of one wife"[245] and their home life in good order.

The qualifications given for deacons are largely negative—in regard to the

tongue, drinking, and money—and are particularly important for those whose responsibilities largely involve practical matters. Double-talk, addiction to wine, covetousness of money—all such will critically affect the outgoing service of deacons.

It is interesting that the qualification for the overseer of being an "apt teacher" is not required of deacons. However, deacons must be deeply committed to the Christian faith, holding it fast with a clear conscience.

A final word on the qualifications of deacons: They obviously must not be less spiritual or less moral than elders. To be sure, many more qualifications are listed for elders than for deacons, but none imply fewer spiritual and moral requirements. Both elders and deacons must be godly persons.

5. *Ordination.* As we have observed, the "table-deacons" of Acts 6, after their selection by the church, were ordained by prayer and the laying on of the twelve apostles' hands. It is important to bear in mind that the congregation, *not* the apostles, did the selecting.

Here the same basic procedures for ordination of deacons as discussed in regard to the ordination of elders may be followed.[246] The prayer and laying on of hands remains a congregational responsibility, whether done through elders or other congregational representatives.

b. Ministry of Women. In the same passage where Paul discusses the office of deacon, he interjects this statement: "The women[247] likewise must be serious, no slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things" (1 Tim. 3:11). This statement is both preceded by (vv. 8–10) and followed by (vv. 12–13) specific words about deacons. Thus it seems apparent that "the women" are also deacons, or deaconesses.[248] Paul could not have said "deaconesses" because there was no such separate word in Greek;[249] however, the word "women" in this context with deacons conveys the idea of deaconesses.

The diaconate therefore may include both men and women. The first qualification listed for deacons—that they "be serious" (1 Tim. 3:8)—is likewise stated for the women (v. 11). The other qualifications for the women deacons —"no slanderers [or 'scandal mongers'], but temperate, faithful in all things"—except for slander, parallel what is said of the deacons in verses 8 and 9—"not addicted to much wine" and holding "the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience." Thus there are essentially the same qualifications for deacons and deaconesses.

The work of women deacons, then, like that of the deacons, is basically

practical ministry. In a third-century book of church order called the *Didaskalia Apostolorum*, the deaconesses are described as "assistants to the clergy with baptizing of women, ministers to the poor and sick among women, instruction of women catechumens, and in general intermediaries between the clergy and women of the congregation."[250] Surely there continues to be a need for similar ministry today.

Deaconesses, however, should not constitute a kind of third order or office in addition to elders and deacons.[251] For they are also deacons, women deacons, and therefore a part of the one church diaconate. This means also that they should be ordained just as the men are. Although their tasks may somewhat differ, they are fully deacons.

Following Paul's words about women deacons, we note that later in his letter Paul has much to say about widows (1 Tim. 5:3–16). At the outset, Paul writes, "Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age" (v. 9). Paul seems to be referring to a special list of older widows in the church. To be on the list—besides the age requirement—a widow must have been "the wife of one husband; and she must be well attested for her good deeds … brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the feet of the saints, relieved the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way" (vv. 9–10). This graphically demonstrates Paul's teaching on the ministry of women in terms of practical content.[252] Also, although the earlier ministry of such widows may have been particularly related to other women, it includes a wide range of ministry to many kinds of needs.

Next we observe Paul's words to Titus about older women: "Bid the older women … to be reverent in behavior, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, and so train[253] the young women to love their husbands and children, to be sensible [or 'self-controlled'], chaste, domestic [or 'working at home'],[254] kind, and submissive to their husbands, that the word of God may not be discredited" (2:3–5). It is interesting that here Paul says similar things about the older women as he said in 1 Timothy 3:11 about the deaconesses not being "slanderers, but temperate"; only here the language is "not to be slanderers or slaves to drink."[255] But, and this is of particular relevance to the ministry of women, Paul here adds that they should "teach what is good." This is detailed through their training of younger women in a number of ways. Older women have a special ministry to young women that no one else —including ordained ministers of the word, overseeing elders, and male deacons —can fulfill. Because of their years of experience in marriage (marriage being

presupposed), they can teach and train—counsel, advise, spur on—younger married women in all domestic matters, including proper submission to their husbands. When these older women teach the younger to so conduct themselves, the word of God will not be discredited but honored.

To sum up thus far: Paul depicts the ministry of women in the three passages noted to include "faithfulness in all things" (1 Tim. 3:11), "good deeds" in many practical ways (1 Tim. 5:10), and teaching "what is good" to younger women about their way of living (Titus 2:3–5).

Now for the sake of brevity I will delineate and summarize various ministries of women in the New Testament.

1. Financial support

Luke 8:3: that speaks of a number of women who traveled with Jesus and the apostles and "provided for them out of their means" (cf. Mark 15:40–42).

2. Witnessing to the gospel

John 4:39: the woman of Samaria—many "believed in him because of the woman's testimony" (cf., e.g., Acts 1:8, 14).

3. Homes open for prayer and worship

Acts 12:12: "the house of Mary … where many were gathered together and were praying." Also Colossians 4:15: "Nympha and the church in her house."

4. Good deeds and charity

Acts 9:36: "Tabitha [Dorcas] … was full of good works and acts of charity" (recall 1 Tim 5:10—a widow "must be well attested for her good deeds, as one who has … devoted herself to doing good in every way").

5. Hospitality

Acts 16:15: Lydia's hospitality to Paul and his companions—" 'Come to my house and stay.' And she prevailed upon us" (cf. 1 Tim. 5:10: "one who has shown hospitality").

6. Joint ministry with husband

Acts 18:26: "Priscilla and Aquila … took him [Apollos] aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately" (NASB) (cf. 1 Cor. 16:19: "Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house").

7. Deaconess (or servant) of the church Romans 16:1–2: "Phoebe, a

deaconess [or ‘servant’—*diakonos]* of the church … helper of many” (recall 1 Tim. 3:11: “The women… ,” probably deaconesses).

8. Female co-workers (possibly sisters)

Romans 16:12: “Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa.”

9. Believing wives accompanying missionary husbands

1 Corinthians 9:5: “Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?” (NASB).

10. Activity of praying and prophesying

1 Corinthians 11:5: a “woman who prays or prophesies” (cf. Acts 1:14: praying believers, including “the women and Mary the mother of Jesus”; 2:17: “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy”; also Acts 21:9: Philip’s “four unmarried daughters, who prophesied”).

11. Team ministry with men

Philippians 4:2–3: “Euodia and … Syntyche … women [who] … have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers” (cf. Rom. 16:3: Prisca and Aquila—“my fellow workers in Christ Jesus”).

12. Teaching and training of younger women (discussed earlier).

It is apparent that a wide range of ministries was open to women in the New Testament and by projection should continue in the church. By a careful study of these twelve areas of ministry and reflection on their contemporary relevance, we can see the multiple ministry opportunities available for women. Unfortunately many of our churches have scarcely begun to recognize and activate the manifold ministries of women.

From the list of the twelve areas of ministry, we observe that women are largely depicted as functioning in supportive, cooperative, and auxiliary roles. Financial assistance, homes open for prayer and hospitality, joint and team ministries, etc., illustrate such roles. There is no suggestion of women being primary leaders, or in positions of authority: they are workers in the Lord, helpers of many, and may share a ministry without being in charge of it.

I must add a further word about the distinctive importance of women’s ministries. Although there is much overlap with what men are called to do, the role of women by virtue of their own feminine nature cannot be identical with

that of men. *What is needed in our churches is the further activation of women's ministries and not their involvement in male roles.* By God's determination, according to Paul, "the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3, NIV); and thus a woman must not in her ministry seek to take the leadership (= headship) or assume male authority, thereby violating her own nature. This applies not only to a married woman (whose head is her husband); it also relates to every woman because of her creation as "a helper"[256] (Gen. 2:18) for man. In Paul's words, "Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man" (1 Cor. 11:9). Hence, there is a natural limitation. Woman must not, especially in the church (with its knowledge of Scripture), presume in her ministry to assume man's God-given authority.[257]

Here we may return to Paul's letter in 1 Timothy. Paul writes, "I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man" (2:12 NASB).[258] Obviously Paul is not excluding women from all teaching, because, as we have observed, he speaks of the older women teaching "what is good." However, their teaching is directed to women, not to men. Nor do Paul's words rule out the activity of a Priscilla and Aquila who, as we have noted, "took him [Apollos] aside and explained the way of God more accurately" to him; however, Priscilla did not presume to do this on her own.[259] In 1 Timothy 2:12, what Paul is prohibiting women from doing is teaching the Christian faith[260] in the setting of the church[261] and thus in a context where men are present. Such teaching is out of order: it is the exer cise of authority over men.[262] Rather, in church, as Paul says immediately prior to his words about not allowing a woman so to teach, "let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness" (v. 1 1).[263] This means readiness to learn in silence rather than to teach, thereby to be in submissiveness to the proper place of male authority.[264]

To further emphasize this point Paul adds that "Adam was formed first, then Eve" (v. 13); hence the priority of authority, including teaching, belongs to men. Paul relates this to the church and thereby declares the impropriety of women occupying a superior teaching role.[265]

We may now refer again to the scriptural fact that church elders have the official responsibility of overseeing and instructing the congregation. To them and them alone belongs authoritative teaching in the church. Since an elder is male ("the husband of one wife"), for a woman to step into the role of an official teacher in church is to exceed her God-given authority. It is significant that just after the section in 1 Timothy 2 where Paul limits women's teaching he proceeds

to speak about the qualifications of an overseer or elder (3:1–7) and these qualifications include being an "apt teacher" (v. 2). Thus Paul's basic reason for women not being permitted to do authoritative teaching is their nonelder status. Such teaching—"apt teaching" as well as ruling—belongs to the office of elder.[266]

It should be added with emphasis that the negation of authoritative oversight and teaching by women in no way rules out women as teachers: it simply limits their sphere of operation. As I mentioned before, for them to teach other women is surely in order, and by implication that includes teaching young people and children. Teaching may be done by a woman nonofficially with her husband (recall Priscilla and Aquila),[267] for in so doing she is not in a position of superiority. Since Paul speaks of certain women (Euodia and Syntyche) as being among his "fellow workers," this suggests team ministries that include women whether or not they are in certain teaching roles. Indeed, there is no Pauline prohibition of women teaching outside the official church context of public worship (where elders carry oversight and teaching authority) even if that includes the teaching of men.[268] What, then, about women proclaiming the gospel? We have already noted that the Samaritan woman so bore witness that many came to faith, and that, according to Acts 8:4, "those [believers in Jerusalem] who were scattered went about preaching ['evangelizing'] the word." All believers are called upon to bear witness, to proclaim the gospel to the lost, hence to evangelize. Such proclamation of the gospel is not the same as authoritative oversight and teaching[269] in a local congregation and is therefore the province of both men and women.

One further point: women may freely minister in charismatic gifts. I have already spoken of the activity of prophesying. Peter's message on the Day of Pentecost, announcing the fulfillment of Joel's words "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy … my men-servants and my maidservants … shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17–18), opens the door wide for ministry in this gift. Moreover, there is no biblical reason to exclude women from any of the other *charismata* mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 or Romans 12:6–8 including, for example, word of knowledge and teaching. None of the *charismata* represent official church ministry,[270] and thus may operate through the total church, men and women alike. Women may be used in some gifts more than others, but the *charismata* are open to all.

Now a final word regarding women in ministry. The fact that some areas are closed to them by no means suggests that women are inferior to men. The issue is not equality of being but distinction of authority and practice. Even as Christ

is equal to God the Father, but also is subordinate, not inferior, to Him; so is woman to man.[271] Paul also speaks of equality in terms of redemption: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). However, equality in salvation and in the unity that this brings about does not abolish creaturely distinctiveness.[272] Male is still male and female female. Christian man and woman, one in Christ, should all the more recognize and rejoice in the God-given positions of each and minister accordingly. Such ministry will indeed reflect the way of Christ Himself.

I close by emphasizing the manifold ministries of women. There is much need in our churches today for fresh reflection on the abundance of opportunities that should be available to women. As we have seen, the New Testament itself affords a wide range of examples that can give further impetus and guidance. Surely when women begin to fulfill their many roles, the church is all the more richly blessed.[273]

III. GOVERNMENT

In this concluding section we deal with the government of the church. What is the New Testament picture of how the church is to be governed? I have touched on this in earlier pages; here I will draw some of these reflections together and add further details.

A. Autonomy of the Local Church

We begin with the glad affirmation of the one church of Jesus Christ throughout the world. The church includes people of all races, languages, and cultures. Although there are many denominations, there is and can be only one church. It is "the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church" of all times and places.[274]

This universal church is invariably the gathering of believers in a particular place. It is the one church in individual expression. The local church is not simply a part of the whole church: it is the church of Jesus Christ.[275]

Christ made reference to the church twice in the Gospels: the first was to the universal church, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18); the second was to a local gathering of believers, "Tell it to the church" (Matt. 18:17). Christ's purpose is to build His church as bodies of believers throughout the world.

Thus in the New Testament we see individual churches coming into being. There is "the church in Jerusalem" (Acts 8:1), "the church at Antioch" (Acts 13:1), "the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2), and the church in many other locales. It may even be a house church, but such is still wholly a church—not just a part of some larger church body. The church is sometimes referred to in the plural: "churches"—for example, "the churches of Macedonia" (2 Cor. 8:1), "the churches of Galatia" (Gal. 1:2), and "the churches of Christ in Judea" (Gal. 1:22). These plural references make clear that the church consists of individual churches. This is shown also in the Book of Revelation, which is addressed "to the seven churches that are in Asia" (1:4). Note that it is not to the church of Asia but to the churches in Asia. Further, Christ speaks to each of the seven churches individually (chapters 2–3).

Accordingly, we refer to the autonomy of the local church. Each church, while under the lordship of Jesus Christ, operates in terms of its self-government and in distinction from all other churches. There cannot properly be the rule of one church over another. Of course, there may be a "mother church" such as the one in Jerusalem, but it does not exercise arbitrary authority over other churches. In the one recorded case in Acts where certain decisions were reached by the Jerusalem church council regarding the Gentile churches (Acts 15), both apostles and elders were present (hence a unique situation). But there is no record of further meetings or decisions; Jerusalem was not "headquarters" for all the other churches.

Further, there is no bishop or other church official over a number of churches. As we have seen, the word "bishop" in the New Testament is simply another translation for *episkopos*, and refers in every case to a local church official. Recall, for example, Paul's salutation in Philippians: "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops [or 'overseers'—*episkopois*] and deacons" (1:1). At the Jerusalem council James presided and delivered the judgment (Acts 15:19) that prevailed. But James did not presume to be an "overseer" for other churches; nor did he travel about to meet with local elders and churches to give advice and direction. Nor is there any reference to either Peter or Paul ordaining individual bishops to succeed them in office. The most that can be said is that Paul participated in the ordination of Timothy to serve as a teaching elder in Ephesus, and Titus was charged by Paul not to be a bishop but to appoint bishops (also called elders) in the churches of Crete. The word *episkopos* in the singular does appear in 1 Timothy 3:1: "If any one sets his heart on being an overseer. (NIV); however, this is clearly a title for the office and does not imply that one person holds it. Bishops in the New Testament are invariably local church officials;[276] they are the overseeing elders.

We also note that there is no presbytery above the local church. The one New Testament reference to the presbytery relates to Timothy's ordination through "the laying on of hands by the presbytery" (1 Tim. 4:14 NASB). The presbytery *(presbyterion*) is "the body of elders" (NIV translation) in a local church. Indeed, there could not possibly have been an ordination through a higher presbytery or body of elders, for none existed. Hence not only could there not have been ordination by a presbytery above the local church (or even representing a number of churches), but also surely there could have been no supervision or control by such a body. The local presbyters, the elders, overseeing and teaching, made up the presbytery.

Thus, again, the local church is autonomous. There is no authority above it except the authority of Jesus Christ.

B. Plurality of Leadership

Leadership in the church is invariably plural. For example, in Hebrews 13:17 is this injunction: "Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account."[277] The leaders are unmistakably the elders or pastors who "keep watch."[278] To the leaders, *not* to a single leader, the church is enjoined to render obedience.

As we have earlier observed, in the Book of Acts there is invariably a plurality of elders. E.g., Paul and Barnabas "appointed elders … in every church" (14:23); "the apostles and the elders were gathered together" (15:6); Paul "called to him the elders of the church" (20:17). Elders—in the plural—are the leaders in the local church.[279] In the Epistles again there is plurality of leadership; e.g., "Let the elders who rule well" (1 Tim 5:17); "Appoint elders in every town" (Titus 1:5); "I exhort the elders among you" (1 Peter 5:1). There is *no* suggestion of one elder being over a church;[280] the leadership is always plural. There may be a duality in eldership—elders who, in addition to ruling, "labor in preaching and teaching" (1 Tim. 5:17).[281] However, again, no one elder, whether called pastor or teacher, overseer or minister of the word, is the leader of a given church. All the elders are ordained, set apart, to work as a unity under the one lordship of Jesus Christ.

Based on the New Testament pattern, a church is not fully in order until elders are in place. Paul charged Titus to "set in order" (Titus 1:5 NASB) the churches in Crete by appointing elders "in every town." Churches already existed there, but orderly church life calls for the rule of elders. Indeed, it may be better to delay for a while if qualified elders are not yet available; however, in time elders do need to be appointed. For a church to be without elders, or to allow one elder, the pastor, to assume the eldership to himself is out of order. This makes for one-man rule rather than a plurality of rule under Jesus Christ.

Deacons should not be in the position of leadership. Deacons in the New Testament are auxiliary persons who serve in various practical matters. They function in conjunction with the elders as church officers—"the bishops ['overseers'] and deacons" (Phil. 1:1). Deacons, however, are not essential to church order (Titus was charged only to appoint elders), but they do fulfill a valuable auxiliary role under the authority of the elders. This means, incidentally, that for a church to have deacons and not elders is also disorderly,

because the true biblical office of rule is totally absent. The deacons then may assume too much authority or—the other extreme—may be allowed too little under the rule of a pastor who has assumed the eldership to himself. Further, a board of deacons can function properly only when it operates under the authority of a board of elders. Without eldership a diaconate ought not even to exist. It is urgent that many churches today reflect seriously upon this New Testament plan of church order.

Now, again, in regard to plurality of leadership, the question may be raised as to whether this can really work. Does not one person, after all, have to be in charge? Will there not be occasions when there is such division of opinion that without one person rendering a final decision no headway can be made? Recall again the Jerusalem council, where numerous apostles and elders met on the very divisive question of Gentile circumcision. What happened? One man, James, presided and even delivered a judgment: "My judgment is…" (Acts 15:19), but he did not make the final decision. For later in a letter prepared by the apostles and elders to be sent to the Gentiles, they said, "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (v. 28). Thus, one man (like James) may preside—and probably should for the sake of order—but progress and unity do not result from his rule but from *the uniting action of the Holy Spirit*. When Christ through His Spirit truly guides the meeting, a consensus will prevail. Indeed, it is the very plurality of leadership that, rather than being a cause of confusion and division, makes for the highest unity, because no one person has the answer. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of unity and can bring out of the most difficult situation true harmony and peace.[282]

Plurality of leadership is the New Testament picture. With neither governing person nor governing body above another, it means that every body of elders is much like the original group of apostles, whose only authority beyond them was the Lord Himself. Serving Him unitedly is the high privilege of those He calls to leadership in His church.

C. The Lordship of Jesus Christ

This leads us to stress finally that Jesus Christ is the Lord of the church. All government therefore has its final authority in Him. He is the source of all rule in the local church. The church, while autonomous in relation to other churches, is theonomous[283] in relation to Christ; while under ordained leadership that leadership must be constantly led by His Spirit. Jesus Christ is the final and ultimate governor of the church.

Since Christ is also the head of the universal church—"He is the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1:18)—and thus is the Lord of each and every church, no local church ought to function in isolation from other churches. Rather, each should have a vital concern for the church worldwide. This means ongoing fellowship and cooperation with other churches, continuing effort to break down barriers that separate one church from another,[284] and, most of all, participating in every possible way in the fulfillment of Christ's prayer that "they may all be one" (John 17:21).

Hence, while no authority on earth is above the local church, this cannot mean dissociation from other churches. Quite the contrary, since Christ is also present among all churches that call on His name,[285] there must be outgoing and loving concern for one another. For example, the church in Antioch blessed the church in Jerusalem by sending financial relief during a famine (Acts 11:27—30);[286] the church in Jerusalem in turn blessed the church in Antioch (and other Gentile churches) by giving relief on the matter of circumcision (Acts 15). Accordingly, without any sacrifice of local autonomy, churches should freely and gladly enter into fellowship with, and provide help for, one another.[287] There is of course also the broader mission of every church to carry the gospel to all people. Christ, the Lord of the church, is concerned not only about unity among His people—that "they may all be one"—but also that they fulfill His commission—"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). Thus among those who have been given equipping ministries (discussed earlier), there are some who function today in apostolic, prophetic, and evangelistic ministries that are largely translocal. Indeed, such ministries are necessary for the missionary outreach of the church. A local church that does not go and send is failing the Lord of the church and is sadly turned in upon itself. However, we must guard against the extreme of apostles (essentially missionaries), prophets, and evangelists

functioning outside any local church connection, thus not being under its authority. Paul and Barnabas were commissioned by the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1–3) and reported back to the church there (Acts 14:26–27); Judas and Silas were sent out as prophets from the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:22, 32). Thus the outreach of the church, which is essential to the Lord's command and its own true existence, needs to be connected with the local church.[288] This is the biblical and proven way.

Every true church throughout the world is under the lordship of Jesus Christ, and as He walks in their midst,[289] governing and guiding, the church will fulfill His mission to all mankind.

[1]The Greek word translated in the kjv above as “minister” is a form of diakoned. “Serve” is now the more common translation.

[2]The Greek word is diakonos.

[3]The Greek word is diakonias.

[4]We will shortly consider the various roles of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers who “equip the saints for the work of ministry” (nrsv). Accordingly, while Paul an apostle is “a minister,” so likewise are “the saints” (believers), who are equipped by the apostles and others. Incidentally, the rsv translation (similarly kjv) of Ephesians 4:12-“for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry”-is misleading. When a comma is used (it is not found in nrsv, nasb, niv, or neb), the statement suggests that the equipping of saints is one thing, and the work of ministry (“the ministry” kjv) is another; therefore, ministry relates only to certain persons. No, all, whatever their position, are involved in ministry.

[5]Or “ministers” (as in kjv). The Greek word is diakonoi.

[6]The Greek word is doulous, literally “slaves” (as in nrsv).

[7]See the next section.

[8]Chapter 18-“Of the Ministers of the Church, Their Institution and Offices.”

[9]See “Ministry of the Word” infra, pages 181-96.

[10]Peter says basically the same thing shortly after his words about royal priesthood by declaring the purpose of this priesthood: “that you may proclaim the excellencies [or ‘praises’] of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9 nasb).

[11]David Watson has written, “The perfect priesthood of Christ means that there is therefore no need, and no room, for any priestly office within the church” (I Believe in the Church, 248). It is striking that Watson was an Anglican priest! Michael Harper, likewise an Anglican priest, says bluntly: “We need to drop the word ‘priest’ from our vocabulary and restore the ministry of the presbyterate to its rightful and scriptural position” (Let My People Grow, 38). If Anglican priests are saying such things, there is at least hope for some important changes!

[12]According to the Roman Catholic Council of Trent, Christ “instituted a new Passover, namely, Himself, to be immolated [offered in sacrifice] under visible signs by the Church through the priests” (Doctrine

Concerning the Sacrifice of the Mass: chap. 1). Priests thus are viewed as necessary to perform this continuing sacrifice of Christ.

[13]The Vatican II Council speaks of "the sacred power of their [priests'] order to offer sacrifice and to remit sin" (Degree on the Ministry and Life of Priests: chap. 1). Accordingly, a distinct order of priests is totally essential to the life of the church.

[14]Paul writes to the Romans, "I urge you … in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God" (12:1 niv). This is a priestly offering that may be made by all believers.

[15]Kleros may refer to "lot" in the sense of "casting a lot." Acts 1:26: "They cast lots [klerous]… and the lot [kleros] fell on Matthias." This meaning broadens to include the lot apportioned to someone, hence portion, share, inheritance.

[16]"Those allotted to your charge" (nasb). Note the idea of "lot" in "allotted."

[17]According to BAGD, under kleros, "[in] 1 Pt 5:3 the /cAfjpoi seem to denote the 'flock' as a whole, i.e., the various parts of the people of God which have been assigned as 'portions' to the individual presbyters ['elders'] or shepherds."

[18]This is a somewhat ambiguous statement. Clement had just been talking about the high priest, priests, and Levites and their "proper ministries" (40:5). So it could be argued that Clement is not applying this to the church. However, since immediately following his statement about the layman, Clement adds, "Let each of you, brothers, in his proper order … this shows at least a strong inclination to viewing a separate order for Christian laymen.

[19]One can only deplore the many titles assumed today by "the clergy" such as "Reverend," "the Right Reverend," "the Most Reverend," all the way up to "His Eminence" and "His Holiness." Incidentally, any use of "reverend" is inappropriate, for it means basically "worthy of reverence" (Webster), and God alone is of such worth (so Psalm 111:9: "holy and reverend is his name" [kjv]). Jesus, after talking about how the scribes and Pharisees loved to be called Rabbi, declared to his disciples: "But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers" (Matt. 23:8 nasb). How would Jesus react to the far more splendiferous titles "the clergy" delight to go by? Why not simply say "brothers," or "brother," as Jesus instructed us? This was surely the language of Jesus' followers in the New Testament (e.g., Peter addresses the apostles and

elders in Jerusalem as “brothers” [Acts 15:7 niv], and refers to Paul as “our beloved brother Paul” [2 Peter 3:15]; Paul refers to “our brother Apollos” [1 Cor. 16:12] and “our sister Phoebe” [Rom. 16:1], etc.). Using “brothers)” and “sister(s)” as titles for everybody might even promote a little more humility, and perhaps help to close the chasm separating God’s people.

[20]See Renewal Theology, 2:335-39, “Ministry in the Community.”

[21]See preceding chapter 4, pages 127-33.

[22]Paurs quotation is a paraphrase of Psalm 68:18. It is interesting that the psalm reads “received gifts” rather than “gave gifts.” “Gave” is found in neither the mt nor lxx of Psalm 68:18. F. F. Bruce (The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians, 342-43) speaks of Paul’s wording as “a targumic rendering” (see Bruce on this expression). In any event Paul is expressing the important point that the ascended and victorious Christ bestows gifts for the equipping of His church.

[23]The Greek word is katartismon. The kjv reads “perfecting”; niv, “to prepare”; neb, “to equip.” “Equipping” (or “equipment” rsv) is the best translation (see BAGD) here.

[24]The rsv places a comma here. Recall my earlier comment (n.4) that this is misleading.

[25]Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:28: “God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers. …” There is no direct reference here to evangelists and pastors; however, apostles, prophets, and teachers are in the same sequence as Ephesians 4:11. The point of immediate relevance is that in both texts, whether they are called gifts of Christ or God’s appointments, the action is wholly from the divine side.

[26]In the previous chapter I discussed the “functional” gifts of Romans 12:6-8, which are the exercise of charismata, gifts of grace. Such gifts are found throughout the body of Christ. The same is true of the “manifestation gifts” (also called charismata) of 1 Corinthians 12:8-10: all may share in them (see Renewal Theology, vol. 2, chaps. 13, “The Gifts of the Holy Spirit,” and 14, “The Ninefold Manifestation”).

[27]This would follow also from Paul’s list in 1 Corinthians 12:28, where no mention is made of pastors; thus Paul may be viewing “teachers” as pastors.

[28]For this twofold function see pages 178-81.

[29]The “original twelve apostles” actually included Judas. However,

Matthias later replaced him (see next paragraph) and so fills out the original group.

[30]Cf. Matthew 10:1-2 and Mark 6:30. All other references (twelve) to "the apostles" in the Gospels are found in Luke. "The Twelve" is a frequent expression (twenty-one times) in all four Gospels.

[31]The Greek word is apostoles, a form of apostole. Significantly, "ministry" (diakonia) and "apostleship" are joined together. Thus (as I have commented earlier) "ministry" is the basic purpose. Apostleship accordingly is a ministering office.

[32]"The apostles," referring to the Twelve, occurs twenty-eight times in Acts; in one instance, however, they are simply called "the twelve" (Acts 6:2). The one exception is Acts 14:14, which refers to "the apostles Barnabas and Paul." Incidentally, in both the Gospels and Acts the plural is always used-"apostles."

[33]See also Romans 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 1 Timothy 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:1; Titus 1:1.

[34]See a discussion of the theory of "apostolic succession" in chapter 2, pages 35-38.

[35]Matthias was chosen to be an apostle not as a successor to Judas but as a replacement: the apostleship (except for Paul) was then complete. This completeness is all the more confirmed by the fact that when James, one of the Twelve, was put to death by Herod (Acts 12:1-2), no successor was appointed.

[36]In church history there have been various restorationist attempts. For example, the Catholic Apostolic Church, founded by Edward Irving in the nineteenth century, claiming that God was restoring this foundational office of apostle in the church, established "the Restored Apostolate."

[37]There is some ambiguity here. "Except"-Greek ei me-may also be translated "only" (niv). Such a translation obviously excludes James from being an apostle. However, the more natural reading is "except" (so BAGD) as found in rsv, nasb, and neb (kjv has "save," meaning the same thing as "except").

[38]The Greek word is Iounian. The kjv reads as "Junia," hence feminine. Iounian can be read as the accusative of the feminine Iounia or as a contraction of the masculine Iounianus. BAGD prefers Iounianus or Junias: "Junias … probably short form of the common Junianus." This is more likely.

[39]The Greek word is episemoi. The kjv reads “of note”; rsv, “men of note”; neb, “eminent.” The nasb (like niv above) translates the word as “outstanding.”

[40]Silas, however, is called a prophet in Acts 15:32. Timothy is perhaps more of an assistant to Paul, and in the case of the church in Ephesus (see 1 Tim. 1:3) both an apostolic delegate and a teacher. Still in a broad sense (as will be discussed later) both Silas and Timothy were apostles.

[41]The neb reads “envoys”; the Greek word, however, is apostoloi. F. F. Bruce in his commentary translates it “messengers” (which is possible, see the following discussion), stating that the “apostles … can scarcely be stretched to include Timothy, his own ‘son in the faith’ (1 Tim. 1:2), whatever may be said of Silvanus” (1 & 2 Thessalonians, WBC, 31). “Messengers,” however, seems too weak a translation to fit the context. Messengers, unlike apostles, could hardly make “demands.”

[42]This is also the translation in kjv and nasb. The niv reads “representatives.”

[43]“We are sending”-vv. 18 and 22.

[44]“I have thought it necessary to send”-v. 25.

[45]According to BAGD, apostolos “can also mean delegate, envoy, messenger … perhaps missionary.”

[46]Many times, particularly in the Gospel of John, the word *apostello* is used in regard to Jesus’ being sent by God: John 1:6, 3:17, 34; 4:38; 5:36, 38; 6:57; 7:29; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42; 17:3, 8, 21, 23, 25; 20:21. See also Matthew 10:40; Mark 9:37; Luke 4:18, 43; 9:48.

[47]The niv translates this as “messenger” (instead of “he who is sent”). Since apostolos in this text is a noun, “messenger” might seem preferable. However, it fails to carry the relation between one sent and the one sending him.

[48]According to EGT: “As they are the gifts of the exalted Christ, it is plain that the otnocrTokow; are not to be restricted to the original Twelve, but are to be taken in the wider sense, including not only Paul but Barnabas … probably James … Silvanus … perhaps also Andronicus and Titus” (3:329). I would add that there is no reason to stop with these New Testament names, for the gift is doubtless a continuing one.

[49]In Ephesians 2:20 the apostles and prophets mentioned are foundational-“the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets”; in 3:5 they are recipients of “the mystery of

Christ… as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." "Apostles" (as well as "prophets") obviously refers in these verses only to original apostles.

[50]Gordon Fee distinguishes between the "functional" (ongoing ministry) and "positional/official" use of the term (First Epistle to the Corinthians, 620). Fee earlier speaks of the "functional" as having "its modern counterparts in those who found and lead churches in unevangelized areas" (p. 397).

[51]Recall that Barnabas was sent out with Paul from the church at Antioch. Epaphroditus and the unnamed brothers who served widely were appointed by particular churches. Andronicus and Junias, greeted by Paul as apostles in Rome, possibly came there as missionaries from an earlier established church. According to E. Kasemann, they "probably … were delegates of Antioch, as Paul and Barnabas were" (Commentary on Romans, 414). In any event, they were Jewish Christians who, as missionaries of the faith, had been fellow prisoners of their kinsman Paul.

[52]Paul adds, "second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues" (same verse).

[53]Ephesians 2:20; 3:5; 4:11. Also recall 1 Corinthians 12:28.

[54]See also Matthew 21:11: "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth."

[55]Jesus also spoke of Himself indirectly as a prophet. See Matthew 13:57: "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house" (cf. Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24; John 4:44); Luke 13:33: "It cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem."

[56]I say "Christian" rather than "New Testament." This means excluding John the Baptist, whom Jesus extolled as "a prophet… and more than a prophet" (Matt. 11:9; Luke 7:26). As the immediate forerunner of Jesus, John occupied the climactic place in a long line of precursors of Christ. Still, John was not a Christian prophet.

[57]Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 14:3 that one "who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding [= 'strengthening'] and encouragement and consolation." Judas and Silas were surely fulfilling this task.

[58]Recall the previous discussion about Silas and Timothy as possible apostles.

[59]For the linkage of saints and prophets also see Rev. 11:18; 16:6; and

18:24.

[60]Revelation 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10.

[61]We recall that Paul speaks of "the mystery of Christ … revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." In the Book of Revelation the focus is on the prophets. However, as quoted, "apostles and prophets" (with "saints") are mentioned together in Revelation 18:20.

[62]See the prior discussion of prophecy as a functional gift on pages 127-28 and as a manifestation gift in Renewal Theology, 2:380-88.

[63]Reference may here be made to the contemporary "prophetic movement." A number of persons viewed as prophets travel widely for ministry to churches and individuals, conduct seminars on prophecy, and the like. (See, for example, Prophets and the Prophetic Movement, by Bill Hamon; also the magazine Ministries Today, January/February, 1992, for several relevant articles.) I believe that such a movement has significant bearing on the role of prophetic ministry in our time.

[64]Although these words apply to prophesying in general, they surely also relate to the activity of one who is a prophet.

[65]Michael Harper writes: "How desperately the Church needs people who are prophets … able to speak clearly and practically God's word for the hour; able to foretell the future and so warn the Church of dangers and changes so that it can steer a safe course; able to discern the secrets of men's hearts and so deliver discussion and counselling from unreality" (Let My People Grow, 53-54). I can only say "Amen" to this!

[66]All genuine prophecy stems from revelation. See 1 Corinthians 14:30-"if a revelation is made to another [prophet] sitting by… This statement implies that all prophecy occurs through revelation.

[67]Marcus Barth writes in regard to all these ministries: "Eph 4 does not contain the faintest hint that the charismatic [or gift] character of all church ministries was restricted to a certain period of church history and was later to die out" (Ephesians 4-6, AB, 437). In regard to apostles and prophets Barth adds, "Ephesians distinctly presupposes that living apostles and prophets are essential to the church's life" (p. 437, n.72). I fully agree with Barth on these matters.

[68]Even as He is "the apostle" and "the prophet."

[69]E.g., Romans 1:15; 1 Corinthians 1:17; 2 Corinthians 2:12; Galatians 1:11; Ephesians 6:19; 1 Thessalonians 2:9.

[70]A11 apostles (as we have seen) are evangelists (this includes Philip the

apostle), but not all evangelists are apostles (as in the case of Philip the evangelist).

[71]The Greek word is ekeryssen from kerysso-“the declaration of an event” (TDNT, 3:703). The noun kerygma refers to “preaching by a herald sent from God” (BAGD).

[72]From Azotus (the Greek name for Ashdod), a town twenty miles north of Gaza, to Caesarea there were such towns as Lydda and Joppa where Philip doubtless preached. Acts 9 first tells of “saints that lived at Lydda” (v. 32), and then reports that “at Joppa [there was] a disciple named Tabitha” (v. 36). It is possible that all of these believers came to faith through Philip’s preaching the gospel. As a side note it is interesting that Philip later made Caesarea his home (see earlier quotation from Acts 21:8).

[73]For example, Paul writes to the Philippians, “As a son with his father he [Timothy] has served with me in the work of the gospel” (2:22 niv).

[74]Paul had just urged Timothy to be “unfailing in patience and in teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2). (On Timothy as teacher, as “minister of the word,” see infra, pages 181-%).

[75]Or pastors and teachers (so throughout this paragraph).

[76]This longer reading, belonging to the Western text, is less well attested than the rendering earlier quoted: “The Spirit of the Lord caught up Philip.” However, it is quoted by such church fathers as Jerome, Augustine, and Cyril of Jerusalem. Bruce writes that the “important effect of the longer reading is to make it clear that the Ethiopian’s baptism was followed by the gift of the Spirit” (The Book of Acts, rev. ed., NICNT, 178).

[77]E.g., in Acts 13:52, there is this statement: “The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.” The connection between the filling of the Holy Spirit and joy is apparent.

[78]Unlike the previous equipping ministries, there is no “some as” before “teachers.” Hence pastors and teachers are best understood, not as distinct orders but as separate functions. EGT-“not two distinct offices but designations of the same men … in different functions, the former defining them according to their office of oversight, the latter according to their office of instruction and guidance” (3:330). See also F. F. Bruce, The Epistles to the Ephesians, NICNT, 348; Marcus Barth, Ephesians 4-6, AB, 438-39. Calvin writes that “Paul speaks indiscriminately of pastors and teachers as belonging to one and the same class,” but then he

adds, “But this does not appear to me a sufficient reason why the two offices … should be compounded” (Commentary on Ephesians, in loco, Beveridge trans.). It seems best to speak of one basic ministry with a twofold function.

[79]The Greek word in Ephesians 4 is poimenas, a form of poimen. Poimen (whether singular or plural) is regularly translated “shepherd” elsewhere in the New Testament.

[80]There are other indirect references to Christ as shepherd in the Gospels. See Matthew 26:31: “ T will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered’ “ (an OT quotation that Jesus applied to Himself and His disciples); Mark 6:34: “He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd”; Luke 12:32: “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom”; 15:3-7, the parable about the lost and found sheep: “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.”

[81]Literally, “shepherd” (as in nasb). The Greek word is poimaine.

[82]The Greek word is poimanate.

[83]We will discuss this in more detail later under nomenclature of elders, pages 202-3.

[84]The Greek word is poimainein.

[85]Recall the words of Paul to the Ephesian elders about “the flock, among [or “in”-not “over” as in kjv-the Greek word is en] which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.”

[86]The Greek word is prosechete, “take heed” (kjv, rsv), “keep watch over” (niv, neb).

[87]The Greek word is didaskolos, and is used some forty times as a title for Jesus. Thirtee times Jesus is addressed as “Rabbi,” a common title for a public teacher.

[88]Jesus quoted these words from Deuteronomy 8:3.

[89]I will not elaborate further at this point on the teaching function since in the next section, “Ministry of the Word,” much of that function will be discussed.

[90]Paul, when he was “going to Macedonia,” urged Timothy to “remain at Ephesus” (1 Tim. 1:3). Timothy did remain there for several years (2 Timothy dates from Paul’s final imprisonment).

[91]See Titus 1:5: “I left you in Crete.” Timothy and Titus may be spoken of “as Paul’s apostolic delegates” (Gordon Fee, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus,

NIBC, 21). However, they both performed preaching and teaching functions while in Ephesus and Crete.

[92]The focus will be more on Timothy to whom Paul wrote in fuller detail.

[93]The Greek word is anagnosei. The kjv has “reading,” which might suggest private reading. However, anagnosis was a word used for “the reading of law and prophets in the synagogue” (BAGD)-see, e.g., Acts 13:15-and carries over into the church. (“Of scripture” is not as such in the Greek text but is implied; it is added also in niv, nasb, and neb).

[94]Or “exhortation” (paraklesai). Recall the earlier discussion of exhortation in chapter 4. Preaching or exhorting is speaking with urgency. See also 1 Timothy 6:2: “Teach and urge [parakalei-’preach’ in nasb] these things.” “Preaching” in these passages does not refer to evangelism, as in “preaching the good news,” which equals evangelism (see previous discussion under “Evangelists”) and is thus to nonbelievers. It refers rather to the exhortation of believers in the congregation.

[95]The relationship between the two is somewhat analogous to that of pulpit and lectern. One ordinarily thinks of the pulpit for preaching and the lectern for teaching. However, some pulpits are used more for teaching and some lecterns are even used for preaching! Still, within an overarching unity there remains some difference between the two.

[96]This expression, found in Acts 6:4, is from a statement by the twelve apostles: “We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” The “ministry of the word” refers particularly to the activity of the apostles in exhorting and teaching the rapidly growing community of believers.

[97]For example, the Ten Commandments were first spoken by God: “And God spoke all these words, saying…” (Exod. 20:1). Jesus many times in His teaching ministry emphasized hearing; e.g., “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Matt. 11:15; Mark 4:9; Luke 8:8; cf. Matt 13:9, 43; Mark 4:23; 7:16; Luke 14:35).

[98]The Greek word is anaginoskon (similar to anagndsei in 1 Tim. 4:13). The kjv, niv, nasb, and neb do not have “aloud.” The rsv “reads aloud,” I believe, better expresses the fact that the reading is preparatory to the hearing. (Similarly in regard to anaginosko, see Luke 4:16 and Col. 4:16.)

[99]“The Greek word is proseche, a present imperative derived from pros echo.

[100]According to Thayer, pros echo in 1 Timothy 4:13 means “to devote thought and effort to.”

[101]The Greek word is hygiainousin (from hygiaiano), “healthy” or “sound.” This may refer to physical health or soundness as in Luke 5:31 (niv): “It is not the healthy [hygiainontes] who need a doctor, but the sick” (cf. Luke 7:10; 15:27). In the Pastoral Epistles hygiaiano invariably refers to words, teaching, doctrine. (Hygiainouno is the origin of our word “hygienic.”)

[102]The Greek word is heterodidaskalein-“strange doctrines” (nasb), “false doctrines” (niv).

[103]Or “old wives” (kjv, niv). The Greek word is graddeis-“a sarcastic epithet which … conveys the idea of limitless credulity” (Kelly, The Pastoral Epistles, HNTC, 99).

[104]It is not altogether clear what the “myths” (referred to three times above) were. Walter Lock, in reference to the “myths and genealogies,” says that they were “probably … legends and stories centering around the pedigree of the patriarchs and O.T. history, which were handed down in tradition” (The Pastoral Epistles, ICC, 8).

[105]One of the two promoting this teaching was Hymenaeus (2 Tim. 2:17). In 1 Timothy Paul declares concerning Hymenaeus (as one of two): “I have delivered [him] to Satan that [he] may learn not to blaspheme” (1:20). This doubtless meant excommunication but with hope of final restoration.

[106]Recall Paul’s words about the future in 2 Timothy 4:3.

[107]Or “fall away from” (nasb). The Greek word is apostesontai, literally “commit apostasy.”

[108]The Greek word is hypotypdsin. The rsv and niv read “pattern”; kjv, “form.” BAGD has “model, example … in the sense of standard.” “Standard” is probably the best translation.

[109]Literally, “the good deposit” (ten kalen paratheken) as in niv. According to Thayer, the term paratheke refers to “a deposit, a trust or thing consigned to one’s faithful keeping … [and is] used of the correct knowledge and pure doctrine of the gospel, to be held firmly and faithfully, and to be conscientiously delivered unto others.”

[110]The Greek is orthotomounta. The kjv reads “rightly dividing”; rsv, “rightly handling”; niv, “correctly handles.” The word orthotomed is not found elsewhere in the New Testament. In the lxx it occurs in Proverbs

3:6: “In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight [orthotome] your paths.” BAGD suggests (in line with Prov. 3:6) that perhaps the meaning of Paul’s statement is “to guide the word of truth along a straight path.”

[111]The kjv reads, “Study to show thyself approved.”

[112]In regard to some teachers, Paul had just urged Timothy, “Solemnly charge them … not to wrangle about words” (v. 14 nasb). The Greek for “to wrangle about words” is logomachein (so our English word “logomachy”-a dispute about words).

[113]Recall my comments in the previous section on the contention that “the resurrection has already taken place.”

[114]As in 1 Corinthians 15:12-57. Belief in the future bodily resurrection is an essential truth in Christian faith. “If there is no [future] resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised … you are still in your sins” (vv. 13, 17).

[115]This is sometimes called “the analogy of Scripture,” namely, that since Scripture is an overall unity, the meaning of a particular passage can be illuminated by a study of other passages.

[116]Or “God-breathed” (niv). The Greek word theopneustos used here does not mean “God-dictated.” Words of Scripture are breathed by God through human words and human ways of speech, so that man is fully active in setting God’s truth in writing. (See Renewal Theology, 1:22, nn.17, 18.)

[117]Peter says about Paul’s letters that “there are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures” (2 Peter 3:16). The “other scriptures” clearly implies Paul’s letters to be Scripture. (See also p. Ill, n.91.)

[118]The Greek word is ophelimos-“useful, beneficial, advantageous” (BAGD). It might also be translated “valuable,” as in 1 Timothy 4:8 where Paul says that “godliness is of value [ophelimos] in every way.”

[119]“The man of God” is the teacher, not the one taught. Timothy was addressed earlier by Paul as a “man of God” (1 Tim. 6:11).

[120]The Greek word is artios, “perfect” (kjv), “adequate” (nasb), “efficient” (neb). “Complete” is probably best. BAGD has “complete, capable, proficient = able to meet all demands.”

[121]I do not mean by this that the teacher should not draw on biblical helps

such as lexicons, commentaries, and the like (but even then the focus must remain on the Scriptures themselves). My point is that other sources-such as philosophy, science, and psychology-add nothing essential to the Christian teacher's understanding. Such sources may, on occasion, be utilized as points of contact and as media for biblical truth (as Paul, e.g., quotes Stoic philosophy and uses it to express truth about God-see Acts 17:27-29). Natural understanding cannot, however, be the source of Christian truth.

[122]Or "servant" (nasb, neb). The Greek word is diakonos.

[123]The charge relates to the life of the church as a whole. However, it refers in a special way to the teacher. Note the words that follow in verses 6 and 7.

[124]The kjv has "unfeigned." The Greek word is anypokritou-literally, "without hypocrisy."

[125]A rich heritage of faith is a special blessing for one who is to be a teacher of God's word.

[126]The Greek word for "conscience" is syneidesin, a form of syneidesis.

[127]Recall the earlier quotation from 2 Timothy 2:18: "holding that the resurrection is past already."

[128]The Greek word is eusebeian, "piety toward God, godliness" (Thayer).

[129]The rsv and neb translate this phrase as "the mystery of our religion." This is also possible. For eusebeia BAGD gives "piety, godliness, religion."

[130]Or "exercise" (kjv). The Greek word is gymnaze (hence our English words "gymnastic" and "gymnasium").

[131]The kjv rendering, "bodily exercise profiteth little," implies that it has almost no value.

[132]The rsv translates, "The love of money is the root of all evil." "A root" is more accurate (there is no article in the Greek text), and "all sorts of evil" is better, lest the translation suggest that "all evil" stems from the love of money. As C. K. Barrett says, "It is extravagant to assert that love of money is the root cause of all sins" (The Pastoral Letters, HNTC, 138). I hardly need to add that the statement one frequently hears that "money is the root of all evil" is even farther from Paul's teaching.

[133]I have already discussed "good conscience" and "sincere faith," and, in a sense, under "godliness" have considered "purity" since the latter two are in many ways similar. However, although I recognize some overlap

between godliness and purity, it is helpful to separate the two because Paul often speaks of them separately; moreover, both are vital descriptions of the teacher's quality of life.

[134]The Greek word for "purity" is hagneia.

[135]The Greek word here is ekkathare, from ekkathaird-"to cleanse out, clean thoroughly" (Thayer). (Note our derivative English word "catharsis.")

[136]Or "end"-the Greek word is telos.

[137]There is no reference to Jesus' laying on hands in appointing the Twelve or the seventy. Of course, Jesus was personally present when He appointed those men. Now that He is in heaven, the laying on of hands is a way of personalizing His appointment for special ministry.

[138]For more on elders, see the next section, "Eldership."

[139]The Greek word for "gift" is charismatos, a form of charisma.

[140]Literally, "within you," en soi.

[141]Or "presbytery" (kjv, nasb). The Greek word is presbyteriou.

[142]There is some hesitation in calling this an ordination. E.g., E. Schweizer writes, "It is not certain that it is a matter of ordination here at all, but … it most probably is" (Church Order in the New Testament, 209). Gordon Fee says, "It is probably an anachronism to refer to this event as an 'ordination' " (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, NIBC, 108). However, J. N. D. Kelly does not hesitate to speak of the passage as referring to "the occasion of his [Timothy's] ordination or consecration to his office" (The Pastoral Epistles, HNTC, 106). Similarly TDNT speaks of the "ordination of Timothy by the laying on of hands" (6:666), also J. D. G. Dunn refers to it as "an act of ordination" (Jesus and the Spirit, 348). Perhaps the hesitancy of some to call this an ordination is due to later accretions in the history of the church wherein ordination takes on more sacramental significance (see p. 222, n.3). However, I would urge that 1 Timothy 4:14 be understood as a definitive picture of ministerial ordination in light of which later ordination practices may be evaluated.

[143]Recall the discussion of this in chapter 4, pages 125-33.

[144]Fee speaks of Timothy's gift as "the calling and gift for ministry as a preacher/teacher of the word" (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, NIBC, 108).

[145]I say "commissioning" because this was not the beginning of Paul and Barnabas's ministry. (For their earlier association and work together see Acts 9:26-27; 11:22-26, 2930; 12:25.)

[146]Timothy seems to have been a person of natural timidity. Paul added,

immediately after the words quoted above, “Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord, nor of me his prisoner” (v. 8). Again, “Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:1).

[147]Paul in one place writes, “Do not despise prophesying” (1 Thess. 5:20). Looking down upon or despising prophesying may be the real problem in many churches. Prophesying will hardly be expected at an ordination when it is really not desired at any time.

[148]The Greek word presbyterion refers in 1 Timothy 4:14 to the local body of elders: “the elders of any body (church) of Christians” (Thayer); “the presbyters [elders] in a local church” (EGT). Presbyterion is also used in reference to the high council of Jewish elders- “the assembly of the elders” (Luke 22:66), “the council of elders” (Acts 22:5). The one occurrence of presbyterion in regard to the Christian church is in 1 Timothy 4:14 and refers to no higher body than the local church. There was no presbytery representing several churches or with authority beyond the local church.

[149]The Greek preposition is dia.

[150]The Greek preposition is meta.

[151]Fee writes, “Here where the interest is almost totally personal, the focus is on Paul’s part … thus appealing to their personal ties” (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, NIBC, 226).

[152]For more on this see the next section, “Eldership.”

[153]See Renewal Theology, 2:380-88.

[154]In some churches a bishop or presbytery above the local congregation is assumed to have this authority; in other churches the authority is viewed as resting in the whole congregation. Since ordination is an action of the church, neither viewpoint is so extreme as to render invalid its ordination practice. However, the ideal is to follow the New Testament procedure.

[155]In regard to ordination Calvin asks, “Was grace given by the outward sign [i.e., the laying on of hands]?” He replies, “Whenever ministers were ordained, they were recommended to God by the prayers of the whole church, and in this manner grace from God was obtained for them by prayer, and was not given to them by virtue of the sign, although the sign was not uselessly or unprofitably employed, but was a sure pledge of that grace which they received from God’s own hand [italics added]” (Calvin’s Commentaries, Pastoral Epistles, 190, Beveridge trans.).

[156]William Hendriksen writes that “in all probability this … happened at

Lystra on Paul's second missionary journey" (I & II Timothy and Titus, NTC, 159).

[157]In accordance with the matters referred to in the previous paragraph.

[158]Paul minces no words in this regard. Shortly after he said, "Do not neglect your gift," he added, "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim. 4:16 niv). For any ordained minister of the gospel these are strong words indeed.

[159]Or "fan into flame" (niv); kjv has "stir up."

[160]Note that Paul's words are in 2 Timothy, written several years after 1 Timothy.

[161]It is interesting that the first mention of elders in the Old Testament is in reference to Pharaoh and Egypt: "Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt" (Gen. 50:7). Note also "the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian" (Num. 22:7). However, the preponderance of references to elders relates to Israel.

[162]E.g., "Go and gather the elders of Israel" (Exod. 3:16); "Moses came and called the elders of the people" (19:7); "the elders of the city came to meet him" (1 Sam. 16:4).

[163]E.g., see Exodus 12:21-28.

[164]E.g., see Deuteronomy 19:11-13; 21:1-9.

[165]E.g., see 1 Samuel 8:4-5; 1 Kings 20:7-8.

[166]See Ezra 6:7 and 10:8,14. For the role of elders in this period see Y. Kaufmann, History of the Religion of Israel, 4:568.

[167]Matthew 21:23; 26:3, 47; 27:1; Luke 22:66. In one case they are called "the elders of the Jews" (Luke 7:3).

[168]E.g., see Mark 15:1: "The chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law [the scribes] and the whole Sanhedrin [synedrion], reached a decision" (niv).

[169]The Greek word is presbyterion.

[170]The Greek word is presbyteriou.

[171]The Greek word is archisynagogos.

[172]BAGD gives for archisynagogos "leader or president of a synagogue."

[173]Twenty-four elders are depicted in the Book of Revelation twelve times. They appear to be a heavenly order of beings and in some sense

representatives of the church on earth (see p. 42, n.79). However, since our present concern is with church elders-elders on earth- we will not discuss the elders in Revelation.

[174]There are eight references in Acts to Jewish elders. This suggests that there are similarities between the two groups.

[175]See Acts 8:1, 14; 9:27; 11:1.

[176]Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4.

[177]They" now meant Paul, Silas, and Timothy (see context).

[178]Not "my decree" or "my decision." James did not dictate for the twelve apostles or the elders or the church what should be done; however, his judgment readily prevailed.

[179]Earlier in Acts after Peter had been set free from prison and had described his experience to a group of praying believers, he said to them, "Tell this to James and to the brethren" (12:17). (This james obviously was not John's brother, who had recently been killed by Herod [see 12:1-2].) James, the brother of the Lord, thus was early recognized as chief among the brethren in the Jerusalem church.

[180]This is one of the "we" passages in Acts implying that Luke was accompanying Paul.

[181]F. F. Bruce refers to "a tradition that the Lord commanded the apostles to stay twelve years in Jerusalem and then go out into all the world" (The Acts of the Apostles, 391). Whatever the validity of such a tradition, the apostles are not mentioned again in Acts after the council in Jerusalem.

[182]Recall Paul's words in Galatians 1:19: "I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother."

[183]Primus inter pares is the Latin expression often used for this.

[184]Peter so describes himself in his first letter: "I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder" (5:1).

[185]They were men chosen to "serve [diakonein] tables" (Acts 6:2). There is some debate as to whether they should be called "deacons" in the sense of 1 Timothy 3:8-13. In any event those chosen in Acts 6 were, at the least, table "deacons." For fuller discussion of deacons see pages 207-10.

[186]It is interesting that the word translated "appointed" above is a form of the verb cheirotoned, which means literally to "elect by raising of hands" (BAGD). This suggests the same pattern as in Acts 6: congregational choice and apostolic appointment. The only other New Testament use of cheirotoned is in 2 Corinthians 8:19, which speaks of a brother

"appointed [cheirotonetheis] by the churches." This is clearly congregational choice. Perhaps, then, both the churches and the apostles were involved in the appointment of elders. S. J. Kistemaker, after a helpful discussion of the matter, says, "In the case of the elders in Lycaonia and Pisidia, the apostles approved the selections made by the churches, and, after prayer and fasting, appointed them" (Acts, NTC, 525). BAGD, however, in regard to Acts 14:23 states that "this does not involve a choice by the group." If it does not, I question why the word cheirotoned is used, with its literal meaning of "elect by raising of hands." (See EGT also, which speaks of "a method [of appointment] in which the votes and voices of each congregation were considered" [2:313]; also cf. R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles, 585-86.) A further word: Why would there be "prayer and fasting" (literally, "fastings") before the appointments if the congregation were not involved in the process?

187 After Acts there is no further mention of Jewish elders.

188 Preshyterion is the same Greek word used for the Jewish high council of the elders, the Sanhedrin.

189 See pages 205-7 for more on the presbytery and ordination.

190 The niv reads "direct the affairs of the church well." The relevant Greek word is proestotes, likewise used in Romans 12:8 and 1 Thessalonians 5:12. Leadership is the basic theme. Recall the brief discussion of these verses on pages 131-32.

191 Previously in 1 Timothy Paul spoke about oversight: "If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task" (3:1 niv). For elders and overseers, see the next section.

192 The Greek word for "appoint" in Titus 1:5 is katasteses, a form of kathistemi. The same word is used in Acts 6:3 for appointment, after the congregation had chosen, of the "deacons." Recall that in the appointment of elders by Paul and Barnabas another Greek word, a form of cheirotoneo, suggesting congregational involvement, was used. In regard to Titus, Lenski writes that "Paul speaks of placing them [elders] in office, having them elected by the congregations and then ordaining them" (Interpretation of Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, Philemon, 896). I believe this procedure is implied, though Paul does not directly so state it.

193 Its author is generally regarded as the brother of Jesus, and the same James who presided at the Jerusalem council.

[194]It is interesting to recall how closely James worked with the elders at the Jerusalem meeting. In his letter, James speaks of the elders in regard to their pastoral role.

[195]Incidentally, there is no suggestion here that oil either has medicinal properties or is the spiritual channel for the healing to take place. It is "theprayer offaith," not the oil, that will "save the sick man." (Also it is "the Lord," not faith, that will "raise him up"!)

[196]Peter does not use the word "church" or "churches" but implies it, especially in 1 Peter 2:9-10.

[197]The Greek word is sympresbyteros.

[198]F. F. Bruce states that "the Epistles were written by … 4John the disciple of the Lord' " (The Epistles of John, 15). John Stott, after a lengthy discussion of authorship, concludes that4'these epistles were … written by the apostle John" (The Epistles of John, TNTC, 41). There has been much debate about authorship, but I believe that the traditional view that John the apostle is the author is correct.

[199]Bruce writes, 44A date [for the letters] toward the end of the first century is most probable" (The Epistles of John, 31). In that case John the apostle would be far advanced in years. The word "elder" does not necessarily point to an official office; it can mean simply an older person (see, e.g., Acts 2:17: "your old men [presbyteroi] will dream dreams"), or a man of great dignity.

[200]The Greek word is episkopon. The kjv, rsv, and neb translate it4'bishop." While this is possible etymologically ("bishop" derives from episkopos), "bishop" has now come to signify an official above the local congregation or the body of elders. J. N. D. Kelly in his commentary translates episkopos as "overseer" both here and in 1 Timothy 3:1, saying, "The traditional rendering 4bishop' for Gk. episkopos has been deliberately rejected as misleading" (The Pastoral Epistles, HNTC, 73). The nasb and niv translation as "overseer" is much better.

[201]Recall the discussion of such ordination on pages 191–96.

[202]Or overseer and shepherd. However, Paul uses the word "overseer" in these passages. We have already observed (on pp. 178–80) some of the things Peter said in 1 Peter 5:1–4 to elders about their responsibilities as shepherds and overseers. Our concern is now more with their qualifications as Paul sets them forth. There will inevitably be some overlap between responsibilities and qualifications.

[203]The Greek word is anepilèmpton, “cannot be reprehended, not open to censure” (Thayer).

[204]The Greek word is anegklèton, “cannot be called to account, unreprovable” (Thayer).

[205]Also Titus 1:6 (nasb) reads, in regard to elders to be appointed, “if any man be above reproach.”

[206]This point may be reinforced by Paul’s later statement about “a widow … sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband” (1 Tim. 5:9).

[207]The first statement above in regard to the necessity of an elder being a married man may be understood to mean “if he is married,” in the same way as “if he has children” (see v. 4). The emphasis is not on being a husband but on being the husband of one wife. Still-to repeat what was said-there may be the thought that a married man, experienced in family responsibilities, would be better qualified to care for the daily life of the church. Incidentally, Paul never calls himself an elder, whereas Peter, a married man, does so speak of himself-recall the phrase “a fellow elder” (1 Peter 5:1). The fourth statement above, in regard to marriage after divorce, may be set in the light of Matthew 19:9: “Whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery”-thus teaching that divorce in this case and remarriage may take place. Accordingly, the argument follows, such a divorced person may legitimately be an elder. The fifth statement, regarding remarriage after the spouse’s death, may be weighed in relation to Paul’s words in Romans 7:1-3 about a woman being free to marry again: “If her husband dies … if she marries another man she is not an adulteress” (v. 3). This would apply to the husband in the event of his wife’s death, namely, that he would be free to marry. The argument then follows that an elder may likewise be married again after his wife’s death. Both of these arguments (in regard to the fourth and fifth statements) have some merit, and should not be readily dismissed. However, I believe that Paul’s words in regard to an elder as being “the husband of one wife” refer ideally to a one-and-only marriage for those in church leadership. Such a single marriage makes for a total commitment that can be exemplary to the church. Indeed, has not our Lord Himself committed Himself totally and finally to one bride, one wife, namely the church?

[208]Wild” (niv). The reference is to “debauchery,” “dissipation” (BAGD); cf. Ephesians 5:18.

[209]“Disobedient” (niv) or “rebellious” (BAGD).

[210]Or “rule.” The Greek word is proistamenon, a form of proistemi. This is the same word that Paul used later (1 Tim. 5:17) in regard to “the elders who rule well”-proestdtes.

[211]Or “rule.” The Greek word is prostemai.

[212]I will omit qualifications that are repeated in Titus.

[213]Even though the qualities set forth are primarily those of an overseeing elder, he must also be “an apt teacher.” Although his position is not that of a “minister of the word,” he must still be able to teach.

[214]Paul adds, “so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9). As an “apt teacher,” he should be able to teach sound doctrine so as to refute any opponents. This again suggests that an overseeing elder, even though, strictly speaking, he is not a teaching elder (minister of the word), must be so sound in the faith that he can communicate it to others.

[215]Or twelve if “gentle” is included from the negative list.

[216]See verses 17-20.

[217]Paul had expressed concern about an elder who so persisted in sin that a public rebuke was called for. Perhaps those who ordained him had not given sufficient consideration to his qualifications for the office.

[218]See notes 186 and 192.

[219]I will discuss deacons later.

[220]The Apostolic Fathers, 2nd ed., trans, by J. B Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, ed. and rev. by M. W. Holmes, 157.

[221]There is wide difference of opinion about the dating of the Didache-anywhere from a.d. 50 to the third century or later! Holmes, in The Apostolic Fathers, writes that, whatever the date, materials from which the Didache was composed go back to approximately a.d. 70 (see p. 146).

[222]D. Guthrie gives a.d. 63-64 as “the most probable date” of these letters (ISBE, 3:685).

[223]See the Didache 11:3, which begins, “Now concerning the apostles and prophets. …”

[224]Recall that local synagogue elders were elected and ordained by the members at large (see pp. 198-200). It is quite possible that early churches, many of them growing out of synagogues, would follow the same procedure.

[225]As is the case in ordination of a minister of the word.

[226]The Apostolic Fathers, 52-53.

[227]The Greek word is diakonôn, literally “serving.”

[228]The Greek word is diakonon.

[229]The Greek word is diakonoi.

[230]The Greek word is diakonos; kjv, rsv, and nasb translate it “minister.”

[231]The Greek word is diakonos; kjv, rsv, and niv translate it “minister.”

[232]The Greek word is diakonos.

[233]The Greek word is diakonias; kjv and rsv translate it “ministry.”

[234]I should add here that the office of deacon seems to have no parallel in Judaism. As we have seen, the office of elder was represented in both the Sanhedrin-“the council of elders”-and the local synagogue. Also, Old Testament Israel did not have deacons.

[235]The Greek word is diakonois.

[236]The Greek word is diakonous.

[237]The Greek word is diakonein.

[238]The Greek word is chreias; “business” (kjv); “task” (nasb); “office” is also possible (see BAGD).

[239]The Greek words are diakonian and diakonia.

[240]Recall my statement that in Romans 12 the reference to diakonia is more functional than official. See pages 128-29.

[241]The Greek word is antilempseis (or antilepseis).

[242]Thayer, under ἀντιλήμψεις, refers to 1 Corinthians 12:28 as “the ministrations of the deacons, who have care of the poor and the sick.” Dunn speaks of a probable “link between ἀντιλήμψεις and κυβερνήσεις [administrations] and the (later) more established positions of deacon and overseer respectively” (Jesus and the Spirit, 253).

[243]Incidentally, this same anointing of the Spirit resulted in at least two of the deacons going beyond practical ministry into witness and evangelism: Stephen (Acts 6:8-7:61) and Philip (Acts 8:4-40). This doubtless shows the freedom of the Spirit to move beyond any fixed office.

[244]This might call for a probationary period, or it may simply mean that the church, perhaps through the elders, needs first to examine carefully the candidate’s personal life. Incidentally, this may correspond to the apostles’ injunction to the church in Acts 6 about choosing seven men “of good repute” who would become deacons. The young church may have

had to examine many persons carefully before they were ready to present candidates to the apostles.

[245]See the preceding discussion of this.

[246]See the previous section.

[247]The Greek word is gynaikas, a form of gyne. The kjv, niv, and neb read "their wives." However, "their" is not in the Greek text: it is only provided to support the translation of gynaikas as "wives." Gyne may be translated either "woman" or "wife" (see BAGD); however, the plural, "wives," seems unlikely in this passage. Why, for one thing, would Paul single out the wives of deacons rather than overseers (elders) for particular discussion?

[248]Walter Lock writes, "From the context and from the parallelism between the qualities required for them and for the deacons … these must be deaconesses (not wives of deacons), women who help" (The Pastoral Epistles, ICC, 40). Kelly describes them as "women deacons," and thereafter as "deaconesses" (The Pastoral Epistles, HNTC, 8384).

[249]The word diakonos has no female equivalent. See BAGD under diakonos, where both "deacon" and "deaconess" are given.

[250]See the article "Deaconesses," New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, 285-86.

[251]A third order developed in the early church, with the deaconesses being viewed more as assistants to the clergy (see quotation above from the Didaskalia) than as women deacons. Incidentally, this order of deaconesses went into eclipse for many centuries, but has been revived in a number of Protestant churches.

[252]What Paul said about deaconesses in 1 Timothy 3:11 is in terms of qualifications ("serious, no slanderers," etc.). Here in 1 Timothy 5:9-10 he is referring to the actual ministry of women (who may or may not have been deaconesses): hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, etc.

[253]The Greek word is sophronizosin. According to BAGD, it means "to bring someone to his senses" (!); TDNT-"to spur on."

[254]The Greek word is oikourgous; kjv, "keepers at home"; niv, "busy at home."

[255]W. H. Hendriksen comments that "wine drinking and malicious gossip often go together" (I & II Timothy and Titus, 364).

[256]On woman as "helper," see Renewal Theology, 1:127-28; 130 n. 46 (especially); 203; 203 n. 17; 228; 237.

[257]Nor should men seek to minister in areas that more suitably belong to women, for example, the counseling of women. Women surely are better equipped to deal with problems relating to their own sex, also without the ever-dangerous possibility of sexual involvement. Incidentally, women will far more readily accept limitation if men will stay out of what properly belongs to them!

[258]Some people view Paul's words (including v. 11-which see) as culturally relative, and thus believe they should not be taken as a directive for the church today. Gordon Fee, for example, writes that "it is altogether likely that 1 Timothy 2:11-12 speaks to a local problem … [thus] the possibility that the prohibition in 1 Timothy 1:11-12 is culturally relative" (How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth, 69). Again, "It is hard to deny that this text prohibits women teaching men in the Ephesian church … a very ad hoc problem in Ephesus" (Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics). I find it difficult to pursue this line of thinking, for, whatever the cultural context, Paul seems clearly to be speaking to the church at large (note, e.g., v. 8: "in every place") and bases his statement in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 not on an ad hoc situation but on the biblical account of Adam and Eve (vv. 13-14). (I will say more on the latter point later.)

[259]Nor is the setting that of the church (see next sentence above). This was a private explanation.

[260]Paul, just a few words before, spoke of himself as "a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth" (v. 7). Clearly, this is not teaching in general but teaching the truth of the gospel. Hence, the teaching that women are forbidden to do refers to the same Christian truth. According to Douglas Moo, "In the pastoral epistles, teaching always has this restricted sense of authoritative doctrinal instruction" (Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, ed. by John Piper and Wayne Grudem, 185).

[261]Note that the background in verses 8-11 speaks about men "in every place … lifting up holy hands" in prayer (thus implying the church at worship) and follows by giving injunctions about women's adornment. Although Paul may be referring to the attire of women at any time, it seems more likely that he is focusing here on the church (see Kelly, The Pastoral Epistles, 66-67, for a good discussion of this).

[262]John Wesley translated 1 Timothy 2:12 in this way : "to usurp authority over the man- by public teaching" (Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament, 770).

[263]Parallel to this are Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 14: "As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches" (vv. 33-34) Such silence obviously is not absolute, because Paul earlier speaks affirmatively of women prophesying-"any woman who prays or prophesies" (11:5). Paul is referring to silence as the proper attitude for receiving instruction. Accordingly, Paul adds in 1 Corinthians 14:34: "they [women] are not permitted to speak." Speaking here probably refers, as EGT 2:915 says, to "Church- teaching and authoritative direction" (italics EGT). This understanding is in basic accord with 1 Timothy 2:11.

[264]John Calvin writes about women that "to teach … is not permitted by their condition. They are subject, and to teach implies the rank of power or authority" (Commentaries: Pastoral Epistles, 68, Beveridge trans.). Calvin is not referring to teaching in general but to "the office of teaching" (p. 67).

[265]Following the words "Adam was formed first, then Eve," Paul adds, "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (v. 14). Many biblical interpreters have viewed this statement as implying that, since Eve was deceived, women should not be trusted to teach. Donald Guthrie, for example, writes that Paul "may have in mind the greater aptitude of the weaker sex to be led astray" {The Pastoral Epistles, 77). J. N. D. Kelly writes that "his [Paul's] point is that since Eve was so gullible a victim of the serpent's wiles, she [woman] cannot be trusted to teach" (The Pastoral Epistles, 687). David Watson puts it more broadly: "By the very intuitiveness of their nature, women may see certain issues much more quickly and clearly than men-and by the same impulse be more strongly tempted to go off on a tangent and away from the biblical balance of the whole counsel of God" (I Believe in the Church, 285). Such interpretations, however, in applying Paul's words to female nature in general, may go beyond the apostle's intention. Susan Foh writes, "Paul is not speaking of women in general or the nature of woman but of Eve…. Paul contrasts the way in which Adam and Eve sinned: Adam was not deceived (he knew what he was doing), but the woman was completely deceived" (Bonnidell Clouse and Robert G. Clouse, eds., Women in Ministry: Four Views, 82). I agree that Paul does not actually state as a conclusion that Eve's deception points to a basic female tendency in the same direction. Rather, Paul declares that Eve's deception led to her becoming "a transgressor." Paul elsewhere

writes about Eve's deception, "I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). It is obvious here that Eve's deception is by no means related to a general feminine tendency to deception but to the dangers of all believers being deceived and led astray from Christ.

[266]This means that not only women are excluded from authoritative oversight and teaching in the church but also men who are not elders. Paul can hardly be accused of gender bias!

[267]The instruction of Apollos by Priscilla and Aquila, as before noted, was done privately. Neither functioned as a church elder, though they were surely used by the Lord to impart to Apollos "the way of God more accurately."

[268]Hence today, for example, women teaching in church schools, Bible colleges, and seminaries, is in order.

[269]I have earlier spoken of this as "the ministry of the word."

[270]As do the domata gifts of Ephesians 4.

[271]Recall again 1 Corinthians 11:3: "the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (Niv).

[272]The distinction between slave and free may be abolished since slavery is not a given creaturely condition.

[273]There is much literature today on women in ministry. Two helpful books expressing different viewpoints are Alvera Mickelsen, ed., Women, Authority, and the Bible, and Bonnidell Clouse and Robert G. Clouse, eds., Women in Ministry: Four Views. In the latter book Susan Foh (earlier mentioned) has an interesting discussion entitled, "What May Women Do in the Church?" (94-102). Especially helpful is the book (earlier mentioned) Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem.

[274]Recall a discussion of this in chapter 2, pages 34-35.

[275]Recall a discussion of this in chapter 2, pages 38-41.

[276]I also call attention to I Clement, an early noncanonical letter that speaks of "bishops and deacons" as local appointees (see 42:4), and the Didache, which does the same: "Appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons" (15:1). In the letters of Ignatius, near the beginning of the second century, the office of bishop had come to be viewed as separate from those of elders and deacons-"the bishops and the presbyters and the deacons"

(Letter to the Philadelphians, Intro.). This represents the beginning of the office of monarchical bishop, which increasingly became separated from the local churches and took on an authority above them.

277 Also, note 1 Thessalonians 5:12: “We request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord” (nasb).

278 “They are pastors responsible to God” (TDNT 2:907, under riyeo/jLai, “to lead”).

279 The church in Jerusalem of course also had the apostles (“the apostles and elders”), with James as the leader among them. But even there they worked in conjunction with the elders; there is no suggestion that the apostles were over them.

280 “Elder,” in the singular, occurs in 1 Timothy 5:19 and 1 Peter 5:1, but in each case it occurs in the larger context of “elders” (see above quotations). “The elder to …” is the opening salutation of 2 and 3 John; however, it is questionable whether elder there refers to a church official.

281 All elders in the New Testament are “ruling” elders, including those whose special work is preaching and teaching. Hence it is a mistake to refer to ruling elders and teaching elders; for all elders rule. Thus, for example, the teaching elder (or elders) should join with all the other elders in making decisions, voting, and the like.

282 Incidentally, this means that all decisions by the elders should be unanimous. A divided decision is not the work of the Lord. It may take longer to arrive at unanimity than to proceed with a majority vote, but the extra time is well spent.

283 Hence the autonomy is not that of self-rule but of rule under Christ. In its basic nature the church is theonomous (i.e., “governed by God [Christ]”), but in relation to other churches it is autonomous.

284 Denominationalism is surely one of these barriers. Where particular churches assume that they uniquely contain the truth, thus becoming sectarian and exclusive, the cause of Christ suffers greatly.

285 Paul writes, “To the church of God which is at Corinth … together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours” (1 Cor. 1:2).

286 See also Romans 15:25-28 for the contribution of the churches in Macedonia and Achaia to the saints in Jerusalem; similarly 2 Corinthians 8-9 in regard to the Corinthian church and Jerusalem; also 1 Corinthians

16:1 about the contribution from “the churches of Galatia.”

[287]While avoiding the infringement of local autonomy, a number of churches may together appoint persons to represent them in a particular matter. In regard to the offering for the church in Jerusalem, Paul speaks of a brother who had been “appointed by the churches [possibly of Galatia] to travel with [Paul and his companions] in this gracious work” (2 Cor. 8:19). Thus churches in a local or larger area may-and often should-work together in various projects.

[288]Of course local churches may work together with other churches in a broader association of churches for cooperative endeavors, but this ought not to mean independence from local church connections.

[289]In the Book of Revelation Christ is seen “in the midst of the lampstands” (1:13)-the churches. He is still there.

6
Ordinances

Jesus Christ prescribed certain visible ordinances for His church to perform. Since an ordinance may be defined as a prescribed practice or ceremony, we may speak of two visible ordinances, namely, baptism in water and the Lord's Supper.[1]

The ordinance of baptism was declared by Jesus as a part of the Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19–20). In another account Jesus, after commanding, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation," stated, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:15–16). The prescription to baptize was clearly set forth by Jesus.

The ordinance of the Lord's Supper was likewise given by Jesus. He declared to His disciples in the Upper Room regarding the bread: "Take, eat; this is my body" (Matt. 26:26); and in regard to the cup, "Drink of it, all of you" (v. 27). Similar words are found in the other synoptic gospels (see Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:17–19). Paul renders Jesus' words regarding the bread in this way: "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24); and the cup, "Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (v. 25). Thus the Lord's Supper is likewise an ordinance for the church to maintain.[2]

These two ordinances relate, on the one hand, to Christian beginnings—baptism—and, on the other, to Christian living—the Lord's Supper.[3]

Let us now proceed to a consideration, in turn, of baptism[4] and the Lord's Supper.

I. BAPTISM

A. Definition

The word *baptism* is simply a transliteration of the Greek word *baptisma*, the verbal form being *baptizd*. The primary meaning of the word is immersion or submersion.[5] Hence, baptism is literally, in the case of baptism by water, a placing under the water.[6]

B. Formula

7. The Triune Name

The historic formula for Christian baptism is that found in Matthew 28:19: “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Since the New Testament period, the church has regularly practiced triune baptism.

2. The Name of Jesus Christ, or the Lord Jesus

In the Book of Acts baptism was performed in the name of Jesus Christ. Peter declared on the Day of Pentecost: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ” (2:38). At a later date the Samaritans were “baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (8:16); then the Caesareans were “baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (10:48); after that the Ephesians “were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (19:5).[7] Other references to baptism in Acts do not specify the formula,[8] but presumably in those instances also it was likewise done in the name of Jesus Christ, or the Lord Jesus.

Both formulas, accordingly, are found in the New Testament and either of them may properly be used in a baptismal ceremony. The fact that the early church in Acts did not practice triune baptism is sufficient basis for the church today, despite centuries of baptismal practice, also to baptize in the name of Jesus only. Either practice is surely valid.[9]

In any event Christ is the vital center of all Christian baptism: whether in the triune or in the Jesus-only formula. Several references in Paul’s letters also reinforce the centrality of Jesus Christ in baptism: Romans 6:3: “baptized into Christ Jesus”; Galatians 3:27: “baptized into Christ”; and Colossians 2:12: “buried with him [Christ] in baptism.” It is clear that whatever the exact formula, Christ is the central reality.

C. Relationships

Baptism relates to a number of matters in Christian beginnings. Let us note several.

1. The Forgiveness of Sins

To Peter's words on the Day of Pentecost "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ" is added, "for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38). The preposition "for"[10] suggests "with respect to," or "with a view to." Water often is used for cleansing, and so in relation to forgiveness of sins it is a vivid symbol.

2. Regeneration

Paul writes to Titus: "[God] saved us … by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5 NASB). "Washing" here refers to baptismal washing,[11] and thus is closely connected with regeneration, or the new birth. Recall also Jesus' words: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).[12] There is undoubtedly a close connection between baptism and regeneration.

3. Buried With Christ and Raised With Him

Two passages in Paul's letters, earlier quoted in part, are relevant. First, Romans 6:3–4: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead … we too might walk in newness of life."

Second, Colossians 2:12: "You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead." Obviously baptism is closely related to burial with Christ into

death and resurrection with Him to life.

4. Incorporation Into Christ and Unity With Other Believers

Another passage in Paul's letters quoted earlier in part—Galatians 3:27—reads, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Following that Paul adds, "You are all one in Christ Jesus" (v. 28). Baptism relates to both a union with Christ and in Him to all other Christians.

5. Engagement to Be the Lord's

The act of baptism expresses an irrevocable commitment to Jesus Christ. It is a public declaration that one henceforward belongs to Another; it is a visible demonstration "before men." Jesus declares, "Everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man shall confess him also before the angels of God" (Luke 12:8 NASB). Baptism shows to the world one's confession of Christ and total dedication to Him.

D. Significance

Now that we have observed a number of relationships, let us next consider the question of significance. What is the significance of baptism in regard to the matters discussed? Baptism is a sign, a seal, and a means of grace.

1. A Sign

The ordinance of baptism may first be viewed as a visible *sign* of grace and salvation—that is, of God's forgiveness, of new birth, of burial and resurrection, of incorporation into Christ and unity with all believers, and of total dedication to Jesus Christ. A sign is a pointer. As we have observed, baptism is "for" the forgiveness of sins, hence it is a sign, a pointer, to that forgiveness. Baptism is a sign of the cleansing in forgiveness, of the washing in regeneration, of being buried with Christ, and so on. Augustine defined a sacrament as "a visible sign of a sacred thing."[13] Baptism verily is a visible sign of God's sacred and invisible grace in all these aspects of grace and salvation. Baptism does not bring about forgiveness of sins and the like, but it does point vividly in that direction.

2. A Seal

Baptism may be understood not only as a sign but also as a *seal*. It is noteworthy that Paul speaks about Abraham's circumcision[14] as both a sign and a seal of his faith. In regard to Abraham, Paul writes, "He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised" (Rom. 4:11 NIV). Hence circumcision was not only a sign of God's grace already received; it was also a seal in the flesh of that same grace. Thus we may draw the parallel with baptism: not only does it signify a faith-righteousness already present, but it also seals that righteousness to the one being baptized. The seal is a visible ratification of God's grace in such a way that the spiritual reality of grace and salvation is confirmed bodily for the believer.[15] Thereafter the believer may continue to recall the occasion (even the day and hour of his confession) and the deeply confirming seal of baptism.[16]

3. A Means of Grace

Baptism may also function as a *means of grace*. Not only is God's grace of salvation signified and sealed in baptism, but also baptism is a channel of that grace. For example, Paul's words about "the washing of regeneration" imply that in the washing, which relates to water baptism, regeneration occurs. *Through* the act of baptism God's grace is given. It is not that the act of baptism regenerates but that baptism may be the channel, or means, by which the grace of regeneration is applied and received. Again, burial with Christ is not brought about by immersion in water, for such burial is a profoundly spiritual experience of dying to self. However, the very visible and tangible experience of going under the water (a kind of momentary death) can be a channel of God's grace in spiritual death and resurrection. Once again, to "put on Christ" is essentially an act of repentance and faith; however, the act of baptism may be a channel of grace in which the putting off of the old self and the putting on of the new occurs. Union with Christ, or for that matter with other believers, does not depend on baptism. But since baptism is a visible and tangible action, it can serve as a physical counterpart to the spiritual occurrence. Finally, in regard to one's engagement to be the Lord's—a profoundly spiritual commitment—baptism is an important component: it serves as the avenue for that engagement to be demonstrated.

In reflecting on baptism, two extremes must be avoided: on the one hand, viewing baptism only as a sign of salvation already received and, on the other hand, viewing it as the necessary means of grace. From the first of these perspectives baptism is understood only to be a pointer to the prior occurrence of salvation;[17] thus it is actually extraneous to that event. However, as we have noted, baptism is immediately related to salvation. It is not only a sign but also a seal and often a means or channel through which God's grace in salvation is received. From the second perspective, baptism is viewed as itself effectuating salvation, hence a necessary means of grace.[18] Baptism, when performed properly, confers grace and thus imparts salvation.[19] Thus there is baptismal regeneration. Such a view undoubtedly goes beyond Scripture, which, while emphasizing baptism even to the degree of its being a means of grace, does not affirm baptism as essential to salvation.[20]

E. Mode

Since the word *baptism* is simply a transliteration of *baptisma*, meaning "immersion," it follows that immersion is the normal mode of baptism. In addition to the etymology of the word, there are other reasons for considering immersion to be the proper mode. Three reasons may be mentioned.

1. Phraseology

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus' baptism is described thus: "[He] was baptized by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water … "(1:9–10 NIV). "In"[21] suggests the element (water) in which, or into which, Jesus was placed; "coming up out of the water"[22] depicts an emergence from the water. The phraseology clearly implies that Jesus' baptism was by immersion.

Similar language is found in Acts regarding Philip's baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch: "Both Philip and the eunuch went down into[23] the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of[24] the water…" (8:38–39 NIV). Again, the phraseology points to immersion.[25]

Returning to the baptizing by John, we find another relevant statement: "John … was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized" (John 3:23 NIV). "Plenty of'[26] may imply the sufficiency of water for the practice of immersion.[27]

In regard to the three preceding scriptures, the phraseology of the first (Mark 1:9–10) presents the strongest case for baptism by immersion.

2. Symbolism

One of the most compelling reasons for viewing immersion as the normal mode of baptism is the symbolism involved.

For example, several of the Scriptures quoted earlier suggest immersion. Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12, which speak of being "buried" with Christ by baptism into death, point to a submersion of the whole body, even to symbolic drowning, and thereafter being raised with Christ from the dead. Even as a

person in salvation undergoes a total spiritual renewal, so in immersion there is the total physical counterpart. It is total death and resurrection. Other scriptures quoted, such as "the washing of regeneration" and "born of water and the Spirit," likewise suggest immersion: a total washing, a total rebirth.

Two others verses, not quoted, may be mentioned. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "Our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Cor. 10:1–2). This highly symbolic language regarding being "baptized into Moses" suggests a parallel with being "baptized into Christ," and "in the cloud and sea" points to Israel's being enveloped, even immersed, in God's surrounding glory in the cloud and in His total protection in the sea.[28] The other significant passage is found in Hebrews 10:22: "Let us draw near [in worship] … with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." Since the author of Hebrews seems to be referring to the original occurrence of salvation and accompanying baptism[29] when he uses the phrase "our bodies washed," the implication seems clearly to be a total immersion of the body.

Finally, in regard to symbolism even where baptism does not refer to water, immersion is often implied. I call attention to the baptism of suffering and the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Jesus declared, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:50 KJV). This was to be a baptism of suffering even to death and an immersion in total grief and pain.[30] In regard to baptism in the Holy Spirit, John the Baptist spoke of Jesus as "the one who baptizes in[31] the Holy Spirit" (John 1:33 NASB). This suggests an immersion in the Spirit comparable to immersion in water.[32]

3. Church Practice

It is possible that the practice of immersion is related to the Jewish rite of proselyte baptism. Shortly before the appearance of John the Baptist, there emerged in Judaism the practice of not only requiring the circumcision of Gentile proselytes but also, because of their uncleanness in Jewish eyes, of their total immersion in water.[33] John the Baptist, of course, went farther than Gentile proselyte baptism because he also required baptism of fellow Jews. However, it seems quite likely that John would have followed the same practice of immersion, and that the disciples of Jesus would have done the same.[34] There is no biblical suggestion that the practice of immersion did not continue in Acts and the early church.

We may now turn briefly from the New Testament to an early teaching about baptism in the *Didache*[35] It specifies immersion as the basic practice but also offers the option of pouring. “Now concerning baptism … baptize ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ in running water. But if you have no running water, then baptize in some other water; and if you are not able to baptize in cold, then do so in warm. But if you have neither, then pour water on the head three times ‘in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit.’”[36] Thus immersion is specified as the normal mode of baptism; only in excep tional cases is another mode to be allowed.[37]

Immersion as the common church practice continued until the thirteenth century, and in the Eastern church immersion, even for infants, has continued to the present day.

EXCURSUS: POURING AND SPRINKLING

In addition to immersion, both pouring and sprinkling are widely practiced in Western Christendom. Pouring, as noted, was permitted in the *Didache*, but clearly this was a concession to situations where there was insufficient water for immersion. Sprinkling has also come to be practiced widely.[38] Indeed, pouring and particularly sprinkling have in some churches become the norm, with immersion much subordinated[39] or not practiced at all. This is a very unfortunate development. Immersion much needs to be reinstated as the normal mode of baptism, and therefore as the regular practice in all Christian churches.[40]

A final word: Let me emphasize that the matter of mode is not the critical issue. Baptisms are not invalid because some mode other than that of the New Testament is followed. Water, however applied and whatever the amount, is still a basic symbol for cleansing. Moreover, since baptism does not itself regenerate, even the omission of baptism does not basically affect a person's relationship with God. Still, although not a critical issue, there is much to be gained both for the church and its members if the original practice of total immersion is universally restored.

F. Subjects

The proper subjects of baptism are those who believe in Jesus Christ. This is apparent from all the relevant New Testament passages. Let us review a number of these in the Book of Acts.

Acts 2:41: "Those who received his [Peter's] word were baptized."

Acts 8:12: "When they [the Samaritans] believed Philip as he preached good news … they were baptized, both men and women."

Acts 8:35, 38: "Philip … told him [the Ethiopian eunuch] the good news of Jesus. And … he baptized him."

Acts 10:48: "He [Peter] commanded them [Gentile believers] to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ."

Acts 16:14–15: "The Lord opened her [Lydia's] heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household[41] had been baptized…" (NASB).

Acts 16:31–33: "And they [Paul and Silas] said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you [the Philippian jailer] shall be saved, you and your household.' And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. And … immediately he was baptized, he and all his household" (NASB).

Acts 18:8: "Crispus … believed in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians … believed and were baptized."

Acts 19:4–5: "Paul said [to the Ephesians], 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.' On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Baptism in all these passages is clearly linked to faith: receiving the word, believing the good news, responding to the gospel message. The baptism was of believers. Their baptism was unmistakably connected with the preaching of the gospel and the response of faith.

In other New Testament references to Christian baptism it is apparent that believers are those who undergo baptism: Romans 6:4; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12; and 1 Peter 3:21.[42] Although the word "believers" is not used in Matthew 28:19, the expression "make disciples … baptizing them" is the equivalent of baptizing those who have come to faith.

All of the passages noted underscore the personal and active faith of those who are baptized. Baptism belongs within the context of God's grace and human

response. Believers' baptism is the New Testament way and should be the practice of the church at large.

EXCURSUS: INFANT BAPTISM

It is surely an important matter that across Christendom infant baptism (paedobaptism) is widely practiced. This is true for Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and many Protestant denominations. Consideration of this, I believe, belongs to an excursus: a digression from the New Testament pattern of believers' baptism. Some of the arguments for infant baptism will be given with response following.

1. Household baptisms

The household baptisms in Acts in all likelihood included infants and children who were also baptized. Since Lydia "and her household" were baptized, this probably included children not yet of believing age. With the household as an organic unit, Lydia's faith would make valid the baptism of all members. The Philippian jailer was told by Paul, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household," thus declaring that on the basis of the jailer's faith both he and his family would be saved. Hence, although household baptisms do not necessarily prove infant baptism, such baptism seems likely on the basis of family solidarity.[43]

We may first respond by observing that "household" in the New Testament does not necessarily include infants and small children. For example, in John 4, the servants of a Capernaum official brought word to him that his son was healed by Jesus; as a result "he himself believed, and all his household" (v. 53). "His household" probably included the servants and members of the official's family without reference to children. This is even clearer in the story of the Roman centurion Cornelius, who "feared God with all his household" (Acts 10:2). When Peter arrived to preach the gospel, Cornelius "had called together his kinsmen and close friends" (v. 24). It was they—household, kinsmen, friends—who later believed and were baptized (vv. 43–48). There is no suggestion that this faith and baptism encompassed children too young to believe.

Now looking particularly at the instance of the Philippian jailer, it is a serious misreading of the Scripture to say that his faith would suffice for his household.

If we had only the words “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household,” that might be claimed. However, immediately following this injunction is this statement: “And they [Paul and Silas] spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house” (Acts 16:32). Clearly “all … in his house” were people of age capable of hearing and believing the word of God: thus likely his wife and older children. Shortly after that “he [the jailer] was baptized, he and all his household”[44] (v. 33 NASB). Finally, “he … rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household” (v. 34 NASB). In no sense whatever is this an account of one person’s faith including others—a supposed solidarity. Rather, *all* in his household heard and believed and were baptized in connection with their own personal faith. Infants obviously were not included.

Lydia’s household may or may not have included her own family. She was a business woman, a seller of purple goods, residing in Philippi; but she had come from the distant Asia Minor city of Jhyatira. Her household (no mention is made of a husband) may then have included various business helpers, perhaps servants. Thus the baptism of Lydia and her household may not refer to family or children at all.[45] If it does, the same thing may apply as with the Philippian jailer: they would have been of age to hear and believe and thus be baptized along with Lydia.

Another significant household baptism (not previously mentioned) is that of Stephanas. Paul writes, “I did bap tize also the household of Stephanas” (1 Cor. 1:16). It might be possible to visualize infant baptism in this statement *except* for the fact that Paul later says, “Now, brethren, you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints” (1 Cor. 16:15). This household sounds rather adult!

All in all, the household evidence for infant baptism is very weak.[46] Its advocates usually admit that it is presumptive evidence (there is no direct statement anywhere that children were baptized); however, even to say that much is questionable. Incidentally, in one account that does not mention households, the wording, as we have noted, simply is this: “They were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12). Are we to presume that children are included in “men and women”? The question hardly merits a serious answer. There is no adequate evidence—even presumptive—for infant baptism in any of the household narratives.[47]

2. Circumcision and baptism

Since infant boys received circumcision under the old covenant, so should infant children under the new covenant. For both circumcision and baptism are signs and seals of God's covenant of grace that includes not only adults but also their children. Baptism, which of course is still more inclusive—females as well as males—is nonetheless a parallel to Old Testament circumcision. Both practices demonstrate that a covenanting God includes the whole family.[48] Thus infant circumcision leads properly to infant baptism. The overarching concept is that of the one covenant of grace (Old Testament and New) to which children of Christian believers now belong; therefore, they should receive the sign and seal of baptism.[49]

By way of response it is important, first, to recognize that there is a connection between circumcision and baptism. Paul refers to both circumcision and baptism in Colossians 2:11–12: "In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God" (NIV). Paul, however, is obviously not talking about physical circumcision "done by … men," which does include infants, but about spiritual circumcision "done by Christ," which includes only those who believe in Him—that is, those who are "buried with him in baptism." Thus the parallel is between spiritual circumcision and spiritual baptism,[50] both of which relate only to active believers in Jesus Christ. Accordingly, there is no way that this passage can be properly used to link infant circumcision and infant baptism.

Again, in reflecting on Old Testament circumcision of infants it is important to note that such was done purely on the basis of physical descent. Abraham, to be sure, received circumcision as a sign and seal of his own faith. Recall Paul's statement about this: "He [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised" (Rom. 4:11 NIV). However, not only Abraham was circumcised, for God had commanded, "Every male among you shall be circumcised … it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He that is eight days old … every male throughout your generations" (Gen. 17:10–12). Thus regardless of the faith (or lack of it) among parents, the sign of the covenant must be made. Thus again there is a great difference between the sign and seal of circumcision based on physical birth and that of baptism, which relates to spiritual rebirth. Because circumcision was given to infant boys in the old dispensation is therefore utterly no reason for giving baptism to infant children in the new covenant.[51]

The basic error lies in the failure to recognize the *difference* between the old

and new covenants. Doubtless there is a similarity, for it is the same covenanting God who graciously acts for His people. However, it is a great mistake to say, as many adherents of infant baptism do, that because God included the natural descendants of Abraham, adults and children alike, in the old covenant,[52] He includes the children of believers in the new covenant.[53] Rather, in the new covenant *in Christ* only those are included who come to personal faith in Him, and in that faith they are baptized.

3. Jesus' blessing of children

Jesus declared, "Let the children[54] come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it" (Mark 10:14–15). Then the text adds, "And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them" (v. 16). The words of Jesus, plus His open reception of children, implies the validity of infant baptism.[55]

All of this, I submit, is special pleading. First, the main emphasis in the passage is not on Jesus' reception of children, but on the childlike attitude of trust and openness that one must have to receive the kingdom: "to such belongs the kingdom of God." Not to children but "*to such*" belongs the kingdom. Second, Jesus assuredly does bless the children, but blessing has no real connection with baptism. We may recall that Jesus' only recorded reference to water baptism was that it was to be given to "disciples"—"baptizing them" (Matt. 28:19). Thus those who come to Christ in active faith, not those who are brought to Him, as were the children, are to be baptized.[56] The attempt to relate Jesus' blessing of children to infant baptism is quite misguided.[57]

Actually the proper use of the texts regarding Jesus' blessing children and taking them in His arms is *not for infant baptism but for infant dedication*. It is altogether fitting that parents should bring forward their infants and small children for dedication to the Lord and that the pastor take the children up in his arms for a blessing. It is also altogether fitting that at some later time, when the child has arrived at a responsible decision of faith, he or she come forward and receive baptism.[58] As a matter of fact infant baptism as practiced in most churches is actually more of a dedication service than a baptism.[59] All that is needed is to omit the water, take the infant up in arms, and bless as Jesus did! Some years later, it will be the privilege and responsibility of one who was

dedicated as an infant to come forward on his own and receive Christian baptism.

It is indeed important for infants and little children to be brought to Christ for His blessing, but it is urgent that the church not confuse baptism with dedication.[60] Baptism belongs to the day—and only that day—when a person makes public confession of his faith in the Lord.

4. God's prevenient grace

The baptism of an infant magnifies God's prevenient grace in that the child is incapable of responding to God's action in this sacrament. The infant is unknowing and helpless, so in baptism he is totally the recipient of God's grace. Such baptism accordingly attests that long before a person is capable of decision God has already acted on his behalf.[61]

God's prevenient grace is a precious truth, namely, that God's grace is always primary (for example, in regeneration and sanctification), but grace calls for personal response. Infant baptism unfortunately denies this, because it affords no place for the response of repentance and faith.

5. The seed of faith and vicarious faith

In infant baptism, faith is operative either as a tiny seed planted in the child's heart or as a vicarious faith on the part of those who bring the child to baptism. From the former perspective it is affirmed that normally the seed will grow until the day when the child can make his own confession.[62] From the latter, it is held that the surrounding faith (of parents, godparents, and congregation) serves vicariously for the faith of the child so that he is truly renewed in baptism.[63]

Neither the seed of faith nor vicarious faith is adequate to the New Testament understanding of baptism. "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). Only those who actively believe are to be baptized; thus saving faith is more than a seed and cannot be accomplished vicariously. Moreover, repentance is required at the time of baptism (recall Acts 2:38); this can hardly be done at the time of infant baptism or by proxy.[64] All in all, per sonal, conscious, even heartfelt faith is essential.[65]

6. Original sin

Since all persons born into this world come with the guilt of original sin, there is need for baptism as early as possible to remove this guilt and stain.[66] Otherwise infants who die prematurely will be forever cut off from the presence of God.[67] Infant baptism is essential to remove the inherited guilt of original sin so that babies if they die may go to heaven.

Even though it is true that infants are not born in innocence—the human race is sinful in nature[68] —baptism is surely not the way to remove the heritage of sin from infants. It is far better to say that even as Jesus blessed the infant children by taking them into His arms, if they die before an age of accountability, He will apply His saving work to them and receive them into heaven.[69] Further, it is obvious that this view of the removal of the guilt of original sin in regard to infants again points to the error of baptismal regeneration.

7. Promise regarding children

The earliest proclamation of the gospel by Peter in Acts about repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Spirit (2:38) continues with these words: “For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him” (v. 39). Since children, against a background that specifies baptism, are included in the promise, they rightly may be baptized.[70]

First, a careful reading of Acts 2:38–39 and the background of these verses will show that in the first place Peter is referring to the gift of the Holy Spirit, *not* salvation (contained in the words “repent,” “be baptized,” and “forgiveness of sins”), which is promised to all whom God “calls to him” (thus who have received salvation).[71] Hence it is misguided to view the baptism of anyone as included in the promise. Second, Peter’s words about children cannot imply infant baptism, since the whole background of repentance and faith calls for conscious decision, and only in that context can baptism occur with the resulting promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Third, “your children” is properly understood as “your sons and your daughters “ (v. 17)—not your infants—those of responsible age. In every way, to view Peter’s words as undergirding the practice of infant baptism is without warrant.

8. Early church practice

Since there is sufficient evidence of early church practice of infant baptism,[72] we may safely assume the propriety of its continuation to the present day.

The problem with this statement is that the evidence for infant baptism in the first century is nonexistent[73] and meager, if at all, in the second century.[74] It is only at the beginning of the third century (ca. A.D. 200) that the first clearcut statement about infant baptism is found, namely, in the writing of Tertullian, in which he opposes what seemed to be a growing tendency toward infant baptism![75] After Tertullian—and despite his efforts—infant baptism became more and more the prevailing practice throughout Christendom. By the time of Augustine (fifth century), infant baptism was officially sanctioned by the whole church.

It is apparent that the propriety of infant baptism cannot be based on early-church evidence for its practice.

Paedobaptists are often determined to find it there—even as they likewise search the New Testament for evidence—but it is all to no avail. Candidly, one suspects that the practice of infant baptism so dominates much biblical and historical research that it is a matter of seeking justification rather than truth.[76] Since the church at large (Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant) practices infant baptism, this fact for some is basically all that is needed: surely the church could not be wrong in so important a matter.[77] Church tradition, no matter how widespread, *must* never become the norm of Christian truth and practice.

I have devoted a number of pages to this excursus on infant baptism, giving many of the arguments for its practice and some responses to them, because the matter is an important one. It is not my intention to exaggerate this matter, since baptism whenever it is done is not as fundamental as that to which it points, namely, salvation. However, infant baptism, if nothing else, does cloud the issue, and in many ways it affects both the church's witness and the practical experience of its members.[78] Hence, my concern is to call those churches that practice infant baptism to seriously reconsider what they are doing and make every effort to reinstate the baptism of believers.

G. Miscellaneous

7. Administrator

The New Testament designates no particular person to administer baptism. Jesus' command to baptize, included in the Great Commission, was given at least to His "eleven disciples" (Matt. 28:16). Perhaps others were included, as the words "some doubted" may suggest (v. 17). In any event, the important matter is that those designated as disciples received the commission to go and baptize.[79]

In the Book of Acts the first recorded baptisms were of some three thousand persons: "So those who received his [Peter's] word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls" (2:41). With such a large number being baptized, it seems likely that others besides the apostles may have shared in the baptizing.[80] If so, this further demonstrates that disciples in general were authorized to perform baptisms. Indeed, the next baptisms mentioned in Acts were performed not by an apostle but by Philip the evangelist; he baptized a number of Samaritans (8:12) and the Ethiopian eunuch (v. 38). Later it was a Christian brother Ananias who baptized Saul of Tarsus (9:18). In the next chapter is the account of the Caesareans' being baptized: Peter "commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (10:48). Peter may have baptized these people; however, the language could imply that others in his company, "the believers … who came with Peter" (v. 45), did the actual baptizing.[81] Three further accounts describing Paul's ministry speak of the baptizing of certain people: Lydia and her household (16:15), the Philippian jailer and his household (16:33), and a number of Corinthians (18:8). But in none of these is Paul specified as the baptizer.[82] To be sure Paul did baptize,[83] but in his case—as that of Peter—it is very likely that other believers did most of the baptizing.

What all of this says to the church is that there should be no requirement beyond being a Christian in regard to who is authorized to baptize.[84] Even as every believer stands under the Great Commission to "go and make disciples," so likewise every believer is commanded to baptize: "baptizing them." To hold that every Christian is called to evangelize but only certain ones are allowed to

baptize is wholly contrary to the command of the Lord.

However, it is important that “all things should be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40).[85] Such matters as inquiry into the faith of the one seeking baptism, the suitability of the water to be used, and the appropriate atmosphere of reverence and sincerity call for careful concern. It is no small thing to baptize someone in relation to his or her salvation.

2. Validity

The validity of baptism does not depend on the worth or dignity of the one who administers the rite.[86] If a person who has come to faith is baptized, the question of the character of the one officiating does not determine the validity of the act of baptism. If the baptism is done in the triune name or in the name of Jesus Christ,[87] and water is used,[88] and a person comes in faith, the baptism is proper. What makes a baptism ultimately valid is the Holy Spirit, not the human administrator, for it is the Spirit who performs His work through the faith of the one being baptized.

It is good to bear in mind the nonde-pendence of baptism on the character of its administrant. People sometimes become concerned about their earlier baptism because of the one who administered it. Perhaps he was not a true believer or was actually living in immorality at the the time of the baptism. Now knowing what I do about his character, was my baptism genuine? Do I perhaps need to go through the baptismal rite again? Again, the answer, I submit, is that the validity of the sacrament does not rest on the worth or character of the administrant. One need not be anxious on that account.[89] To be sure, it is good to know that the officiant was a godly person; but even if he was not, the virtue and value of baptism is still not essentially affected.

In summary, the validity of baptism depends primarily on the work of the Holy Spirit, who signifies and seals the faith of the one who is baptized. On the human side, faith alone makes the sacrament valid.[90]

3. Once for All

The New Testament depicts baptism as occurring only once in the lives of those who received it. There is no evidence of additional Christian baptism.[91] Baptism was a once for all occurrence.

This corresponds to two things. First, Christ's work of redemption was once for all: "He has appeared once for all … to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself' (Heb. 9:26). Second, believers have been sanctified through that once for all offering: "We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10). Neither Christ's act of sacrifice nor our sanctification[92] is repeatable. Baptism, which corresponds to Christ's saving work and our entrance into salvation,[93] is on both counts a once for all event.

Moreover, since it is only through faith that salvation occurs, baptism is a demonstration of both the *objective* act of Christ's work in redemption and the *subjective* appropriation of it in faith. Hence, a person's baptism, on the one hand, is a testimony to Christ's redemptive action, and, on the other, it represents the response of saving faith. Both objective and subjective are once for all occurrences, and to these baptism corresponds.

Here we need to look once more at the practice of infant baptism. From what has been said, it is better not to perform such baptism at all. The proper rite for infants, as I have pointed out, is not baptism but dedication. Parents should be encouraged to bring forward their little ones for Christ's blessing and, along with the congregation assembled, to promise to bring them up in the spiritual nurture of the Lord. This will help to prepare children for the day when they can make a responsible decision for Christ and receive the ordinance of baptism. Moreover, the children, when baptism does occur, will themselves have the privilege and joy of active participation in the baptismal event, which marks their own entrance into the new life in Christ.[94]

What, however, should be done if a person has received the rite of infant baptism and now as an adult believer requests baptism? This doubtless is a complicated situation, especially in light of the once for all character of baptism. Let me mention three possible procedures. First, there is the radical possibility of *denying any validity* to infant baptism and thus baptizing any who later come to a responsible decision. Rather than viewing this as a second baptism—which is clearly un-scriptural—it may be understood as the one and only baptism that corresponds to the decision of faith.[95] The former baptism is viewed as wholly an empty form; the reality occurs only when the person himself participates. Second, it is also possible, without denying the once for all character of baptism, to have an occasion of *baptismal renewals*.[96] In this case there is no question raised about the validity of infant baptism. However, since some persons desire to renew personally the vows taken for them as infants, they are now allowed to participate in the ritual, including water baptism, usually by immersion.[97] This

renewal of baptism is often desired by those who have had a life-changing experience of conversion and/or spiritual renewal and now wish personally to participate in the event of water baptism. Third—and somewhat intermediate between the two just described—there is the possibility of viewing the ceremony of infant baptism as objectively valid but calling for a *future subjective completion or fulfillment* in faith and repentance.[98] The rite of baptism will not be repeated, but it will be supplemented by personal confirmation. In many churches there is a recognized service of confirmation in which the person assumes the vows taken for him in baptism and makes his own public profession of faith.[99] Such confirmation may be viewed as the completion or fulfillment of his or her earlier baptism.[100]

In all three of the above possibilities, the once for all character of baptism is not denied.[101] The important thing, further, is that all such procedures are concerned to implement personal faith, which is critical to the validity of baptism.[102] If this is not recognized, the practice of baptism is injurious to the life of the church,[103] and misleading to all who receive the rite.

Let it be understood, however, that all of these approaches and possibilities would be *unnecessary if churches no longer practiced infant baptism.* The once for all character of believers' baptism would then be highlighted, the objective work of Christ in redemption and its subjective appropriation in faith would be unified, and personal participation in baptism would be a deeply renewing experience.

It is indeed important that the church at large make every effort to return to the biblical practice of baptism. This will not be easy because of centuries of tradition. However, the need is great, and with the blessed Lord's help such reformation can occur. Dare we wait any longer?[104]

II. THE LORD’S SUPPER

A. Terminology

There are a number of ways of designating this second ordinance of Christ, the most common being the Lord's Supper. Interestingly, this language is found only in a negative statement by Paul: "When you meet together, it is not the Lord's supper[105] that you eat" (1 Cor. 11:20). Shortly thereafter Paul sets forth details regarding the institution and form of the Supper (vv. 23–26). Before saying more about the expression "the Lord's Supper," let us observe several other descriptions of it.

1. The Breaking of Bread

This expression goes back to an occasion in the Upper Room: "Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body' " (Matt. 26:26).

A few weeks later, following Jesus' death, resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit, some three thousand persons turned to the Lord and were baptized. From that time on, "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42 NIV). "The breaking of bread" in all likelihood signified the Lord's Supper.[106] The word "fellowship" *(koinonia)* may refer in part to the fellowship meal that preceded the sacramental breaking of bread.[107] Hence "the breaking of bread" points in a special way to the Lord's Supper.[108] If this is the case, the Lord's Supper was celebrated by the early church at Pentecost.

It is interesting that the description of the church's activity continues shortly after in these words: "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes [or 'from house to house'], they partook of food with glad and generous hearts" (Acts 2:46). Probably the breaking of bread again refers—in conjunction with their main meals—to the Lord's Supper.[109] If so, this demonstrates the importance of the Lord's Supper in the daily life of the early Christian community.

Let us note further references in Acts to the breaking of bread. Acts 20:7 reads, "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them [believers in Troas]." This statement is doubly

interesting: it shows that the believers gathered together on Sunday (the new Christian Sabbath) and that breaking bread was the purpose for which they assembled. This can hardly mean an ordinary meal—although it may have included such—but more likely the Lord's Supper.[110] It is also possible that the further words in verse 11, "when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten" (v. 11), refer to the Lord's Supper.[111] Breaking bread, it is noteworthy, is mentioned separately from eating.

Finally, in Acts there is the narration about Paul, his companions, and a number of sailors undergoing a fierce sea storm. Paul urged the hungry and battered men to eat something. Then the text reads, "He took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat. Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves" (27:35–36). There is a possible reference in these words to the Lord's Supper.[112]

The breaking of bread recalls Jesus' words and example and is thus an early way of characterizing the Lord's Supper. Although some of the uses of this expression in Acts are vague, the breaking of bread undoubtedly implies more than an ordinary meal. Since it can hardly be doubted that the church in Acts followed Christ's command to baptize, there is all the more assurance that the breaking of bread frequently refers to the Lord's Supper.

2. The Christian Passover

Paul writes to the Corinthians, "Christ, our Passover lamb,[113] has been sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7 NIV). This states, in vivid simplicity, that the Lord's Supper—with Christ as the Passover Lamb—is the Christian Passover.

Thus the Lord's Supper is the extension and fulfillment of the Jewish Passover. The Passover was the Jewish feast that recalled both the Lord's passing over the Israelites' houses the night He slew the Egyptians and the sacrificed lamb with its blood on the door that kept death from striking the homes of the Israelites.[114]

Jesus' close connection with the Passover is seen in that the Lord's Supper was basically a Passover meal. The Scripture reads, "Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare the passover for us, that we may eat it'" (Luke 22:7–8). When preparations had been made and Jesus was at table with His apostles, He declared, "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer" (v. 15). Thus it was a Passover meal, and the one to

suffer and die was the Lamb of God.

The Lord's Supper is therefore the Christian Passover. Even as the Lord passed over the Israelites, saving them from physical death through the sacrificed lamb, so by Christ's infinitely greater sacrifice believers are saved from eternal destruction. As Christians we celebrate this on every occasion of the Lord's Supper.

3. Holy Communion

Paul also writes to the Corinthians in regard to the Lord's Supper: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16 KJV). From these words derives the terminology of the Lord's Supper as Holy Communion.

The word translated "communion"[115] may also be rendered in this context as "participation" (RSV, NIV) or "sharing" (NASB), hence a participation in or sharing in the blood and body of Christ. Whatever the translation, the point is that in the Lord's Supper there is vital communication with Christ.

4. The Table of the Lord

A few verses later Paul refers to the Lord's Supper as "the table of the Lord" (1 Cor. 10:21): "You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons." By the "table of demons" Paul refers particularly to sitting at table in a pagan temple where the food has been sacrificed to idols, hence demons, and then on another occasion to sit and partake at the Lord's table.

The Lord is host in His Supper and He invites His followers to participate at His table. The table of the Lord and the table of demons have utterly nothing in common.

5. The Eucharist

In all the biblical accounts of Jesus' words at the Last Supper, the note of thanksgiving is present. For example, "He took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said…. And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it"

(Luke 22:17, 19). The word for “given thanks” is a form of the verb *eucharisteo*, the noun form being *eucharistia*, or thanksgiving.

The name Eucharist for the Lord’s Supper, while not used as such in the New Testament, is found in the *Didache*. Section 9:1 begins, “Now concerning the Eucharist, give thanks as follows.” Then occur prayers of thanksgiving in regard to the cup and the bread, and it specifies that at the close of the service further thanksgiving is to be offered to the Lord.[116]

The word “Eucharist” for the Lord’s Supper has come to be used in many of the churches of Christendom.[117]

B. Meaning

What is the meaning of the Lord's Supper? When Christians gather together in celebration of this ordinance, or sacrament, what is the significance of the event? Let us observe several things.

1. Remembrance

The Lord's Supper is, first of all, an occasion of *remembrance*. In the words of instruction, as given by Paul, Jesus said, "This is my body which is for you.

Do this in remembrance of me… .[118]

This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24–25). The Lord's Supper is the recollection and showing forth of Christ's death. Paul adds, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (v. 26). Hence the Lord's Supper is a representation, a re-presentation, of Christ's death, both vividly calling it to mind and showing it forth.[119]

The Lord's Supper is a perpetual memorial to the sacrificial death of Christ. Unlike most memorials that point to the outstanding lives of people, this is uniquely a memorial to a death. The bread broken represents the body of Christ, and the cup represents the blood: His total self-giving for mankind's redemption.

The Lord's Supper, accordingly, is an affirmation of a *historical* event. It points vividly to what happened on the earth almost two thousand years ago: Christ died on the cross for mankind's sin. The Supper, therefore, is not the dramatization of some mythological happening, as, for example, a god or goddess dying and later rising in an annual cycle of winter and spring. Rather, Christian faith is wedded to history, to what took place once for all in our world, in our flesh. The Lord's Supper is the earthly representation of a historical event: the death of Christ on a cross in ancient Judea.

Accordingly, the Lord's Supper is not an elaborate ritual. Rather, there is a kind of stark simplicity: the only action occurring through bread and a cup but dramatizing the most important event in history. Moreover, it is drama in an extraordinary way, for all who come to the Lord's Supper are "on the stage." Each participates by eating the bread and drinking the cup. All the human physical senses are involved: sight (beholding the elements), sound (hearing the

words of institution), and touch, taste, even smell (the bread and the wine). Thus both spiritually and physically we experience Christ's death on the cross—the agony and the wonder. In the Lord's Supper it is as if we were present at the death of Christ.

The Lord's Supper is also the continuing reminder of *the new covenant* in Christ's death.

In a special way this is symbolized by the cup: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." The old covenant with its sacrifices of animals was always insufficient for human salvation. Now in the death of Christ with the shedding of His blood, the new covenant of eternal life has been established. Thus the cup at the Lord's Supper is the vivid symbol and continuing reminder of that new covenant, which Christ's death made possible. Hence every celebration of the Lord's Supper is a reaffirmation of God's new covenant in Jesus Christ.

At the heart of the new covenant and its remembrance in the Lord's Supper stands *divine forgiveness.* According to Matthew's account, Jesus' words were: "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant,[120] which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (26:27–28). Thus there is portrayed in every celebration of the Lord's Supper the immeasurable cost in the new covenant of divine forgiveness: the death of the Son of God. Christ's blood poured out in God's total forgiveness, hence complete salvation, is brought home through the ritual of the Lord's Supper.

Accordingly, there is a profound confirmation of God's gift of salvation in the Lord's Supper. For not only are the bread and cup a sign to us of this salvation but also through our eating the bread and drinking the cup, God's grace is *sealed* afresh in our hearts: truly we have been totally forgiven. Moreover, even as we receive the bread and cup we appropriate God's continuing grace in Christ. Thus the Lord's Supper is also a *means* of receiving and appropriating God's ever-present grace.[121]

Thus in the Lord's Supper we first of all remember Christ's death.[122] In that sense it is a very solemn occasion. For it points vividly to the most agonizing of all moments in history, to the One who in dying for our sins cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). Hence we initially come to the Lord's Supper with solemn, and indeed penitent, hearts. To be sure, there is the ensuing joy of fellowship with Christ and anticipation of His coming again,[123] but this joy can occur only against the solemn background of knowing that both the broken bread and the cup of wine represent the awesome and terrifying death of Jesus Christ our Savior.[124] We must first share with Christ in His death, partaking of the symbols of that death in order to rejoice in His life.

2. Communion

The Lord's Supper is also an occasion of *communion*.[125] Not only do we look to the past in remembrance of Christ's death; we also experience a present personal communion. We have earlier noted Paul's words "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16 KJV).

The words of Paul betoken a very close relationship with Christ in the Lord's Supper. It is a sharing in His body and blood, and this points not only to the death of Christ but also to His living presence. We remember Christ's death through the bread and cup; we also experience Him as active and present in our midst. We receive the elements of bread and wine to reappropriate His saving forgiveness; we also partake of them to be nourished by His life. Moreover, since we have not only been crucified with Christ but also raised with Him, every Lord's Supper is also an occasion of fellowship and communion with the living Lord.

a. Communion between Christ and His church. In terms of communion the Lord's Supper is first an occasion of *Christ's communing with His people.* We may begin by recalling His words in the Upper Room: "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). In the words "with you" Jesus spoke of desiring close fellowship with His disciples, and through the personal symbols of the cup and bread, He shared Himself with them. Jesus was the host at the table, not as a distant person but as One who communicated intimately with His disciples. Thus the atmosphere created was that of close communion with those who belonged to Him.

We may also recall two other occasions after the gathering in the Upper Room when the risen Jesus shared bread with His disciples. One occasion was at the home of two disciples in Emmaus. "When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them.[126] And their eyes were opened and they recognized him" (Luke 24:30–31). Thus "He was known to them in the breaking of the bread" (v. 35). A second occasion took place by the Sea of Tiberias (Galilee). Jesus gave an invitation to several of his disciples, who at first had not recognized Him: "Come and have breakfast…. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them" (John 21:12–13). Although neither of these events was, strictly speaking, the Lord's Supper, they were occasions of meal fellowship in which the risen Christ was present and made Himself known to His disciples. It surely seems possible that on the later occasions in Acts when the

early church "broke bread"[127] there was a vital sense of the resurrected, living Lord in their midst. Thus, we may conclude that in many ways the Lord's Supper was also a celebration of the Resurrection.[128]

Since Christ is now the risen and exalted Lord, we may view every occasion of the Lord's Supper as an opportunity for the living Christ to communicate closely with His people. The bread and wine, while they remain symbols of His death, also represent the Christ who in glory has not given up His bodily reality. He still has flesh and bones,[129] hence a real human body. Thus under the visible symbols of bread and wine on the table, His glorious presence is all the more manifest among His people. He is concretely and tangibly present in fellowship and communion with those who belong to Him.

Hence we move from the death of Christ to His living reality. Indeed, there always is the need to sense again and again the somber reality of Christ's death and likewise reappropriate divine forgiveness. But there is also the joyous reality of Christ's risen and continuing presence that ministers new life. The Christ who was both crucified and raised from death is host at the Holy Communion!

b. Communion between the Church and Christ. I have been speaking of communion in terms of Christ's presence with His people; now we turn to the consideration of *our communion with Christ*. The Lord's Supper is an opportunity for close and vital communion of His people with Him.

Here we may reflect on these striking words of Jesus in the Gospel of John: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life" (6:53–54). Although these words were not spoken at the Last Supper, they seem much related to the inner content of Jesus' words in the Upper Room.[130] In a larger sense Jesus in John 6 was talking about the meaning of faith. Earlier He had said, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst" (v. 35). These words are similar to others in the Fourth Gospel where Christ is depicted, for example, as living water (4:10), as the light of the world (8:1), and as the door (10:9). Faith means drinking the water, coming to the light, and entering the door. Thus the words about Jesus as "the bread of life" are essentially the same: believing means coming to Jesus in faith and never hungering or thirsting again. So when Jesus proceeds with the words about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, He does not leave the realm of faith behind but is stressing even more intensely that to believe is to partake of Him inwardly. Believing is not only a satisfying of spiritual hunger by coming to Christ; it is also a coming in which one receives

Christ into his or her inmost being.

Thus the words of Jesus about eating "the flesh of the Son of man" and drinking "His blood" must be understood not literally but *spiritually*. Shortly after Jesus had spoken these words, many of His own disciples, taking them literally, began to murmur and take offense (6:61). Then Jesus replied, "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (v. 63). He did not mean for them to partake literally of His body and blood but to partake spiritually of Him through faith.

This brings us, then, to the deep meaning of the Lord's Supper. When Jesus says about the bread, "Take, eat; this is my body," and about the cup, "Drink of it, all of you" (Matt. 26:26- 27), the language is almost identical with Jesus' words in the Gospel of John: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood… ." Since these words in John cannot be understood as a literal eating of Christ's flesh and drinking His blood, no more can Jesus' words at the Supper be understood as a call for a literal partaking of Christ's body and blood.[131] Only *a spiritual understanding will again suffice*. In line with Jesus' statement "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life," the same is true of the words at the Table. It is a matter of our spiritual communion with Jesus Christ.

Accordingly, this means that at the Lord's Supper as we partake of the elements of bread and wine, we partake spiritually of Christ. The bread and wine are important because they symbolize Christ. In that sense Jesus called them His body and blood. Indeed, when Jesus said, "This is my body … my blood," He was obviously speaking symbolically because He was not the bread and wine He spoke about: He sat at the table with them. Further, not only are the bread and wine symbols of Christ but also by partaking of them physically the believer has an opportunity to gain a deeper spiritual experience: the appropriation of physical bread and wine leading to a deeper spiritual appropriation of Christ. There is indeed a correspondence between the physical and the spiritual. At the same time that we physically partake of the bread and wine and receive them into our bodies, we likewise partake of Christ spiritually so that He has fuller entrance into our souls and spirits.

Thus the Lord's Supper is an *enhancement* of spiritual communion. There can be spiritual communion without the Lord's Supper, as in times of prayer and worship. Some would even urge that true spiritual communion calls for no physical elements.[132] However, since we are not in this life disembodied creatures, it is good to have corporeal realities through which we reach out into the realm of the spiritual. Holy communion is not ill-served by physical aids: it

is all the more enhanced.

This communion with Christ at His Supper is so meaningful that we should exercise due care not to allow anything to block it. Shortly after Paul's words about our participation in the body and blood of Christ, he declares, "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons" (1 Cor. 10:21). As we have noted, Paul was urging the believers in Corinth not to eat in pagan temples where the food and drink presumably were offered to idols (v. 19), hence to demons (v. 20), and after that to sit down at the Lord's Table to eat and drink. This means, by implication, that any participation in the realm of the demonic makes impossible the partaking of Holy Communion with Christ. Paul's words are quite relevant in a world today where demonic forces and influences in many forms—such as witchcraft, the occult, and "new age" phenomena—abound. Christians cannot share in any of these things—"tables of demons"—and sit also at the Lord's holy Table.

By extension, if anything else is dominating one's life rather than devotion to Christ, it is not possible to have true communion with Him. While most Christians are repelled by overt idolatry and demonism (as just described), they are often prey to more subtle forms of idolatry—for example, allowing money or power or pleasure to dominate their lives. However, in Jesus' words, "You cannot serve both God and Money" (Matt. 6:24 NIV)—or power, or pleasure, or any other idol. If we attempt to do so, we cannot truly recognize God, and the lordship of Christ is usurped by idols that actually are tools of Satan. To serve any such forces is to partake of "the table of demons" and prevent true communion with the Lord.

Now turning to the more positive side: it is also critically important to come *in faith* to the Lord's Table. Although the Lord's Supper is "the communion of the body and blood of Christ," and therefore Christ is truly present as Host, we can receive Him only as we come in true faith.[133] There is no automatic guarantee that because we say certain words or offer certain prayers we will receive Christ. Earlier I spoke of spiritual partaking and I emphasize it as *partaking through the Holy Spirit in faith.* Through the Holy Spirit Christ is present, but only to the faith of those open to receive Him. Indeed, since the very elements depict Christ's body and blood, there can be a heightened experience of His spiritual and real presence—but again only to and through faith.[134]

In regard to faith and the Lord's Supper, the invitation of Christ in the Book of Revelation is appropriate: "Be hold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and *open* the door, I will come in to him, and will sup[135] with

him, and he with me" (3:20 KJV). Although this is not directly a statement about the Lord's Supper, the Lord does invite us to "open the door"—an invitation to open up the heart in faith—and thereby to "sup with Him." It follows that if the door is not opened in faith, then regardless of how truly Christ is present, there can be no Holy Communion with Him. Let us then come in true faith to the Table of the Lord.

c. Communion and union with one another. The Lord's Supper is also an occasion of communion and union with one another. Immediately after his words about the communion of Christ's blood and body, Paul continues, "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf' (1 Cor. 10:17 NIV). Since the loaf, before it is broken into pieces to be eaten, is one, the Lord's Supper, regardless of the plurality of participants, is a meal affirming the unity of all. United in Christ at the Lord's Table, all are united with one another.

This means that the Lord's Supper has not only a vertical dimension, uniting believers and Christ mutually, but also a horizontal dimension, namely, communion and union with one another. In a human family, whatever the usual differences, the table meal, sometimes likewise called "breaking bread," is the expression of an underlying family relationship. This is much more the case when the spiritual family, the church, comes together to break bread at the Table of the Lord, for in so gathering God's people have a deeper sense of community and union. For the Lord, not some family member, is the One who through human hands dispenses the bread and cup to the church family and thus binds them together in fellowship and unity.

This communion and union presupposes that those who share in the Lord's Supper are truly believers. No one should participate, or be allowed to participate, if he or she does not belong to Christ. From the beginning, Christ ordained the sacrament for His own disciples, not for the world; thus believers are the proper persons to sit at His Table. Only those who confess faith in Christ should be invited to receive the elements. There can be no unity at the Table where belief and unbelief are mixed together. Paul, in a later letter to the Corinthians, asks rhetorically, "What fellowship *[koinonia]* has light with darkness? … Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?" (2 Cor. 6:14–15). Accordingly, the Lord's Supper cannot include fellowship between light and darkness, or communion between believers and unbelievers. Thus, while all people—believers and unbelievers alike—are welcome to be in church together, only believers belong at the Lord's Table.

Some further words in this regard should be added. If believers themselves

become involved in certain evil practices, there is no place for them at Holy Communion. Paul had earlier written, “You must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat” (1 Cor. 5:11 NIV). If we are not even to eat with such a person, it is all the more urgent that he be restrained from partaking at the Lord’s Table. There may be cases in which even excommunication[136] should take place. In the same chapter Paul writes the Corinthians concerning a man involved in incest: “Let him who has done this be removed from among you” (vv. 1–2). Paul was also concerned that the church had become too tolerant of evil and needed to take strong action in regard to this perverse situation. There is no place in the church for such gross evil, and all the more so in regard to the Lord’s Table.

Another concern of Paul that relates to fellowship at the Lord’s Table is divisiveness. Paul writes to Titus, “As for a man who is factious [or ‘divisive’ NIV],[137] after admonishing him once or twice, have nothing more to do with him … he is self-condemned” (Titus 3:10–11). Such a person who is dividing the church in any way should not be allowed to come to the Lord’s Table, the focal point of Christian unity. This divisiveness may also be doctrinal in nature. Paul writes to the Romans, “I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching [or ‘doctrine’] which you learned, and turn away from them” (16:17 NASB). To “turn away from” means to withdraw fellowship; this surely applies to the Lord’s Table. False doctrine, which serves only to divide the body and to produce schism, is a critical barrier to communion and unity. Such persons do not belong at the Table of the Lord.

There is one other negative factor so significant that if it exists, there really can be no Lord’s Supper at all. I am not now speaking of unbelief, immorality, or divisiveness (which I have discussed in turn), but lack of love. After Paul speaks of divisiveness in relation to the church at Corinth (see 1 Cor. 11:18–19), he then adds, “When you meet together, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk…. Do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?” (vv. 20–22). It is apparent that the meal held in connection with the Lord’s Supper was anything but an *Agape*, or “love feast.”[138] It was such a travesty of love that no matter what was said or done in a presumed Lord’s Supper, the Supper simply did not exist. Lack of love—selfishness, greed, and thoughtlessness—had emptied it of all validity and significance. It was in no sense whatever a Communion service.

Paul’s negative words about the Corinthians’ “Lord’s Supper” should be a

continuing warning to the church. Far too often it is assumed that if a properly ordained minister is officiating and the right words and actions transpire, the Lord's Supper is thereby celebrated. This is far from the truth. It is Paul who gives us the Communion ritual usually followed in 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 (often read apart from the context); however, this is preceded by his words about the Corinthian "Lord's Supper," which was no Lord's Supper at all! Does this not strongly suggest that our major concern in coming to the Lord's Table should be the proper attitude of all the participants? The Lord's Supper is the vivid portrayal of Christ's love for us—His body and blood sacrificially given. How can we come to His Table except in responsible love to Him and in love for one another?

Finally, I want to reaffirm the value and importance of the Lord's Supper. It is the paramount occasion in the church of our communion and union with other believers. There is church fellowship in many ways, but none can approximate Holy Communion. Augustine called the Lord's Supper "the bond of love."[139] Surely it is that, for it binds believers all the more closely to one another in what love requires.[140] By partaking of the communion of the body and blood of Christ, whose love we share, we are constrained to a fuller and deeper love for one another.

3. Expectation

The Lord's Supper is, finally, an occasion of *expectation*. It is a looking forward to the messianic Supper in the future kingdom. The Lord's Supper is not only a meal of remembering the Lord's death and of present communion; it is also an anticipation of a glorious fulfillment when Christ returns. Every celebration of the Lord's Supper is a foretaste and expectation of what will happen in the age to come.

Jesus Himself spoke of a future fulfillment. Immediately following His words in the Upper Room about earnestly desiring to eat the Passover with His apostles, He declared, "I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:16 NIV). Then, after taking the cup and giving it to the disciples, He said, "I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes" (v. 18 NIV). In another account the latter words are more personal—"until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:29 NIV). Thus the Passover that Christ celebrated—and is now our Christian Passover—will find its fulfillment in the coming

kingdom. Only then will Christ again eat and drink with those who belong to Him.[141] In Paul's delineation of the institution of the Lord's Supper, he also refers to a future event. After quoting Jesus about remembrance—"in remembrance of me"—Paul adds, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). The emphasis is on the continuing observance of the Supper until Christ returns. Paul says nothing about what will happen when the Lord comes back; however, there is clearly a forward look—"until he comes." Hence, the Lord's Supper in every observance contains a note of expectation. This is shown again near the close of his letter when Paul cries out, "Our Lord, come!"[142] (16:22). Al though it is possible that Paul's words have no direct eucharistic reference, the language seems to catch up his earlier words in connection with the Lord's Supper, "until he comes," by a fervent "Our Lord, come!"[143] For, somehow (Paul does not say how), with the return of Christ the earthly Supper will find its ultimate fulfillment.

We move, then, to this fulfillment. In terms of a climactic Supper, the Book of Revelation depicts it vividly as a marriage supper. The Scripture reads, "Let us rejoice and exult and give him [God] the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready…. Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (19:7, 9). The Lamb of course is Christ and the Bride is His church; together they will partake of the Supper that is the climax and fulfillment of every earthly Supper. This is the Supper of the kingdom to which Jesus pointed at the Last Supper: the heavenly banquet to which every earthly celebration points and the glorious fulfillment of the cry of faith and hope, "Our Lord, come!"

Because of the prospect of this final Supper, every occasion of the Lord's Supper should be marked by joy. I have spoken of the Lord's Supper as a solemn time, since it calls to mind the Lord's death. It surely is that, but we have observed further that the Supper is also a witness to the resurrected Lord's presence in our midst. Thus already His presence is a matter of joy and thanksgiving (hence a "Eucharist"). The early church experienced this, as Luke points out: "Attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts" (Acts 2:46). Now as the church, the people of God, continue to experience the risen Lord's presence in their midst, they can further realize that this is but a small token of what is yet to come!

The Lord's Supper has been called "a mystic banquet" in which by feasting at the Lord's Table we even now ascend to the joy and glory of heaven.[144]

However, all the joy and glory we may now know in Christ's spiritual presence at the Table serve only to intensify our yearning for the day when we will see Him face to face and sit with believers of all ages and places at the eternal Supper of our Lord.

Thus at every celebration of the Lord's Supper our hearts cry out, "Our Lord, come," for we long to share with Him in the glorious marriage Supper of His kingdom that has no end.

C. Observance

We come to the actual observance of the Lord's Supper. Now that we have discussed both terminology and meaning, let us consider a number of matters related to its proper observance.

1. Administrator

First, there is the question of who is to administer the Lord's Supper. Imme diately we can say two things from the New Testament perspective: Christ Himself is *the* chief administrator and by implication any who truly believe in Him may administer the Supper in His name.

We have only the synoptic gospels and Paul's account in 1 Corinthians to go by. In the former, Christ is the Host and administers the bread and cup to His apostles; in the latter, Paul rehearses the words and event of the Upper Room without saying anything about who may validly administer the elements.[145] This suggests that any true believer in Christ may do so.[146]

It is important, of course, as with baptism, that any administration of the Lord's Supper be done in a proper and fitting manner.[147] For surely, since every occasion of its celebration is a high and holy time, those who lead should be especially prepared in heart and mind to minister in Christ's name.

2. Time and Place

It is apparent from the Book of Acts that in the early days of the church there was frequent "breaking of bread,"[148] and this occurred in many places. This could have been daily—"day by day … breaking bread" — and in various homes—"in their homes," or "from house to house"[149] (2:46). Another reference suggests a Sunday observance in a house: "On the first day of the week … we were gathered together to break bread" (20:7). This took place in an upstairs room—"the upper chamber where we were gathered" (v. 8). Thus there was frequent occurrence of the Lord's Supper, with specific mention of a Sunday gathering, in various house locations.

The Corinthian believers were meeting—the day of the week not mentioned—in some place separate from their various houses. Paul clearly refers to their gathering as a church, for shortly before declaring, “It is not the Lord’s Supper that you eat” (1 Cor. 11:20), he said, “When you assemble as a church…”[150] ° (v. 18). Then after Paul’s negative statement about the Lord’s Supper, he vigorously speaks out: “What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?” (v. 22). We are not told that the Corinthians assembled in a church building (there were none in the early church) but “as a church.”[151] It could have been an assemblage in any place that was large enough to accommodate them all.

This early church record in Acts and 1 Corinthians suggests that in view of the frequency of meetings in which the Lord’s Supper was observed, we may do well likewise to meet often for a similar purpose. A weekly—“on the first day of the week”—observance would surely be in order.[152] However, this can be more, or less, frequently done, depending in part on the nature of church gatherings. For example, the Supper can be celebrated in house gatherings during the week or in visits to shut-ins and sick at any time. Once a week may be too often for a Sunday gathering, especially if the congregation is large; perhaps once a month will suffice. Another important matter is that the Lord’s Supper not become a formality, which can happen through frequent repetition. However, if there is proper preparation[153] and care given, frequent observance can be a rich blessing to any body of believers.

The place of the Lord’s Supper is the Christian community. It cannot be a solitary matter: private communion is self-contradictory. The Lord’s Supper, to be sure, is first with the Lord; but it is also communion with one another, or it is not communion at all.[154] Moreover, since originally the Lord’s Supper occurred in the context of a fellowship meal, churches today may occasionally use ordinary church suppers as an opportunity to climax with the sharing of the Lord’s Supper. Indeed, to make use of the common bread on the table later for the Eucharist can be a rich experience in the fuller meaning of Holy Communion.

Finally, in regard to place, since the Lord’s Supper is a high occasion of the community’s worship of God, it is fitting that it most often be held in connection with that worship. It should not be an unrelated addendum to public worship but its climax. The Lord’s Supper is the culmination of the church’s worship of God.

5. Participants

All who participate in the Lord's Supper should be believers in Jesus Christ. He is the Host who from the beginning in the Upper Room ordained this service for His own disciples. It is an occasion for those who trust in Christ to sit at His holy Table.

All believers who are present, whether or not they are a part of the local body, should be invited to participate. Since every local body is an expression of the universal church of Jesus Christ, all believers, regardless of denomination or distance from their home church, should be included.

Christ is the Head of the whole church and so invites all His people to participate. Thus there should be no "fencing of the Table" in an unreadiness to share at Table with other Christian brothers and sisters.[155] All who confess faith in Christ and come in true repentance should be included at His Table.[156]

There are, however, certain exclusions. First, unbelievers obviously should not be invited to participate.[157] They are surely welcome to attend the occasion of worship, but until they have made a public profession of faith, they do not belong at the Table of the Lord. Thus it is a mistake to invite all people to partake of Holy Communion. Christ continually invites sinners to come to Him —and so should the church—but an invitation to the Lord's Supper is different. It is only for those who truly belong to Him and thus are able to remember His death, commune with His life, and await His future return.

Second, children who have not yet made a profession of faith should not participate. Even though children are in a different category from that of unbelievers, especially if they are children of believers, they should wait until the day when they make a public confession. It is a mistake to assume that because of family ties a child should be allowed to receive Communion along with his parents. For the Lord's Supper is not in essence the gathering of a natural family but a gathering of the spiritual church family. Moreover, a child cannot possibly follow the injunction of Paul "But let a man[158] examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (1 Cor. 11:28 NASB). Actually, by withholding Holy Communion from a child, he can be better taught the higher significance of the spiritual family. Instead of feeling left out, the child may look forward to the day when he can make his own confession of faith and likewise become a communing member of the body of Christ.

Third, unrepentant believers should not be invited to the Lord's Table. We have earlier talked about Paul's warning not to eat with a brother who is "sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler" (1 Cor. 5:11 NIV). Thus all who are continuing in such evils should be

warned *not* to come to Holy Communion. We may also recall Paul's admonition about avoiding persons who are factious in manner or doctrine and excluding them from a table expressing communion and unity. If, on the other hand, such persons come after repenting of their sins, they should surely be allowed—indeed, encouraged—to participate.

In connection with this last point, let me emphasize that all believers who come in a spirit of repentance are welcome at the Lord's Table. One does not have to be immoral, greedy, a slanderer, or a factious person to need repentance: all Christians, because of continuing sin in their lives, need to come in genuine repentance. If we come, recognizing and confessing our sins, the Lord truly and gladly receives us at His holy Table.

4. Self-Examination

What was just said leads to the importance of self-examination on the part of believers. I have previously quoted these words of Paul: "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (1 Cor. 11:28 NASB). Now let us note in more detail what Paul is saying. Immediately it is obvious that Paul is calling for self-examination to precede the partaking of Holy Communion.

Furthermore, the fact that self-examination is critical is shown by Paul's preface to his call: "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning[159] the body and blood of the Lord" (v. 27). The word "therefore" points back to the Corinthians' profanation of the Supper by their greed and selfishness. Even though they were believers in Christ, they had reduced the whole occasion of Holy Communion to a farce. But even worse, as Paul now declares, they—and any other believers ("whoever") who act similarly in partaking of the elements—are guilty of profaning Christ's body and blood. This is unmistakably a very serious charge.

That is the background of Paul's call to personal self-examination before receiving the elements: "But let a man [a person] examine *himself*." The word "but" is critical because it provides the alternative to profaning Christ's body and blood—the way of self-examination. One's sins may not be the same—or as serious—as those of the Corinthians, but they must be recognized and confessed.

Self-examination is also the way of coming to Holy Communion in a *worthy* manner. Sincere believers have sometimes been disturbed—even anguished—by Paul's prior statement about eating and drinking "in an unworthy manner."[160]

Who is really worthy to come to the Table? Who, if he comes, will not profane the body and blood of Christ? Would it not therefore be better to stay away from the Lord's Table altogether than to risk such a terrible occurrence? The answer, according to Paul, lies in self-examination. To be sure, none of us is worthy to come: we are all sinners saved by grace. But the relevant matter is *not our worthiness but our coming in a worthy manner*, namely, by examining ourselves. If we do this, we will then partake worthily of the Lord's Supper.

Such self-examination may occur shortly before the Supper—either immediately prior to receiving the elements or, if the Supper takes place at the climax of a worship service, at an earlier time given to self-examination and confession. Or, again, it may occur on some occasion prior to the Supper in a period of private prayer or in a special church service of penitence and preparation.[161] Whenever and however self- examination is done, it prepares the way for receiving Holy Communion worthily.

Such examination also leads to a better discernment. Paul next says, "For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body[162] eats and drinks judgment[163] upon himself' (1 Cor. 11:29). If there is no spiritual self-examination, a person is actually blind to the spiritual reality of the body of Christ. He may eat and drink, but the food and drink are not the conveyers of blessing but of judgment. One cannot partake of the holy in an unholy manner without negative results.

Let us consider two final statements by Paul: "But if we examine[164] ourselves, we should not thus fall under the judgment," and "When, however, we do fall under the Lord's judgment, he is disciplining us, to save us from being condemned with the rest of the world" (1 Cor. 11:31–32 NEB). Thus Paul repeats the need for self-examination and adds further that if we do experience "the Lord's judgment" through weakness, sickness, or even death, it is for positive ends: our discipline and ultimately *our noncondemnation.*

This last statement by Paul should remove any fear or trepidation about partaking at the Lord's Table. Surely we should previously examine ourselves—this is very important. But even if we fail, or do it poorly, God does not condemn us. Whatever negative consequences may occur are ultimately for our good, our salvation, and never for our condemnation. We may praise the Lord for this!

Still—back to where we began: "Let a man examine himself." This truly is important as anyone makes ready to partake of Holy Communion.

5. Words of Preparation

Now we look more specifically at the administration of the Lord's Supper. We are here concerned with the procedure. Our first consideration involves the words of preparation.

It is important that such words precede the administration of the sacrament. Since the Lord's Supper is a *visible* showing forth of God's grace in Jesus Christ, it needs *audible* preparation. If the Lord's Supper is celebrated in a regular worship service, whatever is said in the preceding sermon should provide background. When the word of God goes forth and His truth in Christ is audibly proclaimed and heard, such proclamation better prepares the congregation for visible demonstration and personal reception in the Eucharist.

However, whether or not there has been a previous proclamation of the word, there is need for reading, and perhaps commentary on, the words of institution of the Supper. When this is done, the Lord's Supper becomes meaningful. Augustine well said, "Let the word be added to the element and it will become a sacrament."[165] It is by reading and hearing the words about the bread and the cup that God's people are better prepared to receive them.

Incidentally, this means that the words should be clearly understood. If the words of institution are read hurriedly or in a strange language,[166] they do not adequately prepare the way for participation in the Lord's Supper.

6. Prayers of Blessing and Thanksgiving

After the words of preparation, prayers of blessing and thanksgiving should be offered. According to the Gospel of Mark, "while they were eating, He took some bread, and after a *blessing*[167] He broke it, and gave it to them…. And when He had taken a cup, and *given thanks*, He gave it to them" (14:22–23 NASB). Jesus' blessing and thanksgiving preceded the apostles' reception of the bread and cup.

We may focus particularly on the note of thanksgiving.[168] In the *Didache*, which contains the earliest use of the word *Eucharist*, the text reads, "Now concerning the Eucharist, give thanks as follows: First, concerning the cup:

> 'We give you thanks, our Father,
> for the holy vine of David your servant,
> which you have made known to us
> through Jesus, your servant,

to you be glory forever.'[169]

Similar words follow about the bread,[170] with an additional prayer for the unity of the church.

Hence prayers of blessing God and giving Him thanks, prayers that focus particularly on Jesus, "the holy vine of David," are appropriate before the serving of the elements.

The prayers here offered may also include supplication for God to bless with His Word and Spirit[171] the bread and wine soon to be distributed and received. It is appropriate especially to pray that the elements will be set apart from a common to a sacred use, so that both bread and wine will be channels for Christ to come to His people.

7. The Bread and the Cup

Now that prayers of blessing and thanksgiving have been offered, the assembly may proceed with the minis try and reception of the bread and the cup.

First, in regard to the bread, it is appropriate to use a single loaf to represent Christ Himself and our unity with one another. This accords with Paul's words: "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf' (1 Cor. 10:17 NIV). The table minister may hold up the loaf in the sight of all who will participate, and then break it. This accords with Jesus' action: He "took bread,[172] and blessed, and broke it" (Matt. 26:26). Then the minister may give it to all, saying, "Take, eat; this is my body" (v. 26) or "This is my body which is [broken][173] for you. Do this in remembrance of me"[174] (1 Cor. 11:24). If the number of participants is too many for one loaf, other loaves may be broken and shared.[175] Each communicant may then break off a piece,[176] and hold it in hand until all have been served. This gives further time for reflection and self-examination. Then at the leader's word all may partake together.[177]

Second, regarding the cup, it is appropriate to have a single large cup, or chalice, containing the "fruit of the vine."[178] The one ministering may hold up the cup and then quote the words of Jesus: "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:27–28), or "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:25). The contents of the cup may then symbolically be poured into another cup (or cups); this act

represents Jesus' blood being poured out in His work of redemption. Distribution of the sacrament then follows. If the number of participants is relatively small, one cup may appropriately be used, with each person in turn drinking from it. This best symbolizes the action of Jesus and His apostles in the Upper Room, and also, even as with the one loaf, the union and communion of all gathered together. However, for practical reasons, individual cups taken from the same table may be distributed. Again, as with the bread, this can afford time for further con templation and self-examination.[179] Following the distribution of the cup, all may drink together.

Additional comments:

1. It is appropriate that the celebration of the Lord's Supper be around a table or tables. If the number of participants is large and there is only one table, communicants may come forward at various times to sit at the table and pass the elements to one another.[180] If the use of tables is impractical, communicants may remain seated and pass the elements.[181]

2. It is important that both the bread and the cup be received by all participants. There is no suggestion in the Gospels that Jesus withheld one element or the other from His apostles or in the Corinthian account that only the bread was to be eaten by believers. Thus both bread and cup are essential to attest fully the body and blood of Jesus in His death and to receive spiritually the whole Christ in His living reality.[182]

3. At the close of the service there should be a disposition of the remaining elements. Since the bread and the wine do not actually constitute the body and blood of Christ but were only set apart (not consecrated) for the occasion of Communion, they contain no continuing sacramental significance. If, on occasion, the bread and cup are taken to persons unable to attend the Communion service, it is not as if they receive already consecrated elements. Each serving of Communion is a new occasion, calling for words of institution, prayers of blessing, and the like. Whatever remains after any celebration of the Lord's Supper is ordinary bread and "fruit of the vine."[183] They may be eaten and drunk, or otherwise disposed of.

8. Offering of Praise

The Lord's Supper may appropriately close with the offering of praise to God. Immediately following the Supper in the Upper Room, Jesus and His disciples began to sing: "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives" (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26). We are not told directly what they sang; however, in all likelihood it was the singing of various praise, or "hallelujah," psalms of the Old Testament.[184] Hence it was more than "*a* hymn" that they sang; there was singing and praising God for some time. Only after this offering of praise did Jesus and His apostles go out.

This indeed speaks a relevant word to us. When we likewise have partaken of the bread and cup, our praises should also break forth. We may sing Old Testament psalms, but surely we may also sing other hymns and choruses of praise to God.[185] Since we live beyond the occasion of the Upper Room and in addition have experienced the resurrected and exalted Lord in Holy Communion, we have all the more for which to offer praise. Thus there could be song after song, praise upon praise, to express our joy in the Lord.

This is further appropriate because, following the celebration of the Lord's Supper, we look forward to the coming *great Supper* in the kingdom. It is noteworthy that just after Jesus spoke about not drinking again "of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:29; cf. Mark 14:25), they sang together. Hence this forward look to the coming Marriage Supper of the kingdom can make the singing of praise all the more meaningful and joyful. Since we may be living very near to the return of the Lord[186] and His glorious Supper, which will include believers of all ages and places, our praise should mightily sound forth.

The Book of Hebrews encourages us to "continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God" (13:15). The offering of praise at the conclusion of the Lord's Supper can highlight the rich and abounding praise that should constantly be manifest in all God's people.

[1]The word sacraments is the traditional term for these ordinances. Thus we could also speak of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. However, since Christ specifically commanded the performance of baptism and the Lord's Supper, the word ordinances seems preferable.

[2]Many churches in the Anabaptist tradition (e.g., Brethren, Mennonites, and Amish, as well as some Baptists and Pentecostals) affirm footwashing as an additional ordinance. This is done in reference to Jesus' words "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to

wash one another's feet" (John 13:14). However, since Jesus added, "For I have given you an example" (v. 15), it is questionable to view footwashing (whatever the value of the practice) as prescribed by Jesus in the same way as baptism and the Lord's Supper.

[3]The Roman Catholic Church, in addition to baptism and the Lord's Supper (or the Eucharist), includes confirmation, penance, marriage, holy orders, and extreme unction (the Council of Trent, "Decree concerning the Sacraments," Canon 1). These are all viewed as channels of grace, and actually go beyond Christ's ordinances, or commands, of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

[4]Baptism (in water) has been previously discussed in Renewal Theology, 2:38-39, 27987, 291-93; also in this volume, pages 136-39. Hence the study of baptism in the present chapter will in some ways repeat past discussions (as will be noted); however, there will be additional material. It should prove helpful to view baptism in a total perspective.

[5]Thayer: "immersion, submersion." BAGD under 6a7mfo> says, "dip, immerse, wash (in non-Christian lit. also plunge, sink, drench, overwhelm)." In the Old Testament lxx baptizd is found in 2 Kings 5:14, which states that Naaman "went down and dipped [ebaptizato] himself seven times in the Jordan."

[6]Later we will discuss the mode of baptism in more detail (see section E, pp. 225-28).

[7]The English preposition "in" is used above to translate epi (2:38), eis (8:16 and 19:5), and en (10:48). Epi often means "upon"; eis, "into"; en, "in." However, since there is little likelihood of a difference in meaning in the baptismal passages, "in" seems quite adequate. Moreover, there is clearly no difference between "the name of Jesus Christ" and "the name of the Lord Jesus."

[8]"See Acts 9:18; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 22:16.

[9]See Renewal Theology, 2:286-87, for an earlier discussion of this matter (especially n. 48 in regard to extreme Trinitarian and "Jesus only" [Pentecostal] views). Also for more detail see the present volume, pages 138-39.

[10]In the Greek, eis. See Renewal Theology, 2:284, for further details.

[11]The Greek word is loutron: "bath, washing of baptism" (BAGD).

[12]For an earlier discussion of this verse see Renewal Theology, 2:37-38. Not all agree that "born of water" refers to baptism, but see my

comments in nn.15, 16.

[13]De catechizandis rudibus xxvi.50 (tr. ACW II. 82).

[14]The relationship between circumcision and baptism will be discussed in more detail later.

[15]The Westminster Confession of Faith speaks in covenantal terms of baptism as one's personal sign and seal: "Baptism is … to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life" (28.1).

[16]For more on baptism as sign and seal see Renewal Theology, 2:284-85.

[17]For example, A. H. Strong (Baptist theologian) writes, "Baptism symbolizes the previous entrance of the believer into the communion of Christ's death and resurrection, or, in other words, regeneration through union with Christ" (italics added) (Systematic Theology, 940).

[18]The Roman Catholic Council of Trent declares, "If any one says that baptism is optional, that is, not necessary for salvation, let him be anathema" (Canons on Baptism, 5). In the earlier Canons on the Sacraments in General, grace is spoken of as "conferred ex opere operato" (Canon 8), meaning "by the work done" (i.e., the sacramental action). What this amounts to is baptismal regeneration.

[19]This may be described as sacramentalism, the view that grace is invariably conveyed through the religious rite.

[20]On this latter point-the necessity of baptism to salvation-several scriptures are frequently adduced. Among them are Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12; and Titus 3:5. However, these verses about baptism at most should be understood as means of grace (recall point 3 above: "A Means of Grace"). In addition there are other verses, particularly Mark 16:16; John 3:5 (earlier quoted); and 1 Peter 3:21, that are sometimes interpreted as likewise affirming the necessity of baptism. See Renewal Theology, 2:37-39, including nn. 15-20, for relevant discussion of these verses. Incidentally, one of the most striking statements dissociating salvation and baptism is 1 Corinthians 1:17, where Paul says, "Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel." Paul surely baptized people (see the preceding three verses), but he does not stress baptism as integral to his preaching the gospel and by that means bringing people to salvation.

[21]The Greek preposition is eis. The ordinary meaning (as we have before

noted) is “into”; however, “in” is sometimes the better translation. According to EGT, “the idea of descending into the river … [is] latent in eis” (1:342). Whether we translate the word “into” or “in,” the idea of immersion is implied.

[22]The Greek phrase is anabainon ek tou hydatos. The parallel version in Matthew 3:16 has the preposition apo.

[23]Eis.

[24]The Greek phrase is *anebesan ek.* EGT: “[This] indicates that the baptism was by immersion” (2:226).

[25]It could be argued, of course, that since both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and both came up out of it, Philip was immersed also! However, this seems to push the language too far. I. H. Marshall also says that “there is not sufficient evidence to indicate whether the baptism took place by the immersion of the eunuch in water or by the pouring (affusion) of water over him as he stood in shallow water” (The Acts of the Apostles, TNTC, 165). My view, however, is that the evidence is stronger for immersion than for affusion, especially when compared with Mark 1:9-10.

[26]Literally, “many waters”-hydata polla; kjv, rsv, and nasb read “much water.”

[27]EGT comments that “much water” suggests that “even in summer baptism by immersion could be continued” (1:719). Leon Morris holds that the “many waters” refers to “seven springs within a radius of a quarter of a mile” (The Gospel According to John, NICNT, 237). If so, the case for immersion in this passage may be not so strong (Morris, however, does not speak directly to that matter).

[28]As EGT says, “Paul sees a baptism in the waters of the Exodus” (2:857).

[29]F. F. Bruce writes that the “reality which he [the author of Hebrews] has in mind is surely Christian baptism” (Epistle to the Hebrews, NICNT, 251).

[30]A. H. Strong writes, “Death presented itself to the Savior’s mind as a baptism, because it was a sinking under the floods of suffering” (Systematic Theology, 932).

[31]The Greek preposition is en, which may also be translated “with” or “by.” I believe, however, the nasb (likewise neb) well catches the meaning. (See Renewal Theology, 1:169, nn.43-44; also 198-200, and nn.70-77.

[32]“Fire” is also connected with the baptism in the Holy Spirit in both

Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16-“baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire.” Since fire consumes totally, this figure also suggests total immersion.

[33]On the Jewish rite of proselyte baptism see R. E. O. White, The Biblical Doctrine of Christian Initiation, chapter 4, “Proselyte Baptism.” Also note his quotation, “There is no adequate ground for doubting that Jewish baptism in the first century a.d. was by total immersion” (p. 63).

[34]Note the close connection between John’s and Jesus’ disciples baptizing in John 3:22-23 and 4:1-2.

[35]Probably a first-century document. See chap. 5, supra, n.221, on dating.

[36]Didache, 7:1-3 (The Apostolic Fathers, 2nd ed., trans. Lightfoot and Harmer, ed. and rev. M. W. Holmes, 153).

[37]The editors of The Apostolic Fathers add that “this appears to be the earliest reference to the Christian use of a mode of baptism other than immersion” (p. 153, n.26).

[38]Calvin justifies sprinkling thus: “Whether the person baptized is wholly immersed, and that whether once or thrice, or whether he is only to be sprinkled with water, is not of the least consequence: churches should be at liberty to adopt either, according to the diversity of climates, although it is evident that the term baptize means to immerse, and that this was the form used in the primitive church” (Institutes, 4.15.19, Beveridge trans.). It is significant that Calvin, while endorsing sprinkling and putting it on a parity with immersion, declares immersion to be the meaning of the word baptism and that the act of immersion was the early church practice. It seems to me a bit cavalier for Calvin to say that the matter is “not of the least consequence,” that climatic consideration is what counts (were there no cold climates where the early church baptized by immersion?); so do what you like. We may be grateful, however, that Calvin goes beyond many Calvinists who are very loath to say, or admit, that immersion was the original church practice.

[39]The Westminster Confession states, “Dipping of the person into water is not necessary ; but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person” (23.3). This is a very inadequate statement, elevating pouring and sprinkling above immersion. “Rightly,” as used here, cannot help but suggest that there is really something wrong with the practice of immersion. If anything, the reverse should be the case! Incidentally, it is obvious that the Westminster Confession, a Calvinistic document, “out-Calvins” Calvin at this point!

[40]A further word about pouring and sprinkling. Pouring is a better symbol

for the Holy Spirit who is “poured out” (Acts 2:17-18; 10:45) than it is for water baptism. Sprinkling may be connected with Ezekiel 36:25: “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses” and Hebrews 10:22: “our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience.” However, these verses seem to have little, if any, connection with the practice of baptism in the New Testament. Indeed, Hebrews 10:22 continues, as we have earlier noted, with the words “and our bodies washed with pure water.” It is not the sprinkling but the washing that refers to baptism.

[41]The Greek word here and in the following two references is oikos.

[42]Also kindred passages that do not directly mention baptism but probably imply it are John 3:5; Titus 3:5; and Hebrews 10:22.

[43]Oscar Cullmann speaks of “solidarity in baptism” and refers to the incident of the Philippian jailer’s conversion. Cullmann’s argument is that if there were infants in the household (which he admits cannot be proved), they would also have been baptized. See his Baptism in the New Testament, 53.

[44]“The rsv and niv read “family.” Literally, the Greek reads “he and all his” (so kjv). “Household” (as in nasb above), however, helps to maintain the connection with both verse 32 and verse 34.

[45]A distinction between household and children is to be noted in the early letter of Ignatius to Poly carp: “I greet everyone by name, including the widow of Epitropus with her whole household and children” (8:2). Similarly, reference to Lydia’s household may point to individuals other than children.

[46]Karl Barth speaks of this evidence as “a thin thread to which one may perhaps hold,” but adds, “then hardly!” (The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism, 44).

[47]Beasley-Murray states, “Luke, in writing these narratives, does not have in view infant members of the families. His language cannot be pressed to extend to them. He has in mind ordinary believers and uses language applicable only to them. Abuse of it leads to the degradation of Scripture” (Baptism in the New Testament, 315).

[48]Cullmann, for example, speaks of “a fundamental kinship between circumcision and Christian baptism” (Baptism in the New Testament, 56-57) and of “the analogy between infant circumcision and Christian infant baptism” (p. 65). Cullmann is a strong advocate of infant baptism.

[49]The Reformed theologian G. C. Berkouwer speaks of “the unity of the Old and New Covenants” as the “essential and profoundest basis for the defense of infant baptism” (Studies in Dogmatics: The Sacraments, 175).

[50]As we have observed, water baptism as immersion is a vivid symbol of this.

[51]Incidentally, when God told Abraham that this covenant included “every male throughout your generations,” He added, “whether born in your house, or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not your offspring” (17:12). Paul Jewett makes this astute comment: “The insistence that every male attached to Abraham’s house should be circumcised-even those who were slaves bought with money-is markedly different from anything in the New Testament regarding baptism” (Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace, 98).

[52]The Mosaic covenant, after Abraham, maintains the same necessity of circumcision (see Exod. 12:48; Lev. 12:3).

[53]See, for example, Pierre Ch. Marcel, The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism: “Children are legitimately baptized, without faith or repentance, because they belong to the covenant” (209). This, I submit, is the Judaizing of Christian baptism.

[54]The Greek word is paidia. That these were infants is stated in Luke’s parallel introductory statement, “They were bringing even infants [brephe] to him” (18:15).

[55]Calvin asks, “If it is right that children should be brought to Christ, why should they not be admitted to baptism, the symbol of our communion and fellowship with Christ?” (Institutes, 4.16.7, Beveridge trans.). Thus Calvin sees Christ’s blessing of children as calling for their baptism. Even more vigorously in The Biblical Doctrine of Baptism, a study document issued by the Church of Scotland, this statement is made in italics: (tOur Lord, who stated so clearly that the Kingdom of God belongs to little children, could not have *refused to allow them to share in the sacrament of initiation into that Kingdom, which is Baptism*” (p. 49). Some New Testament scholars claim that this Scripture points to the validity of infant baptism. Jeremias, for example, writes, “We may state that the passage Mark 10. 13–16 and parallels in several places contains indirect references to baptism … the church took it as authority for the practice of infant baptism” (*Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, 54–55). Cullmann similarly says about Jesus’ blessing the children: “This story—without being related to baptism—was fixed [!] in such a way

that a baptismal formula of the first century gleams through it" (*Baptism in the New Testament*, 78).

[56]As Karl Barth says, "In the sphere of the New Testament one is not brought to baptism; one comes to baptism" (The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism, 42). Barth also states, "It may be shown, by exegesis and from the nature of the case, that in this action the baptized is an active partner … plainly no infans [infant] can be such a person" (p. 41). Incidentally, Barth's exegesis of Mark 10:13-15 (with parallels), including brief critique of Cullmann, may be found in his Church Dogmatics, IV, 2, 181-82. See also Kurt Aland, Did the Early Church Baptize Infants? chapter 9, "The Blessing of Jesus," which includes a response to Jeremias.

[57]R. E. O. White, The Biblical Doctrine of Initiation, 331-38, contains a valuable study of Mark 10:13-15 (and parallels). His final statement: "The use of Mark 10:13f as support for paedobaptist practice … cannot be said to have lacked ingenious and scholarly defenders; but whichever way the argument is framed, the conclusion fails to stand. It is quite certain that infant baptism was not built, and cannot be supported on Mark 10:13f" (p. 338).

[58]Jesus Himself, although circumcised as a Jewish boy (Luke 2:21), was a few weeks later presented, or dedicated, to the Lord (v. 22), but not baptized until age 30 (Luke 3:21-23)! This of course does not mean that one dedicated to the Lord must wait thirty years for baptism, but it does plainly suggest that baptism belongs to an age of responsible decision.

[59]For example, in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church one of the questions that parents may be asked at the baptism of their infant begins, "Do you now unreservedly dedicate your child to God…?" (The Book of Order, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, III, The Book of Worship, 3, "The Sacraments"). A fine question indeed, but it belongs better to a service of infant dedication.

[60]On this matter see Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace by Paul Jewett, "Jesus Blesses Little Children," 55-63. Jewett's whole book is an excellent refutation of the practice of infant baptism.

[61]Gustaf Aulen, Swedish theologian and Lutheran bishop, refers to baptism as "the sacrament of prevenient grace," and says in regard to infant baptism: "If baptism is an act of God's prevenient grace, the validity of infant baptism is immediately established" (The Faith of the Christian Church, 335, 338). Aulen adds, "The question whether infant baptism

was practiced in the New Testament becomes, from this point of view, of secondary importance" (p. 338).

[62]So Calvin says, "Children are baptized for future repentance and faith. Though these are not yet formed in them, the seed of both lies hid in them by the secret operation of the Holy Spirit" CInstitutes, 4.16.20, Beveridge trans.). Calvin, incidentally, seeks to guard against infant regeneration by speaking of future repentance and faith.

[63]Luther declares, "Infants are aided by the faith of others, namely, those who bring them to baptism…. The infant is changed, cleansed and renewed by inpoured faith, through the prayer of the church that presents it for baptism and believes" (Works of Martin Luther, II, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," 236). Luther's view, likewise, is not, strictly speaking, baptismal regeneration in the sense that ex opere operato the act of baptism regenerates: vicarious faith is required. However, Luther's position, like the Roman Catholic, does see regeneration-cleansing and renewing-taking place in baptism.

[64]One sometimes also hears the view (going beyond the seed-of-faith and vicarious-faith views) that an infant actually can believe. Even an unborn child is to some degree aware of outside impulses (e.g., John the Baptist in his mother's womb "leaped for joy"—Luke 1:44). All the more, an infant outside the womb, may sense God's grace at the moment of baptism and to some degree, even if unconsciously, believe. My response is simply that, without denying that infants may be more sensitive than we usually realize and that they may respond in some way at the time of baptism, this does not constitute a truly biblical understanding of the conscious repentance and faith required for Christian baptism.

[65]In the Acts narrative of the Ethiopian eunuch's baptism, the eunuch asked Philip, "What is to prevent my being baptized?" (8:36). According to some manuscripts, Philip replied, "If you believe with all your heart, you may" (v. 37 nasb). Such heartfelt faith cannot be held by infants.

[66]In Roman Catholic theology, original sin with which infants are born can be removed by baptism. The Council of Trent, in its Decree concerning Original Sin, declares, "From a tradition of the apostles, even infants, who could not yet commit any sin of themselves, are for this cause truly baptized for the remission of sins, that in them that may be cleansed away by regeneration, which they have contracted by generation."

[67]Infants dying without baptism, according to Roman Catholic theology, are consigned to limbo (limbus infantium), a place that is neither heaven nor

hell but where infants are permanently excluded from eternal happiness.

[68]For a discussion of original sin see Renewal Theology, 1:267-73.

[69]Calvin states that when Jesus said, “For such is the kingdom of heaven,” “he includes both little children and those who resemble them” (Commentaries, Harmony of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, 39, Pringle trans.). The Westminster Confession narrows this to “elect infants”: “Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth” (10.3). This is a quite unfortunate statement, unavoidably implying that nonelect infants (who knows how many there are?) have no hope of salvation. Not even limbo is available for them!

[70]Jeremias writes, “The children are not the coming generations, but the sons and daughters of the hearers. Since the gift of the Spirit (2.38) is linked to baptism, 2.39 contains the challenge to have the children baptized also. Thus in Acts 2.38f we have before us a witness for the practice of infant baptism in apostolic times” (Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries, 41). Jewett quotes Henry Alford as saying that Acts 2:39 contributes a “providential recognition of infant baptism in the very founding of the Christian Church” (Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace, 119-20).

[71]Concerning this promise see Renewal Theology, 2:183-85, “The Promise of the Father.”

[72]Calvin writes concerning infant baptism: “There is no writer, however ancient, who does not trace its origin to the days of the apostles” (Institutes, 4.16.8, Beveridge trans.) Jeremias, unlike Calvin, says, “For the first century we have no special evidence for the baptism of Christian children.” However, Jeremias adds, “In the second century it was already taken for granted” (Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries, 55). We may accordingly infer the practice of infant baptism from the earliest days.

[73]Contra Calvin, but affirming Jeremias. For example, the Didache has a section on baptism (as we have seen) that concludes with this statement: “And before the baptism, let the one baptizing and the one who is to be baptized fast…. Also, you must instruct the one who is to be baptized to fast for one or two days beforehand” (The Apostolic Fathers 7:4). Obviously none of this is applicable to infants.

[74]There is actually no concrete reference to infant baptism in the second century. The apostolic fathers (ca. a.d. 100-150) write nothing about

infant baptism, and Justin in his First Apology (ca. a.d. 155) has a section (61) on baptism that clearly refers only to believers (see Aland, Did the Early Church Baptize Infants? 53-55, and Jewett, Infant Baptism, 3941). Jeremias errs in saying that infant baptism was taken for granted in the second century. There may have been a growing practice of infant baptism toward the end of the second century, but there is no direct reference to it in any extant writings.

[75]Tertullian writes in his treatise On Baptism: "Our Lord says, indeed, 'Do not forbid them to come to me.' Therefore let them come when they are grown up; let them come when they understand, when they are instructed whither it is that they come; let them be made Christians when they can know Christ" (chap. 18).

[76]Jewett declares about paedobaptists that "their practice is a practice in search of a theology" (Infant Baptism, 209).

[77]N. P. Williams, who espouses infant baptism, candidly says, "That infants may and should be baptized is a proposition which rests solely upon the actual practice of the church; as in the fifth century, the sole argument for the fact is simply this: The Church does baptize infants, and we cannot suppose that the Church has acted wrongly or without good cause in so doing' " (The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin, 551). Williams says that in his view church practice is "a sufficient ground for affirming the legitimacy and laudability of Paedo- baptism" (554). This, I submit, is a wholly insufficient ground!

[78]Barth speaks of infant baptism as "clouded baptism … a wound in the body of the church and a weakness for the baptized" (The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism, 40).

[79]D. A. Carson writes, "The injunction is given at least to the Eleven, but to the Eleven in their own role as disciples…. Therefore they are paradigms for all disciples" (Matthew, EBC, 596).

[80]WI. H. Marshall conjectures, in light of the huge task of baptizing three thousand people, "that if the other disciples shared in the actual baptizing, there would have been plenty of time to accomplish the task" (Acts of the Apostles, TNTC, 82).

[81]Marshall speaks of the likelihood that "the command was addressed to the other Christians present to perform the rite" (ibid., 195).

[82]In the case of Lydia, Paul was accompanied by Timothy, Silas, and Luke; the jailer was ministered to by Paul and Silas; and Silas and Timothy were with Paul in Corinth. In each of these incidents the statement is in

the passive voice-“was baptized” and “were baptized”-without saying who did the baptizing. In regard to the Corinthians, Paul says in one of his letters to them: “I am thankful that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius … also the household of Stephanas” (1 Cor. 1:14, 16). Thus all the rest were baptized by persons other than Paul.

[83]See preceding footnote.

[84]In the Roman Catholic Church the priestly office is viewed as ordinarily required for the performance of baptism: the priesthood is sacramentally endowed with the necessary power. According to the Decrees of the Council of Trent, “If anyone says that all Christians have the power to administer the word and all sacraments, let him be anathema” (Canons on the Sacraments in General, 10). Hence the power to baptize is not lodged in Christians at large. However, because baptism is viewed as essential to salvation, if no priest is available in an emergency situation, laymen are allowed to baptize. Many Protestant churches likewise limit officiating at the sacraments to certain ordained persons. The Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., for example, states that “for the sake of order the Sacraments are ordinarily to be administered only by those ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament” (Book of Order, Directory for the Service of God, 3.1). Thus it is not a matter of power, as in Roman Catholicism, but of order that invests the right to baptize in the ministerial office. However, in both Roman Catholicism and in much of Protestantism, believers in general are not authorized to perform baptism.

[85]Although Paul is talking about the exercise of spiritual gifts, his words, I believe, may be applied likewise to such a matter as the practice of baptism.

[86]The fourth-century Donatists held that the validity of the sacraments depended on the personal character of the administrant. Augustine vigorously attacked them in his treatise On Baptism, Against the Donatists. It is interesting that the Westminster Confession of Faith contains the statement “Neither doth the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth administer it” (10.7.3). This is well said.

[87]Recall our previous discussion of the different formulas in Matthew and Acts. The former highlights the formula in Matthew; the latter, the one in Acts.

[88]Although immersion is surely preferable (recall the earlier discussion), other modes are not illegitimate. Moreover, whether there is a threefold

dipping, pouring, or sprinkling (recall the Didache's reference to dipping three times), or a single act, is a secondary matter.

[89]Barth quotes Luther as saying, "If I should wait till I am certain that the one who baptizes is holy, then neither I nor anyone else would ever be baptized" {The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism, 57).

[90]Calvin declares about the sacraments (hence baptism): "They confer nothing, and avail nothing, if not received in faith" (Institutes 4.14.17, Beveridge trans.).

[91]According to Acts 19:1-6, the Ephesians were baptized twice; however, the first was "John's baptism" (v. 3), into which they had previously been baptized. Paul then baptized them "in the name of the Lord Jesus." There probably were many others who had earlier been baptized by John and later received Christian baptism.

[92]Sanctification, to be sure, is also a continuing process; however, it is a continuation of the initial sanctification that occurred at the moment of regeneration.

[93]Whether this is called (initial) sanctification, regeneration (new birth), or justification, all are various ways of describing the beginning of salvation.

[94]I recall hearing someone say, "Infant baptism produces little conscripts for the Christian army when Christ really wants volunteers." To be a willing, knowing participant in baptism is a far greater incentive to go forth in Christ's army.

[95]At the time of the Reformation those who practiced such baptism were called Anabaptists, meaning those who baptize "again" (Greek, *ana).* However, this was a name their opponents gave them, thus implying a second baptism. The Anabaptists viewed infant baptism as a meaningless formality; thus the only valid baptism was that of believers.

[96]This is not unlike a service provided in some churches for the renewal of marriage vows.

[97]The Presbyterian Church of New Zealand has provided a "Service of Baptismal Renewal" for its members in which those who so desire may take their own vows and be baptized by immersion. The final question put to the member reads, "Do you submit to this act of immersion to show that you have put off the old man and been buried with Christ in His death; and to show that you are now alive with Christ in the power of the resurrection, as He clothes you with His life and His Spirit?"

[98]Calvin, as we have noted, speaks of infants as being "baptized for future faith and repentance." Although Calvin relates this to "the seed of faith" in infant baptism (which I have earlier questioned), it is significant that he suggests a future fulfillment. The Westminster Confession declares, "The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered" (18.6); hence presumably there can be a future efficacious time.

[99]"See, for example, the Episcopal Service of Confirmation in the Book of Common Prayer.

[100]There are three problems about confirmation as described: (1) to some degree it detracts from baptism, which should be the occasion of personal confession; (2) it separates the objective and subjective sides that baptism itself should represent; and (3) it detracts from what confirmation really should mean, not the assumption of baptismal vows or even for confessing personal faith, but rather the occasion for the reception of the Holy Spirit (see Renewal Theology, 2:289, and n.58).

[101]Even if strained a bit in the second and third!

[102]Along this line Barth writes, "The personal faith of the candidate is indispensable to baptism" (Church Dogmatics, IV, 4, 186).

[103]Calvin puts it bluntly: "What is a sacrament received without faith, but most certain destruction to the church?" (Institutes, 4.14.14, Beveridge trans.).

[104]I wrote this last paragraph on October 31, Reformation Day. What I am calling for is hardly of the magnitude of Luther's Ninety-five Theses posted on the door of the Wittenberg church on that October day in 1517. However, what the so-called Anabaptists of Luther's time stood for in regard to baptism (over against Luther, and later Calvin) needs to be brought to completion. We can be thankful for their witness and that of their Baptist successors to this day. It is now high time for all other churches to join with them in this reformation of baptismal practice.

[105]The Greek phrase is kyriakon deipnon.

[106]I. H. Marshall writes, "The breaking of bread … is Luke's term for what Paul calls the Lord's Supper…. Luke is simply using an early Palestinian name for the Lord's Supper" (Acts of the Apostles, TNTC, 83). F. F. Bruce writes, "The 'breaking of bread' probably denotes more than the regular taking of food together: the regular observance of what came to be called the Lord's Supper seems to be in view" (Book of the Acts, rev.

ed., NICNT, 73).

[107]In the words of J. Jeremias: “If the koivwLol of Acts 2.42 refers to the Agape [iove feast’] then the breaking of bread must mean the subsequent Eucharist…. The designation of the Lord’s Supper as ‘the breaking of bread’ arose as a consequence of the separation of the Eucharist from the meal proper” (The Eucharistic Words of Jesus, 120-21).

[108]Thus the words “Now as [or ‘while’] they were eating, Jesus broke bread. …” Bread probably had already been used in the meal together; now Jesus broke it for another reason.

[109]Bruce declares in regard to verse 46: “They took the principal meal of the day in each other’s houses, observing the Lord’s Supper each time they did so” (The Acts of the Apostles, with Greek text, 100). For a similar understanding, see Jeremias, Eucharistic Words, 119; Marshall, Acts of the Apostles, 85 ; EGT 2:97. See also R. Otto, The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man, 312ff.; A. J. B. Higgins, The Lord’s Supper in the New Testament, 57.

[110]Bruce: “The breaking of the bread was probably a fellowship meal in the course of which the Eucharist was celebrated” (Acts of the Apostles, NICNT, 384). Similarly Marshall, Acts of the Apostles, 325. See also Haenchen, Acts of the Apostles, 584.

[111]Jeremias holds that Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7,11 concerning breaking bread are all Luke’s way of referring “to the Lord’s Supper exclusively” (Eucharistie Words, 133). Both Bruce (Acts of the Apostles, 385, n.30) and Marshall (Acts of the Apostles, 327) suggest the possibility that Acts 20:11 (above) refers to the Lord’s Supper. Higgins sees both Acts 20:7 and 11 as “a eucharistic celebration” (The Lord’s Supper, 57).

[112]Bruce speaks of this as probably “a eucharist meal in a limited sense: all shared the food, but to the majority it was an ordinary meal, while for those who ate with eucharistic intention (Paul and his fellow-Christians) it was a valid eucharist” (Book of Acts, NICNT, 492). Marshall, while admitting a eucharistic possibility, says that it “seems more probable that Luke is simply describing an ordinary meal” (Acts of the Apostles, 414-15). Jeremias’ position is similar (Eucharistic Words, 133, n.6). Higgins states bluntly that there is no reference to the Eucharist here (The Lord’s Supper, 46, n.l). I favor the view expressed in EGT that in regard to the Eucharist “St. Luke seems to intimate such a reference” (2:532).

[113]The Greek word is pascha. The word, strictly speaking, means simply “Passover” (so kjv and nasb read). However, it may also refer to the

Passover (or Paschal) lamb or meal (see BAGD). Clearly in 1 Corinthians 5:7 the meaning is “Passover lamb.”

[114]Recall Exodus 12:21-27.

[115]The Greek word is koinōnia. Often the best translation is “fellowship” (as in Acts 2:42).

[116]I6*Didache*, 9:2-4 and 10:2-6. In regard to the Eucharist among the early church fathers see, for example, *Ignatius to the Smyrneans* 6:2 and Justin Martyr, 1 Apology 65-66.

[117]Two other nonbiblical terms for the Lord’s Supper are “the Divine Liturgy” and “the Mass.” The former is used in the Eastern Orthodox Church, and the latter largely in the Roman Catholic Church. The word Mass derives from the Latin word missa, meaning “dismissal,” the closing blessing at the end of the Eucharist.

[118]The same words, “Do this in remembrance of me,” are found in Luke 22:19 (niv, nasb, cf. KJV).

[119]At the time of the Reformation Ulrich Zwingli particularly stressed the Lord’s Supper as a representation. For example, “The Paschal Lamb represents the passing over of the angel of God; and This is my body,’ that is, This represents my body, the eating of the bread being the sign and symbol that Christ, the soul’s true consolation and nourishment, was crucified for us” (“On the Lord’s Supper,” Zwingli and Bullinger, LCC, 226). Since his day many followers of Zwingli have stressed almost totally the representational or commemorative aspect of the Lord’s Supper (see, e.g., William Stevens, Doctrines of the Christian Religion, chap. 27, “The Lord’s Supper,” for a recent Zwinglian presentation).

[120]Or “the new covenant.” The textual evidence is about evenly divided between “the covenant” and “the new covenant.” However, as we have seen, the word “new” is found in 1 Corinthians 11:25 (see also Luke 22:20) and thus is surely proper here.

[121]I previously discussed baptism as a sign and seal and means of grace (recall “Significance,” pp. 224-25). As shown in this paragraph above, the Lord’s Supper serves in a similar threefold manner.

[122]The Roman Catholic Church speaks not only of past remembrance but also of present sacrifice. The Council of Trent declares, “He [Christ] instituted a new Passover, namely, Himself, to be immolated [= ‘offered in sacrifice’] under visible signs by the Church through the priests…. The victim is one and the same, the same now offering by the ministry of the

priests who then offered Himself on the cross" ("Decree concerning the Sacrifice of the Mass," chaps. 1, 2). This view of the Sacrifice of the Mass, going far beyond remembering Christ's death, was earlier attacked by such Reformation leaders as Luther and Calvin (see, for example, Calvin's Institutes, 4. chap. 18, entitled "The Papal Mass, a Sacrilege by Which Christ's Supper was Not Only Profaned but Annihilated," Battles trans.). In the Vatican II Council, Rome continues to speak of sacrifice: "At the Last Supper … our Savior initiated the Eucharistic Sacrifice of His body and blood" ("Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, "47).

[123]See the next two sections for further elaboration.

[124]In this connection an appropriate hymn for the observance of the Lord's Supper would be "O sacred Head, now wounded" (Bernard of Clairvaux, 12th century).

[125]Recall the brief earlier discussion of "Holy Communion" as one of several terms for the Lord's Supper.

[126]Note the similarity of the words to Jesus' earlier action in the Upper Room (Luke 22:19).

[127]Recall Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11.

[128]Cullmann writes, "The Lord's Supper in the early Church was a feast of the Resurrection" (O. Cullmann and F. J. Leenhardt, Essays on the Lord's Supper, 23). This may be an overstatement, for the Lord's Supper basically relates to Christ's death; however, Cullmann is surely stressing a matter that is often overlooked.

[129]The risen Christ is not a disembodied spirit. Recall Jesus' words to His disciples on Resurrection evening: "A spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have" (Luke 24:39).

[130]The Gospel of John contains no direct depiction of the Lord's Supper. Later, in John 13, the setting is clearly the Upper Room with the Passover at hand and Jesus at supper with His disciples (vv. 1-2). However, instead of making any reference to Jesus taking bread, John writes that Jesus took a towel and a basin of water, then washed and wiped His disciples' feet (vv. 3-20). John's Gospel thereby focuses on the need of the disciples to learn humility. This parallels the account in Luke where Jesus stresses the importance of humble service (22:24-27); but in Luke this follows the account of the Lord's Supper (vv. 14-23). Thus we must look elsewhere in John for a reference to the Lord's Supper, and this we find in John 6. The setting is different: it is not the Upper Room but Capernaum, the background is Jesus' feeding of the five thousand, and the discourse is

with both unbelieving Jews and Jesus' own disciples. Nonetheless, the inner significance of what Jesus said then is closely related to the Lord's Supper.

131 Accordingly, any view of a literal partaking of Christ's body and blood at the Lord's Supper is erroneous. Such a view, for example, follows from the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. The Council of Trent declares, "By the consecration of the bread and wine a change is brought about of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood. This change the holy Catholic Church properly and appropriately calls transubstantiation" ("Decree concerning the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist," chap. 4). By virtue of this presumed total change, recipients of the Eucharist are said to partake literally of the substance of the body and blood of Christ. Luther held a view that likewise affirmed a literal and physical partaking of Christ: "In the Supper we eat and take to ourselves Christ's body truly and physically" (Works, 37.53). This occurs, however, Luther claimed, not as a result of the miracle of transubstantiation, but because of Christ's glorified body and blood being "in, with, and under" the bread and wine: "It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, given to us Christians to eat and drink" (Luther's Smaller Catechism, VI, "The Sacrament of the Altar"). This view, often called consubstantiation, though more adequate than transubstantiation, nonetheless also fails to recognize that the basic partaking at the Lord's Table is not physical but spiritual. Christ is bodily in heaven, but through the Holy Spirit (spiritually) His real presence is communicated at the Eucharist. Calvin, while disavowing both transubstantiation and consubstantiation, also held to a substantive partaking-we are "partakers of his substance" (Institutes, 4.17.11, Beveridge trans.) and of "the wondrous communion of his body and blood," but then adds these important words: "provided we understand that it is effected by the power of the Holy Spirit" (4.17.26). This is a strong affirmation of the real presence of Christ in the Supper by the Holy Spirit. I submit, however, in reflecting on the views of both the Council of Trent and the Reformers, that it is better not to speak of partaking of Christ's substance but of communing with Christ spiritually through partaking of the elements of bread and wine.

132 The Quakers, for example, reject the use of outward elements (in both baptism and the Lord's Supper), viewing them as "survivals" of the Old

Testament and hence contrary to the true inward spiritual worship instituted by Christ (John 4:24).

[133]Calvin says it well: “Men bear away from the Sacrament no more than they gather with the vessel of faith” (Institutes, 4.17.33, Battles trans.). The Westminster Confession speaks of the body and blood of Christ being “not corporally or carnally in, with, or under the bread and wine, but spiritually present to the faith of believers … as the elements are, to their outward senses” (29.7).

[134]As the Evangelical Presbyterian Church puts it, “Christ is spiritually present in the elements and is discerned by the faith of the believer” (The Book of Worship, 3-3, B).

[135]The Greek word is deipneso, a cognate of deipnon, the word used in regard to the Lord’s Supper.

[136]Excommunication refers to exclusion from the fellowship of the church and particularly from the Lord’s Supper. See Calvin’s Institutes, 4.12, “The Discipline of the Church: Its Chief Use in Censures and Excommunication” for a helpful presentation. While excommunication is severe punishment, the ultimate purpose is “reconciliation and restoration” (sec. 10).

[137]“A heretic” (kjv, neb). The Greek word is hairetikon, literally “heretical.” However, the Greek word in Paul’s day more likely meant “factious” or “divisive” (see BAGD, Thayer).

[138]The language of “love feast,” or Agape, is specifically used in Jude in reference to certain “godless men” (v. 4 niv), of whom Jude said, “[They] are blemishes at your love feasts [agapais], eating with you without the slightest qualm” (v. 12 niv). The Agape was a common meal in conjunction with, or ending with, the Lord’s Supper.

[139]John’s Gospel, 26.13 (NPNF 7.172).

[140]Calvin writes, “As often as we partake of the symbol of the Lord’s body … we reciprocally bind ourselves to all the duties of love in order that none of us may permit anything that can harm our brother, or overlook anything that can help him” (Institutes, 4.17.44, Battles trans.).

[141]‘I have earlier commented on Jesus’ breaking bread for the two disciples in Emmaus and for several of His disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; however, Jesus Himself did not partake. Moreover, neither account mentions that Jesus drank with them. Both remain unfulfilled until the consummated kingdom of God.

[142]Or “Maranatha” (KJV, NASB), an Aramaic expression (*Marana*, “our Lord”; *tha*, “come”). Paul’s use of Aramaic rather than Greek suggests the early use of this phrase at the Lord’s Supper in Aramaic-speaking churches in Palestine.

[143]It is interesting to note that the Didache (9 and 10), after relating various prayers to be used at the Eucharist, climaxes them with “Maranatha! Amen” (The Apostolic Fathers, 155). Thus there is all the more likelihood that Paul’s words belong to a eucharistic setting.

[144]In words from one of the Wesleys’ eucharistic hymns:

> To heaven the mystic banquet leads:
> Let us to heaven ascend,
> And bear this joy upon our heads
> Till it in glory end.
>
> (J. Ernest Rattenbury, The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley, p. 226, hymn 99).

[145]We may recall that Paul’s concern with validity had nothing to do with administration but everything to do with the situation of a presumed Supper that, because of lovelessness, was no real Lord’s Supper at all! It was invalid not because of improper administration but because of a totally wrong attitude.

[146]The Roman Catholic Church limits the administration of the Eucharist to those who have received the sacrament of orders. By virtue of this sacrament only priests of the church are said to be qualified to celebrate the Mass and thereby enable people to receive the substantive body and blood of Christ. This means, incidentally, that Protestant churches without the sacrament of orders (as Rome defines such) cannot fully celebrate the Eucharist. Vatican II declares that “ecclesial communities [i.e., non-Roman Catholic churches] … because of the lack of the sacrament of orders they have not preserved the genuine and total reality of the Eucharistic mystery” (Documents of Vatican //, “Decree on Ecumenism,” 22).

[147]Many Protestant churches assign the administration of the Lord’s Supper to ordained ministers, not because of any particular power inherent in their ordination, but for the sake of order (recall n.84). Exceptions may usually be made if no ordained minister is available.

[148]Recall the earlier discussion of “breaking bread” in Acts as likely referring to the Lord’s Supper.

[149]Both are possible translations of Acts 2:46.

[150]The Greek phrase is *en ekklēsia*, literally “in church”; however, this can be a misleading translation suggesting a church building. Fee indicates that the meaning of this Greek phrase is “in assembly” (*First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, 537, 0.29). “As a church” (RSV, NIV, NASH) catches up the note of the church as not being a building but an assemblage of believers.

[151]The church in the New Testament is the meeting, not the meeting place, of believers.

[152]Calvin writes, “The sacrament might be celebrated in the most becoming manner, if it were dispensed to the church very frequently, at least once a week” (Institutes, 4.17.43, Beveridge trans.). Indeed, Calvin adds, “We ought always to provide that no meeting of the Church is held without the word, prayer, the dispensation of the supper, and alms” (4.17.44). Later Calvin moderates this by saying that “each week, at least” (4.17.46) the Supper should be held.

[153]Especially in terms of opportunity for self-examination (see 4, below).

[154]Even where the Lord’s Supper is administered to an individual (shut-in, sick, etc.), it is important to maintain the community aspect by having at least two other persons participate. In the Presbyterian Church, it is usually the ordained minister with another elder, who serves the elements. Thus community is represented: it is not a private affair but a shared fellowship.

[155]The Baptist theologian A. H. Strong, however, speaks affirmatively of “fencing the tables” (Systematic Theology, 970) and raises a number of objections to “open communion” with those who are paedobaptists (pp. 977-980). This makes the Table an exclusively Baptist Table.

[156]Alan Schreck, a Roman Catholic theologian, on the contrary, writes, “For us, it would be a scandal for Christians to gather together in this ‘sacrament of unity* while we remain in basic disagreement over important points of Christian faith, especially as regards the Eucharist itself’ (New Covenant magazine, Sept. 1988, 31). If the Lord is the Host, I would reply, what “scandal” is there-regardless of many differences-in gathering together as Christians at His Table? Is it not a far greater scandal to insist on staying apart when He invites?

[157]Recall some earlier discussion of this on pages 251-53.

[158]Even though “man” should be understood broadly (nrsv reads, “Examine your selves”), the idea of self-examination excludes children who have

not yet reached the age of accountability.

[159]The Greek text does not actually contain the word “profaning”: it reads simply “guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” (as in kjv, nasb). However, such a word as “profaning” (or “desecrating” neb) is implied.

[160]Or “unworthily” (kjv, neb). The Greek word is anaxids.

[161]Some churches provide a separate service of self-examination. For example, the Episcopal Church in its Book of Common Prayer has “A Penitential Order”—two of them—preceding two rites for “the Holy Eucharist.” Each is “for use at the beginning of the Liturgy, or a separate service.” The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in its Book of Common Worship contains two orders of “Preparation for Holy Communion.” As a former pastor, I have found much advantage in having a Saturday night’ ‘Pre-Communion Service” in which self-examination was usually based on reading the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount with a pause at various moments for reflection and confession.

[162]The Greek phrase is diakrinon to soma. Soma, I believe, refers to the body of the Lord (as in v. 27). Some people understand Paul to be speaking of the church (as in 1 Cor. 10:17, and later in 12:12ff.); however, because of the immediate background, the body of Christ (a metonymy for body and blood) seems more likely. For this interpretation especially see I. H. Marshall, Last Supper and Lord’s Supper, 114-15 (similarly, C. K. Barrett, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 275; Leon Morris, 1 Corinthians, rev. ed., TNTC, 161). Contrariwise, Fee views the body as the church (First Epistle to the Corinthians, 562-64).

[163]Rather than “damnation” (kjv). The Greek word is krima.

[164]Better than “judged” (in most translations). The Greek word is diekrinomen, from the same root as diakrinon in verse 29.

[165]John’s Gospel, 53.3 (tr. NPNF VII. 344).

[166]One of the concerns of the Reformation was that of celebrating the Lord’s Supper in the common language. It is significant to observe that the Roman Catholic Church, while still preserving the Latin rite in the Mass, since Vatican II has opened the door for use of “the mother tongue” (see Documents of Vatican //, “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” 36).

[167]A. J. B. Higgins points out that in the Jewish Passover ritual the leader “takes unleavened bread, blesses God in the words, ‘Blessed art thou who bringest forth bread from the earth,’ and breaks it in pieces which he

hands to the guests" (The Lord's Supper in the New Testament, 46).

[168]The words for blessing, eulogeo, and for giving thanks, eucharisteo, are used interchangeably. In his account of the institution of the Supper Paul uses eucharisteo instead of eulogeo in regard to the bread.

[169]The Apostolic Fathers, 153-54.

[170]This order of the cup first and then the bread follows the pattern in Luke 22:17-19.

[171]In many of the early church liturgies there was a special invocation of the Holy Spirit called the epiclesis (from epikaleo, "to call upon"), which was to consecrate the eucharistic elements. For example, in Hippolytus's Apostolic Tradition (c. a.d. 215), this prayer is offered: "We ask you to send your Holy Spirit into the offering of Holy Church; grant, as you gather them together, to all the saints receiving, to be filled with the Holy Spirit so as to affirm their faith in truth, that we may praise and glorify you through your child Jesus Christ…. Amen."

[172]This bread was doubtless unleavened because at the Passover (which Jesus was celebrating-and transforming!) only unleavened bread was used. However, since Christ is our Passover now, it hardly seems necessary to insist on having unleavened bread: it may or may not be used.

[173]KJV includes the word "broken." However, "broken" (klomenon) is "an early gloss" (EGT), hence not in the original text.

[174]The equivalent of these words may also be spoken, since, as quoted, the New Testament has no set pattern (note also the variation in Luke 22:19-20).

[175]Practically, in many church settings this will call for persons to distribute the bread.

[176]This is more meaningful than having each person receive pieces already broken or individually baked, such as small cubes or round wafers. The actual breaking of bread better represents the death of Christ.

[177]In some churches people partake individually, either after being served or by going forward one by one to receive the bread. Although such individual practice is surely valid, the emphasis tends to be more on personal communion than on united participation.

[178]In the three synoptic accounts of the Lord's Supper the content of the cup is called the "fruit of the vine" (Matt. 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18). This doubtless was wine; however, since wine is not directly mentioned

in any of these accounts, it is irrelevant to insist (as some do) that wine must be used. Grape juice equally comes from "fruit of the vine." Incidentally, to use some other liquid (milk, tea, etc.) may be necessary in places where there is no viticulture. However, if possible, "fruit of the vine," resembling blood, should be used.

[179] According to the Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), "it is proper that a part of the time occupied in the distribution of the elements should be spent by all in communion with God, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, and in renewing the believer's personal covenant with the Lord" (5-3.0500).

[180] This also eliminates any idea that the table is an altar. The Lord's Supper is not "the sacrament of the Altar" (an expression often used) but "the sacrament of the Table." When an altar is emphasized, the appropriate action is to come forward, not to sit but to kneel. The apostles sat, not knelt, around a table, not an altar.

[181] Much valuable symbolism is lost if communicants receive singly from the one, or ones, leading in the administration of the elements. This, incidentally, further underscores the value of sitting rather than kneeling.

[182] The Roman Catholic Council of Trent, however, affirms a doctrine of "Concomitance," namely, "that Christ is whole and entire under the form of bread and under any part of that form; likewise the whole Christ is present under the form of wine and under all its parts" ("Decree concerning the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist," chap. 3). Thus a person may communicate "under one species" (bread or wine) and receive the total Christ. An additional statement, entitled "Doctrine concerning the Communion under Both Species," reads in part: "Mother Church … induced by weighty and just reasons, has approved … communicating under one species and decreed that it was to be Law" (chap. 3). Practically speaking, this means that the laity receives only the bread, but are told that they have received, by concomitance, the whole Christ. It is interesting that Vatican II adds, "The dogmatic principles which were laid down by the Council of Trent remaining intact, communion under both kinds may be granted when the bishops see fit…" ("Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," 55). Regardless of this slight moderation in doctrine, the Roman Catholic Church still remains basically committed to an unbiblical and deleterious viewpoint. For Calvin's critique of "Concomitance" see Institutes, 4.17.18; also the Lutheran Augsburg Confession, 22, which specifies "Both kinds in the

Sacrament."

[183]Thus any idea that the contents of the cup must be totally consumed (usually by "priests") or that the sacrament, being viewed as actually the body and blood of Christ, is to be reserved, and even worshiped, is quite wrong. On the latter point, the Council of Trent, in a chapter entitled, "The Worship and Veneration to be Shown to This Most Holy Sacrament," declares, "There is no room for doubt that all the faithful of Christ may … give to this most holy sacrament in veneration the worship of latria, which is due to the true God" ("Decree concerning the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist," chap. 5). This view is not only wrong; it is also sacrilegious.

[184]The Greek word for "sung a hymn" is hymnesantes, literally "singing a hymn." This word, according to BAGD, refers to "the second part of the Hallel [Ps. 113-18 Heb.], sung at the close of the Passover meal." These Hallel (or, Hallelujah) psalms include, for example, Psalm 117, which begins, "Praise the Lord, all nations! Extol him, all peoples!" and has many other expressions of praise to God.

[185]In many churches, there is little more than a brief hymn before dismissal.

[186]See the discussion of the return of Christ in part 2.

7
The Church and Civil Government

One final concern about the church calls for consideration—namely, its relationship to civil government. This is an arena of frequent misunderstanding and conflict. Church and state: how are they properly related?

I. THE TWO SPHERES

Old Testament Israel was a theocracy. There was no separation between Israel as a religious entity and the state as a civil government. From the beginning of their existence as God's special people, Israel stood under His total rule. Through Moses God established not only all the religious rituals but also all judicial functions. Later when kings ruled over the nation of Israel, they did so as God's vice-regents to enforce His will for every aspect of national and personal life. Israel as a people were called by God to reflect His rule and purpose in all areas of their social, political, and religious existence. The ongoing responsibility of government was to see that the whole of life moved under the rule of God.

However, although Israel was a theocracy, there was nonetheless the recognition at the time of Moses of division of authority. Aaron and his sons were priests, and Moses was not authorized by God to perform their priestly role. After Saul became king there was a clear division between the authority of the king and that of judge/priests. So even in the Old Testament theocracy there were seeds of two spheres.

With the establishment of the church, there came into being two distinct spheres: the church and the civil government. The church, composed of Jews and Gentiles alike, was no longer identical with any political configuration but was a new people of God drawn from all races and tongues. Hence wherever Christians were gathered, in whatever land or nations, they were a separate entity from the civil government under which they existed.

In a sense two spheres existed in Israel at the time the church appeared. The people of Israel lived as a part of the Roman Empire under its overarching authority. The Jews had their own secondary authority centered in the Sanhedrin, which, under Rome, acted in both civil and religious matters. Hence there were two spheres of government—the Roman Empire and the Jewish nation, with the latter subordinate to the former.

The church, however, represented a further separation of the two spheres. For although the church had, and has, its form of government, it operates in a separate arena from that of the state. Political and social affairs of state are no longer its realm of operation. The church, composed of people from many states

and nations, is in no sense a subset of any civil government but, drawn out of the whole earthly sphere, exists for an entirely different purpose.[1] Thus in a profound sense the church is a heavenly colony: in Paul's language "our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20 NIV, NASB). This does not, however, deny earthly citizenship as well. Paul himself also declared his Roman citizenship. For example, "Is it lawful for you [a Roman centurion] to scourge a man [Paul himself] who is a Roman citizen?" (Acts 22:25).[2] Thus for the Christian there is dual citizenship—in heaven and on earth.

Next it is important to observe that both spheres are under the rule of God. He is Lord of heaven and earth, hence over both church and state. Church and civil authority have both been established by God. The church is "the church of God";[3] it has been brought into being as a part of His eternal plan and is under His rule and direction. But likewise civil authority is under the rule of God. Let us observe this latter point in more detail.

In the Book of Daniel are these words: "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might…. He removes kings and sets up kings" (2:20–21). Again, note the words addressed to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon: "The Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will, and sets over it the lowliest of men" (4:17). The "kingdom of men," Babylon and all others, are under God's rule, and, accordingly, those who rule do so by His ordination. Indeed, Nebuchadnezzar elsewhere is even called God's servant: "I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant" (Jer. 27:6; cf. 25:9; 43:10). Cyrus, king of Persia, moreover, is called God's "anointed": "Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him" (Isa. 45:1). All such statements emphasize that God establishes and rules over the kingdoms of men and nations.

In the New Testament Paul's words to the church in Rome follow a similar pattern. He writes about "the governing authorities" that "there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God" (Rom. 13:1). Jesus Himself had earlier declared to Pilate: "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above" (John 19:11 NASB). Hence all governing authority, surely including that of Rome, is under God and answerable to Him.

Next we observe that there is a separation in the New Testament between the church and the civil government but not necessarily an opposition between the two. If both the church and "the governing authorities" exist by the will of God, each has its proper function to fulfill. God is at work in and through both to carry

out His purpose. Accordingly, it is a mistake to view civil government simply as the realm of Satan. Satan may indeed seek to influence and take control, and civil authorities may serve him, but ultimately God is sovereign over all. There is now a "kingdom of the world," which indeed is Satan's realm that will some day become "the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" (Rev. 11:15). However, Satan's kingdom is the domain of darkness that, despite its penetration of all earthly kingdoms, is not to be identified with them. Hence, civil government—whatever may be its capitulation to Satan—is not the same as Satan's kingdom, the domain of darkness.

So then, there are two spheres: civil government and the church, each set in place by God. The former deals with mankind's political, economic, and social existence, the latter basically with man's spiritual existence.[4] In the Old Testament theocracy the two spheres ideally were held together; however, Israel's rebelliousness against God increasingly brought a recognition of the necessity of inward spiritual redemption. Thus without denying the fact that mankind's existence must have a political and social dimension, there came to be the reality of the church in which the spirit of man is set right with God. Therefore, rather than a theocratic unity, which, because of human sin, is unworkable in the present order, separation had to occur so that God's purposes could be fulfilled.

One further word: civil government is a part of God's providential order for human life. This is not unlike the human family, which, regardless of all the problems and rifts that may occur, is still God's basic providential arrangement for human welfare. Similarly, the church, which may be called mankind's spiritual family, can never replace the physical family. A far deeper spiritual relationship between members in the church may exist than between family members in the home, but this does not eliminate the continuing need for the human family. So God providentially has set in place human governments, and nothing that the church represents can obviate their continuing importance in the sustaining and ordering of human life.[5]

II. THE FUNCTION OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT

We turn now to a consideration of the function of civil government. Let us observe a number of matters.

A. The Establishment of Justice in Society

In the Book of Proverbs "wisdom"[6] declares, "By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just; by me princes rule, and nobles govern the earth" (8:15–16). This statement stresses the point that justice—"rulers decree what is just"—is fundamental to the purpose of civil government. This concern for justice is frequently found in the Old Testament. For example, Moses declared to Israel, "You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns … and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality…. Justice, and only justice, you shall follow" (Deut. 16:18- 20). King Jehoshaphat later "appointed judges in the land … and said to the judges, 'Consider what you do, for you judge not for man but for the LORD; he is with you in giving judgment … take heed what you do, for there is no perversion of justice with the LORD our God, or partiality, or taking bribes' " (2 Chron. 19:5–7). Impartial and even-handed justice must be the primary obligation of leaders and judges. "Justice, and only justice" is to be the guideline for all. In addition to the multiple references to justice in the Old Testament,[7] there is also a foretelling of the Messiah to come: "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and for evermore" (Isa. 9:7).

All the above passages depict a theocracy in which there is no separation between the secular and religious spheres. However, as we have noted, with the New Testament emergence of the church as a separate entity, the two spheres have become distinct.[8] The church represents a redeemed community of grace within the overall secular order. Its concern is to proclaim the gospel of salvation, to live as a holy people, and to fulfill Christ's commands. Moreover, justice, while surely recognized as needed,[9] is transcended by the operation of love and mercy.[10] Yet—and this is quite important to add—the concern of the church by no means eliminates God's requirement of justice among people. This requirement is also emphasized by the church; however, it is the primary concern of the state, or civil government.

B. The Punishment of Wrongdoers

Let us observe this concern for justice in terms of the punishment of wrongdoers. Here we turn again to Romans 13 and note Paul's further words about a governing authority: "If you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer" (v. 4). Several things are said here. First, there is a proper fear of the governing authority, for he has power to execute divine justice; second, such an authority is God's servant or minister[11] (even though this is not an ecclesiastical office); and, third, he executes God's wrath upon the evildoer. The state, by virtue of its governing authority, is God's servant of wrath against wrongdoing. What Paul is saying applies to all people, unbelievers and believers, pagans and Christians alike. Thus the state performs a necessary, God-given function, not only beyond the sphere of the church but also one that uniquely expresses the wrath of God against wrongdoing.

On this matter of punishment of wrongdoers, Peter writes similarly of the role of civil government. He speaks of "governors as sent by him [the emperor] to punish those who do wrong" (1 Peter 2:14). This, we need to emphasize, is *not* the basic purpose of the church. Leaders in the church are not "sent by" God to punish wrongdoers but to seek to bring them to repentance, forgiveness, and new life.[12] Of course, punishment by the church may be involved (even to excommunication for persistent sinners), but it is neither as primary nor final (e.g., capital punishment) as that of the civil government. Punishment of wrongdoers is, on the other hand, a basic function of the state.

The presence of evil in the world requires that there be a forceful governing power. Civil government, accordingly, at best represents God's providential order to restrain and punish evil. Thus while its punitive function is an aspect of God's judgment, it also indirectly shows God's mercy. For without such restraint and punishment no civilized life is possible: society would degenerate into barbarism and chaos.[13]

C. The Public Good

Civil government, however, is instituted by God not only for punishment of wrongdoers but also for the public good. Paul speaks in Romans 13 of the civil authority as "God's servant for [our] good" (v. 4). So it is that the public good has often been recognized by the church as the legitimate and proper concern of the state. For example, the Westminster Confession of Faith (Presbyterian) declares, "God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates to be under him, over the people, for his own glory and the public good."[14] The Augsburg Confession (Lutheran) similarly states, "It is taught among us that all government in the world and all established rules and laws were instituted by God for the sake of good order."[15] The public good, good order, is the concern of the state.

In a broader sense we may say that the civil government exists to protect whatever good God has given man in creating him. For example, God gave mankind first and foremost life itself; He offered human beings freedom and choice; He desired happiness and joy for them. These God-given endowments are called "rights" by the American Declaration of Independence. "All men … are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights … among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Further, "to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among men… ." Of course, not all governments have been faithful in protecting such rights, but the Declaration stakes out the important fact that government is related to God as Creator and thus to His concern for the genuine good of mankind.[16]

But now we must recognize a further point. Civil government, while a part of God's divine order, also exists in a fallen world: it operates therefore as a fallen entity in a world of fallen humans. Thus the public good can be secured only, first, by checks and balances on the power of civil government itself—else tyranny can result—and second, by such action of civil govern ment regarding human affairs as to adjudicate between manifold and competing self-interests. In the latter case, the restraining power of civil government on human society is essential to prevent anarchy. The public good in an unfallen world would be the direct and voluntary concern of civil government; however, in our present fallen existence the public good can occur only through the proper, often involuntary, application of checks and restraints on both civil government and society at large.

Society at large also includes the church. The church is composed of God's redeemed people, essentially delivered from a fallen condition; however, sin—self-seeking and self-interest—remains. Wrongdoing still occurs, indeed is sometimes of such a kind that it may call for more than repentance and forgiveness or even temporary exclusion from the church. The public good may be so affected that the civil government needs to step in to render proper judgment and mandate punishment. Even a civil government that has little or no recognition of God, and thus operates out of its own self-interest, may be required for its own and the public order to express God's wrath and judgment on Christian offenders.

D. Provision for Exercise of Religious Faith

The public good, just described, also ideally includes provision for the exercise of religious faith. Paul's words are relevant: "I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity" (1 Tim. 2:1–2 NASB). Thus the purpose of these manifold prayers for those in authority is that people of faith may live in godliness and dignity. The civil government, without endorsing the Christian faith or any other particular religious expression,[17] should make room for its religious exercise.

It is interesting that this resembles the First Amendment clause of the United States Constitution that reads, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The prayers urged by Paul in regard to Christian faith were not that civil authorities would establish or even endorse that faith, but that they would simply allow its "free exercise." In later church history there would be, first, the attempt to prohibit Christian expression through bitter Roman persecution of the church (by Nero and others); second, still later would come the establishment of the church as the state religion (by Emperor Constantine). *Neither* of these is what Paul held in prospect, for the church functions best when it is neither prohibited nor established by governing authorities. Moreover, the state should not be in the role of enforcing religious exercise, suppressing heresy, and the like.[18] Such activity by civil government—in regard to any religious group—unquestionably contravenes the First Amendment clause and is inimical to the best interests of both church and state.

Since all civil government derives its true authority from God, it should be only natural for the state to support religious practice. Unfortunately, civil governments have often gone either to the extreme of self-deification (the state *is* God) or total secularization (the state *rejects* God). A government that falls into either extreme has denied its own authority under God and its duty to permit free religious expression.

This leads to the critical point that when civil government recognizes its existence under God, it will both publicly recognize God and ensure the people's right to full religious practice. There is indeed a separation of church and state (the two spheres), but the separation is not from religion but from any particular expression of it. The American Declaration of Independence, as earlier noted,

affirms God as Creator—"all men are … endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights"—and speaks of divine providence—"a firm reliance on the Protection of Divine Providence."[19] Accordingly, there is a proper, indeed continuing, need in the public arena for the recognition of God as Creator and Provider; for example, through national days of prayer, in opening sessions of Congress, and in public school classrooms. Such evidences of recognition of God *must* not be obliterated by a destructive secularism that seeks to separate the nation from God.[20] This recognition does not mean the establishment of any particular religion (including the Christian), but it does demonstrate a nation's basic religious orientation and its essential congeniality to the various religious expressions that it guarantees. Indeed, a nation that publicly recognizes God, for its own good purpose, will foster religion,[21] while at the same time seeking to secure for its people freedom in their varied practice of it.

E. Promotion of Moral Standards

I have earlier quoted the words of Peter about "governors, who are as sent … to punish those who do wrong"; now I add Peter's further words: "and to commend those who do right" (1 Peter 2:14 NIV). In the same vein Paul writes, "Do what is right and he [the one in authority] will commend you" (Rom. 13:3 NIV). Thus it is an additional function of civil government to commend its citizens for doing the good and the right.

This means that civil government is not only in the business of establishing justice, punishing wrongdoers, promoting the public good, and providing for the exercise of religious faith;[22] it also should act as a moral stimulus to its citizenry by commending right and good actions. Public commendation for faithful citizenship, for valorous and rightful deeds in war and peace, for standing heroically against crime and vice—and other such actions—helps to promote a higher level of citizenship.

All of this implies that civil government is in some sense a moral entity. This is true because civil government has been "instituted by God" and thus has a given moral character.[23] Hence, civil government inherently knows what is right. Although it has no way of changing human nature (only the gospel can do this), it can encourage and stimulate its citizens to moral activity.

Moral values *are* a responsibility of the state. Merely to govern by finding a way through competing self-interests is actually self-defeating. Civil government, as an entity ordained by God, must always have as its larger interest the right of all its citizens. When government does the right and commends the right, it governs well.

III. DUTIES TOWARD CIVIL GOVERNMENT

What, next, are the duties that the church owes to the civil government? We have observed a number of functions of the civil government, the state, and how these functions relate to the church. Our concern now is in regard to the church's obligation to the state.

A. Subjection to Authority of the Civil Government

All citizens, including those in the church, owe subjection, honor, and respect to the ruling authorities in the state. Let us recall several Scriptures.

Paul's words in Romans 13 stand out: "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities … he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves" (vv. 1–2 NASB). Later Paul adds, "Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of [God's] wrath, but also for conscience' sake" (v. 5 NASB). Both of these passages strongly call for obedience to civil authority and warn against God's judgment upon those who resist. Likewise the consciences of the disobedient will reflect guilt.[24] Further on Paul speaks of "respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due" (v. 7). Hence, subjection, respect, honor—all are due the governing authorities.

Another related admonition of Paul was given to Titus: "Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient" (Titus 3:1 NASB). Titus had been left by Paul on the island of Crete with responsibility for the churches there. Most of Paul's letter to Titus deals with matters of the church and Christian living; however, he throws in this important reminder about the state: "be subject … be obedient." Paul obviously sees no conflict between this action and the people's devotion to Christ.

Next we turn to Peter. He writes, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right…. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king" (1 Peter 2:13–14, 17 NIV). Here he exhorts the same submission and subjection to governing authorities as does Paul. Likewise the stress is on such authorities as "instituted" by God; however, Peter emphasizes this subjection not because of God's wrath or for conscience's sake but "for the Lord's sake." The Lord has ordained these authorities, and so it is for His sake that Christians, the church, should willingly[25] submit to them.

Based on the above passages, let me make a few observations:

1. The kind of government in power has no bearing on the required subjection. Reference is basically to governing authorities, whoever or whatever they may

be. Peter mentions “the king” (doubtless the Roman emperor at that time) but also other “governors.” Whether the government be a monarchy, oligarchy, or even a democracy is essentially irrelevant. Christians are to be in subjection to whatever governing authority is in place.

2. There is no suggestion that the character of the ruling authority has any bearing on submission. The king, governor, ruler—indeed the whole government—may be overbearing, even pagan, but obedience and respect are still due. Peter’s words are followed by two other passages regarding submission, beginning, “Servants, be submissive to your masters” (1 Peter 2:18) and “Wives, be submissive to your husbands” (3:1). Servants owe submission “not only to the kind and gentle but also to the overbearing”[26] (2:18); wives owe submission to husbands even “though they do not obey the word” (3:1), hence are unbelievers. Thus, in the same manner Christians are to submit even to governing authorities that are harsh, unjust, possibly pagan.[27] The point is that civil government is similar to other societal arrangements that likewise call for submission regardless of the character of those in authority.

3. Finally, as was previously mentioned, the basic reason for subjection is neither the kind of governing authority nor its character, but “for the Lord’s sake.” The fact that governing authority is an ordinance of God—an aspect of His providential arrangement for mankind—means that Christians should willingly submit to its authority. The church, knowing the special providence of God by which it exists under its own authorities, should gladly be submissive to God’s general providence in undergirding the authorities of state. Indeed, far more than the citizenry at large, the church should freely submit itself to civil government.[28]

B. Intercession for Those in Authority

Here we return to Paul's words in 1 Timothy 2:1–2: "I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority"[29] (NASB). Paul's concern is that believers should intercede, first, for all people—interceding along with giving thanks—and, second, for kings and all others in high places.

Thus the church is obligated to intercede for civil government. That Christians are subject to the state does not mean that their prayers should be directed elsewhere. Quite the opposite: since civil government is ordained by God to fulfill certain of His purposes, the church must not shirk its obligation of intercession for the state.[30] Three reasons may be given.

First, since civil government, although ordained by God, is basically involved in temporal and secular matters, it needs the prayers of the church. The responsibilities of executing justice, punishing wrongdoers, providing for the public good, and so on, are weighty indeed. Those in authority may have little or no sense that they are servants of God and may seldom, if at all, turn to prayer. The church therefore must in a sense "stand in the gap" (Ezek. 22:30 KJV) for the civil government and intercede earnestly on its behalf.

Second, civil government, operating necessarily in a fallen world, is itself prone to evil action. Whereas civil authority is "instituted by God" and is "God's servant for [our] good," that authority by no means always fulfills God's purpose for it. Paul's words to the Romans just quoted, as well as those about "kings and all who are in authority" in 1 Timothy, related at that time to the Roman Empire, its emperor (or king), lesser kings (such as Herod), provincial governors, and the like. Basically such authorities are of God, for without them anarchy would follow; however, their actions are often pervaded by evil so that tyranny results. Thus the church needs to intercede for civil government that it may properly be God's servant for good. What can the church do when governments go wrong? The answer is surely neither self-isolation nor interference in government affairs, but continually, and profoundly, to intercede on behalf of kings, presidents, prime ministers, and all lesser officials, that they may turn to the good and right. An interceding church can powerfully affect the ways of civil government.

Third, civil government can stand in the way of Christian living and the spread of the gospel, and this needs the church's intercession. Following Paul's words about interceding for those in authority so that Christians may live a

peaceful life, he adds, “This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:3–4 NASB). For the civil government to allow the church to practice its faith without government interference, hence to “lead a tranquil life” (v. 2), should be continually a matter of intercession. Since the church is the instrument of One who “desires all men to be saved,” prayers should also be regularly offered for civil government to clear the way for the proclamation and extension of the gospel everywhere. On this latter point, there have been, and often are, civil governments that either through their antipathy to religious faith (e.g., in Marxist countries) or capitulation to a particular religious formulation (e.g., in Moslem states) seek to prevent the propagation of the Christian gospel. Indeed, the church must continually intercede for doors to open. Since God Himself desires salvation for “all men,” He will surely hear and bless the prayers of His people in that regard.

May the prayers of the church on behalf of civil government rise constantly to the Lord, especially in these critical days. No other intercessions by the people of God are more important.

C. Payment of Taxes

Another responsibility to the civil government is the payment of taxes. Shortly after Paul spoke about subjection—"one must be subject" (Rom 13:5)—he added, "For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers[31] of God…. Pay all of them their dues, taxes[32] to whom taxes are due, revenue[33] to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due." (vv. 6–7). Civil government, ordained by God, cannot exist without the financial support of its citizens. Regardless of the merits of individual rulers[34] or governments, taxes and revenues are to be paid by all.

Jesus Himself paid taxes. We read in Matthew 17: "When they [Jesus and His disciples] came to Capernaum, the collectors of the half-shekel tax[35] went to Peter and said, 'Does not your teacher pay the tax?' He said, 'Yes' "[36] (vv. 24–25). Later, the Pharisees, through some of their own disciples, tried to tempt Jesus by asking, "Is it lawful [or 'right'] to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" Whereupon Jesus had them bring him a coin stamped with Caesar's portrait and inscription; then He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:17–21). Thus Jesus, even if indirectly, affirmed the propriety of paying taxes to Caesar, the Roman emperor, as well as the importance of rendering to God what belongs to Him. This of course does not mean that Caesar and God are in comparable spheres, for Caesar would have no power at all if God did not give it.[37] But it does signify that there is a temporal realm, which Caesar represents and to whom taxes are due, as well as the spiritual realm for which God's children also have responsibility.

It surely was not always easy to pay taxes to a government that glorified Caesar more than God and whose tax collectors often defrauded the people. It is interesting that John the Baptist had early told tax collectors who came to be baptized, "Collect no more than is appointed you" (Luke 3:13). Thus John did *not* deny the validity of collecting taxes but only the abuse that had set in. In Jesus' ministry many tax collectors (including Matthew) were numbered among His disciples. Not once did Jesus suggest that their office was wrong,[38] only the misuse of it.[39]

Hence, today Christians may declaim about taxes being too much or not always used for proper ends, but the obligation remains. Taxes, unlike

contributions to the church, are not voluntary: they are exactions. However, when there is the fresh realization that civil government is instituted by God and that, whatever its faults, it exercises an irreplaceable role in human affairs, taxes should be much less painful. It may be too much to suggest that one exult over the obligation, but at least there should be a readiness and willingness to pay!

D. Participation in Public and Civic Affairs

We have earlier noted these words of Paul to Titus: “Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient.” To this statement Paul adds, “to be ready for every good deed” (3:1 NASB). This suggests that beyond the call for willing subjection to civil authorities, there is also the call to civic responsibility. Subjection could of course be viewed as a kind of negative acquiescence; however, the positive side is that of readiness for “every good deed.” Christians should be active citizens.[40]

Peter writes similarly: After speaking about governors “who are sent by him [the king] to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right,” he continues, “For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men” (1 Peter 2:15 NIV).[41] This suggests again the importance of good deeds in the civic arena, especially because such deeds will help to silence those who may accuse Christians of being uninvolved in public and community life.

Here we must differentiate between the activity of Christians in the church and their activity in the state. The church’s function is essentially nonpolitical; it represents the spiritual realm: people born of the Spirit who worship together, build up one another in the Lord, and seek to extend the gospel of salvation to all mankind. Accordingly, the sphere of the church does not encompass the political and civic arena; thus the church itself ought not to become involved in affairs of the state.[42] However, individual Christians are not only citizens of heaven, the spiritual commonwealth; they are also citizens of earth and of the God-ordained realm of the state. Therefore, Christians need to do more than submit, pray, and pay taxes: they should also assume their rightful role of “readiness for every good [civic] deed” and “doing good [in society],” wherever they can make an impact.

This surely includes the possibility of political office. Since civil government is also instituted by God, for a Christian to serve in such government is indeed appropriate.[43] The Christian knows God (many civil authorities do not) and thus should be all the more concerned to fulfill the cause of justice and to work for the public good. The Christian, however, must not seek any preferential role for his own church and faith; nor, for example, should a Christian magistrate seek to apply specific biblical laws in the civil arena.[44] However, the Christian in

political office[45] should rightly strive to strengthen the nation's historical commitment to God (e.g., represented by God as "Creator" in the Declaration of Independence, "in God we trust" on our coins and currency, "one nation under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance) and stand firm on the recognition of God in every sphere of public and civil life. Today, I hardly need add, this is of urgent importance because of the increasing efforts by many to exclude from civil life all reference to God.

IV. THE CHURCH BEYOND CIVIL GOVERNMENT

A. A Higher Ethic

The civil government, as we have observed, is concerned primarily with *justice*. Every human society has friction and tension that are brought about by self-interest and result in abuse of the rights of others. Civil government must exist to restrain expressions of violence, to adjudicate between competing claims, to punish lawbreakers, to protect life and property, to maintain peace and order. In all of this, justice is the supreme goal. It is the heart of the concern of civil government.

The church, while affirming justice, goes beyond justice to *love*. One of the best examples of this is the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount where He first quotes the Old Testament commandment "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' " Then Jesus adds, "But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well" (Matt. 5:38–40). "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"[46] was an Old Testament prescription for justice. This was not vengeance but retribution—the *lex talionis*, law of retaliation—and met the demand for equivalence: the punishment to fit the crime. By such punishment justice was served in giving the offender what he deserved and protecting society against acts of lawlessness. The Old Testament law of retaliation with various modifications, of course, continues to be a rule of justice in contemporary life.

Jesus' words "But I say to you" do not contradict the Old Testament law but fulfill it. Indeed, He had earlier said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17 NIV). However, Jesus' words belong to the *new* ethic of the kingdom of heaven (or of God)[47] and can be fulfilled only by those who belong to it. Thus this is not an ethic for the state but for the church that embodies God's kingdom. It does not contradict law but goes *beyond* it and in so doing fulfills it. Retributive justice is entirely proper for the state. But for the church, the born-again people of the spiritual kingdom, there is a higher way—the way of love. Thus a blow to the cheek, while rightly calling for a response in kind, is transcended by the Christian's turning the other cheek; and if sued for something he owns, rather than going to court, he will give the plaintiff what he demands and more.[48] The Christian does not stand for his rights but views whatever happens to himself at the hands of another as an opportunity to show love and

compassion.

Jesus makes this even stronger a few words later in saying, “You have heard that it was said, [49]You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:43–45). Persecution by an enemy rightly calls for retribution, but for the Christian, love is the higher way. Why? Because by love the believer demonstrates his sonship to God the Father who, as Jesus adds, “makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (v. 45). Thus Jesus goes even beyond nonretaliation (as expressed in the preceding verses in Matt. 5:38–42) to positive love (vv. 43–45).

This higher ethic of love may seem like a denial of justice by capitulation to evil. However, it is actually the way to right human relations by changing the enemy! Here we move to Paul’s words in Romans 12:20–21: “ ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.’[50] Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” While justice may be served through retaliation, the enemy remains the enemy. Far better is the exercise of outgoing love that may so overwhelm him that he will no longer be an adversary!

We are moving deeply into the arena of interpersonal relationships and to a quality of life infinitely far removed from legalistic achievement. It is not a matter of securing one’s rights by bringing an offender to justice but of allowing the offense to be an opportunity of expressing God’s love to the offender and thereby possibly bringing about his restoration. Does this mean dealing lightly with an offense? Not at all. For the way of love does *not* overlook the offense or the just deserts of the offender, but, in spite of the hurt, reaches out to him in forgiveness and love. This totally undeserved act of love and forgiveness has the power to do far more than the law can achieve—such as justice, redress, perhaps rehabilitation—because it can restore a relationship, even change the offender, and bring to him new life.

Ultimately we are talking about the way of the cross. Jesus had every right to retaliate against his vicious offenders. Moreover, He could have done so when one of His disciples, to protect Him, began slashing with a sword; but Jesus quickly intervened, saying, “Put your sword back in its place … for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on the Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matt. 26:52–53 NIV). In the cause of justice God could properly have sent angels to punish, even destroy, the enemies of Jesus. But Jesus did not ask; *for there was*

something much higher at stake than justice. On the cross He demonstrated it for the whole world to see, crying out to God, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Whereas this could have been the day of God’s righteous and total judgment upon an evil and offending world, it was the day of mankind’s forgiveness and ensuing salvation. It was the higher and redeeming way of love.

Some day in the future God’s righteous anger and vengeance will be totally unleashed[51] against all who have spurned the forgiveness offered at the Cross,[52] and there are numerous evidences of people receiving just retribution even now.[53] But the way of the Cross, the way of forgiving love, is the way of the present kingdom. Justice is not denied, because Christ Himself at the Cross received God’s righteous judgment and punishment for all people, thus unleashing the awesome power of love and forgiveness. Hence for the church, those who themselves have been forgiven, the high way is the way of love to all who may cause offense.

It is important to add that this higher ethic of love in no way invalidates the responsibility of the state to operate on the level of justice. Since the civil government—even if there are many Christians serving in it, or if it is entirely pagan as was the Roman Empire for centuries—is not the kingdom of God, it cannot operate on the basis of forgiving love. In an unredeemed society ridden with evil and injustice, it is important that civil government seek to restrain evil and punish injustice, and thus work for the public good. Civil government is not in a position to follow such words of Jesus as “Do not resist one who is evil,” but it must resist evildoers in every possible just way. The *lex talionis* also includes “life for life,”[54] thus at times there must be the imposition of capital punishment. Such punishment cannot be ruled out in a still sinful world. Further, this resistance by the civil government may on occasion not be simply against individuals but against groups within[55] or nations without[56] when the cause of justice is at stake. “Do not resist,” while applying to the way of the kingdom and referring to interpersonal relationships, cannot be the way of the state. The civil authority does execute God’s vengeance. Indeed, according to Paul, “he does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer” (Rom. 13:4). Such is the God-given role of the state.

Now obviously there will be some tension for the Christian, who is necessarily a citizen both of the state and of the kingdom of God. For the state the “sword” of authority is proper and necessary—it “does not bear the sword in vain” ; for the kingdom it is improper and self-defeating—“put your sword back in its place.” The only sword the church has is the Word of God: “the sword of

the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17). This means that the Christian must operate on *both* levels: one level calls for justice to be done, and the other calls for love to be exercised. The Christian, for example, cannot therefore properly forego military duty because of the kingdom command of nonresistance and love for enemies. Although this is a higher ethic, it does not invalidate the call to service of the state in a just war.[57] If a Christian, however, is involved in military duty, it is important for him in every way possible to embody love for the very enemy he is fighting against. This is not easy, but it is surely the Christian way.

In conclusion, the higher ethic of love in this present sinful world must operate alongside the ethic of justice. The state is God's servant; so is the church. Where the two function harmoniously together, the purposes of God are being justly and lovingly fulfilled.

B. A Higher Loyalty

One of the most memorable scenes in the Old Testament is that of the three Hebrew young men—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—who defied King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon by disobeying his royal decree to bow down and worship his golden image. After being threatened by death in a fiery furnace, they replied, "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up" (Dan. 3:17–18). Thus, even though Nebuchadnezzar is called God's servant[58] and was placed in power by God,[59] the three Hebrews defied his order. "We will not," they told him, and—as the narrative continues—they were delivered by God from the fiery furnace.

This story brings together seemingly disparate elements: a reign by God's appointment, an imperial or state decree, and defiance of that decree—a defiance that God Himself sustained! How can this be? Despite a ruler's holding office by God's ordination and thus properly calling for submission to his rule and authority, if an ordinance (or ordinances) is contrary to God's will, those under that rule may properly disobey. Such disobedience is not disloyalty to civil authority but, with due respect to it, gives a higher loyalty to God. Earlier in Daniel is the statement that God "removes kings" (2:21), hence no civil authority, despite its God-given position, is as permanent as God's continuing will and command. In time God may remove the unjust governing power.

The classic New Testament example of this is the statement of Peter and the apostles to the high priest and the members of the Sanhedrin,[60] who had commanded them not to teach further about Jesus: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). This does not mean that the high priest and council were viewed only as "men,"[61] hence with no authority from God, but that God and the gospel had a higher claim on the apostles' lives and actions. Even though threatened with death, the apostles and the young church could not submit to an authority that forbade expression of their ultimate commitment to God.

Jesus, as we recall, had said, "Render … to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."[62] This does not mean giving unqualified obedience to Caesar—it is impossible to give such to both Caesar and God. Rather, it means giving to Caesar all that is his due—"the things that

are Caesar's"—but no more. The paying of taxes to Caesar (Rome) was proper, even if Caesar was ruthless and despotic; but if he should begin to demand worship of himself, the church could only disobey. This of course is exactly what was later to happen: the deification of the Roman emperor, the demand for Christians to worship him, and countless numbers of believers being put to death.

Thus Paul in all that he says about the governing authorities as being "instituted by God," and in his statement that "he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment" (Rom. 13:1–2), does not speak of unqualified submission. Even though Paul calls them "ministers [or servants] of God," he does not accord them more than honor, adding, after speaking about taxes, that the Christian believers should give "respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due" (vv. 6–7). Respect and honor are entirely appropriate; not adulation and worship. Likewise, Peter, after speaking of submitting—i.e., " submit yourselves"— to king and governors, climaxes with these words: "Fear [or 'reverence'] God, honor the king." To go beyond submission and honor is unwarranted. Thus if kings, governors, and rulers of any kind exceed their God-given limits, their subjects may, even ought to, disobey.

To review thus far: no unqualified obedience to the civil government is called for. Authorities that either demand worship or seek to prevent the proclamation of the the gospel have gone far beyond their God-given limits.

There is also the matter of conscience. We have noted Paul's words about being subject to civil authority "for the sake of conscience" (Rom. 13:5), namely, because rulers as appointed by God represent His external moral order, even as the conscience is a moral judge within. Hence the two mesh. However, if civil authority acts immorally—for example, by engaging in vicious, self-serving warfare and therein drafting citizens for military service—it is right and proper to object "for the sake of conscience" and even to disobey if need be, regardless of the personal consequences. Submitting to government ends at the point where it sanctions or demands activity that is contrary to conscience.[63] "God alone is Lord of the conscience"[64] —never the state.

Beyond "for the sake of conscience," as we have noted, there is also submission to civil authority "for the Lord's sake" (1 Peter 2:13). The Lord enjoins such submission. But also, even as conscience may inwardly protest against unwarranted intrusions, the Lord as head of the church may call for civil disobedience. Surely this was the case when Peter and the Eleven declared, "We must obey God rather than men." The church is also guided by the written Word

of God, so that if government authority requires activity contrary to what the Scriptures prescribe, the church may protest and disobey. Martin Luther's famous words of defiance—"Here I stand, I can do no other, God help me"—spoken before Roman Catholic Church officials and the Roman emperor, were based on his statement "My conscience is bound by the Word of God." This was a case of both conscience and Scripture calling for a higher loyalty than to any earthly powers. Ultimately, it is a matter of loyalty to the Lord Himself.

A cautionary word: Christians ought not to expect a perfect civil government on this earth. They must always recognize that the state, however constituted, basically represents order (against anarchy and chaos), and that as citizens of that state their first duty is submission, payment of taxes, and the like. Civil disobedience, accordingly, should occur only in situations where there is a clear conflict between the state's demands or laws and the church's higher loyalty to God. Even if conflict ensues, the first response should be to intercede for those in authority rather than to disobey them, and then to work for changes in the law rather than flagrantly to break it. Only at the extreme point where the state is clearly disregarding God's law ought there to be rebellious action. But, to repeat, since there is no perfect civil government, Christians should exercise patience before defying their government's laws and ordinances.

Still there remains a higher loyalty. This is particularly the case if the civil government increasingly degenerates from its true function as a servant of God. The same Roman government that Paul speaks of as "God's servant to do … good" may even become so dominated by evil forces that it becomes the tool of Satan. The "beast" in Revelation 13 represents political power that blasphemes God and wars against Christians (see vv. 6–7). The same Roman government instituted "to do good" now is totally determined to do evil. Romans 13 and Revelation 13 are not too far apart! If and when the state takes on Revelation 13 proportions, there can be no doubt that Christians owe a higher loyalty to God.

V. CHRIST OVER ALL

Finally, it is important to recognize that Christ is over both the church and the civil government. I have already spoken of how both church and state are under the rule of God.[65] Now let us observe this from the aspect of Christ's lordship over all.[66]

This means, first, that Christ is Lord *over all earthly kingdoms and powers.* According to Paul, Christ is "the head of all rule and authority" (Col. 2:10).[67] In the Book of Revelation are the striking words that Christ is "the ruler of the kings of the earth" (1:5 NIV). Hence all earthly governing authorities are under the lordship of Christ.

This does not mean, of course, that earthly authorities recognize Christ's lordship; they usually do not. We could say, therefore, that the state generally is the realm of Christ's *unacknowledged* lordship, even as the church is the realm of His *acknowledged* lordship. The church is privy to the secret of a lordship that is much larger than over itself, namely, a lordship that is over all the nations. This means, for example, that when the church proclaims the gospel to the nations, it is not as if the church is, so to speak, taking Christ to them. *He is already there!* The message is simply: Acknowledge Him, accept Him, receive Him, as your own true Lord. Let go of your idols, open your eyes, "do homage to the Son"[68] —for He is Lord even now.

Second, the lordship of Christ over kings and nations is *the result of His death and resurrection*In Ephesians Paul declares that God "raised him [Christ] from the dead … far above all rule and authority and power and dominion … and he has put all things under his feet and has made him head over all things" (1:20–22). All the kingdoms of earth had been under the control of Satan,[69] but now Christ by His death, resurrection, and exaltation has won a victory over Satan, so that the control is now ultimately in Christ's hands. This means that, despite the continuance, even increase, of evil[70] in the nations, Christ overrules whatever Satan may try to accomplish.

Here we may recall the words of the resurrected Lord: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt. 28:18). The authority "on

earth" surely includes all the nations and governments of mankind. In the Book of Revelation, Christ the Lamb is depicted as having "the scroll" (5:8) of history in His hand. He is the One whose "blood … purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (v. 9 NIV). Later, as the Lamb opens the seals of the scroll (6:1), the future unfolds to the final day of wrath and destruction (vv. 2–17). Thus the crucified, risen, and exalted Lord, "the ruler of the kings of the earth" (1:5)—hence over all governing authorities—is the Lord of history! He is the Lord over all that happens, even to the end.

Third, the lordship of Christ over all earthly authorities is *for the church.* Paul's words in Ephesians 1 continue: "He [God] has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all" (vv. 22–23). Christ's headship over all powers, established through His victory on the cross, is directed to the church. Christ has the authorities in heaven and on earth in His control so that no matter what they do, the church will prevail. The state may even seek to destroy the church, but it cannot possibly succeed. Moreover, since Christ "fills all in all," and the church is His "fulness," His *pleroma*,[71] then all earthly authorities will one day affirm the triumph of Christ's church and kingdom.

We should not, however, expect a final merger of the nations with the church into some kind of theocracy. Earthly rulers and authorities, while under Christ, have their God-given role of restraining wrongdoers and establishing justice in a sinful world. Since there will be continuing evil to the very end of this age, the task of civil government remains. While the state should support the church, indeed all religious expressions, its business is different from that of worshiping God, upbuilding believers in faith and love, and carrying the gospel to all people. The urgent matter for civil government is to do its own job faithfully and well.

[1]See Marcellus Kik, Church and State in the New Testament, chapter 2, "Two Distinct Jurisdictions."

[2]See also Acts 16:37-39; 23:27.

[3]Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:13, and elsewhere.

[4]By "spiritual existence" I do not mean an existence unrelated to the political, moral, and economic sphere, for the spiritual surely has significant effects on the public arena. However, the spiritual signifies such a profound reorientation of life as to represent a separate sphere.

[5]John Calvin speaks highly of civil governments with these words: "Civil

authority is, in the sight of God, not only sacred and lawful, but the most sacred, and by far the most honorable, of all stations in mortal life" (Institutes of the Christian Religion, 4.20.4, Beveridge trans.).

[6]"Wisdom" is personified throughout Proverbs 8. This is obviously God's wisdom, even a second person alongside Him (note especially vv. 22-31), and probably a foregleam of Christ the Incarnate Wisdom of God (cf. 1 Cor. 1:24-30).

[7]There are hundreds of these.

[8]Oscar Cullmann writes that "the Jewish theocratic ideal is expressly rejected by Christianity" (The State in the New Testament, 9).

[9]I refer here to justice for people. E.g., there is Jesus' question, "Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?" Jesus continues, "I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly" (Luke 18:7-8 niv). The church likewise is concerned with justice (see e.g., 1 Cor. 5 and 6).

[10]In the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), for example, the wayward son justly deserves nothing, but through his penitence he receives the loving embrace of his father. Justice is transcended by love.

[11]The Greek word is diakonos. This means that the service of God includes political service!

[12]The words of Jesus in John 8 to the adulterous woman are to the point: "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again" (v. 11).

[13]F. F. Bruce speaks about the difference between "the preservation of the world" and "the salvation of the world" (Romans, TNTC, 238). It is with the former that God's order in civil government is concerned.

[14]Chapter 23, "Of the Civil Magistrate."

[15]Chapter 16, "Civil Government."

[16]See Gary T. Amos, Defending the Declaration, chapter 4, " 'Unalienable Rights' Endowed by the Creator," for a helpful study.

[17]In 1 Timothy 2:1–2 Paul is of course speaking specifically of Christian faith. However Paul's concern surely may be applied to all other religions that likewise desire free expression.

[18]Such a role for the state was set forth in the original 1647 edition of the Westminster Confession of Faith in the chapter entitled "Of the Civil Magistrate." It declared that "he hath authority, and it is his duty to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be

suppressed … he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatever is transmitted in them be according to the mind of God." Let me add that I am thankful that this has been changed in the United States version of the Confession to read, in part: "It is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians." Nothing is said later in the Confession about the civil magistrate suppressing blasphemies, heresies, etc. The word "protect" far better expresses the properly functioning relationship between civil government and the church.

[19]Words referring to those who signed the Declaration.

[20]As Bob G. Slosser writes emphatically, "Separation of church and state is not separation of God and state" (Changing the Way America Thinks, 193).

[21]Calvin declared, "No polity [i.e., political order] can be successfully established unless piety be its first love" (Institutes, 4.20.9, Beveridge trans.). This may be extreme-"its first love"-but it contains a valuable nugget of truth.

[22]As discussed in the preceding paragraphs.

[23]To this may be added the fact that the moral law is basically known by all people. Paul in Romans 2:15 writes about the Gentile nations that "what the law requires is written on their hearts." This means that the ethical demands of the Law (i.e., the Ten Commandments) are written deep in human nature (the heart), so that all people, and therefore governments, have some knowledge of what is just and right.

[24]The conscience is an inward moral monitor. Just after his words about "the law … written on their hearts," Paul adds, "their conscience also bears witness" (Rom. 2:15). Since the state in some sense represents God's moral order, and the conscience bears witness to this fact, an unwillingness to be subject to the state will have repercussions on the conscience.

[25]Just prior to Peter's statement that culminates in "honor the king," he writes, "Live as free men" (v. 16). These words apply, in part at least, to the church's willing submission to governing authorities.

[26]Or "unjust." The Greek word is skoliois-"harsh, unjust" (BAGD).

[27]Calvin writes, "Even an individual of the worst character, one most unworthy of all honour, if invested with public authority, receives that

illustrious divine power which the Lord has by his word devolved on the ministers of his justice and judgment, and that, accordingly, in so far as public obedience is concerned, he is to be held in the same honour and reverence as the best of kings" (Institutes 4.20.25, Beveridge trans.). The Westminster Confession declares, "Infidelity or difference in religion doth not make void the magistrate's just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to him" (chap. 23.4).

[28]That the authority of civil government is not absolute will be discussed in the next section, "A Higher Loyalty."

[29]Or "high positions" (rsv). The Greek word is hyperoche, "a place of prominence or authority" (BAGD).

[30]I quote here a beautiful prayer for "rulers and governors" in I Clement: "You, Master, have given them the power of sovereignty through your majestic and inexpressible might, so that we, acknowledging the glory and honor which you have given them, may be subject to them, resisting your will in nothing. Grant to them, Lord, health, peace, harmony, and stability, that they may blamelessly administer the government which you have given them…. Lord, direct their plans according to what is good and pleasing in your sight, so that by devoutly administering in peace and gentleness the authority which you have given them they may experience your mercy" (The Apostolic Fathers, 2nd. ed., 61:1-2).

[31]The Greek word here is leitourgoi. According to BAGD, "in our literature always [used] with sacral connotations." Dunn writes that "taxes could be regarded as the secular equivalent of the offerings and sacrifices brought to the altar; within the state as ordered by God, tax officials are the equivalent of priests within the cult!" (Romans 9-16, WBC, 772).

[32]Or "tribute" (kjv). The Greek word is phoron. According to Thayer, phoros refers especially to "the annual tax levied upon houses, lands, and persons." C. K. Barrett speaks of it as "direct taxation" (The Epistle to the Romans, HNTC, 242).

[33]Or "custom" (kjv). The Greek word is telos. According to Barrett, "indirect taxation, such as customs dues" (Epistles to the Romans, 248).

[34]E. F. Harrison states, "The man in authority may be unworthy, but the institution is not, since God ordained it" (Romans, EBC, 139).

[35]The Greek word is didrachma, "the sum required of each person annually as the temple tax" (BAGD).

[36]In the verses that follow, Jesus-after speaking of freedom not to pay-tells

Peter, so as not to give offense, to cast a hook into the sea "and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel; take that and give it to them for me and yourself (v. 27). So Peter paid the tax both for himself and Jesus.

[37]Recall Jesus' words to the Roman governor Pilate: "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above" (John 19:11).

[38]Matthew, of course, did give up his tax office to follow Jesus (see Matt. 9:9). However, because of Matthew's call to be an apostle, this was an exception.

[39]This comes out indirectly in the case of the rich tax collector Zacchaeus who, upon turning to Jesus, said, "If I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold" (Luke 19:8).

[40]E. F. Scott writes in this connection: "Christians should be among the foremost in showing public spirit" (The Pastoral Epistles, MNTC, 172). D. E. Hiebert puts it well: "As good citizens, believers must … 4be ready to do whatever is good'-prepared and willing to participate in activities that promote the welfare of the community. They must not stand coldly aloof from praiseworthy enterprises of government but show good public spirit, thus proving that Christianity is a constructive force in society" (Titus, EBC, 11:443).

[41]I. H. Marshall writes that "what starts off, then, as apparently a lesson in political passivity [in Peter's preceding words] culminates in an injunction to take an active role in society" (I Peter, 84).

[42]The Westminster Confession of Faith, in regard to church synods and councils, calls this "intermeddling"! "Synods and councils are to handle or conclude nothing but that which is ecclesiastical; and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs that concern the commonwealth" (chap. 31.5).

[43]Herbert W. Titus, dean of the Law School at Regent University, writes, "There is a ministry in politics, just as sure as there is a ministry in evangelism. If a nation's legal and political structure does not reflect the law of God, it is bound to fail. It is because of God's grace that we have the opportunity to participate in the public affairs of nations, and we ought to do so in accordance with the plan God has for America and nations all over the world" (The Biblical Basis of Public Policy, National Perspectives Institute, 10).

[44]Contemporary Reconstructionism, however, affirms that this is what any civil magistrate should do. For example, Greg L. Bahnsen writes, "The

magistrate today ought to obey and enforce God's Law" (italics his) (Theonomy in Christian Ethics, expanded ed., 433). By "God's Law" is meant the Old Testament laws-all the civil statutes revealed to Moses. In regard to capital punishment, for example, "civil magistrates are under obligation to execute all those who commit capital crimes as defined by God's authoritative law" (442). Bahnsen later lists as "capital offenses" (I will omit the Scriptures he gives): "adultery and unchastity … sodomy and bestiality … homosexuality … rape … incest … incorrigibility in children … sabbath breaking … kidnapping … apostasy … witchcraft, sorcery, and false pretension to prophecy … and blasphemy" (445). This is indeed a rather shocking portrayal of a civil magistrate's penal obligations in a society reconstructed along Old Testament lines. Obviously, from this viewpoint, Christian civil magistrates should be even more concerned that persons who commit such capital offenses be executed. (This is a kind of Christian parallel to Islamic fundamentalism that upholds the right and duty of the Moslem magistrates to "obey and enforce God's [Allah's] Law" in detail as set forth in the Koran.) Reconstructionism, by definition, calls for reconstruction, i.e., of the state, to move from whatever its present form (pluralistic democracy in the United States) to a biblical theocracy in which Old Testament laws are the law of the land and civil magistrates "obey and enforce" them. Such a goal, I must add, has no New Testament support, and is an infringement in regard to separation of church and state.

[45]Here I refer particularly to the American scene.

[46]See Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:19-20; Deuteronomy 19:21.

[47]Jesus' opening words in the Sermon on the Mount are "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven [or "God"-see next chapter in Renewal Theology]." "Poor in spirit" refers to those who "acknowledge spiritual bankruptcy" (D. A. Carson, Matthew, EBC, 8:132) and thus are recipients of the kingdom.

[48]R. T. France speaks of this as Jesus' calling for "a radically unselfish attitude to one's own rights and property" (Matthew, TNTC, 127). This cannot, of course, be the attitude of the state, which exists in part to protect people's rights and property. Lawsuits, for example, are appropriate to the state as a way of abetting justice. The Christian, as a citizen of the state, accordingly, may participate in the legal defense of others' rights-including other believers-while personally refraining from defending his own. However, Jesus' words about the willing

defenselessness of His disciples should not be applied to the state or Christian activities within the state at large. Now one further word: If there is some ambiguity here in regard to Christians and lawsuits in general, there should be none in relation to inter-Christian and interchurch affairs: lawsuits are wrong. Paul makes this clear in writing, "To have lawsuits at all with one another is defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?" (1 Cor. 6:7). Perhaps as we put Paul's words into practice, we may also better learn how to deal with the more complex matter of church and state.

[49]Quotation from Proverbs 25:21 (lxx).

[50]The words of Paul earlier quoted, beginning, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him," are prefaced by Paul's statement, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord" (Rom. 12:19).

[51]See discussion of "the Day of the Lord" in part 2, pages 305-7.

[52]Paul mentions some examples in Romans 1:18-32.

[53]See Exodus 21:24 and Deuteronomy 19:21. Also, even prior to the Mosaic law of "life for life" in these two passages, there was God's word to Noah, and through him to all mankind: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image" (Gen. 9:6).

[54]For example, the United States against the South with its institutionalized slavery in the nineteenth century.

[55]For example, the United States and its allies against Germany in World Wars I and II.

[56]Some would argue that there is no such thing as a just war, especially in light of all the bloodshed in modern warfare. However, in the larger picture of the securing of justice and the protection of liberty, most churches today recognize the principle of the just war. In this matter, however, a pacifist stance is taken by such denominations as the Church of the Brethren, Quakers, and Mennonites, whereas most other Protestant churches, as well as the Roman Catholic Church, adhere to a just war viewpoint.

[57]Recall the earlier quotation from Jeremiah 27:6: "Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant."

[58]God "sets up kings" (Dan. 2:21).

[59]The Sanhedrin, though a religious council, operated also as a functionary of the Roman civil government.

[60]"Later in Acts Paul shows deference to the high priest in saying, 44 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people'" (23:5; quoting Exod. 22:28 lxx).

[61]Recall the earlier discussion of this in regard to taxes.

[62]Conscience is not to be thought of as an invariably sure guide. It needs purification through "the blood of Christ" (see Heb. 9:14). However, conscience exists in all people (recall Rom. 2:15); but in the Christian, whose conscience has been purified, it is much more trustworthy.

[63]The opening words in the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 20.2.

[64]Recall section I, "The Two Spheres," pages 265-67.

[65]In chapter 5, regarding the government of the church, I dealt with Christ's lordship over the church, pages 219-20.

[66]"All rule and authority" may also refer to angelic authorities. Colossians 2:15 declares that Christ "disarmed the principalities and the powers" at the Cross. Nonetheless, "all" suggests authorities not only in heaven but also on earth.

[67]The messianic Psalm 2 declares, "Now therefore, O kings, show discernment, Take warning, O judges [or 'rulers'] of the earth. Worship the Lord with reverence, And rejoice with trembling, Do homage to [or 'kiss'] the Son" (vv. 10-12 nasb). (The rsv reads "kiss his feet," a less likely translation.)

[68]Of course, the preincarnate Christ, as second person of the Trinity and fully God, essentially rules over all.

[69]Recall in the temptation of Jesus that Satan "showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me' " (Matt. 4:8-9). Jesus did not dispute Satan's claim; rather, He proceeded step by step to overthrow his power and authority.

[70]See "The Increase of Evil," pages 326-27.

[71]The Greek word for "fulness" is pleroma; "sum total, fulness, even (super) abundance" (BAGD).

Part Two
LAST THINGS

8
The Kingdom of God

BACKGROUND: THE PATTERN OF HISTORY

Christian faith affirms that all of history moves to a definite end or goal. History is by no mean a series of endless cycles but moves ever to a definite climax. Christian faith is time-conscious and end-conscious. While it looks backward to many decisive events, there is also the forward look to “how it will all come out.” Thus a pattern in history is in the process of being fulfilled.

This movement in history may be noted first in relation to creation and consummation. The whole of history moves forward between these two poles.

Creation

In the language of Scripture the movement is from the creation of "the heavens and the earth" "in the beginning" (Gen. 1:1) to "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1). Even as the first two chapters in the Bible (Gen. 1 and 2) depict the original creation, so the last two chapters (Rev. 21 and 22) portray the future consummation. Everything else occurs in between—the fall of man, salvation through Jesus Christ, the destruction of evil, and the triumph of righteousness. But the movement forward is unmistakable.

A transition has taken place in that Christians are no longer living B.C.—"before Christ"— spiritually but are now living A.D.—"in the year of our Lord." There will not be another radical shift into some kind of post-A.D. era. What believers look forward to is the consummation of Christ's lordship.[1]

History's movement may be represented under the caption of "The Kingdom of God." This term refers to God's rule or reign—His kingship, His sovereignty. On the one hand, it is *the great present fact of history*: "Say among the nations, 'The LORD reigns!' " (Ps. 96:10). It is *everlasting*: "Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endures throughout all generations" (Ps. 145:13). It is *universal:* "The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all" (Ps. 103:19). Although human history might seem to evidence otherwise, the kingdom of God is supreme. On the other hand, the kingdom of God is *to be established*. It is God's intention that His rule become effective among people and nations. Thus Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven…. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done…" (Matt. 6:9–10).

We may now view the kingdom of God in terms of preparation, establishment, and completion.[2]

I. PREPARATION

Although the expression “the kingdom of God” is not directly used in the Old Testament, Israel was clearly a people called in a special way to live under the rule of God: to acknowledge His kingship, His reign, His commandments. E.g., “The LORD became king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people were gathered, all the tribes of Israel together” (Deut. 33:5). Again, “I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King” (Isa. 43:15). Israel, accordingly, was a theocratic nation, first without human kings, then with kings, but in every situation expected to acknowledge God’s ultimate kingship and reign.

Indeed Israel was called by God to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation”—in that sense to be the kingdom of God—if the people would truly serve Him. “If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:5–6). Israel, though under God’s sovereignty, was not as such His kingdom but would become so if the people obeyed His voice and kept His commandments. Over and over again in the Old Testament God’s call to obedience rang out through prophets, priests, and kings. Truly, the general establishment of God’s rule, His kingship, was *the* great concern. But it was to no avail. Israel’s heart was not right; their will was stubborn. Israel only rebelled all the more. The one hope was an inward renewal: God’s law written on mind and heart with a corresponding new orientation of the will.

The Old Testament began to point forward to the coming of a king, a Messiah, who would enable God’s rule to be established. So did Isaiah declare prophetically: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder…. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and for evermore” (Isa. 9:6–7). By the end of the Old Testament era, such a One had not yet been born—a Messiah to establish God’s kingdom so that true justice and righteousness will evermore abound.

Thus the Old Testament was a time of preparation and hope.[3] The kingdom

had not yet come, nor could it come until a radical change occurred in human nature. This change must be connected with the coming of the promised Messiah who would reign over a kingdom of people of transformed lives.

II. ESTABLISHMENT

One of the first declarations in the New Testament was the angel's to Mary that THE child was at last to be born: "You shall call his name Jesus … the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:31–33). The messianic king was to be named Jesus—He would also be the Son of God! At last the kingdom was to be established—and forever! But—and this is important to emphasize—the King would also be Savior! For when the child was born, he was given the name Jesus—"Jehovah saves." Moreover, an angel of the Lord announced to some shepherds: "Behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will be for[4] all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10–11).

The record of that fulfillment begins with the opening declaration of Jesus: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). The promise of long ago was now on the threshold of taking place, and it would come about for those who "repent, and believe in the gospel." (The gospel, of course, is the good news of salvation, even as Jesus Himself is the Savior.) Hence, for those who put their trust in Him and receive His salvation, the kingdom of God will become a reality.[5]

In multiple ways throughout His ensuing ministry, Jesus described the kingdom of God for his hearers. This called for a great shift in their thinking, because, unfortunately, the Jews had come to believe that the kingdom belonged to them as a nation, and that the Messiah—when he came—would overthrow foreign rule and establish Israel's dominion both universally and perpetually. Consequently, Jesus again and again depicted the kingdom in a radically different fashion.

In the first words of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus declared that the kingdom[6] belongs to the "poor [or humble] in spirit" (Matt. 5:3). No doubt to the shock of all His disciples, He said a little later: "I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). Thereupon Jesus described this higher righteousness in one piercing statement after another—no anger with a brother,

no lust, no swearing, and no resistance of evil; also love your enemies, pray in secret, forgive others their trespasses, and on and on. It is clearly a righteousness of the heart, truly an impossible righteousness for sinful human beings. But without it there is no entrance ("you will never enter") into the kingdom of God!

If anyone is going to enter *this* kingdom, something radical must happen within. Indeed, there can be nothing less than a new birth, as impossible as that sounds. On another occasion Jesus said to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a man is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God … he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, 5). Then even more bluntly: "You must be born anew" (v. 7). Jew and Gentile alike are placed on the same plane regarding the kingdom; no one has a monopoly. Entrance into and membership in the kingdom are only by a radical new birth: a re-generation.[7]

Sadly, the Jews as a nation rejected Jesus' message—though they had been the very people called to be God's kingdom, and although it was primarily to them that Jesus was now speaking. They viewed His message as a threat to their status and would not repent and believe. Thus Jesus finally could only say, "I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people[8] who will produce its fruit" (Matt. 21:43 NIV). Rejecting His message, the Jewish nation finally crucified Him. Thus any claim to the kingdom was completely relinquished through their perverse action.[9] Yet at the same time, Jesus' very death on the cross opened a way into the kingdom for all people who would believe.

Further, Jesus' death and resurrection overcame the kingdom of Satan, in which all men—Jew and Gentile alike—had been bound. Over against this, the kingdom of Christ was established. Already Jesus had declared that the inbreaking of this kingdom was the breaking of Satan's power: "If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28). As a result of the establishment of the kingdom, believers may now rejoice with the apostle Paul: "He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:13–14).

The kingdom of God, in summary, can no longer be identified with a partic ular race or nation. Such an identification belonged to a time of preparation for Old Testament Israel, but Israel as a people never truly measured up. The kingdom of God now belongs to the "poor in spirit," to persons whose righteousness is of the heart—hence to those who have been miraculously "born anew." The kingdom that Jesus established is not a kingdom that derives from, or is a part of, the order of this world. Jesus clearly stated this before Pontius

Pilate: “My kingdom is not of this world…. My kingdom is not from here”[10] (John 18:36 NASB mg.). In that sense, it comes from above[11] and is a totally new order within human existence.

We need to add quickly that the reality of God’s kingdom as being “not of this world” does not mean that it is “other-worldly,” that is, having nothing to do with ordinary human affairs. Quite the contrary, it affects *every* relationship both with God and with man. Recall, for example, the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Truly God rules over a transformed people who essentially are eager to do His will, a people who are now able to love both Him and their neighbor, a people who yearn to see the whole world living in His kingdom.[12]

This kingdom Jesus established, and all who belong to him are “sons of the kingdom” (Matt. 13:38). We have “received” a kingdom—“let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Heb. 12:28).[13] Indeed, through Jesus Christ we have been *“made”* a kingdom, as John writes in the Book of Revelation: He “made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father.” So we may declare with John, “To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (1:6)!

This means that Christ is presently reigning over His people. He *is* Lord! And in a real sense, we reign with Him! Paul speaks of how those who “receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:17). Satan no longer reigns—he has been cast down—and we have the victory in Christ! This is what it means to be in the kingdom of God.

III. COMPLETION

We now move to the climax, for the day is yet to come when God's kingdom will be consummated.[14] Although the kingdom has been established among those who have been born "from above," there are many who do not belong. They are still dominated by evil, by worldly passions, by Satan—who for them is still "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4). Hence there remains a kingdom of the world, which has not yet become the kingdom of God.

It is important to note that the kingdom of God continues to grow from its original establishment. Jesus compared it to "a grain of mustard seed … the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs" (Matt. 13:31–32), and to "leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened" (Matt. 13:33). Here is depicted both the inward and the outward growth of the kingdom. It can refer, on the one hand, to what happens in the life of a person who has entered the kingdom and continues to grow spiritually and, on the other, to the overall growth of the kingdom within the world. The truth of these parables is demonstrated by countless people who have matured in Christian faith and whose lives display the leavening influence of the grace of Jesus Christ. This may also be seen in the present worldwide scope of the kingdom of God, with the number of professing Christians today being the largest in all of history.

Two further matters need to be noted in this progress of the kingdom of God. First, what is genuinely present is largely hidden (as in the three measures of meal); it does not reveal itself to the outward eye. Accordingly, on one occasion when Jesus was asked by certain Pharisees when the kingdom would come, He replied, "The kingdom of God does not come visibly,[15] nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within[16] you" (Luke 17:20–21 NIV). Here we find a parallel to the invisible spiritual essence of the church.[17] The true kingdom of God cannot be specifically pointed to with a "Here it is" or "There it is," because it is a hidden, profoundly internal reality.[18] And the number of its members submits to no human calculation: this is known by God alone.

Second, and this follows, as the kingdom grows through the ages it is admixed

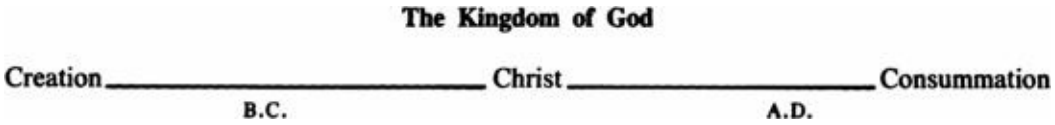
with many persons who are not truly of the kingdom; and there is no possible way of uprooting them or sorting them out until the end. In this connection Jesus gave two parables of the kingdom: the parable of the wheat and the tares (or weeds) (Matt. 13:24— 30, 36–43) and that of the fishnet drawing in both good and bad fish (Matt. 13:47–50). In the former, "the Son of man" sowed good seed or wheat (the "sons of the kingdom"); then in the same field the enemy, the Devil, sowed tares. But the wheat and the tares become so intermingled that only at "the close[19] of the age" (v. 39) can they be disentangled: "The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers…. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (vv. 41, 43). In the latter parable, the fishnet gathered in every kind of fish; so when it was full, "men drew it ashore and … sorted the good into vessels but threw away the bad. So it will be at the close of the age" (vv. 48–49). To summarize, the intermixture of good and evil in this age can be overcome only at the end time when the kingdom stands forth in all its beauty and perfection.

This brings us to the future consummation of the kingdom. At the end of history a voice will cry, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). At that time Jesus will say to His own, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). We will eat and drink with our Lord Jesus in the consummated kingdom, for He said at the Last Supper, "I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:29).

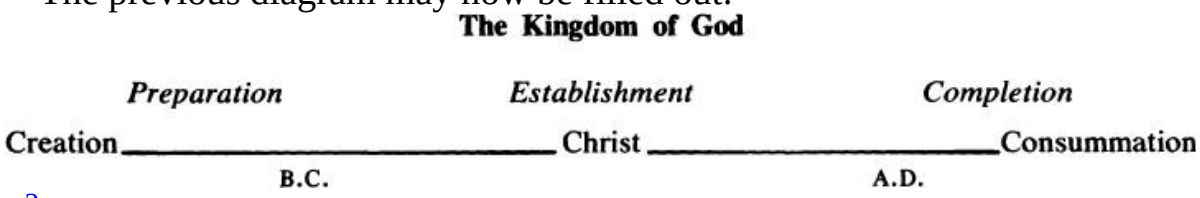
This event will happen only when at the end the "kingdom of the world," namely, Satan's kingdom, is utterly destroyed. For the apostle Paul says, "Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:24–26).

Then comes the glorious climax: "When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one" (v. 28)![20] Such a consummation transcends our most vivid and joyous imagination. But truly it awaits all those who belong to His eternal kingdom.

[1]'We may diagram the pattern of history in this way:



[2]The previous diagram may now be filled out:



[3]John Bright writes in his book The Kingdom of God that "the hope of Israel was the hope of the coming kingdom of God" (p. 181). See chapters 1 through 4 for a helpful presentation of the Old Testament understanding of the kingdom of God.

[4]Rather than "come to" (in rsv). Note also that the "to you" in the second clause corresponds with the "to us" of Isaiah 9:6.

[5]John Calvin writes concerning Jesus that "by the kingdom of God which he declared to be at hand, he meant forgiveness of sins, salvation, life, and every other blessing which we obtain in Christ" (Institutes of the Christian Religion, III.3.19, Beveridge trans.).

[6]Matthew reads "the kingdom of heaven." The parallel in Luke is "the kingdom of God" (6:20). In the Gospel of Matthew "kingdom of heaven" is frequently used as a synonym for "kingdom of God." The expression "the kingdom of heaven" is never found in Mark, Luke, and John whereas it occurs thirty-two times in Matthew. Obviously no distinction should be made—for the Gospels make none—between the two expressions for the kingdom. Incidentally, the Scofield Reference Bible's declaration that the "the kingdom of God is to be distinguished from the kingdom of heaven" (note 1 to Matt. 6:33) is an invalid scriptural distinction. The New Scofield Reference Edition (the same footnote), while now recognizing that "the kingdom of God" is "used in many cases" synonymously with "the kingdom of heaven," adds that "it is to be distinguished from it in many instances." No instances are given, for the simple reason that there are none.

[7]Geerhardus Vos writes that "the kingdom … is constituted by the regenerate; the regenerate alone experience in themselves its power, cultivate its righteousness, enjoy its blessings" (The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church, 86).

[8]Many other translations read "nation" (so kjv, rsv, nasb, and neb). The Greek word is from ethnos, which may be translated either "nation" or

"people" (see BAGD). "People" is preferable in this context because it refers to a people drawn from all nations.

[9]Thus the idea of a postponement of the kingdom for Israel (as in "dispensational" teaching) is totally unwarranted. For dispensational teaching on postponement see, for example, L. S. Chafer, Systematic Theology, 4:266-67; C. C. Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, 162-65; and J. F. Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom, 227-30. (Walvoord holds the dispensational view that the church age is a parenthesis between the Old Testament promise of the kingdom to Israel and its fulfillment in a millennium to come.)

[10]Rather than "from the world." The Greek word is enteuthen, literally "from here" or "hence."

[11]"Reference was earlier made to the necessity of being "born anew" if one is to enter the kingdom of God. "Born anew" may also-perhaps even preferably-be translated "born from above" (the Greek word is andthen). Thus, correspondingly, both the new birth and the kingdom of God originate from a higher realm.

[12]Pat Robertson writes in his book The Secret Kingdom that this kingdom "is the rule of God in the hearts, minds, and wills of people-the state in which the unlimited power and blessing of the unlimited Lord are forthcoming" (p. 48).

[13]C. H. Dodd writes that "to 'receive His kingdom' is to 'enter into life* " (The Parables of the Kingdom, 76). Dodd speaks of this as "realized eschatology" (p. 51), or as he says elsewhere, "the age to come has come" (The Apostolic Preaching and Its Development, 85). The kingdom is, therefore, a present reality.

[14]George Eldon Ladd in his book *The Presence of the Future* speaks of "the consummation of the kingdom" (the title of chap. 13). In an earlier chapter he writes of "fulfillment without consummation" (the title of chap. 4). These topics closely correspond to the headings of sections II and III in this chapter: "Establishment" and "Completion." The important matter to recognize (as Ladd well does) is that the kingdom is both present and future. (Incidentally, Ladd takes Dodd to task for his view of "realized eschatology" which makes little room for a kingdom also yet to come [see pp. 17–19].) See also Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church*, chapter 4, entitled "The Present and the Future Kingdom." For more on Dodd's "realized eschatology," see infra, chap. 9, n. 57.

[15]The Greek phrase is meta paratērēseōs, “with observation.”

[16]The Greek word is entos. The kjv also translates it “within.” The rsv has “in the midst of’; nasb, “in your midst”; neb, “among.” Entos, however, is usually “inside” or “within” (see Matt. 23:26-“inside [entos] of the cup” [the only other NT occurrence of entos]; entos is also used in the lxx where the only possible English translation is “within” or “in” [see, e.g., Pss. 38 (39):3; 102 (103): 1; 108 (109):22]). The other translations suggest that the kingdom of God was in their midst because of Jesus’ presence and activity. This is also a possibility (recall Matt. 12:28 supra); however, the context of an invisible coming of the kingdom points more evidently to its spiritual and internal reality. R. C. H. Lenski writes, “It is wholly and altogether a spiritual kingdom…. The phrase [entos hymon] does not locate the kingdom but states its character as being something internal and not, like earthly kingdoms, external” (Interpretation of St. Luke’s Gospel, 882). Incidentally, the idea of “among” or “in the midst of’ would be better expressed by the Greek word mesos (e.g., John 1:26-“among you [mesos hymon] stands one whom you do not know”). G. R. Beasley-Murray writes that “while it is possible to understand entos as ‘among,’ it must be considered a doubtful interpretation” (Jesus and the Kingdom of God, 102). In regard to the translation “within you,” it is sometimes argued that since Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees, “in the midst of’ or “among” you is much more fitting; however, the “you” may be understood in an indefinite or general sense (so, e.g., I. Howard Marshall who, although he translates the word as “among,” views “you” as “quite indefinite” [The Gospel of Luke, 655]).

[17]See the prior discussion of this on page 21. Vos writes that “Jesus plainly leads us to identify the invisible church and the kingdom. It is impossible to be in the one without being in the other” (The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church, 86). A. H. Strong writes similarly that “the church is identical with the spiritual kingdom of God” (Systematic Theology, 887).

[18]Paul writes that “the kingdom of God does not mean food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). This description fits the picture of the kingdom as an internal, spiritual reality.

[19]The Greek word is synteleia. It may also be translated “completion,” “end,” or “consummation” (BAGD).

[20]Or “all in all,” the Greek phrase is panta en pasin.

9
The Return of Jesus Christ

The great event at the close of the age is the return of Jesus Christ. This is the crown of history. All things move to the coming day of Jesus Christ the Lord. It has been computed that 318 verses[1] in the New Testament refer to His return,[2] and many of the great creeds and confessions of Christendom include this event. For example, the Apostles' Creed at a point of climax declares, "From thence [heaven] he shall come to judge the quick and the dead." Without the return of Christ, history would be incomplete. With His return all things reach their final destination.

I. THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE

The Christian attitude is essentially that of hope: the hope of Christ's return. Paul speaks of "awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). Peter writes about this hope: "Set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13). Hoping is the Christian's forward look; it is not a mere wishful or uncertain thinking[3] but focuses on the sure return of Christ.

A. Eager Waiting

The note of eager waiting belongs to the Christian hope. To be sure, there is waiting,[4] but, according to the New Testament, this waiting is not passive. Rather, it is an eager and active waiting for the return of the Lord.

Paul writes, “Our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:20 NASB). We as believers are already spiritually citizens of heaven, where Christ is now, but we yearn to see Him face to face. Accordingly, we eagerly await the return of our Lord.

In one of his letters to the Corinthians, Paul speaks of the church there as “not lacking in any [spiritual] gift.” Then he adds immediately, “awaiting eagerly the revelation [’coming’ KJV] of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:7 NASB). This suggests that the more the spiritual gifts are present and operating in a community of believers, the more there is expectation of the Lord’s return. Christ was so present in the spiritual gifts—for example, in word of wisdom and word of knowledge, in gifts of healing and working of miracles, in prophecy and speaking in tongues[5] — that the Corinthians could hardly wait until His full personal revelation occurred. So it continues to be: the spiritual presence of Christ through the gifts (and of course in many other ways), despite all its wonder, is but a foretaste of His return. “Our Lord, come!” (1 Cor. 16:22).[6]

One more Scripture passage on eager waiting is Hebrews 9:28: “Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.” The salvation to come will no longer relate to sin but to the fullness of blessing in Christ. The blessings now experienced will be completed when Christ returns. These will surely include salvation from the wrath of God (Paul speaks in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 of Jesus as the One “who delivers us from the wrath to come,” a wrath to be poured out on a sinful and disobedient human race), but even more a salvation from all that remains in our lives of sin and death into a perfect fulfillment when Christ returns. Surely our waiting now must be one of eager expectancy!

B. Loving Christ's Appearing

Here is another beautiful New Testament touch: not only eager waiting but loving His appearing. Paul, toward the end of his life and ministry, wrote to Timothy about "the crown of righteousness" to be awarded not only to himself "but also to all who have loved his [Christ's] appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8). To love Christ's appearing is the deep note of eager waiting. This may be illustrated from human relationships. We may have beloved family members away in a far country. Not only do we eagerly await their return, but also upon their arrival we will greet them with a deep embrace of joy and happiness. We love their appearing—how much more the appearing of Christ our Lord and Savior!

C. Exercising Patience

The Christian attitude of eager waiting, loving His appearing, includes the exercise of patience. James, the brother of Jesus, writes, “Be patient… brethren, until the coming of the Lord” (James 5:7). It is not always easy to await the return of the Lord; it may seem like an endless delay. Indeed, from where we stand today it has been nearly two thousand years! However, Peter reminds us, “Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8). Moreover, the Lord’s seeming delay is not a failure in His promise to return, but it is His giving time that “all should reach repentance” (v. 9). Our eager desire and love for the Lord’s appearing should be tempered by the realization that His timetable is much different from ours and that the Lord Himself is giving more time for people to repent. When He returns, the day of salvation will forever be past; so let our yearning for His return be mixed with compassion now for the lost. “Be patient …!”

D. Purifying Ourselves

There is much stress in the New Testament on the importance of self-purification and holiness in awaiting Christ's return.[7] Let us hear a word from John: "Abide in him [Christ], so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him ['away from Him,' NASB] in shame at his coming…. Every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure" (1 John 2:28; 3:3). Will we be ready when the Lord returns? Will we be living in such sin that although His arrival is "our blessed hope" (which indeed it is), we will shrink in shame at His presence? The Lord who comes is holy and pure; shall we meet Him in unholiness and impurity of life? To be sure, none of us will be perfect when the Lord returns, but we can make better preparation, as John says, by seeking in every way possible to "purify ourselves as he is pure." Hebrews puts it quite strongly: "Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (12:14). If we are striving and seeking for holiness and purity of life, we need not shrink in shame at the Lord's appearing. Are you—am I—making ready?

E. Being Watchful

One of the strongest New Testament emphases in regard to the return of Christ is the importance of being watchful. Jesus Himself lays heavy stress on the necessity of watching, being on the alert for His return. In the Gospel of Mark, after Jesus said, "But of that day and hour no one knows,[8] not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father," He adds, "Take heed, watch, for you do not know when the time will come"[9] (13:32–33). Then a few words later Jesus again speaks strongly: "Watch therefore—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Watch" (vv. 35–37). In the Gospel of Matthew, after making a similar statement (in chap. 24), Jesus reinforces the importance of watchfulness in His parable of the ten virgins. Only five of them had oil for their lamps when the bridegroom suddenly arrived at midnight, and so they were able to go into the marriage feast. At the close of the parable Jesus said, "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (25:13). In all of these statements watchfulness—alertness, readiness, preparedness—is the truly critical matter.[10]

A further word of Jesus about watchfulness is found in the Book of Revelation. The kings of the earth are being gathered for the Battle of Armageddon when suddenly the scene is interrupted by Jesus' declaring, "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame" (16:15 KJV).[11] As the time draws very near for the Lord's return, it is all the more important to be on the alert, with "garments"[12] ready at hand. A person who is so waiting is truly blessed by the Lord.

Paul himself echoes many of Jesus' words in writing to the Thessalonians: "You … yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night" (1 Thess. 5:1–2 KJV). Then after describing how that day will catch unbelievers by surprise, with its "sudden destruction," Paul adds, "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day…. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (vv. 4–6 KJV). Thereby Paul compares the situation of a world in perilous darkness not expecting the return of the Lord with believers who as "children of light" will not be surprised by that

day. Thus, similar to Jesus' frequent injunctions, Paul urges his readers to be always on the watch.

Being watchful suggests alertness at all times. A watchman is one who is alert to his surroundings. It may be that certain signs not recognized by others afford the watchman suggestions or signs of an event to come. So it is with believers; we are to be watchful and alert, seeking to discern the signs of the Lord's coming and being ready whenever He will appear.

F. Exercising Faithfulness

Another important New Testament emphasis is exercising faithfulness. This refers to the importance of being good stewards of what the Master has given us to do, so that whenever He comes He will find us faithfully doing our tasks. In this regard we may call to mind Jesus' parable of the talents. Immediately following His parable of the ten virgins and His warning to all: "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (Matt. 25:13), Jesus tells about a master who entrusted various talents of money to three servants. After a long time the master returned, and to each of the two who have multiplied their talents he says, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master" (Matt. 25:21, 23). Accordingly, the ones rewarded at Christ's return will be those who have been faithful stewards of what has been committed to them.

In the similar parable of the pounds Jesus again stresses the importance of faithfulness. A certain nobleman, before going away into a distant country, calls his servants together and entrusts to them ten pounds saying, "Occupy till I come" (Luke 19:13 KJV).[13] When the master returns, he calls the servants to accountability, and to one of them who has multiplied his pound tenfold, the master says, "Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities" (v. 17).[14] Faithful stewardship is again the critical matter before the Lord's return.

This matter of faithfulness must not be neglected. The Lord has given all of us tasks to perform and responsibilities to be fulfilled, and He expects us to faithfully "occupy" until that day when He returns. Indeed, we should be all the more faithful because the Master of our house in His coming will call us to give an account of what we have done. Although He is the loving Savior whom we earnestly desire to see, He is also a stern Lord who will have little toleration for slothfulness. In the parable of the talents one servant who had buried his talent in the ground is addressed by the returned master as a "wicked and slothful servant"[15] (Matt. 25:26) and is then cast into "outer darkness" (v. 30). This is a severe picture, but in light of the coming of the Lord it underscores the urgency of our being active and faithful in what He has given us to do.[16]

It does not matter how seemingly small or great our God-given task is; the returning Lord will require of us faithfulness. Knowing that He will surely

return, we should be all the more diligent to be found faithful at His coming.[17] "Occupy till I come" is the Lord's word to all believers.

G. Proclaiming the Gospel

Paul writes to Timothy, “In view of his [Christ’s] appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word” (2 Tim. 4:1–2 NIV). This injunction to Timothy surely applies to all Christians. We are not only to eagerly await and purify ourselves and, in addition, to be expectant and faithful in our God-given tasks, we are also called upon to proclaim the gospel. In view of Christ’s appearing, and while there is yet time and opportunity, we are to bear witness. Paul adds, “Be ready in season and out of season” (v. 2 NASB). Whether or not the situation seems opportune—hence on any and every occasion—we are to be ready to proclaim the word about Jesus.

Here we may recall Acts 1:6–11. The disciples first asked Jesus about a restoration of the kingdom to Israel (v. 6). Jesus replied, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority” (v. 7). He then added, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (v. 8). Then, while the disciples were observing, Jesus was taken up into heaven. Afterward two angels spoke: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (v. 11). This Scripture passage sets such matters as the timing of the coming kingdom and the nature of the Lord’s return within the context of the prior urgency of bearing witness to the gospel. We are not to remain gazing into heaven—however eager we may be—but to move forward under the injunction to be a witness to Jesus Christ even to the farthest reaches of the earth.

Now I add a word about the relation of this witness, this proclaiming the gospel, to being faithful in our daily tasks. *Both* are important. As we have observed, Christ calls us to faithful stewardship in our ongoing tasks and responsibilities, but He also calls us to be His witnesses “to the end of the earth.” It is as we both discharge our stewardship responsibilities *and* proclaim the Word that we truly fulfill the Lord’s intention and make ready for His return.

But surely the climactic activity in prospect of the Lord’s return is that of bearing witness to Him. For through our witness, Christ adds people to His kingdom, and as the coming Lord and King He will return to receive all His people to Himself. Surely there can be no greater challenge, no more compelling urgency than that of being the Lord’s witnesses until He comes.

II. LANGUAGE OF THE RETURN

A number of terms in the New Testament relate to the return of Christ. It should prove helpful to note the variety of expressions. Both the meaning and use of these terms, as well as their context, can provide insight into this climactic event.

A. *Parousia*—"Arrival," "Presence"

The word *parousia* is most often used today as the technical term for the return of Christ. It is advantageous in some ways to speak simply of "the parousia of Christ," because translation from the Greek is not easy. Usually the English word "coming" is used (as we will note below); however, the Greek word contains the aspects of both arrival and presence. It is a coming that is both a "becoming present" and a "being present" for a shorter or longer period. It is also a coming that is a personal arrival and presence. The word *parousia*, incidentally, is used in the New Testament not only in relation to Christ but also in reference to others: e.g., "the coming of Titus" (2 Cor. 7:6), "my [Paul's] coming to you again" (Phil. 1:26), "my [Paul's] presence" (Phil. 2:12), also "the coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan" (2 Thess. 2:9). Despite the wide range of uses and persons mentioned, the word *parousia* in relation to Christ always refers to His *future* coming and presence. Let us now observe some of the relevant Scripture passages.

In the four Gospels the only place where the word *parousia* occurs is in Matthew 24. Here it is used four times in connection with the return of Christ. The first is found in the question of the disciples to Jesus: "Tell us, when will this[18] be, and what will be the sign of your coming *[parousia*] and of the close of the age?" (v. 3). The first part of the question, "when will this be," refers to the future destruction of the temple, which Jesus had just declared (vv. 1–2). The second part relates to the coming of Christ, the *parousia*, and the close, or end, of the age.[19] In the discourse that follows, Jesus says concerning His *parousia:* "As the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming *[parousia*] of the Son of man" (v. 27); "as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming *[parousia]* of the Son of man" (v. 37); and "they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming *[parousia]* of the Son of man" (v. 39).

In the accounts of Mark 13 and Luke 21, which also begin with the question about the destruction of the temple and cover many of the same sayings as Matthew 24, there is no use of the term *parousia*. The question in Mark and Luke begins as in Matthew: "When will this be…" (Mark 13:4; Luke 21:7), but does not mention the *parousia* of Christ. Rather, Mark continues, "And what will be the sign when these things are all to be accomplished?" Luke continues, "And what will be the sign when this is about to take place?" "These things" (Mark)

and “this” (Luke) specifically refer to the destruction of the temple. We may infer, however, that the matter of the *parousia* is implied, since it is included in the question in Matthew’s Gospel. Nonetheless, the term *parousia* is used only in Matthew.

Turning to the Epistles, we discover that the word *parousia* is used twelve times in relation to Christ.[20] It is not to be found in the Book of Revelation. A careful reading of the verses in the Epistles shows that all references, except one (2 Thess. 2:8), relate in some way to the situation of believers. For example, “Christ the first fruits [of all who are to be ‘made alive’], then at his coming those who belong to Christ” (1 Cor. 15:23); “that he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness … at the coming of our Lord Jesus” (1 Thess. 3:13); “concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to meet him” (2 Thess. 2:1); “establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand” (James 5:8); “abide in him, so that … we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming” (1 John 2:28). The reference mentioned as an exception (2 Thess. 2:8) concerns the situation of “the lawless one” whom “the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming” (NIV). In conclusion, the coming *(parousia*), which relates primarily and centrally to the expectation and future of believers, will *also* be the destruction of the man of lawlessness. The focus of *parousia* remains, however, on believers—as the multiplicity of passages above clearly testify.

B. *Phanerōsis*—"Manifestation"

Another term used for the return of Jesus Christ is *phanerōsis*, which is best translated "manifestation." Actually only the verbal form, *phanerōo*, is used in relation to the return of Christ, and the verb in each of its occurrences is in the passive voice.[21]

Paul writes that "when Christ, who is our life, is manifested, then you too will be manifested with him in glory" (Col. 3:4 NEB). It is significant that believers will be manifested with Christ at the same time.[22] Peter writes, "When the chief Shepherd is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown of glory" (1 Peter 5:4). Finally, John writes, "Abide in him, so that when he is manifested[23] we may have confidence and not shrink in shame at his coming…. We know that when he is manifested we shall be like him" (1 John 2:28; 3:2).

In all of these cases the manifestation is in relation to the future of believers.

C. *Epiphaneia*—"Appearance"

In the Pastoral Epistles a term used by Paul for Christ's return is *epiphaneia*. The usual translation is "appearance"; however, the Greek word also contains the idea of brightness, radiance, even splendor. Literally, *epiphaneia* means "shining upon." From *epiphaneia* the English word "epiphany" is derived.

We have earlier noted that at the return of Jesus the "lawless one" will be destroyed by "the splendor[24] of his [Christ's] coming" (2 Thess. 2:8 NIV). So overwhelmingly bright and radiant will be the appearance of Christ that, like fire, it will consume and even annihilate this final concentration of evil.[25] Such will be the *epiphaneia* of Christ's presence. As far as believers are concerned, the same *epiphaneia* will be an appearance of glory—"the glorious appearing[26] of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13 NIV). In preparation for this we are "to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing… " (Titus 2:12–13 NIV). In other words, although the Christian should have no fear of harm at this glorious epiphany, there is need for spiritual preparation. In this same connection are these words of Paul to Timothy: "I charge you to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Tim. 6:14). This again is a call to personal godliness in light of Christ's coming *epiphaneia*. Further, Paul exhorts Timothy that a sense of this coming should also affect his whole ministry: "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season … be unfailing in patience and in teaching" (2 Tim. 4:1–2). The urgency of proclaiming the truth in Christ is all the more heightened by the sense of His coming epiphany.

A further note, added by Paul to Timothy, tenderly refers to loving Christ's appearing: "Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8). To love Christ's *epiphaneia* greatly deepens the expectancy of the coming event.

Truly the glorious appearance of Christ at His return is our "blessed hope." For His coming will mark the ultimate destruction of all evil and the fulfillment of the long awaited coming of Christ in His kingdom.

D. *Apokalypsis*—"Revelation"

The Greek word *apokalypsis* is also frequently used in relation to the return of Christ. The word is usually translated "revelation." It means literally "an uncovering,"[27] thus a bringing to light what has not before been known or perceived. Hence, for example, the Book of Revelation, or the Apocalypse, is a book containing many things long hidden but now being disclosed. Apoca lyptic literature is a type of religious writing that purports to reveal secret information about God and His kingdom.[28] Specifically, in the New Testament, *apokalypsis* refers to the revelation centering in Christ.

In relation to Christ's return we may note several passages that contain this term. The first is found in the words of Jesus Himself. He speaks of the time of Noah when the flood destroyed an unsuspecting, unprepared people and of the time of Lot when fire and brimstone did the same. Then He adds, "So will it be on the day when the Son of man is revealed" (Luke 17:30). Paul uses the word *apokalypsis* twice in his letters. First, in writing to the Corinthians he says to them, "You are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:7–8 NASB). Second, in writing to the Thessalonians Paul says, "It is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed[29] from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution … the penalty of eternal destruction … [and] to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed" (2 Thess. 1:6–10 NASB). Peter refers three times to this coming *apokalypsis*: first, he speaks of various sufferings so that the believers' "faith, more precious than gold … may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7); again, "Gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13); and finally, "To the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation" (1 Peter 4:13 NASB).

Based on the Scripture passages quoted and the use of the word *apokalypsis*, several observations may be made. First, the very word itself conveys a note of suddenness and unexpectedness; second, it is a disclosure of a terrifying kind of retribution on the wicked; and third, it is the occasion when the saints richly

glorify Christ, receive abounding grace, and rejoice with great joy.

The *apokalypsis*, therefore, is the day when all things will at last be fully revealed.[30]

E. *Hēmera—"Vay"*

The term that is used quite often in relation to the return of Christ is *hēmera*, always translated "day." The word "day" in this connection does not so much refer to the natural day (of twelve or twenty-four hours) but to the period of Christ's return. In one sense it is "the last day" of the present age, but since it represents the inauguration of the age to come, the word "day" transcends ordinary terminology.

The use of "day" in relation to the return of Christ varies considerably. Scriptures that specifically connect Christ with "day" are found in Paul's letters to the Corinthians and Philip- pians: "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:8); "the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14); "the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6); and "the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:10; 2:16). In these verses, Paul is referring particularly to the believers' future blessedness. For example, "[God] … will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:8) and "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

Often in the New Testament the expression omits any direct reference to Christ and is simply "that day" (Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32; 1 Thess. 5:4; 2 Thess. 1:10, 2:3; 2 Tim. 1:12, 18; 4:8); "what day" (Matt. 24:42); "a day" (Matt. 24:50); "the day" (Matt. 25:13); "his day" (Luke 17:24). Finally, there are references to "the day of the Lord" (1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10); "the day of God" (2 Peter 3:12); and "the great day of God the Almighty" (Rev. 16:14).

The indirect references—"that day," "a day," etc.—in the Gospels are invariably Jesus' own words about His future return. For example, "But of that day and hour no one knows. (Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32), and "Watch … for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (Matt. 24:42). It is a day that will be unknown ahead of time to anyone. Although it will catch an unwatchful world by complete surprise (see the continuation of Matt. 24:36), believers are told to be constantly on the alert for it. In Paul's letters where "that day" is used, similar motifs are found. He writes to believers, "You are not in darkness … for that day to surprise you like a thief' (1 Thess. 5:4). Also, Christ will come "on that day to be glorified in his saints" (2 Thess. 1:10), and "May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day" (2 Tim. 1:18).

Similar are the "day of the Lord" expressions. For an unsuspecting world "the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night…. Sudden destruction will

come." However (as we have previously noted), Paul says, "You are not in darkness … for that day to surprise you like a thief' (1 Thess. 5:2–4). Again, "[Do not] be quickly shaken … to the effect that the day of the Lord has come" (2 Thess. 2:2). Paul writes these words in relation to "the coming *[parousia*] of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to meet him" (v. 1) and then describes a coming apostasy, in which "the man of lawlessness" will appear before that day will come (vv. 3–8). The day of the Lord is both the day of our "assembling to meet him" and the day when the lawless one will be destroyed by the "splendor" (*epiphaneia*) of His coming *(parousia).*

It is apparent from the above quotations (and others could be added) that "the day"—whatever the terminology used—has a double aspect. It is both the day of believers' future blessedness and a fearful day for all the wicked; it is the day that will take the world by surprise, but believers are to be on the alert, ever watching; it is the longed-for day of our being gathered to meet Him even as it is the day of destruction upon the incarnation of evil.[31]

Climactically, it is "the great day of God the Almighty" (Rev. 16:14). It will be a day of fearsome destruction upon the world—even "Armageddon" (v. 16). But on the other hand the message to believers is "Lo, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is he who is awake …" (v. 15). It is even "the day of God" (2 Peter 3:12) in which "the heavens will be kindled and dissolved." But believers should be prepared with "lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day," because the glorious result is a "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (vv. 11–13). The day of God, the day of the Lord—whatever the name—will be that great day when the old will completely pass away and the new will gloriously come.

F. *Erchomai*—"Coming"

Finally we turn to the verb *erchomai*, which is often used to refer to the return of Christ. For example, the Book of Revelation, in the next to the last verse, records the Lord Jesus saying: "Surely, I am coming *[erchomai]* soon," and the ringing response of the faithful: "Amen. Come *[erchou]*, Lord Jesus!" (22:20).

In the Gospel of Matthew we find these words of Jesus: "For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done" (16:27). Later Jesus says, "All the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:30). In the next chapter various pictures of His coming are given—the bridegroom arriving at midnight, a man coming back after a long journey to settle accounts with his servants, and the Son of man coming to judge all nations ("When the Son of man comes in his glory" [25:31]). In the Gospel of Luke Jesus states, "Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes…. He will come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them so, blessed are those servants…. The Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (12:37–38, 40). In a later passage Jesus asks rhetorically, "When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (18:8). According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus declares, "Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (8:38). In the Gospel of John Jesus speaks to Peter concerning John's future: "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?" (21:22). In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul declares concerning the Lord's Supper: "You proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (11:26).

All of the above quotations are examples of the use of some form of *erchomai* in relation to the Lord's return. Many additional passages could be quoted. One other verse in the Book of Revelation may be cited: "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples[32] of the earth will mourn because of him" (1:7 NIV).

It is apparent from these quotations that the return of Jesus is the climactic event in the New Testament: "Come, Lord Jesus!"[33] His coming will be the occasion for judging the nations, for recompense and reward to all people. The "peoples of the earth" will mourn because the day of penitence will be past.

Those who have been ashamed of Christ will find Christ ashamed of them. Now those who belong to Christ are called to render faithful stewardship and always be on the alert, for no one knows the hour of His return. His coming for those who are wakeful will be a special blessing: “He will come and serve them” (Luke 12:37). There is also the warning against apostasy, a lack of faith on the earth at His return. The future coming of the Lord has many aspects.

Those who sincerely belong to Christ continue to look for His coming. Indeed, each celebration of the Lord’s Supper is not only a commemoration of Christ’s death, but also a looking forward “until he comes” (1 Cor. 11-.26).[34] There is the yearning to behold Him face to face and to know His glorious presence. This is the primary thing. But also it is the deep desire to see evil at last totally removed and righteousness forever prevail.

In summary, from this study of the various words used for the return of Christ, certain conclusions may be drawn.

1. The variety of terms—*parousia*, *phanerōsis*, *epiphaneia*, *apokalypsis*, *hēmera*, and erchomai—exhibits the richness and fullness of Christ’s return. These many terms, signifying “arrival,” “manifestation,” “appearance,” “revelation,” “day,” and “coming,” convey something of the wealth of meaning involved in the event. By looking at these terms one at a time, we behold increasingly the glory of this climactic event in history.

2. The focus of the first two terms, *parousia* and *phanerōsis*, is on Christian believers. *Parousia*—the technical term most often used now—refers in most cases to Christ’s return in relation to believers. *Phanerōsis*, or “manifestation,” is invariably used of Christ’s return in relation to Christians. *Epiphaneia* and *apokalypsis* are used in relation to both believers and nonbelievers. Christ’s “epiphany” and “apocalypse” is the believer’s blessed hope and is eagerly to be awaited. But for unbelievers these terms signify the “brightness” of destroying fire and the revelation of retribution upon all evil. *Erchomai* is likewise used in reference both to blessing and to judgment.

3. *Hēmera*, or “day,” is the scriptural term for the event of Christ’s return. It will be the occasion of both blessing for Christian believers and judgment upon unbelievers. It is both the “last day” of this age and the breaking in of the new age. On that “day”—“the day of Christ,” “the day of the Lord,” “the day of God”—whatever the terminology—there will be the final consummation of all things.

4. Christ’s future coming will therefore be a single event. Each term used—*parousia, phanerōsis, epiphan- eia, apokalypsis, hēmera*, or *erchomai*—points to the unique and final returning of Jesus Christ. These are different aspects[35] of

Christ’s return, for there is only one final day of Christ’s return at the end of history.

EXCURSUS: THE COMINGS OF CHRIST

A striking fact of the New Testament witness is not only that Christ's coming is the climactic event at the consummation of history, but also that there have been previous comings.[36] There are some references to a coming that is an event at that time, some that seem to point to events in the near future, and still others (as we have observed) that clearly refer to Christ's final coming.[37]

These comings can be called *erchomai* events, for some form of this verb is often used in these accounts.[38]

A number of comings relate clearly to the period of Christ's life and death, His resurrection, and possibly Pentecost. For example, His incarnation: "He came to his own home, and his own people received him not" (John 1:11); His triumphal entry: "Behold, your king is coming to you" (Matt. 21:5); and His resurrection: "Jesus came and stood among them" (John 20:19). Jesus possibly made a reference to Pentecost when He said, "There are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Matt. 16:28).[39] All of these are past, "*erchomai*," comings.

But there are also comings of Jesus that seem to relate to early events subsequent to His life, death, resurrec tion, and Pentecost. In Matthew 10:23 Jesus charges the twelve disciples: "When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes." The charge, which begins in 10:1, is related to much more than a brief journey. No doubt a fairly long period is envisaged in such words as "you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them and the Gentiles" (v. 18). This coming seems to represent God's visitation upon the Jews by the Romans in A.D. 70.[40] Indeed, the language of being "dragged before governors and kings for my sake" is almost identical with that of Luke 21:12: "You will be brought before kings and governors for [His] name's sake." This is followed by a prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem—"when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near" (Luke 21:20). Thus the coming referred to in Matthew 10:23 was likely fulfilled in the desolation and destruction of Jerusalem.

Another significant reference to a future coming, perhaps identical with that of Matthew 10:23, is the statement of Jesus before the Sanhédrin. The high priest declared, “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God” (Matt. 26:63). Jesus replied, “You [singular] have said so. But I tell you, hereafter[41] you [plural] will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (v. 64). Jesus’ words apparently refer to an occurrence within the lifetime of the members of the Jewish high council. The fulfillment—at least in the primary instance[42] —would again occur in the coming judgment upon and destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.[43] For this happened within forty years of the time Jesus spoke the words.

Let us now reconsider Jesus’ words in Matthew 24:30 about His coming. Jesus, speaking to the disciples, says, “They will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (cf. Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27). It is noteworthy that the language is almost identical with that of Matthew 26:64: “They [instead of ‘you’] will see the Son of man … coming on the clouds of heaven.” This suggests that Jesus is referring basically to the same event. If Matthew 26:64 refers primarily to an event within the lifetime of the Sanhedrin members (as seems likely), then Matthew 24:30 could do so as well. This seems to be confirmed by the later words of Jesus in Matthew 24:34 (cf. Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32): “Truly, I say to you, this generation[44] will not pass away till all these things take place.”

A review of Jesus’ earlier words in Matthew 24 reveals that “all these things” finds its primary focus in the destruction of the temple. There Jesus declares, “Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down” (v. 2). The first question the disciples asked Jesus concerned the temple: “When will this be?” Hence, “all these things” would unmistakably include the temple destruction and thus occur within the first generation. The destruction of the temple is, by no means, God’s final judgment, for that will occur at “the close of the age” (a part of the disciples’ second question). However, the destruction of the temple (and of Jerusalem) is signified as the primary coming of the Son of man in judgment.[45] This fact is important to keep in mind in light of two additional matters. First, the coming of the Son of man in Matthew 24 (and in the Mark 13 and Luke 21 parallels) is unquestionably depicted on a larger scale than the Jewish nation, Jerusalem, and the temple. I have commented on the near identity between the “*you* will see the Son of man … “ (Matt. 26:64) and “*they* will see” (Matt. 24:30). That reference thereby basically alludes to the same event—namely the visitation of judgment upon and destruction of Jerusalem. However, “they”—as the context shows—includes far

more than the Jewish nation. Although the reference to "all the tribes[46] of the earth" (Matt. 24:30) essentially refers to the tribes of Israel, it refers ultimately to all the peoples[47] of the earth. Thus the focus on Jerusalem broadens to a worldwide perspective, and the prophecy, accordingly, relates also to the final judgment at the close of the age. Since "this generation" (Matt. 24:34) can also mean, expansively, "this race,"[48] then the "coming of the Son of man" refers ultimately to His coming at the end of history.

The second matter concerns the language that describes the coming of the Son of man. Would not such terminology point exclusively to Christ's final advent? Did He—we may ask—actually come "on the clouds of heaven" in A.D. 70? The answer seems to be yes—in a real, though figurative, sense. The Old Testament frequently uses similar language. Isaiah 19:1 reads, "An oracle concerning Egypt. Behold, the LORD is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt; and the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence." "Riding on a swift cloud" is obviously figurative, not unlike Psalm 104:3, where God is addressed: "[Thou] who makest the clouds thy chariot, who ridest on the wings of the wind." Another psalm, traditionally attributed to David as a "song to the LORD on the day when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul,"[49] reads, "He bowed the heavens, and came down…. He rode on a cherub, and flew; he came swiftly upon the wings of the wind" (18:9–10). The "clouds" with their parallelism "wings of wind" represent God coming majestically to the earth,[50] especially for the destruction of evil and the establishment of righteousness. Because of such Old Testament imagery, it is possible to say that Christ came "on the clouds of heaven" in the devastation of Jerusalem and the further victory of his kingdom.

In addition to the language of "the clouds" Matthew 24:29 (parallels in Mark 13:24–25; Luke 21:25–26) has other apocalyptic language such as the sun being darkened, the moon not giving light, the stars falling, the powers of the heavens being shaken—all prior to the coming on the clouds. In the Old Testament, as we have similarly noted, this is frequently the language of God's judgment upon a nation. One of the most vivid examples is the judgment on the pharaoh of Egypt: "Son of man, raise a lamentation over Pharaoh king of Egypt, and say to him…. When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens, and make their stars dark. I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give its light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over you. (Ezek. 32:2, 7–8). This will happen by "the sword of the king of Babylon" (v. 11). What is vividly pictured here in unforgettable language is the utter destruction to occur in Pharaoh's own time. Many other Old Testament pas sages similarly portray such a day of judgment

upon a particular nation or upon the whole earth.[51]

With even greater intensity than against the pharaoh of Egypt, the king of Babylon, or any other, is the judgment of God—and all heavenly forces—upon the nation of Israel. God had spoken through the prophet Amos to Israel: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2).[52] In other words, because Israel was "known" by God, blessed specially by Him, His "chosen" one, her sin and rebellion were all the more heinous in God's sight, and so her punishment would be all the greater. And now that she had spurned God's own Messiah, His very Son, the judgment upon her would be far more severe than upon any other nation. Indeed, immediately before He depicted the devastation in Matthew 24, Jesus proclaimed, "Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate" (Matt. 23:38). Thus the destruction dealt out upon Israel would be far vaster than anything the world had ever before known.[53] Celestial phenomena will be evidenced far beyond those of the Old Testament—and this, of course, is exactly what is depicted in Matthew 24 (and parallels).[54] For then, almost forty years later, Israel's desolation would be complete; the kingdom taken from her spiritually would be destroyed politically. Thus it would be the dawning of a new age in which the kingdom of God, broken free of all identification with one nation, would be released into the whole world.

Let me make two summary remarks about the "coming" of Jesus in Matthew (with parallels in Mark and Luke) which climaxes with the language, "this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." First, this is a coming that refers primarily to the visitation in judgment upon Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Hence, the generation that was alive when Jesus spoke would not have passed away by the time of fulfillment. Some would live through all the things described in Matthew 24:4–34, and thus experience "the coming of the Son of man." Second, although the desolation of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 is the primary focus, the words of Jesus extend far beyond the first generation, indeed to the very end of history. This "generation"—now to be understood as "race"—will not pass away before all things are accomplished. Hence, the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 are the paradigm on a smaller scale (as vast as those events were!) of that which is yet to come.

Finally, one verse in the Book of Revelation may be cited. Although it seems to focus primarily on the end, it may also refer to events of an earlier generation. The passage reads, "Behold, he is coming with the clouds! Every eye shall see him, and among them those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the world shall lament in remorse" (1:7 NEB). Insofar as this prophecy also relates to events

that refer to a coming judgment upon Rome,[55] it is possible that these words have a tentative fulfillment in the early centuries of the church. “Every one who pierced him” could, in addition to the Jews, also include the Romans who shared in Christ’s crucifixion.[56] But beyond that, mankind at large is involved. For all the “peoples” of the earth—not just Jews and Romans—are guilty through their sin and evil of putting to death the Son of God. Thus, “every eye will see him” and all unbelievers will lament in anguish upon His return. Hence, the ultimate reference of these words about the coming of Christ points to the final generation.

III. A REAL EVENT

The return of Christ is the event that ushers in the climax of history. The last words of Jesus in the Book of Revelation are unmistakable: "Surely I am coming soon" (22:20). These words, yet to be fulfilled, are the assurance of a real future event.

This needs to be emphasized over against any view that Christ has already finally come. To remove all futurist elements in favor of a "realized eschatology"[57] is to do radical disservice to the overall biblical witness. Christ surely has come—and this is the central fact of history—but He is also to come. Without the reality of the latter, history has no conclusion. This also needs to be said over against the "demythologizing"[58] view, which regards all language of a return of Christ as being mythical. This view calls for reinterpretation in terms of the believer's own future possibilities. Even more radical than either of these views is that of "consistent eschatology,"[59] which very bluntly says that the New Testament (including Christ Himself) was simply wrong about a future real event. The consummation was expected to take place upon Jesus' death, but it did not, so there is nothing yet to happen.

Milder, perhaps, than the preceding views are those that do not deny a future event, but look upon it as the general fulfillment of God's purpose. For example, history will end with a vindication of Christ's life and teachings: this is His "return." The message of Christ, while only now partially realized, will at some future time be fully recognized and put into practice.[60] That will be the day of the Lord: His truth acknowledged by all mankind.

Over against all the previously mentioned views—whether moderate or more radical—we do, and must, affirm that there is to be a *real* return of Jesus Christ. Any view that detracts from His actual coming again in glory is less than the true witness of Christian faith. Indeed, He *Himself* is our hope of the future—nothing else; He is the "blessed hope." Without Him and His final advent, there can be no assurance of God's ultimate triumph.

[1]"All but four of the New Testament books refer to it, with a total of 318 verses in which it is set forth within the 216 chapters of the New

Testament … one-fifth of the Bible is prophecy … one-third of the prophecy relates to Christ's return … one-twentieth of the New Testament deals with the subject." So writes William M. Arnett in Basic Christian Doctrines, 277-78.

[2]The word "return" is not itself actually used (except indirectly in the parable of the pounds [Luke 19:11-27] where the Scripture speaks of a "nobleman" who went "into a far country to recive kingly power [or 4a kingdom'] and then return" [12]. This of course refers to Jesus); however, I believe it is a good word to express Jesus' final coming again. He who was once manifested in the Incarnation will return.

[3]In ordinary speech, hope is a desire for the future, or something future; for example, "I hope it will come about." Thus it may or may not happen. However, hope in regard to Christ's return is the forward look to an assured occurrence.

[4]Recall Titus 2:13 above.

[5]See 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 for a listing of these and other spiritual gifts.

[6]Paul closes this letter to the Corinthians with the Aramaic words, "Marana thai" meaning "Our Lord, come!"

[7]In addition to the Scriptures in 1 John and Hebrews quoted in this paragraph, see also Philippians 1:10-11; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 5:23; 1 Timothy 6:14.

[8]This refers to Jesus' earlier words about seeing "the Son of man coming" (Mark 13:26).

[9]In Matthew the parallel to Mark 13:33 is "Watch … for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (Matt. 24:42).

[10]See also Jesus' words in Luke 12:35-40, which climax with this statement: "You also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

[11]"I quote the King James Version because of the word "watcheth" (rsv reads "is aware"; niv and nasb, "stays awake"). This is a form of the same Greek word gregored used in the previous quotations from the Gospels.

[12]This is similar to the picture of the virgins having oil ready for trimming their lamps.

[13]The rsv reads "trade with these till I come." The basic idea is to "do business" (so nasb) with the pounds.

[14]Similar words are spoken to another servant who has multiplied his pound

fivefold.

[15]Similarly, in the parable of the pounds one servant who laid away his pound in a napkin is addressed by the Lord as a “wicked servant” (Luke 19:22).

[16]Earlier I spoke of the need of purifying ourselves in making ready for the return of Christ. This remains necessary even as we now emphasize faithfulness. Actually, it is holiness allied with faithfulness that marks the proper Christian preparation.

[17]This should be our stance whether or not Christ returns in our lifetime. It is the same Lord who will some day call us to render account.

[18]Or “these things” as in nasb. The Greek word is taut a, a plural. Since the antecedent of the pronoun is a singular subject, namely, the fact that “there will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down” (v. 2), the rsv (also niv, neb) translation above seems grammatically proper in English.

[19]The Greek word is aidnos. “Age” is preferable to “world” (the latter being the kjv translation).

[20]Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:19, 3:13, 4:15, 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 8; James 5:7, 8; 2 Peter 1:16, 3:4; 1 John 2:28.

[21]Colossians 3:4; 1 Peter 5:4; 1 John 2:28; 3:2. The translation frequently is “appears.” However, that translation fails to convey the passive voice; moreover, the basic meaning of phanerōo is “to make manifest” (Thayer), or “to make known” (BAGD).

[22]This will be discussed later.

[23]In these two verses I substitute “manifested” for “appears” (as in the rsv and most other modern translations). The Greek word is phanerothe, a passive voice (as in the previously quoted words of Paul and Peter), so that “is manifested” again seems to be the preferable translation. The American Standard Version (asv) of 1901 reads “manifested.”

[24]The rsv reads “his appearing”; nasb, “the appearance”; neb, “radiance”; kjv, “brightness.” The latter two, as well as niv “splendor” above, much better capture the meaning of epiphaneia.

[25]The neb vividly translates this as “that wicked man whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of his mouth, and annihilate by the radiance of his coming.”

[26]NEB translates the word as “splendour.”

[27]From the Greek preposition apo> signifying “away from,” “off,” and the

verb kalyptein, “to cover.”

[28]The Apocalypse ofBaruch, for example, was written after the fall of Jerusalem in a.d. 70 to explain why tragedy had befallen God’s people.

[29]“Literally, “at the revelation [apokalypsis] of the Lord Jesus.”

[30]Thus the final book of the Bible is well named as the Revelation, or the Apocalypse. Significantly the book begins with the words Apokalypsis Iesou Christou: “[the] Revelation of Jesus Christ.” The word apokalypsis never appears again in the book, because the whole essentially is a book of revelation. The opening of the seals (chap. 6 and following) signifies an “unsealing,” an “uncovering,” of what is hidden and thus one continuing revelation after another.

[31]Clearly these are not two separate days. According to the *Scofield Study Bible*, there is first “the day of Christ” which “in the N.T. is described as relating to the reward and blessing of the Church at the rapture in contrast with the expression ‘the day of the Lord’ … which is related to judgment upon unbelieving Jews and Gentiles, and blessing on millennial saints” (note 1 to 1 Cor. 1:8). According to this reckoning, since “the rapture” of the church is viewed as occurring prior to the period of “the great tribulation” (see pages 370–80 for a discussion of “pretribulationism”) and the return of Christ in judgment as occurring after the Tribulation, the two “days” are distinct and separated by a number of years. However, in response to such a view, it is apparent, from the Scriptures I have cited, that there is no legitimate way of distinguishing temporally between “the day of Christ” and “the day of the Lord.” It is the same “day” containing both blessing and judgment, and not two different “days.” (For a helpful discussion of this matter see George Eldon Ladd, The Blessed Hope, 92-94, in which he speaks of “the identity of the day of the Lord and of the day of Christ.”)

[32]Instead of “tribes” (as in rsv and neb). The Greek word is phylai and can mean either “tribes” or “peoples” (see BAGD). “Peoples” seems more appropriate to this worldwide context.

[33]In 1 Corinthians 16:22 are similar words: “Our Lord, come!” These words are a translation of the Aramaic “Marana tha” that Paul uses here. The fact that Paul uses Aramaic words in a Greek setting doubtless shows how deep and fervent was the early church’s cry for the return of the Lord.

[34]“Christ’s death is not itself the End, but the beginning of the End. … By these final words Paul is reminding the Corinthians of their essentially

eschatological existence" (Gordon Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 557).

[35]Some biblical interpreters believe that there will be a future coming of Christ in relation to believers and at a later day a coming in judgment on the world. (Recall the earlier footnote regarding a similar distinction between "the day of Christ" and "the day of the Lord.") For example, this has been popularized in books by Hal Lindsey. In his There's a New World Coming, Lindsey speaks of "two stages in Jesus' second coming." The first is "Christ's coming in the air and in secret"; the second is "Christ's coming in power and majesty to the earth, with every eye seeing Him" (italics his). Lindsey then adds, "Both of these can be true only if there are separate appearances of Christ in the future" (pp. 77-78). Two future stages, or appearances, however, is biblically incorrect. There are indeed two aspects but not two stages (I will later comment on the presumed earlier "secret" coming). Lindsey's view actually makes for two final comings of Christ.

[36]See G. B. Caird, The Revelation of St. John the Divine (HNTC), pages 32, 49, 58 in regard to some previous localized comings.

[37]The "Second Coming," an expression popularly used for the return of Jesus, is therefore not altogether appropriate. Incidentally, the Book of Hebrews does say that Christ "will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (9:28). This is the closest approximation in the New Testament to "second coming" language; however, "appear" (ophthēsetai) is more related to other "return" terminology and thus is distinctive of Christ's final advent.

[38]Thus the word erchomai, unlike the other terms (parousia, phanerdsis, etc.) that refer only to the return of Christ, has a much broader range of reference.

[39]There are two other possible interpretations of this verse: first, that it was fulfilled in the transfiguration of Jesus six days later (Matt. 17:1-8); second, that it occurred in the destruction of Jerusalem in a.d. 70. The first interpretation places the coming within a week, which seems difficult in the context. The second gives a range of time more fitting for the clause "some standing here who will not taste death," in that the destruction of Jerusalem occurred about forty years later. R. H. Lenski writes that "in the judgment on the Jews the royal rule of Jesus would become visible. In this calamity some of the hearers were actually to 'see' the Son of man coming in his kingdom, i.e., clothed with the royal

majesty as the King that he is" (The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel, 649). W. E. Biederwolf in his Second Coming Bible Commentary, 322, agrees with this interpretation.

[40]"Biederwolf writes concerning this coming that the "expression here is most certainly a direct reference to the destruction of Jerusalem which historically put an end to the old dispensation and which is of course a type of the final coming of the Lord" (The Second Coming Bible Commentary, 314). Similarly, J. Barton Payne says, "In Matthew 10:23 … the concept which is forecast by 4the coming of the Son of man' seems to be that of God's visitation upon the Jews through the Romans in 70 ad" (Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy, 127). Likewise, D. A. Carson writes about Matthew 10:23: "They [the disciples] will have not finished evangelizing the cities of Israel before the Son of man comes in judgment on Israel" (Matthew, EBC 8:253).

[41]The Greek ap' arti means literally "from now." Weymouth's New Testament in Modern Speech translates this as "later on." In a footnote Weymouth remarks, "Or before long, in the near future." The niv translation, "in the future," does not convey the sense of nearness. The parallel text in Mark 14:62 has no ap' arti, but simply reads, "Jesus said, T am; and you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.' " All in all, "hereafter" (rsv, kjv, and nasb) seems to be the best translation.

[42]This does not deny the final coming of Jesus in even more fearful judgment at the end of the age. Indeed, the coming in a.d. 70 is a preliminary fulfillment of the final fulfillment yet to occur. The divine visitation upon an unbelieving Jewish nation represents the final visitation yet to come upon an unbelieving world. Biederwolf entitles his discussion of Matthew 26:64 "The Second Coming of Jesus in a Figurative and Ever Present Sense" (The Second Coming Bible Commentary, 360). Hence, while Jesus' words point ultimately to "the awful time of the end when every eye shall see him … the reference is not specifically to this … but rather … to the whole judicial administration of Christ, which commences immediately after His resurrection, but more especially at the destruction of Jerusalem, and shall be completed in the end of the world" (p. 361).

[43]The language of "coming on the clouds" might seem to rule out any idea of Matthew 26:64 as referring to a.d. 70. I will say more about this language later.

[44]"The Greek word here translated "generation" is genea. "This generation," accordingly, signifies the approximate lifetime of people then living. Earlier in Matthew 23, Jesus had repeatedly denounced the Jewish leaders, the scribes and Pharisees, climaxing His denunciation by saying, "Upon you [will] come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, all this will come upon this generation" (vv. 35-36). Then Jesus adds concerning Jerusalem, "Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate" (v. 38). Hence, the focus of the judgments in Matthew 24 (Mark 13, Luke 21) indisputably centers on the Jewish nation and Jerusalem its center. Thus before "this generation" was to "pass away," "all these things" would happen.

[45]In Mark 13 and Luke 21 the only explicit question concerns the destruction of the temple. Hence, Jesus' words about "all these things" must even more be recognized as fulfilled in the first generation at a.d. 70. This does not mean that the account in Mark and Luke relate to nothing beyond this destruction, for implicitly they do relate to something more, as will be observed shortly. Nonetheless, it would be a serious error to ignore the fact that the primary focus is Jerusalem at the time of Christ.

[46]The Greek word is phyla-its primary meaning "the twelve tribes of Israel" (BAGD).

[47]The secondary meaning of phylai is "nations, peoples" (BAGD).

[48]A second possible translation of genea is "race" (as in nasb and niv margins on Matt. 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32) or "family." (For genea Thayer suggests also "men of the same stock, a family" and "in a bad sense a perverse race"-e.g., Matt. 17:17.) Hence "this genea" could also refer to the Jewish race, which did not pass away before all the things Jesus spoke were fulfilled. This other translation expands the picture far beyond the destruction of the temple in a.d. 70 down through history, even to the present day. This secondary meaning of genea, I believe, is likewise included in Jesus' prophecy.

[49]The caption of Psalm 18 in the rsv (similarly niv, nasb).

[50]"The clouds are an emblem of God's sovereign power and majestic glory moving to the earth." So writes Paul Minear in his Christian Hope and the Second Coming, 124. Minear also states, "Wherever the cloud appeared, there the invisible transfigured the visible surface of man's

existence, giving to it the depth dimension of eternity" (p. 127). Minear further comments that a person must avoid either a literal or a purely metaphorical understanding of Scripture's use of "clouds": "By insisting on either a literal or a purely metaphorical meaning he may be depriving the Word of its power to convey living truth concerning the depths of reality" (p. 127).

[51]E.g., Jeremiah 4:23-24: "I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light… all the hills moved to and fro" (judgment on Jerusalem). Note also Isaiah 34:2-5 (all the nations/Edom) and Joel 2:28-31, both a picture of the universal outpouring of God's Spirit as well as "portents in the heavens and on the earth…. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes" (cf. Acts 2:16-21). The use of such imagery is at least as old as the judges of Israel, e.g., the song of Deborah and Barak: "From heaven fought the stars, from their courses they fought against Sisera" (Judges 5:20; note also the earth trembling and the mountains quaking: 5:4-5). J. Adams, commenting on Christ's words in Matthew 24 and Peter's in Acts 2, speaks of this as language "used to describe the fall of the old order and the entrance of a new one" (The Time Is at Hand, 63, n.). This would apply also to the many passages already cited.

[52]Note also the apocalyptic imagery in Amos 8. God declares, "The end has come upon my people Israel" (v. 2), and 44on that day I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight" (v. 9).

[53]Josephus, Jewish historian and eyewitness of the destruction, estimated that 1.1 million Jews were slain in the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. "Accordingly," wrote Josephus, 4 4 the multitude of those that therein perished exceeded all the destructions that either men or God ever brought upon the world." Those not killed in Jerusalem were sent into the provinces "as a present to them, that they might be destroyed upon the theatres by the sword, and by the wild beasts…. Those under seventeen years of age were sold for slaves … [some] 97,000" (Wars of the Jews, 6.9.3-4). (It is also estimated that more than 1.3 million Jews in Judea and bordering countries were slain in the seven years preceding the destruction of Jerusalem.) The result was that not a single Jew was left alive in Jerusalem, and that all buildings, including the temple, were totally demolished.

[54]It is interesting that Josephus speaks of such phenomena as "a star

resembling a sword, which stood over the whole city, and a comet that continued a whole year"; on another occasion "before sunsetting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running ajsout among the clouds, and surrounding cities"; again "at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner [court of] the temple … to perform their sacred ministrations, they said, that… they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard the sound of a multitude, saying, 4Let us remove hence.' " Josephus expressed his vast sorrow that the Jews "did not attend nor give credit to the signs that were so evident, and did so plainly foretell their future desolation" (6.9.3).

[55]The latter chapters of Revelation speak of a judgment upon "Babylon the great" (17:5), which undoubtedly includes judgment upon Rome, the city of "seven hills" (17:9).

[56]Zechariah 12:10 depicts a future day when "the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem … look on him whom they have pierced [and] they shall mourn … ." In his Gospel, following the description of a Roman soldier at the cross piercing Jesus' side with a spear, John quoted the words from Zechariah thus: "They shall look on him whom they have pierced" (19:37).

[57]As, e.g., held by C. H. Dodd. In his book *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, Dodd writes, "The Age to Come has come. The Gospel of primitive Christianity is a Gospel of realized eschatology" (p. 85). Later in his writing Dodd made more room for a real future (see his *Gospel and Law: The Relation of Faith and Ethics in Early Christianity*). However, Dodd will likely remain best known for his stress on "realized eschatology."

[58]This is Rudolf Bultmann's well known term. For example, in his essay "New Testament and Mythology," Bultmann speaks at the outset of "the mythical view of the world and the mythical event of redemption." He includes in such "mythology" the belief that Christ "will come again on the clouds of heaven to complete the work of redemption, and [that] the resurrection and judgment of men will follow" (Kerygma and Myth), 2). Because, says Bultmann, such is mythology, and yet contains a kernel of truth, "theology must undertake the task of stripping the Kerygma [the gospel message] from its mythical framework, of 'demythologizing' it" (p. 3). For "the real purpose of myth is not to present an objective picture of the world, but to express man's understanding of himself in the world in which he lives" (p. 10). This is a radical reduction of the supernatural

to the natural, and a reinterpretation in terms of human life and possibilities. Eschatology, accordingly, has nothing to do with objective events such as a real return of Christ. This is pure mythology, and needs to be radically "demythologized" in terms of human existence. To be blunt: Bultmann totally subjectivizes and thereby destroys the factuality of an eschatological event.

[59]Albert Schweitzer held that Jesus' message was eschatological throughout and that only by a "consistent" application of the eschatological category are we able to understand Jesus at all. Jesus' only concern was the preaching of the coming kingdom. So He sent out His disciples in the belief that they would cause the kingdom to come. When this failed, Jesus offered Himself on the cross in the mistaken conviction that God would thereby bring all history to its consummation and his parousia forcibly be brought to pass. Here are some of Schweitzer's best-known words: "In the knowledge that He is the coming Son of Man, [Jesus] lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on that last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuses to turn, and he throws Himself upon it. Then it does turn; and crushes Him. Instead of bringing in the eschatological conditions, He has destroyed them" (The Quest for the Historical Jesus, 368). Obviously, there is no future coming of Jesus Christ.

[60]For example, William Adams Brown writes, "Not through an abrupt catastrophe, it may be, as in the early Christian hope, but by the slower and surer method of spiritual conquest, the ideal of Jesus shall yet win universal assent… and his spirit dominate the world. This is the truth for which the doctrine of the second advent stands" (Christian Theology in Outline, 372). In this view we do not look forward to an "abrupt catastrophe" (i.e., the events associated with an actual return of Jesus), but toward the day when His ideal has "universal assent."

10
Signs

Prior to the return of Christ, a number of things will take place. The Scriptures make clear that certain events will happen that point to the final coming of Christ and the consummation of history. Recall that the disciples asked Jesus, in addition to the question about the destruction of the temple, “What will be the sign of your coming *[parousia]* and of the close of the age?” (Matt. 24:3). Christ’s future coming and the completion of the age are so closely connected that the question is really a single one. Hence, we may speak of “the sign,” or “signs,”[1] that will particularly point to this final consummation.

Another way of putting the question is this: Are there evidences that the climactic event that centers in Christ’s return is near? Do the signs point in that direction? We need to examine carefully the witness of Scripture concerning the events in the end times and to view all such testimony in the light of world affairs.

I. THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a basic sign of the "last days." On the day of Pentecost Peter quoted the prophet Joel to this effect: "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy…" (Acts 2:17). Peter clearly was referring, first of all, to what had just taken place in the effusion of the Spirit upon the believers in Jerusalem. In that sense the "last days"—signified by the coming of the Spirit—had now begun. After speaking these and other words about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (vv. 17–18), Peter proceeded to state what God had prophesied through Joel: "And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day" (vv. 19–20). Hence, there is a close and vital connection between the outpouring of the Spirit and "the day of the Lord." Both belong to the "last days," with the effusion of the Spirit preceding the coming day.

While signaling the "last days" and the approach of "the day of the Lord," the events of Pentecost were only the presaging of things yet to come. In a real sense, the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost was but the beginning of fulfillment, for it is apparent that the effusion was limited to Jerusalem and some Jews dwelling there. Later there would be an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on some half-Jews in Samaria (Acts 8:14–17), some Romans in Caesarea (Acts 10:44–47), some disciples in Ephesus (Acts 19:1–7),[2] and doubtless on others far beyond. Accompanying the gospel there would be "signs and wonders and various miracles and … gifts of the Holy Spirit" (Heb. 2:4). But as surely as the prophecy of Joel is universal—relating to "all flesh"[3] —its comprehensive fulfillment would occur at a later time in history prior to the day of the Lord.[4] When such a universal outpouring occurs, it will be an unmistakable sign of the near advent of Jesus Christ.

This brings me, then, to comment on the contemporary Pentecostal effusion of the Holy Spirit. In a manner unprecedented since New Testament times there is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit across the body of Christ and around the world.

With the dawn of the twentieth century the "Pentecostal Reality"[5] has increasingly been breaking in upon the churches. People in many places are experiencing a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit, prophecy (as at Pentecost) is recurring, extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit are happening. Although we cannot be certain, this present-day outpouring of the Holy Spirit—unparalleled in past history—could be a profound sign of the near return of the Lord and the consummation of history.[6]

It is undoubtedly a fact that the more fully the Holy Spirit is known and experienced among believers, the greater is the sense of the Lord's being at hand. For the Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of Christ. To the degree that the Spirit is dynamically present, Christ is spiritually present, and there is an increased expectation of His corporeal return.[7] Since the manifestation of the Holy Spirit may be described as "powers of the age to come" (Heb. 6:5) breaking in upon the present age, the very experience of these powers can but create a lively sense of the near approach of that age.[8] All in all, the building up of spiritual intensity could move to such a peak that like a lightning flash between heaven and earth would be the Parousia of the Lord.

It is not the absence of the Lord but His presence—intensified—that is preparation for His return. Through the activity of the Holy Spirit, Christ becomes so manifest that a thin line separates this from His final manifestation *(phanerōsis).* For He will not come as a distant stranger, but as One who is our very life. Hence Paul can say, "When Christ who is our life appears…" (Col. 3:4): not "when *Christ* appears," but "when *Christ who is our life* appears." Thus —to repeat—it is not Christ's absence that is the deep note calling out for His return but His presence in the Spirit: He is so real now we can hardly wait for His full appearance![9]

There are several reasons that the outpouring of the Spirit is a sign of the "last days" and the Lord's return. For one thing, the power (and powers) of the Holy Spirit is much needed by believers to stand against the heightened activity of Satan and evil forces in the end times. Paul speaks of "deceitful spirits" and "doctrines of demons" because of which "in later times some will depart from the faith" (1 Tim. 4:1). Hence, one highly important reason for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the multiplication of genuine spiritual manifestations is to provide the divine power and strategy necessary to cope with the increasing tide of evil. If today, amid the flood of occult practices, cult proliferation, even Satanism and witchcraft, the church seems almost helpless, it will remain that way unless there is a fresh endowment of spiritual resources. Only this latter-day outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the church's participation in it will provide

adequate fortification against the assaults of evil. Satan is having his own "counterfeit Pentecost" by increasingly pouring out his evil spirits. Thus nothing can suffice except a true Pentecost to turn back the crescendo of evil in these difficult hours. The fact that God is providing an outpouring of fresh spiritual resources in our time is undoubtedly an "endtime" sign.

Another, yet related, reason for the outpouring of the Spirit is to provide courage and wisdom for Christian believers to endure whatever trials may come. Jesus emphasized that all who follow Him will endure persecution, but the Holy Spirit will be their help: "And when they bring you to trial and deliver you up, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say; but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak but the Holy Spirit" (Mark 13:11). Persecution will intensify as the end draws near;[10] hence a full investment of the Holy Spirit is all the more needed. Those who rely on the Holy Spirit—regardless of what may come at the end—will find wisdom and courage that none can stand against.

The final reason for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is for the empowerment of the gospel proclamation. Jesus tells us, "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14).[11] In order for this end-time proclamation to be effective, the plenitude of the Spirit's endowment is called for. If the first disciples had to receive power to witness—"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8)—then all the more so do we as the final testimony goes forth. Human strategies and efforts (though necessary) are insufficient in a time of increasing secularism, materialism, and pseudo-religions of many kinds. Only the endowment of "power from on high" (Luke 24:49) can provide the resources for completing the final task.

To conclude: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is undoubtedly a sign—perhaps the primary sign—of the return of Jesus Christ. For as surely as the Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of glory" (1 Peter 4:14 NIV) who comes from the Lord in heaven, there is but a short step from this coming to the final coming in glory of Christ Himself.

II. THE GOSPEL TO ALL THE WORLD

The time between the Ascension and the Parousia is peculiarly the time for the spread of the gospel. The Great Commission of Matthew 28 is unmistakable: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (vv. 19–20). Hence, the church has one basic mission: to bring the nations to Christ through discipling, baptizing, and teaching, with the assurance of Christ’s continuing presence in this mission even to “the close [or ‘end’] of the age.”

A. Universal Proclamation

In connection with this mission to reach all nations, the "sign of the end" will be the universal proclamation of the gospel. As Jesus earlier declared, "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14). What is said is *not* that all nations will turn to Christ—though this is the goal (as Matt. 28 states)—but that all will hear and have opportunity to turn. When this occurs, the end will come.

Let us look more closely. The Great Commission is not only to proclaim but also to reach—and this refers to "all nations" (in both Matt. 24 and 28)—so that people are discipled, baptized, and taught. The goal is testimony plus con version: it can never be anything less than that. And as surely as Christ is with His church throughout the ages, there will be—and unquestionably has been—the turning of many "nations" to Him. However, Christ does *not* say in the Great Commision that this goal will be fully reached. Nor—and here we return to the matter of "sign"—did He earlier say that all nations must be converted before the end of the age and His return. *But*, when the church universally proclaims the gospel as a testimony (or witness) so that all may hear and believe, then the end will come. The "sign," therefore, is not universal salvation but universal witness with opportunity for decision.

Now let us examine more closely Jesus' words "the whole world" and "all nations." The word translated "world" is *oikoumene*, meaning literally "the inhabited earth."[12] Hence the gospel of the kingdom is to be proclaimed wherever there are people. The word translated "nations" is from *etlinos*, meaning not necessarily a political entity but a large number of people who make up a cohesive group socially, culturally, and racially.[13] To all such *ethnē*[14] —wherever they are across the face of the earth—the gospel must be proclaimed as a testimony. Then the end will come.

A question that naturally follows is this: Has this proclamation been accomplished, or are we perhaps very close to fulfilling the task? One obvious problem is that no one is sure how many *ethnē* there are. If this refers only to "nations" in a larger sense, it is probably correct to say that all nations have now had some gospel testimony. But if it refers to cohesive groups of people within or without nations, there may be large numbers who have not yet heard. Indeed, there are many "unreached peoples"[15] in the world who might be called *ethnē*

and to whom the gospel has not yet been proclaimed. Whether or not they are *ethnē* and therefore must hear the gospel before the end can come, it is still the mission of the church to keep on preaching and witnessing to everyone everywhere. For as surely as God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4) and as truly as "the love of Christ compels us" (2 Cor. 5:14 NIV) to seek every lost soul, the church must continue—sign or no sign—to witness to the good news as long as time remains. But, returning to the point of inquiry, the only proper answer must be that we simply do not know for certain. From God's perspective it is quite possible that the witness to the *ethnē* has been accomplished, or is now being accomplished, so that the end could quickly come. It may be, on the other hand, that we have a long way yet to go before all *ethnē* have had a chance to hear and respond.

B. Growth of the Kingdom

The Scriptures emphasize the growth of the kingdom all the way to the end. Here we turn back to Jesus' earlier parables of the kingdom—as recorded in Matthew 13—particularly those concerning the mustard seed (vv. 31–32) and the leaven (v. 33). In the former parable, Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to the small grain of mustard seed, which "when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches"; in the latter parable, He likens it to "leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened." Both parables unmistakably teach the growth of the kingdom from very small and hidden beginnings to a large and significant place. The kingdom externally will be great and expansive in size; internally it will be a force that permeates and pervades all.

Such parables might seem to suggest that the kingdom will be all-inclusive and gradually overcome every alien force; thus all the world will finally hear "the gospel of the kingdom" and believe. But such is not Jesus' teaching. There will be—and, of course, there has been over the past two thousand years—much growth and much leavening influence. From its minute beginnings in a small nation, the gospel has gone forth—as Jesus commanded—"from Jerusalem" to "all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."[16] The kingdom of heaven, in the sense of the Christian church, now embraces approximately one-third of the world's population.[17] Its influence extends far beyond its own boundaries with striking growth in recent years. It is possible that we are now on the verge of even greater increase and development.[18] Therefore in accordance with Jesus' parables, the kingdom of heaven will be unmistakably "the greatest of shrubs" and the "meal" will be yet further "leavened." For this we may hope and pray—and believe. However, to repeat what was said shortly before, Jesus does not teach that before "the end" the kingdom of God will be all in all. "The greatest of shrubs" is not the only shrub, nor is "leaven" the meal it leavens. Indeed, to the very end there will be those who do not respond. Also, another parable in Matthew 13 declares that there will be both wheat and tares (vv. 24–30, 36–43) to the very end.

Hence, the kingdom of God filling the earth is *not* the sign of the end. This is no more the case than is the turning of all nations to Christ. There is the Great Commission to minister the gospel to all nations, and there is also the assurance

that the kingdom will grow mightily. But the sign is not total conversion or total expansion. The sign is total witness—the proclamation of the gospel “throughout the whole world” (recall ing Matt. 24) “as a testimony to all *ethnē*.” When the witness has been accomplished the end will come.

C. The Fullness of the Gentiles and of Israel

Climactically, the fullness (or full number) of both the Gentiles and Israel is to come to salvation. For the first time, we specifically note the two groups. I have referred before to the proclamation of the gospel to the "nations"—the "nations" being understood essentially as the "Gentiles"[19] — and to the growth of the kingdom. The latter include all who have entered the kingdom through faith in Christ, Jews and Gentiles alike. Now consider the important fact that along with the fullness of Gentiles coming to faith, there will also be a full-scale turning of Israel to Christ and finding salvation through Him.

Here, with Paul as our guide, we recognize an extraordinary sequence of events regarding Israel and the Gentile world. Paul speaks of the gospel as "the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). Israel had a definite priority—"to the Jew first"—and this, of course, is a historical fact. The first proclamation in Jerusalem was to Jews only on the Day of Pentecost, and Paul himself first preached to the Jews (Acts 9:20–22 and elsewhere) before turning to the Gentile world (whether Greek or Roman). Although many Jews responded, there was from the beginning bitter and ever growing opposition. Gentiles, on the other hand, soon began to come in increasing numbers into the kingdom. Jesus Himself had said to Israel, "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (Matt. 21:43 NIV). Paul finally said to Jews who continued to oppose him, "From now on I will go to the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6). Although the Jews were first to hear the message, a hardness rapidly set in, so much so that the Gentiles largely became the recipients of the kingdom. Thus Paul later declared, "Through their [Israel's] trespass [or 'transgression'][20] salvation has come to the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:11).

Hence the focus of gospel proclamation throughout the centuries has been to the "nations" or "Gentiles" primarily. When they have all had an opportunity to hear and respond, the end will come. But—and this is an additional highly significant fact—the end will not occur without Israel's coming to salvation. Paul continues, "Lest you [Gentiles] be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel,[21] until the full number [or 'fullness'][22] of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:25–26). Paul had pointed in this direction earlier: "Now

if their [Israel's] trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion [or 'fullness'][23] mean!" (Rom 11:12). Thus the fullness of the Gentiles—through proclamation of the gospel to the *ethnē*, and the growth of the kingdom (largely Gentile growth)—is not the last word! Indeed, there will finally be such a fullness of Israel when their hardness and blindness[24] is overcome as to vastly enrich the whole world. For the almost unbelievable truth is that *all Israel will be saved.* The first shall be last! The fullness of Gentiles will climax with the fullness of Israel.

All of this belongs to the realm of "mystery."[25] Moreover, it shows that God is not done with Israel. Paul had earlier said, "God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew" (Rom. 11:2). Although for a time Israel has been cut off, like branches, through unbelief, and the Gentiles grafted in, God will "graft them in again" (11:23). When this happens, truly the end is at hand!

The "fullness" of Israel—"all Israel"—will come in exactly as does the fullness of the Gentiles: through faith in Jesus Christ.[26] For, says Paul, "if they do not persist in their unbelief, [they] will be grafted in" (Rom. 11:23); and later he speaks of all Israel being saved. Likewise, just after the statement about Israel's salvation, Paul quotes freely from the Old Testament: "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish [or 'remove'][27] ungodliness from Jacob; and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins" (Rom. 11:26–27). The Deliverer is undoubtedly Christ,[28] and "ungodliness" will be removed with the taking away of sin.

Does the saving of "all Israel" mean every individual Jew? Paul does not say. It would seem likely, however, that he is referring to a wide-ranging cross-section of Israel, including the leadership, that would represent the whole people.[29] "All Israel" in the Old Testament could mean representatives of the people, for example, "all Israel had come to Shechem to make him [Rehoboam] king" (1 Kings 12:1). In any event, this future conversion of Israel will be the reversal of that terrible day when, at Jesus' trial, the people cried, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matt. 27:25), and the chief priests, scribes, and elders "mocked him" (Matt. 27:41) as He hung dying on the cross. Against such a background the prospect is glorious indeed: all Israel will be saved!

That this will happen before Christ returns is also suggested in the words of Jesus Himself. Just after pronouncing the forsakenness of Jerusalem ("Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate") He said, "For I tell you, you will not see me again,[30] until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord' " (Matt. 23:39). When the Lord returns, it will be to an Israel who is blessing His name—indeed, along with Gentiles from all over the world.

Since we are considering “signs” of Christ’s return—and surely the turning of Israel to the Lord is an end-time event—it is noteworthy that presently there are increasing evidences of Jews turning to Christ. The “Jews for Jesus” movement in the United States,[31] the growth of “Messianic Judaism”[32] throughout the world, the enlarging number of “completed Jews”[33] serving as missionaries of the gospel—while none of this is yet a groundswell, all could be the initial evidences of a truly significant breakthrough. It is also quite possible that the establishment of the nation of Israel is a prelude to a wide-scale national conversion that could include the leadership of the people. If (when?) it happens there in the ancient homeland, the effects will be felt around the world—among both Jews and Gentiles alike. There are, to be sure, far more Jews outside than inside Israel; however, if the *nation* should turn to Christ (through its prime minister, rabbis, and various other ruling authorities), it would be the reversal of the *nation’s* turning *from* Christ almost two thousand years ago. Truly all Jewry around the world would be mightily affected. Paul goes so far as to say, “If their [Israel’s] rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?” (Rom. 11:15). When Israel is “grafted” back in as “natural branches” (unlike Gentiles who are “cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree”—Rom. 11:24), it will have such a vitality (“life from the dead”) as is hard to imagine. The Jewish people will at long last turn to their own natural brother Jesus—accepting Him, believing in Him, obeying Him. Truly it will be riches to all the world—and what more fitting final preparation could there be for the return of the Lord in glory!

If this en masse turning of the Jews to Christ seems almost unbelievable against the background of their centu ries-long opposition to Him—not to mention, on the Gentile side, the long history of bitter anti-Semitism—then we need today to count all the more on the power of the Holy Spirit to bring about a total change. This, I believe, is where the first sign, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, stands as background for the second, the preaching of the gospel to all the world—and especially to the Jews. It will take a powerful anointing of the Holy Spirit, in terms of courage, wisdom, boldness, patience, and much else, upon those who witness if the gospel is to be heard and received by Israel. But it *did* happen at the beginning: the Spirit was poured out, and three thousand Jews came to salvation! It *can* happen—and by God’s word it *will* happen again!

III. THE INCREASE OF EVIL

The return of Christ will also be preceded by an increase of evil throughout the world. Along with the wide extension of the gospel there will be a corresponding growth of evil and evil forces. So Jesus spoke regarding the wheat and the tares: "Let both grow together until the harvest" (Matt. 13:30). Both good and evil will increase to the very end.[34] We will now consider the nature of this evil and to what degree it approximates the evil to be expected at the close of the age.

We begin with Paul's graphic statement "There will be terrible[35] times in the last days" (2 Tim. 3:1 NIV). Then he proceeds to portray something of what it will be like: "People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness [or 'religion' RSV] but denying its power" (vv. 2–5 NIV). This picture of "the last days" could, in some sense, apply to any period in Christian history—the Christian dispensation itself being "the last days."[36] For there has never been a time since Christ came that the world has not included many people who could be characterized by Paul's words. Although many are nominally religious ("holding the form of religion"), it is only a cover-up for what they really are. But, as Paul says later, the situation will get no better: "Evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse" (v. 13). Hence, as we draw still closer to the end, there will be no improvement. The times will become even more "terrible."[37]

Paul's catalog of evil surely seems to correspond to our present days. Only a brief reflection on the intensive commitment of society at large to self-love and self-gratification, the passion for money and pleasure, the surrender of self-control to instant satisfaction, widespread brutality marked by lessening concern for human life—and on and on—makes one realize how close we are to collapse. The breakdown of morals, through increasing and open adultery, divorce, homicide, homosexuality, abortion, and the like, seems imminent. The "form of religion," without genuine substance, is not only the situation in society around

us, but also—far worse—is increasingly prevalent in the Christian church. A growing number today are tacitly denying the power of faith by spurning the dynamism of the Spirit while going through the motions of religiosity. Thus along with gross immorality there is an ever more pervasive spiritual vacuum. Chaos seems near at hand.

That these are “terrible times” does not mean that everything is bleak and evil. Forces of righteousness and goodness are standing over against the violence and immorality of our day. Many people deplore the ubiquitous evil in society and seek both to rectify it wherever possible and personally to live godly lives. Also, as we have noted, the kingdom of God is continuing to grow in the world, and opportunities for witness abound. Nonetheless, evil is resurging and becoming increasingly virulent in the world at large. In that sense Paul’s words about “terrible times” seem vividly to denote our present situation.

IV. RELIGIOUS APOSTASY

We focus next on the matter of religious apostasy. In Jesus' answer to the disciples' question about "the close of the age," He says at one point, "Because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold" (Matt. 24:12). Then Jesus adds, "But he who endures to the end will be saved" (v. 13). This suggests that the decline of Christian love—the love toward God and all people that Christ makes possible[38] —will be prevalent toward "the end." This points to a falling away, or apostasy. Jesus' concern about this matter is also shown in His words in the Book of Revelation to the church at Ephesus: "I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first" (2:3–5). Of course, these words are addressed to one church,[39] but they also underscore Jesus' concern about a departure from love. We see from Matthew 24 that it is the multiplication of wickedness that stands behind the growing dearth of love. As wickedness abounds—a wickedness[40] that cares for neither God nor man—love diminishes. This departure from love is the core of apostasy, for when love is gone, there is little left. Toward the end of the age such tragic lovelessness will be true of "most men."

What shall we say about today? On the one hand, the love of many Christians has actually intensified. Struggling against the wickedness of the world around, and seeking to be open constantly to the love of God in Christ, they have an ever-deepening love and compassion. They have come to experience profoundly the content of Paul's words in Romans 5:5: "God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (NIV). Through the gift of the Holy Spirit they know the abundant love of God and grow daily in a personal relation to Him, to brothers and sisters in Christ, and to all people. But this is *far* from the total picture. The balance has tipped quite the other way: for many there was a love at first (at the time of their affirming commitment to Christ), but that love has decreased over the years. Love of the world, love of money, love of pleasure, love of self—all of which is the seedbed of wickedness—has driven out that first affection. This is the *primal* apostasy—departure from love. It far

too often marks the church in our time.[41]

Apostasy can also include a departure from the truths of Christian faith. Paul writes Timothy: "The Spirit clearly says that in later [or 'the latter' KJV][42] times some will abandon[43] the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron" (1 Tim. 4:1–2 NIV). This abandonment of "the faith," this apostasy, which is demonically inspired, comes through persons of calloused consciences who do not hesitate to substitute a lie for the truth. Paul accordingly is speaking against false teachers who subtly lead people farther and farther from the truth until at last they have totally departed from it. "The faith" is the body, or corpus, of Christian truth[44] —indeed, its essence. This "faith" is at last laid aside.[45]

Because such apostasy is caused by demonically inspired teachers, people who desert the faith scarcely realize what they are doing. It is delusion and deception that leads them to commit apostasy. Paul speaks of this apostasy as happening "in later times." Such times were obviously, in some sense, already present, because a little later the apostle tells Timothy to "fight the good fight of the faith" (1 Tim. 6:12). Throughout this letter Paul has much to say about the importance of "the words of the faith … the good doctrine" (4:6), about Timothy's taking heed to himself and to his teaching (4:16), and about the need for carefully proclaiming "the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching which accords with godliness" (6:3). Times of apostasy have frequently appeared in church history since Paul's day. This is the reason that early church councils declared "the faith" over against heretical teachings, that the Reformation occurred so as to steer the church back into many vital truths, and that even today numerous churches struggle to reaffirm the faith despite increasing secularism and liberalism.

What about the late twentieth century? Paul said that "in later times some will abandon the faith"; and if ever this statement was true, it seems to be vividly so today. Many of the major denominations have become less and less concerned about doctrinal integrity, so much so that we may legitimately question whether some have not become largely apostate.[46] An evangelical upsurge occurring both outside[47] and, to some degree, inside[48] the mainline denominations has come into being largely as an attempt to counter these deviating forces. Still the departure from biblical faith continues, and the end scarcely seems to be in sight.[49]

There is also New Testament reference to apostasy that is graphically called "*the* apostasy" and that is definitely related to the Parousia of Christ. Paul writes

to the Thessalonians “with regard to the coming *[parousia]* of our Lord Jesus Christ… the day of the Lord” thus: “Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy[50] comes first” (2 Thess. 2:1–3 NASB). This Scripture speaks of an apostasy so specific in nature as to be *the* apostasy. Further, it is more than an apostasy of “later times,” or even “the last times”; it is “the apostasy” that is closely connected with the return of the Lord.[51] Indeed, the second advent will not happen without the apostasy preceding it: “Let no one … deceive you… .”[52] 2

Unmistakably we are here dealing with a sign of the return of Jesus Christ—or, it might be said, a definite precursor. Unless “the apostasy” has occurred, it is a deception to claim that the Parousia of the Lord is imminent.[53]

What, then, is “the apostasy”? Paul does not specifically answer. However, it seems to follow that whatever is most central to Christian faith, if that is abandoned, this would be *the* apostasy. The center undoubtedly is the Lord Jesus Christ, who came in the flesh and wrought mankind’s salvation; hence the denial of Christ as God incarnate would be the very essence of apostasy. This brings us in a roundabout way from Paul to John and to John’s language about “the antichrist.” Let us now turn briefly to John’s letters.

V. THE ANTICHRIST

The antichrist is one who deceives others by denying that Christ is God come in the flesh. “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist”[54] (2 John 7 NASB). This is the ultimate deception, namely, that the Incarnation did not occur; anyone who denies this is “the deceiver,” “the antichrist.” By such deception the ultimate in apostasy occurs: Jesus Christ, the Word become flesh, is spurned.

I have quoted from John’s second letter. In his first letter, John emphasizes that it is “the last hour” because of the many antichrists that have appeared: “As you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour” (2:18). Later he adds, “Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son” (v. 22). Still later in this letter John speaks about “the spirit of antichrist” (4:3) being now present in the world.[55]

From these statements there is no suggestion that “antichrist” or “the antichrist” is a particular person. *Anyone* who denies the coming of Christ from the Father, that “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14)—the central truth of Christian faith—is “the antichrist.” Thus, many antichrists have come, and many more will come. For “the spirit of antichrist” is in the world—all the way to the end. What, then, about “the last hour”? It is “the hour” of the multiplication of antichrists (again see 1 John 2:18).[56]

The antichrist, then, is not one who commits such sins as murder, adultery, and theft to the maximal degree, nor is he one who tortures and kills Christians in some gruesome, physical manner. He is actually far worse than any of this, for he deceives people about Jesus Christ. In this wicked deception (which ultimately goes back to *the* Deceiver—Satan),[57] he shuts the door to eternal life. He is “*anti*“—opposed to—“*Christ*.” This is the ultimate evil, and his activity is the ultimate deception.[58] For there is no greater tragedy in the world than that of turning people aside from Christ, the Son of God, who has wrought mankind’s salvation.

Now let us seek to bring the language of Paul and John together about “the

apostasy" and "the antichrist." It seems apparent that they are two sides of the same dark situation. "The antichrist" is the deceiver, and "the apostasy" is the falling away through deception. And at the heart of it all lies the denial of the inmost essence of faith: the eternal Word, the Son of God, became flesh for the redemption of mankind.

Here we need to mention also those who are called by Jesus "false Christs." Jesus declares in a passage that culminates with His Parousia (Matt. 24:23–27): "False Christs [pseu-do-Christs][59] and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (v. 24; cf. Mark 13:22). These "pseudochrists" are actually "antichrists" because they presume to be Christ,[60] and will be increasingly evident as the end draws near.[61] Jesus adds, "So, if they say to you, 'Lo, he [Christ] is in the wilderness,' do not go out; if they say, 'Lo, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the *parousia* of the Son of man" (vv. 26–27).

It is a fact of history that many times over the centuries claimants to be Christ have arisen and have drawn large numbers of people away to follow them, even to wait for their manifestation. In the late twentieth century such claims have multiplied,[62] all of which could signal that the Parousia of the *real* Christ is near at hand.

It is important to recognize that the false Christs actually are also opposed to the Incarnation. The true Christ, who came in the flesh to effect mankind's salvation, is replaced by a pseudochrist who claims to bring final truth. Thus there is no need to look back to Jesus Christ as Savior when *the* Christ is at hand. The pseudochrist therefore by actually denying the decisive significance of the Incarnation is also an antichrist:[63] he has taken the place of the true Christ.

What has been said above about "false Christs" is one of the aspects of the so-called New Age Movement.[64] Jesus is viewed by many New Age devotees as only one of many manifestations or appearances of the Christ. There have been innumerable incarnations through the ages and there will be many more. This thinking is rooted in the Hindu idea of the avatars who again and again embody themselves in human form. Jesus accordingly is not "*the Word*" that "became flesh" (as in John 1:14) but one among many. Such "New Age" teaching is likewise antichrist in its opposition to the once-for-allness of the Incarnation and its essentiality for mankind's salvation.[65]

Now let us more specifically address the church. For within it recently leaders and teachers have arisen who radically question the Incarnation, often labeling it mythology[66] or denying its uniqueness.[67] This is far more serious than when an

outsider—for example, an avowed atheist or secular humanist—makes a similar statement, for that is to be expected and there is no pretense of its being somehow a Christian statement. But when this kind of questioning comes from theological and ecclesiastical leaders who still claim to represent the Christian faith, it is much harder to cope with. For deception is now occurring with the result that many of the faithful are led into departure from truth. Thus do "the spirit of antichrist" and "apostasy" tragically go hand in hand.

Perhaps we have not arrived at "the apostasy"—but who really knows? We have earlier noted with gratitude the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the growth of the kingdom in our present day—and this includes a rising tide of affirmation of the central truths of Christian faith.[68] The percentage of church members who affirm the deity of Christ, the Incarnation, and the Resurrection has seemingly reached an alltime high.[69] But—and this is the dark side—many of our denominations, theological schools, church colleges, and ecclesiastical boards have moved far to the left, and, if at all, hold only loosely to the historic Christian faith.[70] What people, both outside and inside the church, do not fully realize, however, is how far this defection has really gone. Seminaries particularly are often at fault, for despite occasional public statements to pretend orthodoxy, the situation in many places is really an ominous one.[71] For it is in the seminaries that the pastors and leaders of the church most often receive their basic training and orientation. Truly "a spirit of antichrist" is abroad in many of the churches.

Once again: Is *the* apostasy here? Let me try to give no further answer. Perhaps enough has been said to suggest that, however this question may be answered, it is a perilous moment in the life of faith. We *could* be in the last days before the return of the Lord.

VI. THE MAN OF SIN

We have been considering the increase of evil as one of the signs of the Parousia of Christ and have noted both the general picture of the last days —"terrible times"—and the growth of apostasy. It is now in order to reflect on the disclosure of "the man of sin"—or "man of lawlessness." According to Paul, not only will there be "the apostasy," but also the revelation of this man before the Lord returns. Referring to the day of the Lord, he writes, "It will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness[72] is revealed…" (2 Thess. 2:3 NASB).

It is particularly relevant that the appearance of this man of sin closely relates to the return of Christ. For a few verses later Paul says, "Then the lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming *[parousia]"* (V. 8 NASB). Hence, we may add, when this man of wickedness is revealed, the final advent of Christ is at hand.

Let us examine more closely the identity of this man. In the first place it is possible that he emerges from apostasy, since Paul speaks of his appearance immediately after mentioning "the apostasy." He could represent some one who has become so utterly apostate that he is now the very embodiment of sin and wickedness.[73] He may be the climactic stage where "the antichrist" and "the apostasy" are combined.[74] Thus, from such a dark situation in which "the spirit of antichrist" is regnant and apostasy abounds, the man of sin who is the very incarnation of evil could readily emerge. In Christian tradition he has frequently been called "the Antichrist";[75] however, more accurately, he is the man of sin, the man of lawlessness, the man of total wickedness.[76]

It is also possible that rather than being directly related to apostasy, the appearance of "the man of sin" is a parallel phenomenon. Paul speaks of both happening[77] before the Parousia of Christ. What he does specify, as we have observed, is that the appearance of this man occurs in very close connection with the return of Christ. So let us look more carefully at Paul's description of this man and the nature of his appearance.

Immediately he is spoken of as "the son of perdition": "… and the man of

lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition" (continuation of 2 Thess. 2:3).[78] This title suggests both his origin, the offspring of all that is evil,[79] and his destination, eternal damnation. He is not the devil but his instrument, for what he does is totally activated and empowered by Satan. Thus Paul later speaks of "the coming of the lawless one by[80] the activity of Satan … with all power" (2 Thess. 2:9).

Now let us return to the statement about "the son of perdition." This man —"that Wicked"[81] —shows his devilish character at once. For, Paul continues, he "opposes and exalts himself against every so-called [or 'everything that is called'] god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming [or 'showing' KJV] himself to be God" (2 Thess. 2:4). Here truly is the devil's own way: the way of standing against God, seek ing to exalt himself above God.[82] Wherever God, or anything called God, is worshiped, "that Wicked" enters "the temple,"[83] "takes his seat," and calls for worship of himself. This has been Satan's one vast ambition and compulsion from the beginning—and he will seek to have it fulfilled on earth through his vicar, the man of total iniquity.

Although this man of wickedness will emerge just prior to the Parousia of Christ, "the mystery of wickedness" is now present: "Already the secret power[84] of wickedness is at work. (2 Thess. 2:7 NEB). It is not as if the man of wickedness will bring wickedness on to the scene, for it is "already" operating. This sounds much like "the spirit of antichrist," which is "in the world already";[85] then comes its full manifestation. In the present situation, Paul suggests, there is a restraint upon the working of this "secret power"; otherwise he would be fully revealed. Paul says to the Thessalonians, "You know what is restraining him[86] now so that he may be revealed in his time" (v. 6). After speaking of the secret power of wickedness already operating, Paul adds, "Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way [literally, 'comes out of the midst']"[87] (v. 7). Who the restrainer is, Paul does not directly state, nor is it clear how the restrainer is out, or comes out, of the way. It has been suggested that Paul is referring to the order and fabric of society that restrains evil, so that when it breaks down, evil will have full sway.[88] Insofar as the Holy Spirit in the world provides the "cement" of society and the restraint upon evil and disruptive forces, this is also possibly Paul's meaning.[89] To come "out of the midst" would signify that near the Parousia the restraining influence of the Spirit of God will be so removed from the midst of human society that the man of sin is free to express himself fully and at the same time be revealed in his totally evil reality.[90]

We read next that this release of restraint upon the man of sin will initiate his revelation, even his *parousia*. Words that usually apply to Christ in His final advent now are applied to him: "And then the lawless one will be revealed … the *parousia* of the lawless one by the activity of Satan"[91] (vv. 8–9). Suddenly he will be out in the open for all to see. "That Wicked"—the man of sin, of lawlessness, of total iniquity—will have come on the scene!

We further read that the coming of this man of wickedness by Satan's activity will have two aspects: (1) it will be "with all power and signs and false wonders"; and (2) it will be "with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish" (vv. 9–10 NASB). The Wicked One will have power over all those who do not belong to Christ ("those who perish"); they will be dazzled by his counterfeit miracles; they will be utterly deceived by his wicked deeds. Indeed, as Paul proceeds to say, because they have "refused to love the truth and so be saved … God sends upon them a strong delusion to make them believe what is false…" (vv. 10–11). Those who know salvation in Christ, however, will not be thus deluded.

Finally the revealing of the man of sin will be brief, for immediately following the words "the lawless one will be revealed," Paul adds, "whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming" (2 Thess. 2:8 NASB). This is the total and final end of the Wicked One.

Now let us summarize this teaching about the man of sin in relation to the return of Christ:

1. The man of sin must appear before the return of Christ. His appearance immediately precedes "that day." Recall the words "The lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord Jesus will slay." The appearance of the man of wickedness belongs to the final moments in history.

2. His appearance is in close conjunction with *the* apostasy. The man of sin may emerge from that apostasy or be a parallel phenomenon. Indeed, he may make use of the apostasy to achieve his own ends.

3. The man of sin is "the son of perdition." He is the offspring of evil, wholly activated by Satan, and is on his way to destruction.

4. He totally opposes every object of worship, takes his seat "in the temple," and declares himself to be God. In his self-deification there is no room for the true God.

5. At the present time this secret power of wickedness is already at work. This suggests that the God-defying, God-identifying attitude operates throughout history. It is possible that just before the appearance of the man of sin this attitude will be reaching a climax.

6. He will emerge on the scene when the present restraint upon this secret power is removed. This may mean the collapse of the social/moral order as held together by the Holy Spirit.

7. The appearance of the man of sin will also be that of a *parousia*. While he previously has been restrained and not known, he will now be revealed and present for all to see. (An additional note: Since the word *parousia* in relation to Christ always refers to His future coming, the Scripture suggests that the man of sin is the final counterfeit appearance of Christ.)

8. The man of sin will dazzle the world with his powerful deeds, including miracles, and various deceptions. These will lead those who do not truly believe in Christ to be so deluded as to follow him to destruction.

9. The *parousia* of the man of sin will be brief, for closely connected to his appearance will be the return of Jesus Christ.

Next we must ask, Is the scenario previously described relevant for our time? Does any, or all, of it suggest we may be near the time of the Lord's return? Again, as with apostasy, we cannot be sure. However, there is at least one line of increasing evidence that the appearance of the man of sin and therefore the return of Christ could be near at hand.

Let us focus on one particular point. It is apparent from what has been said that the man of sin is one who elevates himself to deity. He is not described (any more than "the antichrist") as a thief, a murderer, an immoral person, but as one who puts himself in the place of God. God is simply shunted aside in human pride, and man declares himself to be God. Since "the secret power" of this deep sinfulness is "already" at work—and has been over the centuries—are there evidences of its presence and perhaps increase in our time?

We could pursue many lines and seek to check out much historical data, but rather than doing so (an impossibly complex task in our limited space), I will focus on the recent growth of secular humanism and the so-called New Age movement.[92]

By secular humanism I refer to various views of human existence that have no place for God. For example, the thought of such men as Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, and Sigmund Freud has made a strong impact on the twentieth century. Materialistic communism, an evolutionary interpretation of the world and human life, and Freudian psychological analysis have all served to view God at best as expendable, but most often as a liability. Secular humanism, as, for example, set forth in *Humanist Manifesto I* and *Humanist Manifesto II*, has no place for God, faith, or moral law.[93] As we have noted, Paul speaks of the man of sin as one "who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called God or object of

worship." This sounds similar to secular humanism, which opposes every trace of religion and puts man and his self-fulfillment as the only legitimate concern. Thus, without saying so, secular humanism deifies man. Humanist man, accordingly, to use Paul's further words, is one "proclaiming himself to be God."

On the American scene, despite the high percentage of people who claim to believe in God, there is an ever-growing secularity. The constitutional freedom *for* religion has become increasingly a freedom *from* religion. For example, the use of the name of God in the public arena is increasingly forbidden. Moral values in the public schools are now frequently made subject to "values clarification," by which the student is called upon to make his or her own moral choice. Abortion presumes the right to kill the unborn and is protected by law. Homosexuality, a profound human perversion, has come more and more to be viewed as a viable lifestyle. The critical orientation in all such aberrations as these is not God and objective moral principles but man's own selfish preferences. Many of our churches have likewise become so secularized that, despite the verbal avowal of God, they simply go along with, indeed often even encourage, the secular tide. In a strange way, the secular man therefore "takes his seat in the temple of God."

The New Age movement goes the further step of specifically identifying man with God. Whereas secular humanism declares there is no God and then proceeds to make man into God, New Age thinking quite bluntly speaks of man as one with God and urges all people to realize their true identity. To be more precise, the New Age movement views all things as one—man, the world, God—so that we need look nowhere else than our inner selves to discover God. As one contemporary New Ager puts it: "The myth of the savior 'out there' is being replaced by the myth of the hero 'in here.' Its ultimate expression is the discovery of *the divinity within us.*"[94] Another declares, "*Know thyself and that will set you free; to thine own self be true; to know self is to know all; know that you are God; know that you are the universe.;*"[95] If we know that we are God, then we may even apply such biblical words about God as "I AM" to ourselves.[96] When this happens—and it is occurring in various shapes and forms throughout the New Age movement—surely we are not far removed from the man of sin who proclaims himself to be God.

VII. THE TWO BEASTS

We turn now to a consideration of the two beasts in Revelation 13: the beast out of the sea and the beast out of the earth. As will be apparent, they represent in a quite dramatic manner much of the same reality as “the man of sin.”

Let us first note the background. The dragon (Satan) has been making war on believers, “those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus,” and now he stands “on the sand of the sea [i.e., ‘on the seashore’]” (Rev. 12:17). As he stands there, one beast begins to emerge “out of the sea” (13:1) and later another “out of the earth” (13:11). Thus from the outset a connection is suggested between the dragon and the two beasts.

A. The Beast out of the Sea

This beast "out of the sea"[97] is obviously a full representative of the dragon, for it has "ten horns and seven heads" (Rev. 13:1), identical with the "great red dragon" with his "seven heads and ten horns" (Rev. 12:3).[98] Since the dragon is the depiction of Satan,[99] the beast out of the sea is Satan's identical representative. Indeed, "to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and his great authority" (13:2). This hideous looking beast is Satan's surrogate and plenipotentiary.

Next we observe that the beast had received a mortal wound in the past, but now it was healed. "And I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain,[100] and his fatal wound was healed" (v. 3 NASB). This suggests the continuing vitality of the beast, for even with a mortal wound it had now been healed.[101] This calls to mind the fact that Satan himself had received a mortal blow at Calvary—indeed in fulfillment of the ancient promise that "the seed of woman" would crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15 NIV).[102] Satan is therefore a mortally wounded force, even though he is alive in the world today. Likewise, the beast as his identical representative has a crushed head, but is very much alive and active in the world.[103]

One might think that this hideous beast would be anything but attractive to people. However, Revelation adds that "the whole world went after the beast in wondering admiration" (v. 3 NEB), and they "worshipped the dragon because he had conferred his authority upon the beast; they worshipped the beast also, and chanted, 'Who is like the Beast? Who can fight against it?'" (v. 4 NEB). There is both great adulation of the beast and the conviction that none can withstand its power.

The beast next is shown as having been "given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words … against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling" (vv. 5–6). Since it was earlier said that "each head had a blasphemous name" (v. 1 NIV), this means that all seven heads were united in blaspheming God. The beast, by blaspheming, speaks contempt against God, arrogates to itself divine attributes; by blaspheming against His name,[104] it speaks evil against everything God represents, including His laws; by blaspheming His dwelling, it even denounces those who dwell in heaven, both angels and human beings. This last-mentioned blasphemy may also be against believers whose true home is in

heaven, even while they still dwell upon the earth.[105]

Moreover, the beast has authority over all who dwell on earth *except* the true believers: "Authority was given it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation, and all who dwell on earth[106] will worship it, every one whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the Book of life of the Lamb that was slain" (vv. 7–8). The authority, however, is for a limited period of time: "It was allowed[107] to exercise authority for forty-two months"[108] (v. 5). For this relatively short time the beast is in complete control over all persons except those whose names are in "the Book of life," namely those who belong to Jesus Christ.

However, during this same period the beast is also "allowed[109] to make war on the saints [believers in general] and to conquer them" (v. 7). The saints, not bending to the beast's authority over the world with its adulation and worship, not willing to accept the beast's dominion, are overcome. Thus the beast, unable to claim believers for itself, turns to their persecution and destruction, and for a time (forty-two months), it is successful. The saints are conquered by it.[110]

How should believers react during this time of the beast's persecution? Are they to fight against it? The next verses emphatically answer: "If any one has an ear, let him hear:[111] If any one is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if any one slays with the sword, with the sword must he be slain" (vv. 9–10). If captivity is the result of the beast's persecution, believers should not seek to avoid it; moreover, if they seek to slay with the sword through self-defense, it will only result in their being slain.[112] The important thing for believers is to stand firm and endure whatever comes. So the exhortation concludes: "Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints" (v. 10).

Next we need to reflect further on the identity of the beast out of the sea. Later in Revelation 17, a woman[113] is depicted sitting on the beast described as "a scarlet[114] beast… full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns" (v. 3). Afterward John is told, "The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is to ascend [or 'is about to come up' NASB] from the bottomless pit [or 'the abyss' NASB] and go to perdition" (v. 8). This cryptic statement refers to the fact that the beast, like Satan, did exist ("was"), received a mortal blow[115] ("is not"), is going to break forth in totally evil fury ("is to ascend from the bottomless pit"),[116] and is now on his way to final perdition.[117] The verse ends by saying, "It [the beast] was and is not and is to come" (v. 8). Thus the coming of the beast is in some sense a future event.

Let us examine this more closely, for it is apparent from what follows that the

beast is both present and future. The Book of Revelation now identifies the seven heads: “The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman is seated; they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain only a little while. As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it is of[118] the seven, and it goes to perdition” (vv. 9–11). The “seven hills” doubtless refer primarily to Rome,[119] the famed city of seven hills, thus the beast with its seven heads, in part, refers to the imperial city. But then the seven heads also refer to “seven kings,” or emperors, that have reigned, one who is now reigning, and another yet to come who will have a short reign.[120] Still this is by no means the entire picture, because the beast that was and is not will finally be an eighth: he will be of the seven in the sense that he will share their kind of rule, but he will be separate from and beyond them. This clearly is the final, eschatological beast for whom the Roman emperors (as beastly figures!) are the prototypes. This beast will epitomize all the evil of the deified and deifying[121] emperors and especially of those who did everything possible to ravage the Christian church. The beast out of the sea is therefore *the final concentration of evil in worldly form*,[122] for after that “it goes to perdition.” This is its divinely destined end.

It is important to note that with the eighth beast we have finally gone beyond the Roman Empire into the final days of history. The seven heads of the beast representing seven emperors of ancient Rome have been left behind: an eighth has come to take their place and go far beyond them in its evil power. Moreover —and now we move on—the ten horns previously mentioned also become future! John is told, “And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have *not yet* received royal power [literally, ‘a kingdom’], but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. These are of one mind and give over their power and authority to the beast; they will make war on the Lamb” (17:12–14). The ten kings represent the totality of earthly powers[123] that in the time of the end will be wholly subservient to the beast and make final warfare against Christ. The authority of these “ten kings” and the beast is short-lived. In “one hour”[124] it is all over, and the victory is the Lamb’s—“the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings!” (v. 14).

Thus we have come full circle. The beast out of the sea in Revelation 13 is ultimately this eschatological beast at the consummation of history. In one sense the beast represents the Roman emperors who increasingly took on evil proportions, through both prideful deification of themselves and vicious persecution of the church. Thus what John saw rising out of the sea was a terrifying reality already experienced in his day.[125] Rome was the beast: its

seven heads and ten horns depicting the Roman emperors in their successive power. But the beast was more than a Roman symbol;[126] it surely further represents all earthly powers that have risen up and, seeking to assume divine proportions, have found Christians and Christian faith intolerable. Still, beyond that, there is also the beast to come (the "eighth") who will be the final manifestation of evil on earth in its God-defying and Christian-persecuting reality.

Now a critical question. Does this necessarily mean a totalitarian state (such as, for example, Stalinist Russia or Nazi Germany)? Such a state seems to closely approximate Roman self-glorification and ruthless domination. There can be little question of this. However, the Book of Revelation focuses more on "the kingdom (singular) of the world" than on "the kingdoms (plural) of the world." I call attention to the triumphant climactic words in Revelation 11:15: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever." The kingdom of the world signifies more than, and perhaps other than, any earthly kingdom, however violent or debased it may be. It is the whole world as dominated by the power of Satan, the power of evil, arrayed against the kingdom of "our Lord and of his Christ."[127]

Now let us observe a number of similarities between the man of sin and the beast out of the sea.

1. Both the man and the beast operate under the total power of Satan. The coming of the former is "by the activity of Satan … with all power" (2 Thess. 2:9); to the latter "the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority" (Rev. 13:2). They both are earthly embodiments of Satan.

2. Both the man and the beast are totally anti-God. The former "exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship" (2 Thess. 2:4); the latter "opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God" (Rev. 13:6) and everything connected with God.

3. Both the man and the beast make themselves into God. The former "takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thess. 2:4); in the latter case people worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast?" (Rev. 13:4).

4. Both the man and the beast have only a short time to function. In the same statement about the man being revealed, the text reads that "the Lord Jesus will slay him" (2 Thess. 2:8); the beast is given authority "for forty-two months" (Rev. 13:5).

5. Both the man and the beast are on the way to "perdition." The man is called "the son of perdition" (2 Thess. 2:3); and the beast "goes to perdition" (Rev.

17:11). The end of both is eternal destruction.

Unmistakably, the man of sin and the beast out of the sea represent the same malign reality.

B. The Beast out of the Earth

The beast out of the earth,[128] which John next beholds emerging, has none of the terrifying appearance of the beast out of the sea: "It had two horns like a lamb" (Rev. 13:11). When compared with the first beast's ten horns and seven heads, body like a leopard, feet like a bear, and mouth like a lion,[129] this beast seems positively innocuous. Surely it can do no one any harm. But then it speaks. Rather than a little lamblike "baa," its voice was that of a dragon: "It spoke like a dragon" (v. 11). Hence this second beast is another embodiment of Satan. Likewise it "exercises all the authority of the first beast" (v. 12). Thus the evil triumvirate is now fully on the scene: the dragon on the seashore, the beast out of the sea, and the beast out of the earth.[130]

The important matter to underscore here is the deceptive character of the beast out of the earth. It looks anything but threatening, and its appearance as a lamb suggests a Christlike figure. Christ is called the Lamb (or a lamb) many times in the Book of Revelation.[131] Hence there is the suggestion of a representation of Christ in the figure of the two-horned lamb.[132] Deception is undoubtedly involved, for although the lamb's speech is like that of the dragon (hence, satanic), the lamb appears to all as a guileless and trustworthy figure.

Next we observe that this second beast is wholly a henchman of the first beast. It indeed has all the authority of the first beast (as noted before), but this authority is "in its presence" (Rev. 13:12). Therefore, even as the first beast was worshiped by "the whole earth" (vv. 3–4), the second beast in the presence of the first is constantly engaged in making that worship happen. It "makes the earth and those who dwell in it[133] to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed" (v. 12 NASB). Thus the sole purpose of the second beast is to direct the worship and glorification of the first.[134]

In order to further this adulation of the first beast,[135] the lamblike beast engages in deceptive practices. First, in the presence of the other beast, "he performs great signs [or 'miracles']," so that he "even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men"[136] (Rev. 13:13 NASB). Second, because of these signs that deceive the "earth dwellers," the second beast tells those "who dwell on the earth[137] to make an image" (v. 14 NASB) to the first beast. Third, the second beast gives breath to the image so that "it might even speak" and "cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be

killed”[138] (v. 15 NASB). Believers—those neither deceived by the great signs nor involved with the image made by “earth-dwellers”—are subject to death.

What do we make of all this? First, in line with the interpretation that the first beast initially signifies first-century Roman emperors, the second beast seems primarily to represent the religious cult around the emperors, whose basic purpose was to further the worship and even the deification of the emperor.[139] Not having the vast (ten-horned) power of the emperor, the pagan priests of Rome (with only two horns) seemed to be almost harmless (lamblike). But by their magical practices and sorceries they further duped the pagan world—the “earth-dwellers”—into making an image of the emperor in various places that could even speak.[140] Christians, who, unlike the rest of the world, were not deceived by the godlike imperial image, were nonetheless required to pay homage or be subject to persecution and death. Genuine believers could not salute the emperor as “*Dominus et Deus noster*“ (“our Lord and God”),[141] for Christ was the only Lord and God. As a result, untold numbers of Christians were put to death.

Let us reflect briefly on the image of the beast. It is significant that it is not the second beast but the “earth-dwellers” themselves who make the image. To be sure, this is at the instigation of the second beast, but they all do it: they voluntarily capitulate. Since reference here is to all “earth-dwellers,” hence even beyond the reach of the Roman Empire of John’s day, there must be some further meaning than literally constructing images of the Roman emperors. Since, as we have observed, the first beast is ultimately the “eighth king” who represents a final power and is the focal point of admiration (“the whole earth followed the beast in won der”) and worship (“they worshiped the beast and chanted, ‘Who is like the beast? Who can fight against it?’ “), the second beast is his continuing religious support. In every way possible the lamblike beast intensifies the adulation of the first beast by performing great signs. Thus the “earth-dwellers” make or, to put it a bit differently, conjure up an image of the beast that is almost overwhelming and takes on life in itself (the religious beast giving breath and speech to the image). They worship not only the beast but also the very image of it.[142] The image “speaks” in such fashion as to demand total obedience.

We have seen this phenomenon in the twentieth century to a limited degree in such countries as Germany and Russia. In regard to Nazi Germany, there was an approximation to the worship of Adolf Hitler and the images (pictures, paintings, etc.) made of him. This near worship was accentuated both by those who made a pagan religion of German blood and destiny and by the so-called German Christian Church that expressed devotion to Hitler and the Nazi state. Russia has

had a long history in which the Russian Orthodox Church, the state church, has given support to both czarist and communist leaders. Indeed, in almost every established church there is the strong tendency to give religious support to the governmental authorities. Of course, this may not be worship of the state (as represented by kings, queens, and the like), but inflated images of leadership (with all its pomp and ceremony) often intensify devotion to the political powers.

Thus it is possible that this political and religious coalition will reach its zenith at the close of the age. In any event, the Roman emperors whose deification was supported by the religious cultus is the paradigm in the Book of Revelation of what will yet fully occur.

But there is more to this "beastly" situation than is found in the political/religious arena alone. For, as earlier noted, the first beast is more than a political entity. It signifies also the whole world—"the kingdom of the world"—as dominated by the power of evil. It is this world that is deeply anti-God and anti-Christian and denies divine truth as a basis for law and morality. A profoundly sinful perversity is at work not only in the political arena but also in all human society, making an "image" out of evil and following it "religiously." This applies to every area of life in which mankind substitutes idols for God, an image for reality. People may not directly worship Satan (though many do), but before the images of him they readily bow: self-glorification (even to self-deification),[143] self-gratification (through money, sexual license, pleasure hunting, power seeking), and self-fulfillment (seeking one's own fulfillment as the goal of life). Much more could be added to describe this "beastliness" that grips all "earth-dwellers." But now the truly grotesque feature is that the harmless-appearing lamb, the religious beast, wholly approves of this demonic self-orientation, indeed blesses these images, and fully undergirds the worldly enterprise.

The second beast may be called an "ecclesiastical beast." For here we behold representatives of the worldly church, whatever their outward differ ences, endorsing and demonstrating many things secular. Leaders vie with one another for position and acclaim, many church denominations sprinkle "holy water" on such immoral practices as homosexuality and abortion, and people are taught that success and prosperity are the right of every believer. When this occurs, the world is all the more secure in its sinfulness, for the church is doing the same thing and granting total encouragement to others. The worldly beast is in all its glory as the ecclesiastical beast vents its approval!

Let me add a further word about the second "ecclesiastical beast." It has actually no interest in true faith. With sanctimonious (lamblike) and stentorian

(dragonlike) utterances it points away from good and gives justification to evil. This is done very subtly, because it uses God-language in such a way as to deceive people into thinking that it speaks truly. Later in Revelation the second beast is described as "the false prophet";[144] for indeed he pretends to speak for God while leading people astray.

In many ways this is "the apostasy" come to full flower. Rather than standing for God, biblical truth, and moral values, the church is more and more deceived into walking the way of the world and, in turn, endorsing that way. It is a tragic situation that can only end in chaos and destruction.

Returning to the Scripture about the second beast, let us observe further that "it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave,[145] to be marked on the right hand or the forehead" with "the name of the beast or the number of its name" (Rev. 13:16–17). The worship of the beast and its image results inevitably ("it causes all") in economic activity being wholly marked by the beast: "No one can buy or sell unless he has the mark" on his right hand or forehead (vv. 16–17). The mark of the beast on the right hand or forehead denotes the capitulation of self to be Satan's instrument—the right hand signifying activity, the forehead implying mental power.[146] The result is that only those who have so capitulated—hence have been so marked—can buy or sell in the marketplace of the world.[147] It is the way of selfish con cern, exploitation, and self-aggrandizement: there is no other way to go for those who bear the mark of the beast.

Yet both are the way of ultimate destruction. An angel later cries out a terrible warning: "If anyone worships the beast or its image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also shall drink the wine of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone … for ever and ever" (Rev. 14:9–11). Such a person has sold out to the devil: the devotion of his heart (worship), mind (forehead), strength (hand) to Satan. This is just the opposite of true devotion to the Lord: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul (or mind), and with all your strength" (Deut. 6:5 NIV).[148] Such a one will live forever in the presence of the Lord, enjoying His love and blessing. If the Lord is not the center of devotion, another—Satan, the beast, the "man of wickedness"—will be. The terrible result is eternal destruction.

A final word regarding the mark of the beast. The mark is said to be "the name of the beast or the number of its name" (Rev. 13:17).[149] Then this cryptic comment is added: "This calls for wisdom: let him who has understanding

reckon the number of the beast, for it is a human number,[150] its number is six hundred and sixty-six" (v. 18). Many attempts have been made to identify this number with a particular known emperor[151] or some other person in later history;[152] however, this procedure is probably ill-advised. Six hundred and sixty-six (like many other numbers in Revelation) is a symbolic figure, and most likely signifies the beast in its most evil human manifestation[153] —the eschatological beast at the consummation of history. Roman emperors in John's time doubtless represented this evil,[154] but John foresaw another yet to come[155] so totally evil that even as it is being described, John says, "It goes to perdition." This is the final God-boasting, world-acclaiming, Christian-persecuting beast that, supported by the devil, is in human form.

Now in retrospect concerning what has been said about "the man of sin," "that Wicked" (KJV), it is apparent that the second beast is quite similar to him in various aspects. One aspect in particular stands out: both the man of sin and the second beast are masters of deception. Recall the statement that the *parousia* of the man of sin would be "by the activity of Satan … with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish" (2 Thess. 2:9–10). Compare similar words about the second beast: "It works great signs, even making fire come down from heaven … [thus] it deceives those who dwell on earth [i.e., 'those who are to perish']" (Rev. 13:13–14). False signs and vicious deception are hallmarks of both the man of wickedness and the second beast.

This brings up an interesting question: Is the second beast only similar to the man of sin, or is it somehow identical with at least one aspect of him? I have earlier commented on many similarities between the man of sin and the first beast and concluded that the two figures represent the same evil reality. It is interesting, we may now observe, that there is one striking feature about the man of sin that is not depicted in the first beast, namely the performing of counterfeit miracles and wicked deception. With the second beast, such activity is elaborated in vivid detail.

The man of sin, the Wicked One, I submit, is therefore actually a kind of composite beast. In himself he represents both the secular and the religious components: the man of sin is at one and the same time the ten-horned and seven-headed beast out of the sea *and* the two-horned, one-headed lamb out of the earth. Each is the counterpart of the other. He is both terrifying and seemingly harmless; he both blasphemes God Almighty and demonstrates miraculous powers. He is the awesome combination of worldly power and

idolatrous veneration; he is a kind of wholly secular entity supported by the religious (non-Christian) forces of the earth.

Finally, it should be clear that what is being represented by these eschatological figures is man. Neither the Wicked One nor the beast(s) is Satan, however much each is his instrument. Nor is any of them a demon under Satan's direction, however demonically activated they may be. They are both man: the Wicked One is "the man of sin"; the beast has "the number of a man." Here is man inspired by Satan—*man in open and final revolt against Almighty God.*

EXCURSUS: THE BEAST IN REVELATION 11 AND THE TWO WITNESSES

In the discussion about the two beasts I have not commented on an earlier account in the Book of Revelation that likewise speaks of "the beast." We have observed the emergence of the beast "out of the sea" and the beast "out of the earth" in Revelation 13 and also the "eighth" beast in Revelation 17 who ascends "from the bottomless pit."[156] This last depiction of the beast, as observed, is manifestly the climactic appearance of demonic evil in its effort to destroy all Christian witness from the earth. For along with "the ten kings" it "will make war on the Lamb"; but "in one hour" it is all over, and the victory is the Lamb's. Now we note, for the first time, that this beast "from the bottomless pit" was earlier shown in Revelation 11 as emerging on the scene: "the beast that ascends from the bottomless pit" (v. 7). It is obvious that this is the same eschatological beast—up from the pit—and that it is doing essentially the same thing: it "will make war" (v. 7). And, as in Revelation 17, the war is against Christianity (against "the Lamb," v. 14); in Revelation 11 it is against Christ's "two witnesses" (vv. 3, 7): the war will be "upon them" (v. 7).

Revelation 11 earlier depicts a trampling of "the holy city" by "the nations" and two witnesses prophesying during that same period: "The nations … will trample over the holy city[157] for forty-two months. And I will grant my two witnesses power to prophesy for one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth" (vv. 2–3). The witnessing covers the same period as the trampling,[158] and belongs to the end of history immediately preceding the beast's making war upon them. It is the period of the persecuted (trampled) church's final witness.

The two witnesses who prophesy during this period are described as "the two olive trees and the two lampstands which stand before the Lord of the earth" (v. 4). The "two olive trees" relate to Zechariah 4, where they precede these words spoken to Zerubbabel: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts" (v. 6). The olive trees are later declared to be "the two anointed who stand by the Lord of the whole earth" (v. 14). These words refer to the task of rebuilding the temple amid many difficulties, not by human strength but by

the power of the Holy Spirit. The “two anointed”[159] become in Revelation the two Spirit-anointed witnesses who, as the church,[160] bear witness at the end of history. As noted, they appear in sackcloth, symbolizing a call to repentance and the approaching judgment. But also, as the text continues to show, during the days of their witnessing they have great miracle-working power.[161] No foe can stand against them.

What this suggests is that the church in the time of the end will be Spiritanointed to a high degree. It will witness with great authority and effectiveness. Its message of repentance and coming judgment, its proclamation of the gospel,[162] its miraculous deeds all will point to the church successfully carrying forward the gospel commission to its final climax. This is indeed a challenging and wonderful prospect!

When—and only when—the witness is complete, does the beast ascend from the bottomless pit: “And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that ascends from the bottomless pit will make war upon them[163] and conquer them and kill them” (Rev. 11:7). The gospel has been testified to all the world; the task assigned by Jesus to His witnesses (also recall Matt. 24:14) has been done. The beast is too late on the scene! He conquers and kills utterly to no avail![164]

The beast in Revelation 11 accordingly is the same as the beast(s) in Revelation 13. The first beast conquers (v. 7) and the second beast kills (v. 15). What is not said in Revelation 13 is that the saints have already won the victory through their witness. So whatever calamities may happen to the church when the beast breaks onto the scene, the Great Commission will already have been gloriously fulfilled.

VIII. THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION

Our concern continues to be the increase of evil as a sign and precursor of the return of Christ. We have earlier noted the words of Jesus about apostasy: "Most men's love will grow cold" (Matt. 24:12).[165] This is followed by His statement about "the gospel of the kingdom" and "the end"[166] (Matt. 24:14). Next we come to the words of Jesus about "the abomination of desolation" (Matt. 24:15 NASB)—and to this we now give our attention.

The text reads, "So when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION[167] which was spoken through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place[168] (let the reader understand)…" (NASB).[169] Then will follow a period of "great tribulation"[170] (Matt. 24:21), which Jesus describes, and then declares that "immediately after the tribulation of those days" (v. 29) He will come "on the clouds." Hence, the event of the "abomination of desolation" will be a sign ("when you see") of the coming of the Lord.

We have previously observed how this coming (*erchomai*) of Jesus was fulfilled initially in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.[171] Now we note that the words of Jesus concerning "the abomination of desolation" also had their near fulfillment in that same event. By observing what occurred then we should be better able to understand the meaning of such an "abomination" before His final coming.

However, in looking at the significance of "the abomination of desolation," we need to turn even farther back, to the Book of Daniel. The words of Lord Jesus are quite specific on this: "… spoken through Daniel the prophet … (let the reader understand)." So first we will observe what Daniel himself had to say about this expression.

There are three references in Daniel to "the abomination of desolation," though the language in the first account is slightly different. First, Daniel 9:27: "And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week[172] he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate" (NASB). Next, Daniel 11:31: "And forces from him will arise, desecrate

the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation ['the abominable thing that causes desolation' NEB]" (NASB). Finally, Daniel 12:11—"And from the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days"[173] (NASB).

It is generally recognized that references to "the abomination of desolation" have an initial fulfillment in the desecration of the Jewish temple by the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes.[174] Antiochus, after making a covenant with many apostate Jews, captured the city in 170 B.C. He plundered it, set it ablaze, stripped the temple of its precious vessels, and in 167 B.C. caused all sacrifices to cease. A few months later Antiochus placed a pagan altar in the temple, offering swine and other unclean beasts. To climax it all, he set up in the temple an image to the pagan deity, Zeus Olympius. This was "the abomination of desolation."[175] The next three and a half years after the sacrifice stopped were years of severe oppression and continuing sacrilege against the temple until Judas Maccabeus restored the worship of God and rededi-cated the temple[176] in 164 B.C.[177]

Now the words of Jesus that relate to the desecration of the temple in A.D. 70 can take on more concrete significance: "When you see the abomination of desolation … spoken through Daniel the prophet … then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. (Matt. 24:15–16 NASB). For that will be the time of Jerusalem's total destruction, and of great tribulation to follow.

What then was this "abomination of desolation"? Actually, it was not unlike what happened under Antiochus Epiphanes, except that in this case the desolator was Titus, the Roman emperor. As the temple was being destroyed, the Roman legions under Titus brought their military standards of eagles to the holy precincts, offered up sacrifices to them, and saluted Titus as imperator.[178] Thus Roman eagle ensigns rising over the Jewish temple, the offering of sacrifice to them, and the adulation of Titus—all represented "the abomination of desolation." Later, as further desecration, the statue of Titus was erected on the site of the destroyed and desolated temple. Thus did the Roman emperor assume the place of God.

This brings us again to the close of the age. For as we have previously observed, all that is said about Jerusalem—its destruction and desolation—refers ultimately to events prior to the return of Christ. Antiochus Epiphanes and Titus with their sacrilegious practices and blasphemy against the holy temple and the living God are types and precursors of the final abomination.[179]

Thus we come once more to "the Wicked" who will carry the abomination of desolation to its ultimate height. Exalting himself over all gods and objects of

worship, and taking his seat in "the temple of God," he will proclaim to all the world his deity. This Wicked, this composite beast, this mouthpiece of Satan, is man in his final, and promethean, exaltation of himself as God.

Now we raise the question, For how long a period will this "abomination" be manifest? We have previously observed, first, that "forty-two months" are mentioned for the time of the beast. This, of course, is the equivalent of 3½ years, or "half a week"[180] (in Daniel's terminology). Since the desolator in Daniel's prophecy causes sacrifice to stop "in the middle of the week"[181] and his abominations continue thereafter, this is a period of 3½ years, or 42 months.[182] Later, as we observed in Daniel, the statement is made that there will be 1,290 days from the time the abomination of desolation is set up until the end: this again is approximately 3½ years, or 42 months. Hence, the time the beast exercises authority and the extended period from the appearance of the desolation of abomination is the same.

Thus the various figures given in days, months, or years signify the same period of time. There is, I might add, yet another designation for the same period, namely, "a time, and times, and half a time," (a "time" = one year, "times" = two years, and "half a time" = six months) in Revelation 12:14[183] and similarly "a time, two times, and half a time" in Daniel 7:25 and 12:7. Daniel 7 contains a vivid portrayal of the anti-God person: a "little one" who comes up among ten horns with "eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things" (v. 8); further, "he shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High … and they shall be given into his hand for a time, two times, and half a time" (v. 25). Daniel asks, "How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?" (12:6).[184] The reply is that "it would be for a time, two times, and half a time; and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be accomplished" (v. 7). Again, it is evident that the same time period is being spoken of—the time of the anti-God's total sway and the desolation of God's people.

It is important to recognize that the time—whether measured in days, months, years, or "times"—is a relatively short period totaling three and a half years. This may be a literal calendar designation, or it may symbolically refer to a limited time of Satan's final power.[185] Since three and a half is one-half of seven —the symbolic number of wholeness—reference may be to an abbreviated, even broken period. Satan (through the man of sin, beast, desolator, "little horn"), though seemingly great, cannot completely destroy. His power is always broken and incomplete. However, during this brief time there will be great devastation.

Finally, in regard to "the abomination of desolation," there will be this

culminating manifestation. Rather than putting an end to Jewish sacrifice and offering or desecrating the temple sanctuary, the desolator will seek to end Christian worship and abolish all testimony to Jesus Christ. The attack will no longer be on the physical city of Jerusalem but on the city of God, the church of the living God. The armies and weapons and strategies will not be directed against earthly strongholds but against God's holy people. It will be Satan's final effort to erase every trace of Christian witness from the earth.

It is apparent that as this age draws to an end, there will be an intensification of the attack of evil upon Christian faith. We have earlier discussed the matter of the growth of the gospel and its successful proclamation to all the nations (the *ethnē)* before the end comes. But along with this ongoing fulfillment of the Great Commission, evil becomes, and will become, all the more vicious. This we have observed in terms of increasing violence and immorality, of religious apostasy, in the emerging spirit of antichrist, and in the man of sin with whom all this culminates. At present the full release of this evil is restrained. Thus society is checked from its total expression, and Christian faith is not wholly opposed by the surrounding secular culture. Nonetheless, there are ominous signs both of near total moral collapse and of an increasing virulence against all things Christian.

In America this virulence is expressed in a growing undercurrent of opposition to Christian faith and morals as *the* truth of God. This stems not only from secular humanism and New Age thinking—however bitter their opposition—but also from a spirit of religious pluralism that steadily dilutes Christian uniqueness. Further, Christ is often defamed on the screen and in art,[186] ministers and priests are frequently depicted as corrupt and immoral,[187] biblical morality is replaced by situational ethics, sexual promiscuity is now being redefined as "safe sex" (no moral questions asked), and on and on. Although millions of Americans still stand firm in faith and morality (and that number is growing), there is an ever-deepening hostility by millions of others against all things essentially Christian. The church is becoming a beleaguered garrison in a hostile land.

This of course does not mean that Christian faith cannot influence the secular world. It is important to recall some words of Jesus to His disciples: "You are the salt of the earth" and "You are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13–14). As salt, Christians must continue to press for high standards in political life, economic affairs, education, the arts, and in society at large, and in this way seek to preserve society from destroying itself. As light, Christians must seek to shine brightly in the midst of a world of corrupt practices and not hesitate to turn the

light on all that is shady and dark. *Christians must not withdraw from the world*, for none of us knows what changes can occur by energetic participation. Doubtless, the most significant changes in the secular realm will be personal. Through the faithfulness of Christians who overcome frequent ridicule and persecution, many people will turn to Christ and experience salvation. Changed people can cause changes in society by their faithfulness.

A further positive word needs to be spoken. The basic order of society, particularly the political, is God-given. The first beast in Revelation 13 was not Rome itself with its imperial rule, but *the perversion of that rule* by lust for power, ruthlessness, and deification. We must also bear in mind that "governing authorities" are "instituted by God" (Rom. 13:1). Hence public office ought to be viewed as a trust from God. Therefore godly people should seek to participate in it, and all Christians should be concerned about government's proper and good functioning. Despite the "beastly" tendencies of the state, Christians are not simply to forswear involvement in the political arena. The state first of all belongs to God, not Satan!

But having said these things, we must face the biblical truth that, whatever the impact the church can make on the world, things in society will become progressively worse as the end draws near. Christians, despite their growing numbers, will more and more be vilified and persecuted. This is the result of a number of factors. For example, the secular world, through its acts of violence and perversion, is increasingly in radical opposition to everything Christian. There is the growing antagonism of anti-Christian religions (including resurgent Islam, the New Age movement, and a multiplicity of cults).[188] Growing secularism gladly expunges all references to God and the Bible from every day life. Subtle attacks have arisen within the nominal church, which espouses worldly values and is bitter against the true church of Word and Spirit. None of this will decrease in the time of the end; rather, the opposition and attacks will grow more and more pronounced.

Indeed, before the end comes, a vastly heightened demonic attack will be unleashed against the church of Jesus Christ. The restraint on "the man of sin," of total lawlessness and iniquity, will be removed. The two "beasts" who combine political and religious power will temporarily be victorious over the people of God. The "desolator" will forbid Christian worship, education, and missionary outreach from occurring. The saints—the believing church—will be ruthlessly fought against, and for a time vanquished.

Martyrdom, like that experienced by the early church under the Roman emperors, will again be common. Already in the twentieth century more believers have paid the ultimate price than in any previous period in history.

Today, as I write, there has been a reprieve in such countries as Russia and China. For this we may be extremely grateful, not only for the lessening of persecution but also for fresh opportunities to proclaim the gospel. But the doors could close again in those countries and elsewhere, with increased persecution even to death.[189]

Of course, we do not know whether such persecution is imminent or not, but the "changing of the guard" in totalitarian countries is no assurance of continued freedom.

Whether or not there is increased physical persecution and martyrdom, the deeper issue, doubtless, is spiritual. What the secular world desires is not so much the physical death of Christians as their being stripped of all voice and influence. They want no Christian faith on the earth[190] to bar their way to total self-expression. The world desires the neutralization, the isolation, the enervation—in very fact, the death of Christian witness. This by no means excludes physical martyrdom, but spiritual isolation can be even more severe. In any event, evil will for a time prove victorious.

Ultimately the important thing for Christians to realize is that God is in it all! It is not that the gospel has failed, or will fail, when evil breaks forth in full power. God *allows* the evil beast to emerge, exercise authority, and conquer the faithful.[191] This is not always easy for believers to understand. Most of us would probably prefer that the beast be smashed before it can raise its ugly head. But this is not God's way. It was smashed once at Calvary *only after* the beast had done its worst in the crucifixion of the Son of God. The beast received a mortal wound then, but God in His omniscience has allowed it to live on until the time of the end. The passion of Christ ending in seeming defeat and death by the beast will likewise be the passion of the church. Satan will make his last deadly attack and will again seemingly succeed. We cannot really expect it to be otherwise.

But, finally, as with the Resurrection, there will be victory. The Christ who rose from the grave triumphant over death and hell will return this time not only as victor but also as the One who will utterly destroy all evil. The man of sin, the deadly beast(s), the Antichrist, the desolator of God's people—however named—will be out in the open. *Totally exposed*, it will receive God's own total deathblow. The victory will be not ours, but the Lord's!

Meanwhile, knowing the final outcome, we must be patient, keep on with the proclamation of the gospel to the ends of the earth, seek to be salt and light in an evil world, and be prepared to endure evil's expanding power and influence. The last will not be easy, for it will mean much faith and endurance.[192] But by God's grace *His* triumph is sure.

IX. GREAT TRIBULATION

Another sign of the end, the near advent of the Lord, is that of great tribulation. This is to be understood primarily from Jesus' words: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven … then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven … and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven. (Matt. 24:29–30).[193] The word "immediately" places the tribulation referred to—described as "great tribulation" in verse 21—in close proximity to the final advent of Christ.

Before looking specifically into "great tribulation" mentioned above, which is unmistakably a sign of the end, we will first examine the broader picture of tribulation. Tribulation is frequently declared in the New Testament to be a fact of Christian existence. Jesus speaks to His disciples elsewhere: "In the world you have tribulation. (John 16:33)—not *will have*, but *have*. In this sense tribulation is a continuing reality of Christian life and witness, because the "world" is basically in opposition to what Christianity represents. Hence persecution is to be expected: "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you" (John 15:20). Paul says much the same thing later: "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). Thus tribulation—in the sense of persecution, affliction, oppression[194] — is invariably the lot of the believer who truly follows his Lord.

Let us look a bit further. Paul and Barnabas visited various churches in Asia Minor "strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Tribulation thus is not only a fact of Christian life in this world; it is also a *necessary* one. Similarly Paul later urges the Thessalonians that "no one be moved [or 'unsettled' NIV] by these afflictions [or 'tribulations' KJV].[195] You yourselves know that this is to be our lot" (1 Thess. 3:3). Paul also speaks to the Thessalonians of their "persecutions" and "afflictions [or 'tribulations' KJV]" as avenues by which they are "made worthy of the kingdom of God" (2 Thess. 1:4–5). In such language the emphasis is unmistakable: tribulation is not only an inevitable fact of Christian life—the believers' lot—but it is also the proving ground for genuine existence in the kingdom of God. Does

one truly belong to Christ and willingly suffer with Him,[196] risk life, even lay it down if need be?

In his letter to the Romans Paul affirms the significance of tribulation for Christian hope. Against the background of being "justified by faith" and having "peace with God," Paul states that "we exult in hope of the glory of God" (5:1–2 NASB). Then he adds, "We also exult[197] in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance [or 'endurance'];[198] and perseverance, proven character;[199] and proven character, hope…" (vv. 3–4 NASB). The progression is noteworthy: Beginning with hope, Paul moves through tribulation to the endurance that follows and the proven character that develops, and on to hope again. However, this hope is obviously far richer and deeper because it is the fruit of tribulation, endurance, and developed character. Hence tribulation, far from dimming hope of the glory ahead, is the primary stage in leading to an even greater hope. Instead of feeling disturbed by tribulation—affliction, persecution—"*we exult*" in it! Paul, it may be supposed, could add that "the worse it gets, the more radiant that hope of glory becomes"!

Later in Romans Paul has an extraordinary statement about the love of Christ. Already he had said (and this I did not mention above) that "hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us"[200] (Rom. 5:5 NASB). Now referring later in his letter to the love of God, or Christ, Paul asks, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (8:35). Then Paul adds, freely quoting Psalm 44:22: "For thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered" (v. 36). Then—against what seems like an impossibly dreary picture of tribulation, even death—Paul triumphantly affirms: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors[201] through him who loved us!" (v. 37). Therefore, whatever may seem to conquer the Christian believer—tribulation, persecution, famine, sword, even death itself—is actually' 'overconquered"!

Here, then, is a new motif: not only do all these things, if patiently endured, make for a deeper and richer hope of the coming glory, but we are also, both now and in the life to come, "more than conquerors"! The climax is beautiful: "For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities ['demons' NIV],[202] nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (vv. 38–39). In that vast love —"poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit"—nothing can separate us: we overwhelmingly conquer all.

Here we return briefly to Matthew 24 and observe an earlier reference to tribulation.[203] Jesus says to His disciples, “They will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake…. But he who endures to the end will be saved” (vv. 9, 13).[204] Thus the primary mention of tribulation and endurance, also of death and salvation, is to be found in the words of Jesus. This is quite similar to Paul’s later emphasis (in Acts 14:22) that “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” By holding firm through all tribulation—including death itself—the followers of Jesus have the victory: “He who endures to the end will be saved.” In Paul’s words again: We are “more than conquerors.”

Some of the emphases on tribulation thus far noted are to be found also in the Book of Revelation. John, to whom the revelation was given, says, “I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation, and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (1:9). Note that “tribulation” is immediately followed by “endurance”[205] as in Romans 5:3. John says that he is sharing both (also “the kingdom”)[206] with his readers, who are “the seven churches that are in Asia” (1:4). John has obviously been exiled to the island of Patmos—just off the coast of Asia Minor—since he speaks of being there as a result of his testimony. Thus John shares the tribulation with the seven churches.

Now we come to the words of Jesus who Himself speaks directly to the church in Smyrna: “I know your tribulation…. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (2:9–10). Tribulation—fairly short (“ten days”) but unmistakably intense, even “unto death”—was to be the lot of some of the Smymeans. Again, similar to Paul’s teaching in Romans 8, there is tribulation, suffering, and death; but even more patently here the devil is declared to be the source. (Recall the “principalities,” or “demons,” in Romans 8.) Nonetheless, the devil cannot win, because finally they will receive “the crown of life.” Thus, one might add, the Smyrneans, like the Romans, will be “more than conquerors.”

Now we move to another expression of tribulation, sometimes designated “great tribulation,” which is sent upon the forces of evil. This is not the tribulation visited upon God’s people (which I have been describing) that makes for persecution, suffering, and death and whose roots are in the opposition of the world to Christian faith.[207] Rather, this is tribulation from God Himself sent upon those who do the works of evil. Here we may refer back for a moment to 2 Thessalonians where Paul, in speaking of persecutions and afflictions (or

tribulations) by which we are made worthy for the kingdom of God,[208] also speaks of "the righteous judgment of God … since indeed God deems it just to repay with affliction [or 'tribulation'] those who afflict [us]" (1:5–6). Hence, so to speak, there will be tribulation upon the "tribulators"— and this will be greater and more intense.

In this connection we again take up the Book of Revelation and continue with further words of Jesus. In this case He addresses the church at Thyatira, which, despite its "patient endurance" (Rev. 2:19), is putting up with the false prophetess Jezebel, who, by Satan's devices, is leading some of the believers into immorality. Jesus warns, "Behold, I will throw her on a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her doings; and I will strike her children dead" (vv. 22–23). This tribulation is quite unlike the tribulation that is the lot of every true believer. It is rather "great tribulation" that God sends as punishment upon evil—those who are involved in "the deep things of Satan" (2:24), who seek to prevent and destroy the good, and who are distorting the true Christian witness. The church at Thyatira has endured and suffered much (as have all the churches of Asia Minor), hence has experienced much tribulation, but upon those who follow Satan's devices, there will come "great tribulation."

Now we again return to Matthew 24, this time to the place where Jesus also speaks of "great tribulation." This may be referred to as the Great Tribulation.[209] Jesus had earlier spoken of tribulation that would occur to His followers ("they will deliver you up to tribulation," v. 9) and the need for endurance to the end. After this He speaks of a time when the "desolating sacrilege" (or "the abomination of desolation") will stand "in the holy place" (v. 15) and a little later He adds, "Then there will be great tribulation" (v. 21). It is clear that this great tribulation is due to divine vengeance—"these are days of vengeance, to fulfil all that is written" (Luke 21:22).[210] It is God's judgment primarily upon unbelieving Jerusalem,[211] *but also* ultimately upon an unbelieving world. Thus there will be "great distress[212] … upon the earth and wrath upon this people" (Luke 21:23). Hence all will know severe distress, or tribulation, even as divine judgment is poured out upon "this people" who are to receive God's vengeance. This great tribulation or distress is not described, but that it will be *intense* is unmistakable; for it will be "such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be"[213] (Matt. 24:21). That it will be universal is clear from Jesus' next words: "And if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened" (v. 22). There is no suggestion that "the elect"—God's people—will be removed

from the Great Tribulation; rather they will live through it. But God in His mercy will shorten the days for their sake.[214] It is important to recognize that "the days of vengeance" in this Great Tribulation refer to days of judgment. They are consequently days of the wrath of God upon all who work iniquity, who have spurned His ways. What happened to an unbelieving Jerusalem in the first generation will happen manifoldly to an unbelieving world in the last generation. Those who have spurned God's offer of grace, persecuted God's servants, and gloried in themselves will receive the full measure of divine judgment.[215] Such will be something of the "great tribulation" they will endure.

What of God's servants during this time? By no means is this Great Tribulation a time of judgment upon them, nor is the operation of God's wrath directed against those who believe. How then can God's "elect" endure a devastation and judgment so vast as to engulf an unrighteous world? The answer may be seen first in the instructions Jesus gave in relation to the destruction of Jerusalem. The key word is *flight*: "Let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it" (Luke 21:21).[216] Since the visitation of divine judgment was in that case local (upon Jerusalem and the immediate environs of Judea), the word then was: Flee quickly, get out, do not enter the area of devastation. Believers alive at the time of that tribulation, while in a sense living through it, did have a way of escape.[217]

But now what about the vastly larger situation in which, instead of an unbelieving city and nation, the judgment will be on an unbelieving and hostile world? What will be the case when it is no longer divine vengeance on Jerusalem and Judea or on the Roman Empire in its idolatry and immoralities and its intense persecution of Christians—but when it is matter of the whole world? In such a time of far greater and broader tribulation, how can believers possibly be spared the judgments of God? Yet somehow this must happen, since the wrath of God is not on them but on the world.

We turn again to the Book of Revelation where the answer becomes clearer. I have already called attention to the "great tribulation" that God was to send upon the evil forces perverting many in the church of Thyatira. Of course, that was local,[218] but it does demonstrate that God will not allow evil to go unavenged. We next observe that in the message to His church in Philadelphia, Jesus says, "Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial which is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell upon the earth" (Rev. 3:10). These words of Jesus, although including the local scene, also extend far beyond it to "the whole world." Whether this is viewed as the

Roman Empire (which, in a sense, was the whole world[219] at the time the messages in Revelation were spoken) or the entire earth, (wherever people are) does not matter. In any event the trial will come upon "those who dwell on the earth" (the "earth-dwellers"), an expression that, as we have earlier noted, refers particularly to the earth in its godlessness. The "hour of trial" thus refers not to a time of testing of God's people but to "*the* hour of trial," thus to *the* Great Tribulation that will come upon the world in its opposition to God.[220] It points to that awful time at the end when God's final judgments will be poured out.[221] After speaking of this "hour of trial," Jesus proceeds to say, "I am coming quickly"[222] (Rev. 3:11 NASB). "Quickly," it might be added, accords with the "immediately" of His statement in Matthew 24:29: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days… ."

But now we must return to the question, How will God keep His people from this "hour of trial"? If it points to the time of God's judgments coming upon an unbelieving world, and such judgments are universal, how can believers avoid them? The answer is "God will keep them from… ," meaning that whatever may happen to the "earth-dwellers," Christian believers will somehow be protected. "Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you… ." Thus believers are called not to be catapulted out of the world but to endurance within it.[223] As they patiently endure the persecution and affliction that the world brings against them, believers will be kept by God from the judgments He will release upon His foes and those who oppose His people.

To be kept "from," it bears repeating, is not to be removed from.[224] It is, of course, true (as we have noted) that the Christians who were in Jerusalem at the time of its destruction were told to flee from the devastation (in that sense to "remove" themselves). However, there can be no flight when it is a matter of the whole world, for there is no place to go. The answer again is God's keeping from, or safekeeping. If we patiently endure, He will keep us safe. If we hold fast, regardless of the attacks of the world—persecution, affliction, suffering, even death—all of which will multiply as the end draws near,[225] God will shield His own from the judgments that are to be poured out upon the oppressors. There is no need for removal—a kind of escape hatch into the beyond—for God promises to protect those who belong to Him.

Let us look further in the Book of Revelation. For as important as the passage in Revelation 3 is, the most vivid picture is that of "the great tribulation" multitude in Revelation 7. John has now been transported in the Spirit to heaven, a voice having said, " 'Come up hither, and I will show you what must take place after this.' At once I was in the Spirit…" (4:1–2). After a number of visions,

John beholds "a great multitude which no man could number … clothed in white robes … crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb'" (7:9–10). Then one of the "elders" in heaven identifies this multitude clothed in white: "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation;[226] they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (vv. 13–14). Then follows a beautiful picture of these Great Tribulation saints before the throne of God, serving Him day and night and knowing the blessings of the Lamb with tribulation forever over: "God will wipe every tear from their eyes!" (vv. 15–17). This is a preview of the climactic pictures of eternal bliss as shown in Revelation 21 and 22.[227]

Regarding a point of prior concern, it is obvious that those so richly blessed in heaven—the "great multitude which no man could number"—are those who have *come out of* the Great Tribulation. They did not avoid it, nor were they snatched from it, but they went through it, emerging victorious on the other side. Since these Great Tribulation saints doubtlessly represent the believers of the end times[228] (any local designation such as believers dwelling in Jerusalem and Judea, or the church in Philadelphia—both already noted—having dropped away), we are all the more ready to ask what happened to them during this climactic tribulation.

For an answer we need to look back in the chapter to the *sealing* of the servants of God. The scene is vivid: four angels are about to release the four winds that will devastate the world when another angel, who has "the seal of the living God," cries out, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads" (Rev. 7:3). The sealing is unmistakably for protection—to prevent them from being harmed when the judgments of God are released upon the world. This is doubly confirmed later when, after the judgments have begun, locusts with fearsome power to torture people are told "not to harm the grass or earth or any green growth or any tree, but only those of mankind who have not the seal of God upon their foreheads" (9:3–4). The seal, therefore, marks out those who are "the servants of our God" so that no harm will come to them, regardless of the injury to nature or man.[229] Those sealed, according to Revelation 7:4, are said to be "a hundred and forty-four thousand … out of every tribe of the sons of Israel," with twelve thousand sealed out of each tribe. It seems apparent that this is a composite figure and that "Israel" here represents Christian[230] believers sealed from the final judgments of God.

The picture, then, is one of divine protection. No matter how great the tribulation upon the world, the servants of God are sealed from the divine

judgments. This does not in any way mean that they are exempt from the persecution of the world. Such tribulation including suffering and death is their lot. In fact, in another scene, in Revelation 6, we see “under the altar the souls” of those “who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne” (v. 9). Many more, they are told, will likewise be killed for the sake of the gospel—and as the Book of Revelation shows, this martyrdom continues to the very end.[231] However, whatever their lot of persecution, suffering, or even death, the saints of God are *totally* shielded from the judgments of God. Indeed, these very judgments are God’s vindication of His “elect”—those “under the altar” who cry out, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?” (v. 10). He does hear their cry; He releases His judgments and preserves His own in the midst of His outpoured wrath.

As the judgments of God are released upon the world and with far greater intensity toward the end, those who are truly His servants will be untouched. The Book of Revelation depicts everincreasing calamities: with the opening of the seals and the horsemen riding forth, death and Hades are given power over *one-fourth* of the earth, and so kill with sword, famine, and pestilence (6:8) ; with the blast of the trumpets *onethird* of the earth, sea, rivers, heavenly bodies, and mankind are smitten (8:7–9:19); with the outpouring of the bowls of wrath *all* the earth, sea, rivers, sun, and mankind at large receive the divine judgment (16.1–10).[232] These are patently not just natural disasters;[233] else the servants of God would be as afflicted as anyone else. Rather, they are divine visitations in which the godless increasingly feel the severity of divine judgment upon their sin and evil. They are also a call to repentance, but to no avail. Even when one-third of mankind is slain, “the rest … did not repent” (9:20–21); even when the total sun scorches people with fierce heat, they curse God—“they did not repent and give him glory” (Rev. 16:8–9).[234]

Hence at the time of the end there will be increasing tribulation across the face of the earth. It will be upon all the “earth-dwellers,” even to a point of such intensity as to be designated as the Great Tribulation.[235] The saints will not be affected by it, for they will “come out of it, having “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14). Moreover, they have been willing to endure, even unto death, whatever travail and persecution has been their lot. Hence the judgments of God do not fall upon them. But upon all who are not “sealed” by God, the judgments will be increasingly fearsome.

What, finally, are we to say about the Great Tribulation, which will immediately precede the return of the Lord? Are there signs that it is at hand?

Although it is difficult to answer definitely, there can be little question but that God's judgments are upon the earth, whether or not they are fully recognized as such. We live in an age of increasing rebellion against the rule of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and principles of law and morality. Turning instead to a totally self-serving view of life, spurning the life-giving gospel, many are walking in the way of the world—the way of death. Although there may be outward success and achievement, there is much inward disturbance. There is a gnawing inward sense that somehow things are not right, as well as widespread deep anxiety and foreboding. These result from the judgments of God—whether yet partial (only "one-fourth" or "one-third") or nearing totality.[236] The call to repentance goes unheeded—as people move on in increasing opposition to the things of God while ever intensifying judgment comes upon them from heaven.

Doubtless we can expect this situation to intensify in these latter days as the gospel goes forth in final testimony to all the nations. Either people will be drawn by the proclamation of salvation to Christ or they will be repelled and hardened by it. The message will be "a fragrance from life to life" for many, but for others it will be "a fragrance from death to death" (2 Cor. 2:16). This means, in the latter case, condem nation and judgment,[237] for "he who does not obey the Son … the wrath of God rests upon him" (John 3:36). Opposition will grow toward the gospel and hatred against those who represent it. And God's judgments consequently will be increasingly severe. The divine judgments still call to repentance (they are not merely punitive) and sternly warn concerning the ultimate end of all who oppose God's way and truth. But the "earth-dwellers" will not hear; they continue to bow to the beast and bear his number in the marketplace of the world. So they move, step by step, into ever accelerating judgment and ultimate destruction.

EXCURSUS: PRETRIBULATIONISM[238]

Since the mid-nineteenth century a number of evangelical biblical interpreters have espoused the view that the church of true believers will not have to endure the Great Tribulation.[239] The church throughout history does experience general tribulation, but when the time of the Great Tribulation arrives, the church will be removed[240] from earth to heaven. Unbelievers, however, will remain on earth during this time of unprecedented trouble.

Pretribulationists generally affirm that Revelation 4–19 describes the period of the Great Tribulation. John F. Walvoord writes, "The major Scripture portion in the New Testament on the [great] tribulation is the Book of Revelation, chapters 4–19."[241] The claim is that since the church is not mentioned by name in these chapters (whereas it is mentioned seven times in chapters 2 and 3), and since the various scenes in chapters 6–19 are filled with pictures of unparalleled devastation and destruction that God in His wrath pours out on the earth, the church must have been earlier removed from the scene. Wal- voord quotes Revelation 6:17, "For the great day of their [God and Christ's] wrath is come and who is able to stand?" and later adds, "The only way one could be kept from that wrath would be to be delivered beforehand."[242] Against those who might argue for God's preservation in this time of wrath, Paul Feinberg writes that "if the wrath is falling *everywhere*, it is difficult to see how preservation could be by any other means than the Rapture, or removal."[243] Both Walvoord and Feinberg claim that the words in Revelation 3:10 to the church at Philadelphia, "I will keep you from the hour of trial which is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell upon the earth," promise the removal of the church before the Great Tribulation begins.[244] This verse, it is claimed, points to a pretribulation removal of the church. Some pretribulationists cite Revelation 4:1, just following John's letters to the seven churches (chaps. 2–3), where John is told to "come up hither," as referring to the church's being taken up to heaven.[245] Hal Lindsey, popular pretribulation writer, says, "I believe, along with many scholars, that the apostle John's experience here is meant to be a prophetic preview of what the living church will experience in the Rapture."[246] This prepares the way for the

church's not being mentioned in Revelation 4–19.

Other passages often claimed by pretribulationists to affirm that the church will not go through the Great Tribulation are Luke 21:36: "Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen" (NIV); Romans 5:9: "We are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God"; 1 Thessalonians 1:10, which speaks of waiting "for his Son from heaven … who delivers us from the wrath to come"; and 1 Thessalonians 5:9: "God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."[247] The last passage is especially emphasized against the background of 1 Thessalonians 5:3, which speaks of "sudden destruction" coming upon the world. Walvoord, in viewing the overall biblical picture, does not hesitate to say, "The Scriptures reveal no evidence that the church of the present age will go through the tribulation."[248]

But what then, we may ask—returning briefly to the Book of Revelation—are we to make of the many references in chapters 4–19 to "saints" being present on the earth?[249] For example, Revelation 13:10 reads, "Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints." Walvoord claims that these saints are *not* the church or any part of it. He writes, "The omission of the phrase 'unto the churches' in 13:9 is most significant and tends to support the teaching that the church, the body of Christ, has previously been raptured and is not in this period … the message is not addressed to the church as such but to the entire world."[250] References, therefore, to "the saints" in Revelation never refer to the church but to believers in the time of the Great Tribulation. Walvoord declares, "The church has a distinct place in God's plan and program and as such is contrasted to saints who will come to know Christ in the tribulation period or in the future millennium[251] … [the church] must not be confused with those described as saints or with Israel or with the elect in the tribulation period … never are tribulation saints referred to as a church."[252]

This brings us to a consideration of Matthew 24 where "the elect" are definitely said to be present in the Great Tribulation. The Scripture reads, "Then there will be great tribulation … for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened" (vv. 21–22). However, according to pretribulationists, "the elect" here are *not* the church. Walvoord again: "While the term 'elect' is found in Matthew 24:22, 31, no mention is made of the church or of any other term which would identify the believers of that period as belonging to the present dispensation."[253] Hence "the elect" are not the church, but future believers living during the time of the Great Tribulation.[254] Thus when in Matthew 24 Jesus adds that "immediately after the tribulation of those days" (v. 29), He will return (vv.

29–31), the church will not have been involved in the prior tribulation. It will have been removed from the earth.

Now this does not mean that the professing, or apostate, church will not be in the Great Tribulation. Indeed, the professing church during that time will "form the nucleus of the ungodly, apostate church of the tribulation which becomes the state religion of that time."[255] The true church, the church of the regenerate, will be in heaven throughout the entire period.

Next, it is apparent that the pretribu-lational viewpoint presupposes the coming of Christ prior to the Great Tribulation to remove, or rapture,[256] the church from the scene. Walvoord's opening chapter in *The Rapture Question*, entitled "The Promise of His Coming," emphasizes that this coming of Christ is prior to the Great Tribulation. Indeed, this is "the blessed hope": "The blessed hope is the rapture of the church before the great tribulation."[257] Again: "The hope offered … in the New Testament is the hope of rapture before the tribulation, not the hope of survival through the tribulation."[258] But, we may ask, if Christ returns *before* the Great Tribulation to rescue the church, what about Scriptures that seem to point to the coming of Christ *after* the Great Tribulation? For example, in Matthew 24 Jesus declares that "immediately after the tribulation of those days" (i.e., the "great tribulation" referred to in verse 21) "they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven" (vv. 29–30). Thus there would seem to be *two* returns: one for the church, the other in relation to the world *("they* will see"). Pretribulationists do not hesitate to affirm *both* as returns of Christ, though they usually refer to the first as "the rapture" and the second as "the second coming."[259] Thus there is a posttribulational return of Christ, but, since the Great Tribulation has intervened, it has nothing to do with the church. The hope of the church is deliverance from this tribulation by the first return of Christ.

One of the chief arguments of pretribulationism relates to the imminency of Christ's return. If there is to be a period of great tribulation before Christ comes back, how can we truly speak of Christ's any-moment return? So Walvoord writes, "If the church is destined to endure the persecutions of the tribulation, it is futile to proclaim the coming of the Lord as our imminent hope."[260] Indeed, says Paul Feinberg, "There is no mention of any signs or events [including the Great Tribulation] that precede the Rapture of the church in *any* of the Rapture passages" (italics his).[261] Pretribulationists thus claim that theirs is the only position that adequately affirms an any-moment return of Christ.

Furthermore, pretribulationists seek to assure the church, that is, the church of

true believers, that it has nothing to fear about all the terrors of the Great Tribulation to come. Terrors, indeed, there will be. Charles Feinberg declares, "The plagues of Egypt will be insignificant in comparison with it, and the Reign of Terror in France during the French Revolution or the unspeakable atrocities of the Spanish Inquisition will not even remotely approximate it. Even the diabolical Nazi holocaust will not equal it."[262] It is little wonder that the return of Christ to rescue His church from such horror is the believer's "blessed hope." In regard to the tribulation saints (those who turn to Christ during the Great Tribulation), "only a small portion of them will survive."[263] Obviously believers today are far more fortunate, for *all* of them will be raptured when Christ returns.

For pretribulationists this is far more than a minor theological point. The pretribulational rapture is an antidote to personal despair. Lindsey writes, "The hope of the rapture keeps me from despair in the midst of ever-worsening world conditions."[264] In fact, there is the excitement or hope that at any time Christ will return and take believers far beyond all that will happen on earth below.

A further point in pretribulationism is that the church will be removed from the scene not only to avoid the terrors of the Great Tribulation but also to make room for a transitional period between God's dealing with the church and His dealing with Israel. Charles Ryrie writes, "The distinction between Israel and the Church leads to the belief that the Church will be taken from the earth before the beginning of the tribulation (which in one major sense concerns Israel)."[265] The church age, our present age, has nothing to do with the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies about Israel's glorious future, but, in Walvoord's words, it is a "parenthesis in the divine program."[266] The church age is both "an *unexpected* and *unpredicted* parenthesis as far as Old Testament prophecy is concerned"[267] (emphasis mine). God's basic (unparenthetical?) program for the future is the establishment of the earthly kingdom of Israel.[268] This will be initiated in the period of the Great Tribulation with the church first raptured out. God will renew His dealings primarily with Isra el. The tribulation accordingly is "a prelude to Israel's restoration and exaltation in the millennial kingdom."[269]

Also during the Great Tribulation a remnant of Israel, who have come to salvation when their spiritual blindness is removed at the rapture of the church, will proclaim the gospel to the nations.[270] According to J. Dwight Pentecost, "the result of their [Israel's] testimony is seen in the great multitude of Gentiles saved"[271] (Rev. 7:9–17). In summary, with the church removed from the scene, not only will Israel be readied for her exaltation in the Millennium, but also she will be used by God to bring multitudes of peoples to salvation.

During the Great Tribulation there will also be terrible persecution by the Antichrist so that vast numbers of believers will be put to death. During the same period God will pour out His wrath upon all the forces of evil. According to Charles Feinberg, "It will be the period of the most intense judgments and the greatest activity of the beast, the false prophet, or the Antichrist, and Satan himself. So horrendous will they be that unless they were shortened, no one would be saved."[272] The church, however, is safely in heaven while "tribulation saints" on earth are going through indescribably horrible times.

Such in general is the picture of events as portrayed by pretribulationism. It is interesting that there is also today a suggested modification of this system often known as *midtribulationism*.[273] According to this view, the church will go through a part of the future tribulation but will be removed before the worst occurs. Rather than viewing the rapture of the church as occurring prior to Revelation 6–19, the midtribulationist holds that it occurs prior to the outpouring of the "bowls of wrath" in Revelation 16. Midtribulationism, like pretribulationism, envisions two future comings of Christ, though for midtribulationism the time period separating the two is briefer.

I will mention three representatives: Norman B. Harrison, J. Oliver Bus well, and Gleason L. Archer, Jr. Harrison holds that the Great Tribulation, properly speaking, refers only to the latter portion of Revelation, where the words "wrath" and "judgment" are frequently repeated. Harrison writes, "Let us get clearly in mind the *nature of the Tribulation*, that it is divine 'wrath' (11:18; 14:8, 10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19) and divine 'judgment' (14:7; 15:4; 16:7; 17:1; 18:10; 19:2)."[274] Since Harrison identifies this later period with the Great Tribulation and says that Christ will return for His church just prior to that tribulation, he views himself as a pretribulationist.[275]

Bus well, on the other hand, identifies the Great Tribulation as the period preceding the outpouring of wrath. This climaxes in Revelation 11 with the destruction of God's two witnesses (representing the true church) and their ascension to heaven: "The ascension of the two witnesses in the cloud (Rev. 11:12) synchronizes precisely with the rapture of the church."[276] Thus Buswell could be called posttribulational in that Christ will return after the Great Tribulation. However, since the period of God's wrath follows, after which Christ will return, Buswell retains (as does Harrison) the basic pretribulational view that there will be two stages in Christ's return separated by a number of years.

Archer prefers to speak of "the midseventieth-week" rapture of the church.[277]

He refers to Daniel 9:27, which reads, “And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week [i.e., a heptad of years], but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate” (NASB). “In the middle of the week,” i.e., a week of seven years, the Antichrist will appear, and God’s terrifying judgments will follow. Thus “the raptured church will not be present on earth to experience the unparalleled disasters and afflictions of the last three and a half years while the wrath of God is poured out in successive judgments upon the guilty earth.”[278]

Midtribulationism, it is apparent, seeks to give more space to the church’s enduring tribulation. However, in the larger sense, it remains pretribulational throughout.[279]

Critique of Pretribulationism

Much of what I have written preceding this Excursus contains, at least indirectly, a critique of pretribulationism. But now I will focus on some of the specific points raised in the Excursus.

1. The scriptural basis for a pretribulational removal of the church. The claim that the Book of Revelation evidences such a pretribulation removal cannot be substantiated. For example, to claim that the many references to “the saints” in Revelation do not refer to the church is a serious error. “Saints” throughout the New Testament are believers in Christ: they are the church. Moreover, throughout all of history since the time of Christ the saints have had to face persecution. When, for example, the “beast” in Revelation 13 is “allowed to make war on the saints” (v. 7), this refers to a climactic persecution of the church at the end of history. Even to suggest that they are some other breed of saints (“tribulation saints”) and that the church has already been removed from the scene borders on the incredible. To be sure, the word “church” is not used in Revelation 4–19, but, incidentally, the term is not used either for those in heaven who are depicted a number of times in these chapters.[280] Why, then, are the (presumably) raptured ones not called “the church”?

That Revelation 3:10—“I will keep you from the hour of trial which is coming on the whole world”—refers to the removal, or rapture, of the church prior to the Great Tribulation is a misreading of the text. To “keep from” is *not* to be “removed from,” but to be “kept through,” or “protected from.”[281] Moreover, the suggestion of some pretribulationists that the words in Revelation 4:1—“Come

up hither"—refer (symbolically or otherwise) to a pretribulational rapture of the church is utterly without exegetical validity. A final remark on the pretribulational view that Revelation 4—19 refers to the period following the removal of the church: Since this removal obviously has not happened yet, those chapters would have relevance *only for a future time.* It is hard to see what value these chapters would have been to the seven churches addressed in Revelation 2 and 3 almost two thousand years ago![282]

Similarly the claim by pretribulationists that "the elect" in Matthew 24— "for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened" (v. 22)—are not the church is as indefensible as the view about "the saints" in the Book of Revelation. "The elect" in the New Testament are often identified with the church;[283] moreover, in Matthew 24 Jesus is clearly talking about the future of His own disciples who will constitute the church. Already, according to Matthew 21, Jesus had said to the Jerusalem leaders, "I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (v. 43 NIV). Why then would Jesus not be dealing with the church, a new "people," in Matthew 24?[284] The obvious reason that the pretribulationist cannot say this is that these "elect" are suffering "great tribulation" (v. 21); thus the church must already have been removed from the earth! Matthew 24, however, in no way suggests such a prior removal of the church any more than does Revelation 6–19.

2. *The matter of the wrath of God.* Pretribulationists, as we have noted, emphasize that the church must be removed before the Great Tribulation begins because the church is not to be subjected to God's wrath. In a section entitled "The Church Promised Deliverance from the Tribulation,"[285] Walvoord initially quotes 1 Thessalonians 5:9: "For God appointed us not unto wrath, but unto the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (ASV). Since the wrath of God is depicted as being poured out during the Great Tribulation, it follows that since the church is not "appointed … unto wrath," it must have already been removed to heaven. Indeed, since God's wrath is poured out many times in the Book of Revelation, beginning with 6:17—"the great day of their wrath has come"—the church cannot be on the scene. But such is faulty reasoning. To be sure, the church will *never* be subjected to the wrath of God that always falls upon God's adversaries, but it will be sustained in the midst of it all. The sealing of the 144,000 in Revelation 7:1–8, who unquestionably are saints in the time of the Great Tribulation,[286] is testimony to this fact. The saints are protected from, I repeat, not removed from, the wrath of God.[287] It follows, therefore, that the church, believing Christians, need fear nothing in the time of God's outpoured

wrath. Pretribulationists, however, in reading about all the expressions of God's wrath in the Book of Revelation, question whether anyone could avoid it. Recall Paul Feinberg's words that "if the wrath is falling *everywhere*, it is difficult to see how preservation could be by any other means than the Rapture, or removal." But that *entirely* misses the point: the "other means" is not Rapture but sealing. Nowhere in the Book of Revelation are saints pictured as being even touched by God's judgments; only the "earth-dwellers" are affected.[288] The parallel to all of this is the Book of Exodus where again and again the Israelites are protected from God's wrath upon Pharaoh. *Never once* does a plague fall on them. How God preserved then, and how He will do it in the coming Great Tribulation, we cannot tell. This does not mean there will be no persecution ahead for believers. Quite the contrary, as we have noted, it will be worldwide and devastating. But in the matter of the Great Tribulation, which is *not* persecution suffered by believers but God's wrath on the world, there will be total protection. Hence, rather than shuddering or even despairing[289] at the possibility of such fearsome expressions of God's wrath, we should rejoice in God's assured protection.[290]

Now a further word: for a pretribulationist to say that "the blessed hope is the rapture of the church before the great tribulation" (Walvoord) is grossly to misstate what the "blessed hope" really is. Paul speaks of "awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). *The "blessed hope" is Christ's glorious appearing:* it is *that* that we await —not His presumed rapture of us from tribulation. Indeed there is something quite self-centered about desiring Christ to come to rescue us from danger, rather than to behold Him in all His glory and grace.

3. *Christ's return in two stages.* Let us move on to an even more serious matter: the dividing of Christ's return into two stages. As we have noted, according to pretribulationists, Christ will come *before* the Great Tribulation to remove, or rapture, the church; He will also come again *after* that tribula tion to establish His kingdom. But, I submit, there is utterly no biblical justification for a twofold future coming. We have observed that some early pretribulationists tried to distinguish between "the Rapture" and "the Revelation" (this is now seldom attempted), thereby to avoid two future comings. Now the attempt is to differentiate between "the Rapture" and "the Second Coming."[291] However, in reply, let me say that the Rapture as described in 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17 is *also* the Second Coming. Paul speaks in this passage of "the coming of the Lord" (v. 15). In 2 Thessalonians 2:8, a recognized Second Coming passage relating to the

destruction of “the man of sin,” Paul says that “the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming.” In both passages the word “coming” is *parousia.* Thus there are two aspects of the one and same event of the Second Coming, but not a distinction or separation between a “Rapture Coming” and a Second Coming.[292] Such a division is biblically and theologically out of the question.[293]

4. *The view of imminence.* One of the arguments used to support a pretribulational coming of Christ, as we have noted, is that such a coming, and rapture, can occur at any time. If, for example, the Great Tribulation is future, we cannot expect an imminent coming. Recall Walvoord’s words: “If the church is destined to endure the persecutions of the tribulation, it is futile to proclaim the coming of the Lord as an imminent hope.” Thus there must be a pretribulation return if there is to be an imminent hope. But such an argument fails to recognize that the New Testament does not actually teach a return at any moment. Jesus does declare, “Watch … for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming” (Matt. 24:42). However, shortly after that Jesus tells the parable about the master who entrusted his property to three servants and then “after a long time” (Matt. 25:19) returns to settle accounts with them. Since this parable is one of several in connection with the injunction to “watch,” the point is not a return at any moment but that all must be prepared for the future coming of the Lord.[294] The same thing can be said about the Great Tribulation: it must happen first. However, its duration may be rather brief (more intensive than extensive) and its profile so indeterminate that we could be in the first stages of the Great Tribulation even now.[295] Surely we could easily see the Lord’s return in the very near future.

5. *Israel and the church.* Nothing is more disturbing about pretribulationism than its view that the church is a parenthesis in God’s plan to bless and glorify Israel. The church presumably is nowhere predicted or foreseen in the Old Testament; hence after the present parenthetical church dispensation, God will move ahead to fulfill various Old Testament prophecies. Thus—and this is critical—the church *must* be removed from the scene in order for the divine program to get underway again and be consummated. Recall Ryrie’s words: “The distinction between Israel and the church leads to the belief that the church will be taken from the earth before the beginning of the tribulation.” The controlling motif for pretribulationism, accordingly, is not what Scripture teaches about the “horrors” of the Great Tribulation or even the return of Christ, but the

distinction between Israel and the church. To put it more bluntly, it elevates Israel and minimizes the church. Dispensationalists might deny this relegation of the church to second-class status, since they recognize it to be truly God's vehicle of heavenly salvation. However, in their view the Old Testament is concerned with another program entirely. Thus there is the parenthetical church age and the necessary removal of the church before God's program for Israel can be carried through. It is sad indeed that this is essentially what pretribulationism is all about.

Now a word about midtribulationism. As we have observed, whatever terminology is used, this position seeks to give more space for the church's being present during a part of the tribulation period. Thus Revelation 6–19 is not viewed wholly as the future time of the Great Tribulation. In some ways, midtribulationism is an improvement over pretribulationism in that it sees the church as still on earth throughout a large portion of the book, and thus during at least some of the coming tribulation. However, midtribulationism makes a serious double mistake in holding that the church will not be on earth when the wrath of God is poured out and that this outpouring of wrath is limited to the later chapters in Revelation. The first part of this mistake midtribulationists share with pretribulationists; on the second they stand alone. Regarding this second part, pretribulationists do have the better position since the expression of God's wrath is vividly portrayed in Revelation 6:17— "the great day of their [God and the Lamb's] wrath has come"—and thus relates to the unfolding of events before "the bowls of wrath" are depicted in Revelation 16. However, the critical matter is that midtribulationism, just like its pretribulational counterpart, errs in its view that the church will be removed prior to the time when God's wrath is progressively poured out. Thus, again, in contradiction to the Scriptures, there must be both an earlier coming of Christ to remove the church and a later one to culminate His wrath. The only difference is that midtribulationism views the time between the two events as being shorter. However, pretribulationism and midtribulationism are essentially the same in their misapprehension of the church's situation regarding the wrath of God and in their misunderstanding of the *one* coming of Jesus Christ.

Finally, in regard to pretribulationism I must express a definite alarm. I wonder if pretribulationists are aware of the danger of misleading believers into thinking that when things get *really bad*, they will not be here to have to face them. If the persecutions of "saints" described in Revelation refer only to saints after the Rapture—as pretribulationists claim—then what will happen to the faith of present believers who have embraced the pretribulation rapture teaching if

increased persecution and the Great Tribulation lie ahead?[296] Rather than being prepared to meet whatever may come, such believers run the risk of profound disillusionment and despair. Also, as I suggested earlier, there is a touch of self-centeredness in wanting to "go up" when, as pretribulationists say, there will be "tribulation saints" on earth that must endure everything that the raptured believers have avoided. One pretribulationist actually writes about having "a balcony seat in heaven"[297] to view the terrible events below. Surely there is something terribly misplaced, almost a smug self-satisfaction, in this kind of pretribulational thinking.

A further word must be said in regard to the Great Tribulation. Since this is not (as I have earlier discussed) the church undergoing persecution but God's judgment upon the "earth-dwellers," we really have nothing to fear. God will preserve His own from whatever spiritual and natural disasters may occur. God's wrath is a terrifying thing, but we are not "appointed unto" it. We will in no way be subjected to God's wrath, not because we have been raptured to heaven but because He keeps us safe on earth.

I close with the words of the psalmist: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea[298] …. Come and see the works of the LORD, the desolations he has brought on the earth.[299] …. The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress" (46:1–2, 8, 11, NIV). Verily *we will not fear* in the midst of all this, for God is, and will be, our refuge and fortress.

X. EXTRAORDINARY PHENOMENA

The last of the signs before the return of Jesus Christ is that of extraordinary phenomena in the heavens and on the earth. Jesus Himself describes how after "great tribulation" and just prior to His return, certain signs will appear. The fullest account is in Matthew: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven…" (24:29–30). In the Lukan account, just after the statement that "there will be signs in sun and moon and stars and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (21:25–26), certain earthly aspects are added, namely 'the roaring of the sea and the waves." These apparently follow the heavenly occurrences in the sun, moon, and stars, which have their counterpart in the waters below (tidal waves, tempestuous sea winds, and the like). The result of the shaking of the "powers of the heavens" is a disturbance on earth that increases fear and foreboding among people in general.

At this juncture we may turn to the Book of Revelation and observe a still more vivid picture. With the opening of the sixth seal John writes, "I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood,[300] and the stars of the sky fell to earth … the sky vanished like a scroll that is rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place" (6:12–14). As a result, the people of earth cry out to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:16). Here, even more vividly, cosmic and earthly convulsions are depicted immediately preceding the return of Christ.

As I mentioned in the section on the Great Tribulation, when we reflect on many of the phenomenal descriptions in the Book of Revelation, it is apparent that not everything can be understood with a strict literalism.[301] Moreover, as we have also earlier observed, the passages quoted in Matthew and Luke also apply, in a preliminary way, to what happened in Jerusalem in A.D. 70.[302] Also, as we have noted, some of the language in the Old Testament about occurrences in the

sun, moon, and stars has to be understood in a figurative sense, since it applied to a local situation of that time.[303] However, even with all this recognized, such language concerning the end cannot be understood in a purely figurative or symbolic way: it has a profound spiritual and cosmic base.

In this connection observe that the extraordinary phenomena in all these instances relate particularly to the coming of Christ in judgment. For example, just after Jesus said, "Then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven," He added, "[and then] all the nations of earth will mourn" (Matt. 24:30 NIV). This mourning is not one of sorrow or penitence but of remorse and fear at the impending judgment.[304] The "fainting with fear" (in Luke) and the "fall on us and hide us" (in Revelation) also bespeak attitudes, not of believers, but (to use the expression from Revelation) of "earth-dwellers" who are about to experience the wrath of the Lord's appearing.

Indeed, the Old Testament writers attribute the cosmic phenomena of darkened sun, moon, and the like to the coming day of the Lord as the day of God's wrath. For example, the prophet Zephaniah cries, "A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry…" (Zeph. 1:15- 16).[305] Isaiah speaks for the Lord, saying, "Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising and the moon will not shed its light. I will punish the world for its evil …" (Isa. 13:9–11). The prophet Joel cries out, "Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision![306] For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining" (Joel 3:14–15). In these (and many other) accounts the apocalyptic language of extraordinary cosmic phenomena is part and parcel of the visitation of God's wrath on "the day of the LORD."

The consummation of all this is, of course, found in the New Testament depictions of that day. What is described in the Old Testament is carried forward with increasing intensity in the apocalyptic language of the New, climaxing in the Book of Revelation. The description in the sixth seal (Rev. 6) of total disturbance in the heavens and vast cataclysms on earth—although portrayed relatively early in the Apocalypse—actually brings to a climax not only the words of Jesus in the Synoptics but also the sequence of ever-increasing cosmic and earthly catastrophe related to the approaching day of wrath.[307]

Finally, we should note again the last word of Jesus *after* speaking of the phenomena in sun, moon, stars, and powers of heaven, and immediately *prior to* the statement about His coming "on the clouds," namely, "Then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven"[308] (Matt. 24:30). We have observed that this precipitates mourning: "and all the nations of earth will mourn"—the mourning of remorse and misery. But just what, we may ask, is this very last sign before His final coming? Jesus does not say; hence, we cannot really know until it happens. One suggestion I like is that it is "the dawning of the Messianic glory, growing brighter and brighter until Christ appears in the midst of it."[309] It will surely be a sign of glory!

If such a final sign brings remorse to the world—as surely it will—it will also bring great rejoicing to all believers who yearn for the Lord's return. For truly, as the apostle has said, "we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." We await the final sign, but even more His "glorious appearing"!

[1]It is relevant to note that Jesus in His reply spoke of a number of signs and also focused on particular ones (Matt. 24:4–30).

[2]The word “outpouring” occurs only in Acts 10:45: “The Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also” (nasb). However, the same basic action is conveyed in the use of the word “fallen” in Acts 8:16 and the statement “The Holy Spirit came on them” in Acts 19:6. For a study of these and other terms that parallel “outpouring,” see Renewal Theology, 2:181-207.

[3]”4All flesh’ signifies all men…. We must not restrict the expression ‘all flesh’ to the members of the covenant nation” (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzch, Commentary on the Old Testament, 10:210).

[4]“Peter was right in taking Pentecost with its accompanying miracles as the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy. It was the beginning of its fulfillment, the beginning of the signs of the end, and then, as Alford says, ‘follows the period, known only to the Father, the period of waiting-the Church for her Lord’s return-and then the signs shall be renewed and the day of the Lord shall come’ “ (Biederwolf, The Second Coming Bible Commentary, 405).

[5]See my book The Pentecostal Reality. E.g., “Truly an extraordinary spiritual renewal is beginning to occur across Christendom. We are seeing the release of the primitive dynamism in our century. … At the first Pentecost, people were gathered together 4from every nation under heaven’ in one place, Jerusalem; but now Jerusalem is the world, with Christians in almost every place. As the Holy Spirit moves in mighty power over the earth, baptizing people from on high, we can but rejoice exceedingly!” (pp. 53-54). For further specific information on the Pentecostal outpouring, see Vinson Synan, In the Latter Days: The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Twentieth Century, and idem, The Twentieth-Century Pentecostal Explosion.

[6]In prophetic eschatology the consummation of the Kingdom of God is to be marked by a great revival of charismatic happenings. Both leaders and people will be Spirit-filled and Spirit-empowered on a scale hitherto unknown” (G. E. Wright, The Rule of God, 104).

[7]“The more powerfully life in the Spirit of God is present in it [the church], the more urgent is its expectation of the coming of Christ; so that the fullness of the possession by the Spirit and the urgency of expectation are

always found together" (Emil Brunner, Dogmatics ///, 400).

[8]"The 'Pneuma' was in the mind of the Apostle [Paul] before all else the element of the eschatological or the celestial sphere, that which characterizes the mode of existence and life in the world to come and of that anticipated form in which the world to come is even now realized in heaven" (Geerhardus Vos, The Pauline Eschatology, 59). Hence when the Spirit becomes active in the present-in the sphere of the church, the believing community-this is the breaking in of the "world to come."

[9]How sad, then, is the view of some today who emphasize His absence, or-what amounts to much the same thing-His powerlessness. In this view Satan is the dominant figure through his presence, power, and rule-not Christ. Thus the coming of Christ will be that of a veritable stranger to earth. To be sure, Satan's activity will be increasingly felt as the end draws near (as will be discussed later), but it will remain subordinate to the lordship of Christ.

[10]As the context of Mark 13:11 demonstrates. Jesus had just declared, "The gospel must first be preached to all the nations" (v. 10), and later adds, "But he who endures to the end will be saved" (v. 13).

[11]See the next section for a discussion of this proclamation of the gospel as a sign of the end, or the return of the Lord.

[12]So nasb margin. Oikoumene is "the world in the sense of its inhabitants, humankind" (BAGD).

[13]Ethnos signifies "a multitude of people of the same nature or genus" (Thayer); it means "the natural cohesion of a people in general" (TDNT). From ethnos, of course, is derived the English word "ethnic," which may be defined as "relating to races and large groups of people classed according to common traits and customs" (Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary). I should add that in other contexts the ethne are "the Gentiles." For example, see the discussion below regarding Israel (or Jews) and Gentiles.

[14]Since the word *ethnos* is difficult to translate adequately ("nations," as noted, conveys too much the image of a political configuration), I am here using the plural of *ethnos* instead of attempting further translation.

[15]"Unreached peoples" is a term sometimes used by missiologists to refer to peoples who have no indigenous church. According to some estimates, at the beginning of the last decade of the twentieth century, there were some twelve thousand such groups.

[16]These words of Jesus in Acts 1:8 define the Great Commission in terms of the movement of the gospel from its beginnings in Jerusalem through an ever widening circle to "the end [kjv-'uttermost part'] of the earth."

[17]According to David Barrett, editor of the World Christian Encyclopedia, "the total of all Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant believers is now an estimated 1,758,777,900 or about 33 percent of the world's 5.3 billion people" (as quoted in Christianity Today [May 14, 1990], 51). That a large number of these "believers" may be only nominally so (as will be discussed later) does not detract from the fact that the kingdom of God is truly worldwide.

[18]According to Peter Wagner, professor of church growth at Fuller Theological Seminary, "Every day sees 78,000 new converts. Each week 1600 new churches start." In regard to third-world nations, Wagner adds, "In 1900 there were 50,000 evangelical Christians in Latin America; by 2000 that figure will be 137 million. In 1900 there were 10 million Christians in Africa; by 2000 that figure will reach 324 million" (as reported in Ministries Today [May- June 1990], 45).

[19]Ethnè, as we have observed, means both "nations" and "Gentiles."

[20]The Greek word is paraptòmati-"false step, transgression" (BAGD).

[21]Instead of "upon part of Israel." The Greek reads apo merous tò Israèl-literally, "in part to Israel" (so kjv).

[22]The Greek word is pléróma; kjv and nasb read "fulness."

[23]Again pleroma.

[24]Paul speaks elsewhere of a "veil" being over Israel's face: "For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted" (2 Cor. 3:14).

[25]Paul writes to the Ephesians concerning another "mystery," namely, that "Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (3:4-6). I suggest that the "mystery" he describes in Romans is a complementary one, and a humbling one, lest the Gentiles become too proud-"wise" in their "own conceits"! That the Gentiles are partakers of the promise-a matter not made known, says Paul, "to the sons of men in other generations" (Eph. 3:5)-is a glorious truth. But the mystery beyond this is that Israel will likewise some day come in.

[26]"The salvation of all Israel is distinguished from that of the Gentiles, but the manner of salvation will nevertheless be the same, namely, it will be

the victory of the free grace of God that will save Israel" (Giinter Wagner, "The Future of Israel: Reflections on Romans 9-11" in W. Hulitt Gloer, ed., Eschatology and the New Testament, 105).

[27]As in nasb and neb. The Greek word is apostrepsi.

[28]Some interpreters speak of the conversion of Israel as occurring at the return of Christ and thus identify this return with the "Deliverer" coming "from Zion." For example, E. F. Harrison states that "the conversion of Israel will occur at Messiah's return" (EBC, 10, 124). But "from Zion" is hardly the origin of Christ's return. (It is interesting that Isaiah 59:20, which Paul quotes, does have "to Zion." He would surely have quoted the phrase if he were thinking of Christ's final return). Moreover, such a view contradicts one of the basic motifs in Christ's return, namely, that He comes in final salvation and judgment (see later discussion). There is no more "banishing" of "ungodliness." Also, if the conversion of Israel were delayed until Christ's return, salvation would come to the Jews in a way different from all others-not through the proclamation of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit but by the supernatural intervention of Jesus Christ.

[29]F. F. Bruce writes, " 'All Israel,' is a recurring expression in Jewish literature, where it need not mean 'every Jew without a single exception' but 'Israel as a whole' " (Romans, TNTC, 222). C. E. B. Cranfield similarly states, "The most likely explanation of 'all Israel' is that it means the nation Israel as a whole, though not necessarily including every individual member" (Romans: A Shorter Commentary, 282).

[30]The Greek is ap' arti, literally "from now," thus "henceforth" (kjv). This expression is found also in Jesus' words to the high priest in Matthew 26:64 (see prior discussion in chap. 9).

[31]Founded in 1973 by converted Jew Moishe Rosen in San Francisco as an outgrowth of the "Jesus Movement." There is now a staff of over one hundred, offices in fourteen cities in six countries, and some fifty volunteer chapters. As Jewish Christians, they are concerned about evangelizing Jews. Other organizations reaching out to Jews include the American Board of Missions to the Jews, the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America, and the International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues.

[32]This includes many Messianic congregations that seek to retain their Jewish heritage while at the same time accepting Jesus-"Yeshua"-as the Messiah.

[33]Many Jewish believers in Christ prefer to call themselves "completed [or 'fulfilled'] Jews" rather than Christians. Others, less desirous of retaining cultural Jewish ties, simply call themselves "Hebrew Christians."

[34]This is not just a numerical fact due to increase of population, so that the measure of good and evil will proportionately increase. It is also due to the fact that the growth of good brings forth the counterattack and growth of evil. (In the above parable the devil comes along and sows tares among the good seed.) If there is a "Pentecost" today (as was discussed earlier) with the Holy Spirit and His gifts being poured out, Satan will-and does surely-have his counterfeit Pentecost with his evil spirits let loose. A. H. Strong observes, " 'Wherever God erects a house of prayer, the devil always builds a chapel there.' Every revival of religion stirs up the forces of wickedness to bring opposition. As Christ's first advent occasioned an unusual outburst of demoniac malignity, so Christ's second advent will be resisted by a final desperate effort to overcome the forces of good" (Systematic Theology, 1009).

[35]The Greek word is chalepoi-"perilous" (kjv), "difficult" (nasb), "(times of) stress" (rsv). Chalepoi conveys the note of "hard to bear," even "dangerous" or "fierce" (Thayer). Chalepoi so describes the two demoniacs in Matt. 8:28.

[36]"Recall Acts 2:17 (also cf. Heb. 1:2).

[37]We might also note the words in Jude 17–19. Jude first quotes "predictions of the apostles": "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions." Then he adds, "It is these who set up divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit."

[38]R. T. France writes that the words "most men's love will grow cold" mean "that the majority … will cool off in their love, whether for God or for their fellow-men. It is a somber picture of a church in decline" (Matthew, TNTC, 338-39).

[39]Nonetheless they are applicable to the church at large, as are all seven letters in the Book of Revelation though they are addressed to particular churches.

[40]Some of this we noted in preceding paragraphs.

[41]We earlier observed that some one-third of the world's population can be designated as Christian. However, it is also undoubtedly true that a large number of these are not only nominal Christians but that many who were once truly believers and knew the love of Christ have lost their earlier

devotion.

[42]The Greek word is hysterois. BAGD renders hysterois here as “last,” “in the last times.”

[43]The Greek word is apostesontai; literally, “apostatize,” “depart from” (also kjv), “fall away from” (nasb), “desert from” (neb).

[44]Jude speaks of “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (v. 3). There is a body of truth that does not vary through the ages. Jude, by the way, urges his Christian readers in the same verse to “contend for” this faith.

[45]It is true that after this Paul speaks only of teachings that forbid marriage and enjoin abstinence from certain foods-matters that may seem less than central to the faith. However, such teachings (due to certain Gnostic influences that viewed the body itself and its natural appetites as evil) falsified God’s good creation and had to be dealt with. Before long other subtle attacks on such matters as the Incarnation (see later discussion on the Antichrist, pages 330-34) and salvation would no doubt work their way in.

[46]For example, the former United Presbyterian Church (at that time the largest Presbyterian denomination in America) in one situation was charged with apostasy by one of its seminary professors. When certain conservative actions were taken at its General Assembly in 1981, this charge was withdrawn. However, these actions (partly at least to fend off further local church defections) seem to have been only a momentary pause before further drifting away. (For further comment on the case see note 70 below.)

[47]Outside the mainline denominations in recent years there has been a large increase in the number of evangelical churches (e.g., those taking a strong stand on such matters as the authority of Scripture, the necessity of regeneration, and biblical morality). Such churches are generally growing in size and influence, whereas the traditional denominations are gradually decreasing.

[48]To illustrate: Inside the United Presbyterian Church a group called “Presbyterians United for Biblical Concerns” long strove for more biblical and theological integrity. A number of churches in 1981 broke away from both the United Presbyterian Church (UPUSA) and the Southern Presbyterian Church (PCUS) to form the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC). Since the merging of the United Presbyterian and Southern Presbyterian Churches in 1983 to form the Presbyterian

Church (U.S.A.), the liberal drift has continued, with the result that an increasing number of churches within the merged body have felt conscience-bound to withdraw.

[49]What has been described about the Presbyterian situation is to be found similarly in most other Protestant denominations. For example, the Southern Baptist Church, the largest denomination in the United States, at this writing has managed to stem the liberal tide. But the pressures to move away from a solid evangelical stance are intense.

[50]The Greek is he apostasia. This is translated as “the rebellion” in rsv and niv, “a falling away” in kjv, and paraphrased as “the final rebellion” in neb. “The apostasy” is a more literal and a more accurate translation. “Rebellion” is a possible rendering of the term in a political context, but misses the religious meaning here (cf. Acts 19:19, the other N.T. use of apostasia, which has a definitely religious connotation). “A falling away” fails to show that Paul is talking not about an act but the act of falling away, that is total apostasy. Schlier writes that he apostasia is not the state but “the act” of turning away, and signifies “complete apostasy” (TDNT, 1:513). In the Greek Old Testament (lxx) apostasia is particularly used in a religious sense (e.g., Josh. 2:22; 2 Chron. 29:19; 33:19; Jer. 2:19).

[51]This does not mean that this apostasy is different from the one mentioned earlier (e.g., in 1 Tim. 4:1-2 and 2 Tim. 3:1); however, Paul is here focusing on its final manifestation.

[52]One further word might be said about apostasia. The claim of some that apostasia means “departure” (see e.g., E. Schuyler English, Re-Thinking the Rapture, 67-71; Kenneth S. West, Bibliotheca Sacra, 114:63-67), and therefore is to be understood as “rapture” (i.e., the “catching up” of believers) has utterly no biblical basis. See R. H. Gundry, The Church and the Tribulation, 114-18, for a clear refutation.

[53]Along with this deception is the appearance of “the man of sin.” This will be discussed later.

[54]The Greek phrase is ho antichristos, literally “the antichrist” rather than “an antichrist” (kjv).

[55]There are no other occurrences of the word antichrist in the New Testament. I have mentioned all of them: 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7.

[56]Hence the word “hour” should not be understood literally. John Stott puts it well in saying that John “was expressing a theological truth rather than making a chronological reference. … It is still ‘the last hour,’ the hour of final opposition to Christ” (The Epistles of John, TNTC, 108-9). F. F.

Bruce, in regard to this text, writes, “In the Christian era it is always five minutes to midnight” (The Epistles of John, 65).

[57]“Satan, the deceiver of the whole world” (Rev. 12:9).

[58]In the history of the world after the time of the New Testament there has been no more vivid demonstration of this deception than in the seventh-century rise of the religion of Muhammad, namely Islam. According to the Koran (presumably dictated to Muhammad), all are infidels who claim that Jesus Christ was the Son of God (e.g., “Surely now they are infidels who say, ‘God is Christ the son of Mary…. Christ, the son of Mary, is no more than an apostle”). Muhammad, by denying that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, was wholly antichrist, and by this teaching has deceived untold millions of people down through the centuries.

[59]The Greek word is pseudochristoi.

[60]Anti can mean not only “against,” or “opposed to” Christ (as in the previous passages quoted from John’s letters), but also “in the place of’ (BAGD: “for, instead of, in place of’).

[61]F. F. Bruce writes, “Like the Antichrist of 1 John 4:3, the false Christs here are linked with false prophets; like the Antichrist of 2 John 7, the false Christs here are deceivers” (“Antichrist in the Early Church,” A Mind for What Matters, 182).

[62]On this latter point, a frequently recurring claim of New Age devotees is that Christ now secretly waits somewhere but will soon manifest Himself. For example, in the major newspapers of the world on April 25, 1982, a full page advertisement declared in large letters, “THE CHRIST IS NOW HERE,” adding that his name is “Lord Maitreya” (“the World Teacher”), whose “location is known to only a very few disciples” (recall Jesus’ words about “the inner rooms”!) but who “within the next two months will speak to humanity through a worldwide television and radio broadcast” (italics theirs). Despite the obvious fact that this pseudochrist never so spoke or appeared does not prevent such a claim from continually recurring. Incidentally, I have recently heard it announced that “Maitreya” is secretly in London but will soon declare himself to the world! So it goes … from deception to deception.

[63]“Another full page ad of response appeared a week later (May 2, 1982) in the Los Angeles Times declaring “ANTICHRIST IS NOW HERE.” This ad, produced by a number of Christians in southern California, was an important, and true, perception of the “Lord Maitreya” as not the Christ but representing the antichrist. The ad continued in bold letters, “THE

TRUE CHRIST HAS ALWAYS BEEN HERE," and pointed out that He will not come back in hiding but as suddenly as a flash of lightning.

[64]"The New Age Movement" is an umbrella term for a variety of persons, organizations, and practices that proclaim the alteration of human consciousness so as to recognize humanity's oneness with God and affirm the emerging unity of all religion and government in a new "Aquarian" age of peace and love. This movement draws heavily on various Eastern religions (especially Hinduism), the occult (e.g., channeling/mediumship), and humanistic psychology. The book that particularly heralded the "new age" was Marilyn Ferguson's Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in the 1980's. See also David Spangler, Revelation: the Birth of a New Age; Mark Satin, New Age Politics; Jessica Lipnack and Jeffrey Stamps, Networking (cataloging some 1,500 diverse New Age networks); George Trevelyan, A Vision of the Aquarian Age. Shirley MacLaine, a Hollywood celebrity, through her autobiography, Out on a Limb, and subsequent television miniseries, is one of the best-known New Age exponents. For critiques of New Age thinking, see, e.g., Walter Martin, The New Age Cult', Karen Hoyt, ed., New Age Rage-, Douglas R. Groothuis, Unmasking the New Age; Ruth Tucker, Another Gospel: Alternative Religions and the New Age Movement; and Tal Brooke, When the World Will Be as One: The Coming New World Order in the New Age.

[65]Instead of emphasizing that Jesus was one of the embodiments of the divine, New Age thinking often stresses that He was simply an embodiment of the universal and impersonal "Christ consciousness." This exists in all people and needs only to be recognized. Benjamin Creme in his book The Reappearance of Christ and the Masters of Wisdom writes, "The christ is not God, he is not coming as God. … He is the embodied soul of all creation…. He would rather that you didn't pray to him, but to God within you, which is also within him" (p. 135).

[66]Rudolf Bultmann, German Lutheran New Testament scholar, has stood out prominently in our time. See his essay, "New Testament and Mythology" in Kerygma and Myth, where he makes this statement: "What a primitive mythology it is, that a divine being should become incarnate, and atone for the sins of men through his own blood!" (p. 7). Also within recent years a number of British churchmen and theologians (all Anglicans) have come forth with a collection of essays entitled The Myth of God Incarnate. These question the basic, ontological reality of

the Incarnation. For example, in the preface, the editor calls for "a recognition that Jesus was … 'a man approved by God' for a special role within the divine purpose, and that the later conception of him as God incarnate, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity living a human life, is a mythological or poetic way of expressing his significance for us" (p. ix). These are but a few evidences (illustrations could be multiplied) of an ever-growing "spirit of antichrist" within the church in our time.

[67]For example, Matthew Fox, a Roman Catholic theologian, claims that the "cosmic Christ" has become incarnate in all of us. Fox asks, "Does the fact that the Christ became incarnate in Jesus exclude the Christ's becoming incarnate in others-Lao-tzu or Buddha or Moses or Sarah … or Gandhi or me or you?" (The Coming of the Cosmic Christ, 235). This is a violent antichrist statement, for it denies Jesus as the Christ and views all people as incarnate "cosmic" Christs.

[68]On the matter of The Myth of God Incarnate, it should be added that in the same year as this work by Anglican theologians was published, a number of evangelical church leaders and scholars responded with a series of essays entitled The Truth of God Incarnate, edited by Michael Green. These essays strongly affirm the historic faith, and for this we may be profoundly grateful. In regard to Matthew Fox's book The Coming of the Cosmic Christ, it is encouraging to note that Fox in 1988 was ordered silenced by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

[69]As recent polls have shown.

[70]The focal point of the United Presbyterian Church controversy, mentioned earlier, was the deity of Christ. The problem centered in a pastor who was unwilling to affirm that Jesus is God. To the ordination question, "Is Jesus God?" he replied, "No, God is God." His case went through six church tribunals with the result that his status as a minister was left intact. The General Assembly declined to take action, but did draw up a statement on the deity of Christ. The pastor still rejects, he says, the "notion of Jesus being God" ; rather, He is "one with God." Such a statement, I would urge, remains a departure from, and a dilution of, historic Christian faith.

[71]For example, a survey in 1977 of the theological viewpoint within a number of seminaries on the deity and resurrection of Christ revealed that many faculty members deny both. In an article in the Los Angeles Times, John Dart cited one example among many: "For instance, at the

nine-school Catholic and Protestant Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, which has the largest theological faculty in the world, New Testament professor Edward Hobbs said he didn't know of one school there in which a significant part of the faculty would accept statements that Jesus rose physically from the dead or that Jesus was a divine being" ("Did Jesus Rise Bodily? Most Scholars Say No," Sept. 5, 1977). The situation has hardly improved within recent years.

[72]The Greek phrase is ho anthrópos tés anomias. The kjv reads "the man of sin"; rsv, niv, and nasb read "the man of lawlessness." Although anomia is literally "lawlessness," it frequently is best translated "sin," "wickedness," or "iniquity" (see, e.g., Matt. 23:28; 24:12; Rom. 4:7; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:14; and Heb. 10:17 in various translations). According to TDNT, in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 "avofiia has in fact no meaning other than that of á/juapría [sin]" (4:1086). It is interesting that some ancient Greek manuscripts have hamartia rather than anomia. This evidence all the more reinforces the view that "the man of sin" is preferable to "lawlessness," because it better signifies the concentration of evil he represents. So while retaining "lawlessness" as a possible translation, I will also render anomia as "sin," "wickedness," or "iniquity."

[73]The neb translation suggests this: "That day cannot come before the final rebellion against God, when wickedness will be revealed in human form."

[74]Or, as TDNT has it: "The apostasy makes possible the power of the man of sin, and this in turn increases the apostasy" (1:514).

[75]It is important to bear in mind that, strictly speaking, "the antichrist" (as we have noted) is one who denies the Incarnation. There is nothing said in John's letters about the antichrist being "the son of perdition" or proclaiming himself "to be God" (as Paul proceeds to describe "the man of sin"). Hence-whatever the long tradition to the contrary-I will not make a simple identification between the two.

[76]The neb later calls him "that wicked man" (2 Thess. 2:8).

[77]Note the conjunction "and" in 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

[78]The Greek word is apōleias. The nasb reads "destruction"; niv, "the man doomed to destruction." The Greek word usually means "destruction," and frequently (as here) "eternal destruction." For example, 2 Peter 3:7 speaks of "the day of judgment and destruction [apōleias] of ungodly men." The traditional translation "perdition" (kjv as well as rsv), meaning "eternal damnation," vividly sets forth the picture. (Judas

Iscariot is called “the son of apōleias” in John 17:12.)

[79]Cf. Isaiah 57:4: “Are you not children of transgression, offspring of deceit?” Jesus addresses the Jews who oppose Him: “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires” (John 8:44). He also condemns the scribes and Pharisees for proselytizing a person and making him “twice as much a child of hell as [them]selves” (Matt. 23:15).

[80]“The Greek word is kata-“in accord with” (nasb).

[81]The KJV uses this title for the man in translating 2 Thessalonians 2:8.

[82]Recall the words of “Lucifer” in Isaiah 14: “I will ascend into heaven. I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. … I will be like the most High” (vv. 12-14 kjv). Cf. also “the little [horn]” in Daniel 7:8 with “a mouth speaking great things,” and the willful king in Daniel 11:36-37 who “shall exalt… and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods.” (Also cf. Ezek. 28:2ff.)

[83]“The temple” may be viewed as a literal temple, perhaps Jerusalem, but more likely this is a metaphor for the usurpation of God’s authority. F. F. Bruce writes, “The Jerusalem sanctuary is meant here … but meant in a metaphorical sense … he [’the son of perdition’] demands not only the obedience but also the worship due to God alone” (7 & 2 Thessalonians, 169). Leon Morris, contrariwise, affirms a more literal understanding of the temple (see The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians, NICNT, 4). I believe Bruce’s view better represents the text. Another view is that “the temple” represents the church. Paul refers to the church likewise as “the temple of God” in 2 Corinthians 6:16 (cf. Eph. 2:21-22). It is possible that the usurpation of God’s authority includes both world and church (see below concerning the two beasts). Incidentally, about a decade before Paul wrote the Thessalonians, the Roman emperor Caligula in a.d. 40 had attempted to place his statue in the temple at Jerusalem to assert his claim to divinity. Although this attempt failed, it may have provided Paul background for his teaching about the eschatological temple and the man of sin.

[84]The Greek word is mysterion-“mystery” as in kjv, rsv, nasb. The niv, like neb, translating the word as “secret power” seems proper in this context.

[85]As John says in 1 John 4:3. See the earlier discussion.

[86]The Greek word is simply katechon-“restraining,” “holding back.” There is no “him” in the Greek. So the kjv has “what withholdeth” without an object.

[87]The Greek phrase is ek mesou genetai. There is no word "taken" ("taken out of the way") as in kjv, niv, nasb. The neb puts it well: "until the Restrainer disappears from the scene."

[88]In regard to "the restrainer," Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, "The 'restrainer' is the force which takes effect within history through God's governance of the world, and which sets due limits to evil. The 'restrainer' is not God; it is not without guilt; but God makes use of it in order to preserve the world from destruction…. The 'restrainer' is the power of the state to establish and maintain order" (Ethics, 44).

[89]L. Berkhof writes, "He [the Holy Spirit] restrains for the present the deteriorating and devastating influence of sin in the lives of men and society" (Systematic Theology, 426). It is possible that Paul is referring both to the state (as exemplified by Rome in his day) as an order given by God and the Holy Spirit's restraint through the state (cf. Rom 13:1).

[90]This could correspond to the "loosing" of Satan (Rev. 20:7). See later discussion.

[91]Paul's use of the word parousia for the coming of the man of sin suggests that he is Satan's false christ. "He is Satan's messiah, an infernal caricature of the true messiah" (EGT, 4:49).

[92]Recall the brief discussion of the latter in Section V.

[93]See Humanist Manifesto I (1933) and Humanist Manifesto II (1973). Also note A Secular Humanist Declaration (1980). For a fuller discussion of the two manifestos, see Renewal Theology, 1:247-49.

[94]Words of Marilyn Ferguson, author of The Aquarian Conspiracy, in the Yoga Journal (July/August 1981), 10. (For this quotation I am indebted to Tal Brooke, When the World Will Be One, 206.)

[95]Shirley MacLaine, Dancing in the Light, 350 (emphasis hers).

[96]David Spangler, spiritual leader of the Findhorn New Age community, writes about himself: "I AM now the life of a new heaven and a new earth. Others must draw upon Me and unite with Me to build its forms" (Revelation: The Birth of a New Age, 110). Shirley MacLaine at one point speculates whether the statement "I AM THAT I AM" (Exod. 3:14) could well mean that she was her own creator, even that she had created God (see her book *It's All in the Playing*, 192). In the television production of *Out on a Limb*, Shirley is shown on the beach at Malibu with her occultist spiritual adviser, their arms flung open to the universe, shouting out, "I am God! I am God! I am God!" Here is the absolute

zenith of human pride and self-deception.

[97]Out of the sea" probably signifies out of the peoples and nations of the world. Cf. Isaiah 17:12: "Ah, the thunder of many peoples, they thunder like the thunder of the sea! Ah, the roar of nations, they roar like the roaring of many waters!" Also note Revelation 17:15 where the "waters" (i.e., the sea) are described as "peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues." Biederwolf writes, "By the vast majority of commentators the sea is taken, and rightly, as symbolic of the disordered and confused life of the Gentile nations of the world" (The Second Coming Bible Commentary, 630).

[98]The ten horns find their background in Daniel 7. There four great beasts come up "out of the sea" (v. 3), in turn like a winged lion, a bear, a leopard, and the last unnamed but described as "terrible and dreadful and exceedingly strong" and having "ten horns" (v. 7). Horns represent power, and ten horns in apocalyptic language the completeness of power. Because Revelation 13:2 describes the beast as looking like a leopard, bear and lion ("the beast … was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth"), thus a combination of the three fierce animals in Daniel 7, it portrays all the more the intensity of terrifying power in the ten horned beast of Revelation 13. "Seven heads" suggest the tremendous vitality of the beast-as we will observe. (Later we will note how the references to seven heads and ten horns are specifically applied to earthly kings, according to Rev. 17.)

[99]In Revelation 12 the dragon is specifically called Satan "the great dragon … who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (v. 9).

[100]The Greek word is esphagmenén. This is the same word used in Revelation earlier for the Lamb (Christ): "I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain [esphagmenonV (5:6; see also v. 12), and again in chapter 13 again about "the Lamb that was slain" (v. 8). The above text does not mean that the head of the beast was only apparently slain (any more than that the Lamb was only apparently killed). No, the head was mortally wounded, but the death wound had been healed.

[101]Although only one of the seven heads is said to have been slain, it was a mortal blow to the whole beast. Later in the chapter, reference is made to "the beast [not just one of its heads] which was wounded by the sword and yet lived" (v. 14). Incidentally, some commentators have seen in the slaying of one of the heads and its healing a reference to the Roman

emperor Nero, who, after a career of violently persecuting Christians, committed suicide. The legend later developed that Nero still lived and returned again and again in succeeding brutal emperors, climaxing with Emperor Diocletian. Although this interpretation is possible, it is noteworthy that the text in verse 14 (as just quoted) does not say that the beast died and lived on but that the whole mortally wounded (v. 3) beast "yet lived." As Robert H. Mounce puts it, "It was the beast who recovered from the death-stroke upon one of its heads" (The Book of Revelation, NICNT, 253). (For further references to Nero, see infra.)

[102]The words in Genesis apply to the serpent who, in Revelation, is also the dragon. The "great dragon" is likewise called "the ancient serpent" and both are identified as "the Devil and Satan" in Revelation 12:9.

[103]The mortal wounding of the beast, accordingly, must be traced back, prior to any Roman emperor, to the mortal wounding of Satan himself. (On this, see especially Paul S. Minear, "The Wounded Beast," in The Journal of Biblical Literature 72, (1953), 93-101.) Although wounded fatally, Satan continues his diabolical activity.

[104]According to George E. Ladd, "to blaspheme … in connection with God [is] to do or say anything that desecrates his divine name or violates his glory and deity" (The Revelation of John, 180).

[105]This whole picture of the beast uttering haughty words calls to mind Daniel 7. From the last beast-"terrible and dreadful and exceedingly strong" with its ten horns-there emerged a little horn that "pulled out by the roots" three of the horns and "possessed eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth uttering great boasts" (vv. 7-8 nasb). The "great boasts" are not specified as blasphemies in Daniel, but this seems to be implied.

[106]"A11 who dwell on earth," from what follows, obviously does not include believers. In Revelation, wherever "earth-dwellers" are mentioned, the reference is to unbelievers. See also Revelation 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:12, 14; 14:6; 17:2, 8.

[107]The word "allowed" (or "given" as in kjv, niv, nasb; the Greek word is edothe) refers not to Satan but to God. Although Satan had "great authority" (v. 2), it was by God's permissive will that the beast was allowed to exercise that authority. God remains sovereign!

[108]Mounce speaks of forty-two months as "a conventional symbol for a limited period of time during which evil would be allowed free reign" *(The Book of Revelation*, NICNT, 221). It is the same period as 1,260 days (see Rev. 11:2–3; 12:6), or "a time, and times, and half a time" (cf.

12:6 and 14), or 3 + 2/2 years (a time = one year, times = two years, half a time = six months). Also again see Daniel 7 where it is said that "a little horn" comes up among the ten horns with "eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things" (v. 8); further, "he shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High … and they shall be given into his hand for a time, two times, and half a time" (v. 25; cf. Dan. 12:7).

[109]Note the word "allowed" again. What happens to the saints is by God's sovereign permission.

[110]Again returning to Daniel 7, we read later in the chapter about the little horn: "As I looked, this horn made war with the saints, and prevailed over them" (v. 21). Daniel's fourth beast with its little horn obviously in some sense prefigures the beast out of the sea in the Book of Revelation, for this beast likewise conquered (= "prevailed over") the saints.

[111]Earlier in Revelation, John declares, "Blessed are those who hear" (1:3), and each of the letters to the seven churches (chaps. 2-3) contains the words "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

[112]The words about the sword are sometimes interpreted as referring to the beast or its followers who slay with the sword and who, in turn, will be slain. However, I believe that the words refer to believers. Recall Jesus' injunction to Peter: "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt. 26:52). Note also John 18:11: "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?" Even as Jesus would not take the sword, but rather submitted to captivity and death, so should His disciples at all times and particularly in the end time of evil's (seeming) victory.

[113]The woman is described as "Babylon the great, mother of harlots and of earth's abominations" and "drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (Rev. 17:5-6) and also as "the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth" (v. 18).

[114]"Scarlet" suggests its master, "the great red dragon" of Revelation 12:3.

[115]Recall Revelation 13:3, 14.

[116]Ladd writes about the beast: "He once existed in one or more of his heads; he ceased to exist when one of the heads received a mortal wound; but he will have a future existence when the wound is healed. The healing … will involve a satanic embodiment that will exceed anything that has yet occurred" (A Commentary on the Revelation, 226).

According to Mounce, “In the broadest sense the beast is that satanically inspired power that, although having received the stroke of death, returns to hurl himself with renewed fury against the forces of God” (The Book of Revelation, NICNT, 312).

[117]Regarding this “perdition” see Revelation 19:20.

[118]I have substituted “of’ (as in kjv) for “belongs to.” The Greek word is ek. “Of’ better expresses the idea of being of the same spirit and attitude as the preceding seven without being a part of them.

[119]As Leon Morris puts it, “This does not mean that Rome exhausts the meaning of the symbol… the great city is every city and no city. It is civilized man apart from God” (The Revelation of St. John, 209). “Babylon” and “Rome” are essentially the same.

[120]Much effort has been expended to identify these seven emperors. At the time John received the Revelation, as noted, five had preceded, the sixth was presently reigning, and the seventh was still to come. The sixth is sometimes identified as Nero. Preceding him were Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius. Nero reigned subsequently, from A.D. 54–68, and brought to a peak the bitter persecution of Christians that was later to become the official policy of the Roman Empire. (For more on Nero see the next section, “The Second Beast.”) Galba succeeded Nero and reigned less than a year (A.D. 68–69), hence “only a little while.” However, most New Testament scholars date the writing of the Book of Revelation much later toward the end of the reign of Domitian, who was emperor from A.D. 81 to 96. According to G. R. Beasley-Murray, “from Irenaeus on, the tradition of the church has maintained that John [4] saw the Revelation … at the close of Domitian’s reign’” *(Revelation*, NCBC, 37; the inner quotation is from Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, v.30.3). To get to Domitian in John’s reckoning of the emperors it has been suggested that only the five emperors deified by an act of the Roman Senate be included (Julius Caesar, Augustus, Claudius, Vespasian, and Titus) and, as the sixth, Domitian, who demanded the worship of himself as *Dominus et Deus noster* (“our Lord and God”) and actively persecuted the church. Domitian was succeeded by Nerva, who reigned for less than two years (hence another possibility for the other king “who has not yet come”). Whatever the reckoning—whether Nero or Domitian, or some other emperor at the time of the Revelation, with short-lived emperors immediately following them—the important matter is the eighth (as I will discuss in the next paragraph). A further note: It is

important to recognize that seven is more a number of totality all through the Book of Revelation than necessarily an exact figure (e.g., “the seven spirits” [1:4], the seven churches, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, etc.), so that the seven kings may not call for particular identification as much as recognition that they signify the totality of God-defying authority represented by the Roman emperors.

[121]See note 120.

[122]Mounce writes, “He is Antichrist, not simply another Roman emperor. … He belongs to the cosmic struggle between God and Satan which lies behind the scenes of human history. Yet he will appear on the stage of history as a man. He is of the seven-not one of the seven-in that he plays the same sort of role as his earthly predecessors. He, himself, however belongs to another sphere of reality” (The Book of Revelation, NICNT, 316). The fact that the eighth beast is not another head is important to bear in mind. Thus, according to I. T. Beckwith, this describes “Antichrist not as an eighth head but as the eighth world ruler coming up after the 7 world rulers impersonated in the Roman emperors have fulfilled their course” (The Apocalypse of John, 708). Thus the eighth beast will appear at the climax of history.

[123]Some interpreters view these earthly powers as ten political entities in a revived Roman Empire. In our time much attention has been given in some circles to the formation of the European Economic Community, which until 1981 consisted of ten nations. However, in 1986 Spain and Portugal joined the E.E.C., thus bringing the number to twelve. Thus the interest in this possibility has somewhat waned. I agree with Beckwith’s statement: “The ten kings are purely eschatological figures representing the totality of the powers of all nations on earth which are to be made subservient to Antichrist” (italics his) (The Apocalypse of John, 700). Recall that the dragon himself (Satan) is depicted as having ten horns. To repeat, ten is a symbolic number in Revelation for completeness or fullness.

[124]“One hour” signifies a short period. See also Revelation 18:10, 17, 19 for a similar use of this expression.

[125]John received the Revelation while exiled on the Isle of Patmos, as part of a church- wide experience of “tribulation”: “I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 1:9).

[126]Earlier I mentioned the four beasts of Daniel 7. It is generally recognized that the four represent different earthly empires (usually Babylonia, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome). Since the beast in Revelation 13 is a composite of the four Danielic beasts (see earlier), it may well represent more than the Roman Empire.

[127]I will say more about this later.

[128]The "earth" may represent that which is sensual and deceptive. James speaks of a "wisdom" that "does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil" (3:15 niv). This beast out of the earth, as we will note, is the epitome of falsehood. In no sense does his "wisdom" "come down from heaven."

[129]Recall note 98 for this description and reference to Daniel 7.

[130]This evil triumvirate, or evil trinity, is the exact opposite of the Holy Trinity. Even as each member of the Holy Trinity has equal authority so does each member of the unholy trio.

[131]Twenty-seven times, against the background of Revelation 5:6: "I saw a lamb standing, as though it had been slain." Thereafter, in Revelation, "a lamb standing" is invariably called "the Lamb."

[132]Significantly, however, Revelation 5:6 specifies that the "lamb standing" had "seven horns and … seven eyes" so that ultimately the two-horned lamblike beast out of the earth will be no competitor for the Lamb of God.

[133]Recall that "earth-dwellers" are those whose names are not written in "the Book of life of the Lamb that was slain" (v. 8).

[134]This is evidence of another diabolical parallel to the Holy Trinity. Even as the Holy Spirit constantly focuses on Christ ("He will glorify me"- words of Jesus about the Holy Spirit and Himself in John 16:14), so the second beast's total concern is the glorification of the first beast.

[135]I say "further" because, as we noted, the first beast is already an object of adulation- "the whole world went after the [first] beast in wondering admiration" (v. 3, neb).

[136]Thus the beast seemingly operates like the prophet Elijah in whose presence the fire from heaven fell (1 Kings 18:20-39). However, Elijah's miracle was for the glorification of God, the beast's for the glorification of Satan. The second beast is therefore also "the false prophet," the designation given later in Revelation 16:13; 19:20; 20:10.

[137]Once again, the earth-dwellers are the unbelieving world.

[138]Note the similarity here to Daniel 3, which records the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar's demand that everyone worship his "golden image," with death the certain penalty for refusing to do so.

[139]Henry B. Swete writes, "The Caesar [i.e., emperorj-worship was a State function at which the Proconsul and the other magistrates assisted, and the pagan priesthood wrought their σημεῖα ['signs'] before these representatives of the Empire" (Commentary on Revelation, 170). Since John is addressing seven churches in Asia Minor (chaps. 2-3), it is also noteworthy that the imperial cult was strong there and many temples had the ruling emperor's statue in place for the people to come and worship. Pergamum was the center of the imperial cult. As Hemer notes, "The provincial temple at Pergamum is portrayed on many coins of the city and of the Commune. It served as a precedent for the cult in other provinces" (The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting, 84).

[140]Beasley-Murray writes that "sorcery and trickery were part of the stock-in-trade of pagan priesthoods" (Revelation, NCB, 217). Ventriloquism was a common practice in the various temples.

[141]Recall note 120. This was the title by which Domitian later demanded he be saluted.

[142]R. C. Lenski writes, "By bowing down before the antichristian world power all the dwellers on the earth make an idol of it and worship that idol" (Interpretation of St. John's Revelation, 414).

[143]The apex of this, as earlier mentioned, is to be found in New Age thinking (cosmic humanism) in which man is acclaimed as God: "I am God." However, such self-deification practically exists in the world at large.

[144]Revelation 16:13; 19:20; 20:10.

[145]This is a more expansive way of describing the "earth-dwellers": the classes mentioned represent all people who are not believers.

[146]"A prostration of bodily and mental powers to the beast's domination is implied" (The Second Coming Bible Commentary, 241, quoting A. R. Fausset). Hence this does not mean that one has to have a physical mark-name or number-of the beast on the hand or forehead (as some biblical commentators say). Such is too external and superficial. What is intended here is not a physical but a spiritual imprint. The same thing is true of those in the next scene who have the name of the Lamb and the Father on

their foreheads-“a hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name [the Lamb’s] and his Father’s name written on their foreheads” (Rev. 14:1). Incidentally this imprintation by God is likewise God’s “seal.” Earlier 144,000 were “sealed” for protection (7:3-4) and the seal is “upon their foreheads” (9:4). The devil “marks,” but God “seals”! Both are profoundly spiritual. The question comes to this: Which way will it be-the devil’s “marking” or God’s “sealing”? The outcome is of ultimate significance, with eternity finally at stake.

[147]It would be an error to infer from this that buying and selling are bad in themselves (they are not), or that believers (those without the mark of the beast) are excluded from the marketplace. Rather, it is that all who have received the mark (that is, who are committed to the way of Satan)—and this signifies all “earth-dwellers”—cannot buy or sell without the mark upon them. They operate in the world of buying and selling as those already committed to the way of Satan: the way of exploitation, self-interest, etc.

[148]Recall also that in the Old Testament the Israelites were told to bind these words on their “hands” and “foreheads” (Deut. 6:8). This is the outward sign of total devotion to God, even as the mark of the beast likewise on the hands and foreheads means total commitment to Satan.

[149]In Greek (also in Hebrew and in Latin) every letter was also viewed as a number (as though a = 1, b = 2, c = 3, etc.). Thus any word could be computed as a numerical sum by adding up all the letters.

[150]Or “the number of (a) man.” The Greek phrase is arithmos anthrdpou.

[151]The most common suggestion is Nero. The name “Nero Caesar” when transposed into Hebrew comes out to 666 (although an extra n must be added to “Nero”-“Nero/i”). Because of the ruthlessness of Nero’s persecutions of Christians, it is possible that 666 represents him or any later “Neronic” oppression-a kind of “return of Nero.” However, Domitian’s full Latin title in an abbreviated Greek form also equals 666. By another computation the initials of the Roman emperors from Julius Caesar to Vespasian add up to 666. It is also interesting that Irenaeus, writing in the second century, shows along with other suggestions that the word Lateinus (the Roman Empire) translates into 666 (incidentally Irenaeus makes no reference to Nero). In regard to Nero, it is questionable whether John would have expected his Greek readers to know Hebrew also, and further, even if they did know, to make a transposition from the Greek text of Revelation into Hebrew.

[152]Including such disparate figures as the Pope, Martin Luther, Napoleon, and Hitler-to mention only a few.

[153]In biblical numerology the number seven symbolizes completeness and perfection (e.g., see Rev. 1:4 where "the seven spirits" doubtless signify the completeness and perfection of the Holy Spirit). Six in sequence is before seven but never reaches or equals it. Three sixes, 666, may then signify the final, but abortive effort of the beast in human form to attain divine status.

[154]Recall the seven heads of the beast being identified as seven Roman kings (emperors); thus 666 in a sense applies to all of them.

[155]The eighth beast of Revelation 17:11.

[156]Or "the abyss" (as in niv, nasb, neb). The Greek word is abyssos.

[157]The holy city" in Revelation is best understood as "the church" (see also Rev. 21:10, 11, 19, where the glorified church, the "new Jerusalem," is called "the holy city"; likewise see "the beloved city" in Rev. 20:9). So Mounce writes, "In John's imagery the holy city is yet another designation for the church" (The Book of Revelation, 221). The background of the "trampling" may be seen in Daniel 8:9-14, which contains the earliest reference to "the transgression that makes desolate" (i.e., "the abomination of desolation") and "the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled under foot" (v. 13). Also recall Daniel's reference to "the holy people" in 12:7 as background for "the holy city."

[158]The 42 months = 1260 days (computing the year, or 12 months, as 360 days). This is, of course, likewise 3½ years. The period of 1,260 days also corresponds with the 1,290 days of Daniel 12:11. (In regard to the latter, the 30 days of difference may reflect the difference between lunar and solar calendar reckoning [see John Goldingay, Daniel, WBC, 310].)

[159]The "two anointed" in Zechariah in the first instance probably refer to both Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest (on Joshua see Zechariah 3).

[160]The two lampstands represent the church. The churches are depicted in Revelation as lampstands: "The seven lampstands are the churches" (1:20). The number two does not mean that only two churches bear witness. Rather "two" probably is used because two witnesses signify a valid and complete testimony (e.g., see Deut. 19:15: "Only on the evidence of two witnesses, or of three witnesses, shall a charge be

sustained"; cf. also Jesus' words in Matt. 18:16 and Paul's in 2 Cor. 13:1). Some biblical interpreters, however, view the two as that portion (two out of seven) of the church that will suffer martyrdom in the end (see, e.g., Morris, The Revelation of St. John, TNTC, 148; G. B. Caird, The Revelation of St. John the Divine, 134). Others view the two as literal individuals who in the last days will bear powerful witness (see J. M. Ford, Revelation, AB, 177-78 for various possibilities that have been suggested).

[161]Their miracles described in verses 5-6-"fire from their mouth" to protect their witness, "power to shut the sky" from rain failing that would dampen their witness, "power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague"-are reminiscent of Elijah (see 2 Kings 1:10-12; 1 Kings 17:1) and Moses (Exod. 7-12). But see also Jeremiah 5:14: "Behold, I am making my words in your mouth a fire … and the fire shall devour them."

[162]This is suggested by the two witnesses having "power to prophesy" (v. 3). Prophesying in Revelation refers particularly to testifying to Jesus: "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (19:10; cf. John 1:7).

[163]The language of making "war upon them" is further evidence that the two witnesses are not individuals. One would hardly make war against two people!

[164]This is all the more apparent in the verses that follow, for after a short time ("3Vi days," v. 11) the witnesses stood on their feet and "in the sight of their foes went up to heaven in a cloud" (v. 12). This may be a parallel to "the rapture" of the church. See later discussion.

[165]Incidentally, before moving on, we should observe that Jesus prefaces this statement thus: "And because wickedness is multiplied. …" The word translated "wickedness" is anomia, the same as in 2 Thessalonians 2 ("the man of wickedness," "the mystery of wickedness"). We have noted the close connection between anomia and apostasia in Paul's letter, although apostasy was there mentioned first; in Jesus' words anomia is first mentioned and given as the reason that most people's love will grow cold.

[166]See the prior discussion on this.

[167]The Greek phrase is bdelugma tés erémóseós = "the detestable thing causing the desolation" (BAGD). The niv translates this as "the abomination that causes desolation"; rsv, "the desolating sacrilege."

[168]Thus the abomination, the detestable thing, brings about the desecration

of the holy place by standing in it. Instead of “in the holy place,” Mark 13:14 reads “where it should not be.”

169The NASB capitalizes ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION, not for emphasis, but because it is an Old Testament expression.

170See the discussion in the next section.

171See the preceding chapter.

172“Week” here is translated “seven” in niv. Actually this is a week of years, “seven of years,” sometimes called a hebdomad. Hence the covenant is for seven years, and “the middle of the week” (next mentioned) refers to the midpoint of three and a half years.

173 1,290 days = approximately VA years (see n.158).

174Also called Antiochus IV.

175See The Apocrypha, 1 Maccabees 1, which describes this tragic situation for Jerusalem. Verse 54 specifically mentions “the abomination of desolation”: “On the fifteenth day of the month Kislev…. ‘the abomination of desolation* was set up on the altar” (neb). See also Josephus, The Antiquities of the Jews, 12.5.4., for another vivid account.

176Jews to this day celebrate the victory over Antiochus and the rededication of the defiled temple in the Feast of Hanukkah (also called the Feast of Lights).

177See 1 Maccabees 4:52-59.

178“And now the Romans … brought their ensigns to the temple; and set them over against the eastern gate; and there did they offer sacrifices to them, and there did they make Titus imperator, with the greatest acclamations of joy” (Josephus, The Wars of the Jews, 6.6.1.) It is also interesting that Josephus viewed the words of Daniel as applying to the desolations wrought both by Antiochus and the Romans: “Our nation suffered these things under Antiochus Epiphanes, according to Daniel’s vision. … In the very same manner Daniel also wrote concerning the Roman government, and that our country should be made desolate by them” (The Antiquities of the Jews, 10.11.7.). F. F. Bruce also notes, “In Josephus’ eyes the abomination of desolation-the profanation of the sanctuary and of the priestly office [by the insurgent zealots]-was manifested increasingly as the war went on; he records, in fact, a succession of ‘abominations’ “ (“Josephus and Daniel,” A Mind for What Matters, 24).

179C. F. Keil, focusing on Antiochus Epiphanes and the final assault of the

Antichrist, writes, “The rage of Antiochus Epiphanes against the Jewish temple and the worship of God can be a type of the assault of the Antichrist against the sanctuary and the church of God in the time of the end” (Commentary on the Old Testament, 8:370). I would only change “can be” to “is”!

[180]Half a hebdomad. See note 172.

[181]I should mention here that some biblical interpreters view the stopping of sacrifices “in the middle of the week” as the work of Christ, who by His death brought to an end the necessity of other sacrifices. (See e.g., E. J. Young, The Prophecy of Daniel, 208.) However, the immediate background points not to Christ but to an adversary: “The people of the prince to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined” (9:26 nasb). Then these words follow: “And he will make a firm covenant with many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice… .” It is true that “the Messiah” (or “an anointed one” [rsv]) is referred to-“the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing” (v. 26a nasb)-just prior to the statement about “the people of the prince to come.” However, it is more natural to connect “he will make a firm covenant” with the immediate antecedent, “the prince.” Moreover, this understanding better accords with Daniel 11:31 and 12:11.

[182]I have not sought to deal with the complex issue of Daniel’s “seventy weeks,” beginning with 9:24 (which see). For our purpose the important matter is that the seventieth, or last, week refers to the activity of the Desolator. Some interpreters have held that the seventieth week is totally fulfilled in the activity of Antiochus Epiphanes, or Titus, or the final Antichrist. In the last case, dispensationalists claim that there is a large gap (a parenthesis) between the sixty-ninth week, understood as the Incarnation, and the seventieth week viewed as the future coming of the Antichrist. I submit, however, that there is nothing in the text to suggest such a gap. It is far better to view both Antiochus and Titus as types of the Antichrist. According to some computations, the seventy weeks wholly end with Antiochus; others view these weeks in closer connection with Christ’s coming and being completed with Titus. However, if these two events are typological (which seems apparent), there is no need to posit a gap between the sixty-ninth and a long-delayed seventieth week.

[183]This is the period given for the nourishment of “the woman” away from “the dragon.” See later discussion.

[184]This question refers to a time of great trouble for God's people followed by the wonders of their deliverance, resurrection from the dead, and eternal life.

[185]According to Beckwith the reference is to "the indefinite but short period … preceding the end … the period of the last terrible sway of Satan and his agents in the world before the second coming of the Lord" (italics his) (The Apocalypse of John, 252).

[186]Recent examples include the film The Last Temptation of Christ, videos by the rock star Madonna, and an art work that features a crucifix submerged in a jar of urine.

[187]Unfortunately there has been some recent justification for this, but Hollywood has taken this as opportunity for the further vilification of things religious. In an article entitled "Does Hollywood Hate Religion?" film writer Michael Medved describes what he calls "the pervasive hostility to religion and religious values in Hollywood. … If someone turns up in a film today wearing a Roman collar or bearing the title Reverend, you can be fairly sure that he will be crazy or corrupt-or both" tReader's Digest, July 1990, 100-101).

[188]See, for example, Walter Martin, The Kingdom of the Cults, and Ruth A. Tucker, Another Gospel.

[189]Earlier in the Book of Revelation seven seals were opened. With the opening of the fifth, John beholds "the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne" (6:9). These souls cry out for God to execute justice and vengeance, and they are "each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been" (v. 11). Death and martyrdom are continuing facts of Christian history.

[190]Jesus Himself raises the rhetorical question, "When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8 niv). His question does not intend to suggest that when He returns there will be no believers but that faith may have no place on earth-in the language of Revelation, among the "earth-dwellers."

[191]Recall the words of Revelation 13:5, 7: "It was allowed to exercise authority. … It was allowed to make war on the saints and conquer them."

[192]Bear in mind what John said after depicting the victory of the first beast

over the saints: “Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.”

[193]Mark 13:24 reads, “But in those days, after that tribulation… .”

[194]The Greek word usually translated “tribulation” is thlipsis. “Affliction” is also a frequent translation.

[195]Again, the Greek word here and in verse 4 below is from thlipsis.

[196]Paul speaks about his earnest desire: “… that I may know Him … and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Phil. 3:10-11 nasb). Thus suffering, i.e., tribulation, and conformity to Christ’s death, is even said to be necessary to attain the resurrection. This resembles Paul’s statement, previously quoted, about being “made worthy” through “persecutions and afflictions … of the kingdom of God.”

[197]The Greek word is kauchdmetha-“glory” (kjv), “rejoice” (rsv, niv), “exult” (nasb, neb).

[198]The Greek word is hypomonēn, frequently translated “endurance.”

[199]The Greek word is dokimēn, literally, “the quality of being approved” (BAGD), or tested-hence “character.” The neb translation-“proof that we have stood the test”-is excellent. (The kjv’s “experience” is an unsatisfactory translation.)

[200]This is actually the climax of Paul’s statement relating to the hope that stems from tribulation, endurance, and proven character.

[201]The Greek word hypernikōmen is literally “we overconquer.” The nasb excellently translates this as “we overwhelmingly conquer”; the neb paraphrase is “overwhelming victory is ours.”

[202]The Greek word is archai-earthly rulers and authorities; but it is also used in reference to “angelic and demonic powers” (BAGD). Since “angels” have just been mentioned, “demons” is the likely meaning, as translated in niv.

[203]Earlier, that is, than the reference to “great tribulation” previously noted (to which we will later return).

[204]The parallel Markan passage gives other details, e.g., “They will deliver you up to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues … brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death” (13:9-12; cf. Luke 21:12-19).

[205]The Greek word again is hypomone, whether translated “patient endurance” (rsv above and niv), “perseverance” (nasb), or simply “endurance” (neb). (“Patience,” the kjv translation, is misleading.)

[206]See the earlier discussion of “the kingdom of God.” We will return to this later.

[207]This opposition we have further observed in the guise of “the man of sin” and the two “beasts” in preceding sections.

[208]See supra.

[209]For specific language of “the great tribulation” see Revelation 7:14 (discussed infra).

[210]These words in the parallel passage in Luke 21, not found in Matthew and Mark, make it clear that the Great Tribulation is vengeance upon the enemies of God.

[211]Recall the earlier discussion of this matter.

[212]“Great distress” (ananke me gale) is the parallel expression in Luke to “great tribulation” (thlipsis megale) in Matthew.

[213]I have earlier commented on the destruction of Jerusalem in a.d. 70 and the anguish, suffering, and tribulation involved. Truly it was “great,” and in magnitude nothing like it had been experienced before. Still, for all its devastation, there will be a tribulation near the end that will be far more intense. Thus the desolation of Jerusalem is the precursor of the final and ultimate devastation.

[214]The parallel in Mark 13:20 concludes, “He shortened the days.”

[215]Thus all the forces leading up to the appearance of “the man of sin” (the composite beast, the desolator-whatever the name) will undergo divine judgment. The climax, at the conclusion of Christian witness, will be total destruction (see chap. 12).

[216]The immediate background is: “When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies…”; in Matthew and Mark: “When you see the desolating sacrilege … standing in the holy place [Mark-4 set up where it ought not to be’]. …” We will return to this later.

[217]Christians living in Jerusalem and environs did escape. Norval Geldenhuys writes, “When the first signs appeared that Jerusalem was going to be surrounded by the Roman forces practically all the Christians fled from the city and its environs across the Jordan to … Pella … where they remained until after the destruction of Jerusalem” (The Gospel of Luke, NICNT, 528). It is interesting that Eusebius, an early church historian, says that they went out in response to “an oracle given by revelation” (Ecclesiastical History 3.5.3).

[218]While this tribulation is local in a sense, a proper understanding, I

believe, of the Book of Revelation sees in the message to Thyatira (as well as to all the seven churches) a message to the church and world at every stage in history, including the final time.

[219]The "whole world" (oikoumene), for example, is clearly the Roman Empire in Luke 2:1: 44In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world [pasan ten oikoumenen] should be enrolled."

[220]Accordingly, Ladd writes, 44This prophecy [Rev. 3:10] refers to the Great Tribulation, and it is directed not against God's people but against 4earth-dwellers.' This phrase is a recurring one in Revelation by which the author designates the people of a godless society … and who are to suffer the wrath of God (cf. 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 14:6; 17:2, 8)" (The Blessed Hope, 85).

[221]Thus the word translated 44trial" (peirasmos) cannot here refer to God's people. Hence the translation "temptation" (kjv) or "testing" (nasb), while appropriate for peirasmos in other contexts, is unsatisfactory here. Seeseman says in his article on peira and its cognates that the peirasmos in Revelation 3:10 refers to "the total eschatological terror and tribulation of the last time" (TDNT, 6:30).

[222]Rather than "soon" (as in kjv, rsv, niv, and neb). The Greek word is tachu. Thayer renders tachu as "quickly, speedily"; BAGD suggests "quickly" as preferable to "soon" in this context.

[223]Recall the word spoken to believers attacked by "the beast" in Revelation 13:10: "Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints."

[224]As held by those who view this verse as affirming a rapture of the church whereby the hour of trial is avoided. (See, e.g., René Pache, The Return of Jesus Christ, "The Removal of the Church," 118-19.) But keeping from is not removal; it rather means protection. A good illustration of this may be found in Jesus' prayer to the Father for His disciples: "I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world [hence 'remove them'], but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15). See, e.g., Eldon Ladd, The Blessed Hope, 85-86, and especially Robert Gundry, The Church and the Tribulation, 54-61. See also my Excursus on pretribulationism, pages 370-82.

[225]Recall previous sections.

[226]The Greek phrase is erchomenoi ek tés thlipseós tès megalès, literally, "coming out of the great tribulation."

[227]This is obvious from the many similar details; e.g., cf. Revelation 7:15 and 22:3, both referring to "the throne of God" and those who "serve [or 'worship'] him"; 7:17 and 21:6, speaking similarly of the "spring(s) of the water of life" (nasb); and 7:17 and 21:4, both saying that God "will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

[228]It is important to recognize that these tribulation believers are not martyrs. To be sure, as we have earlier observed, persecution and death may indeed be the lot of believers especially in the end time; however, the focus of Revelation here is that of believers sealed and therefore emerging unscathed from the judgments of God. Beasley-Murray writes, "It is a puzzling feature to the present writer that the majority of commentators on the Revelation in this century identify the great multitude with the martyrs. Of this there is not a hint in the text" (Revelation, NCBC, 145). Similarly I. T. Beckwith says, "The redeemed here are … in no way distinguished as martyrs. These latter are described as 'those who have been slain for the word of God' (69), and 'those who have been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus' (204); but the multitude in this vision are those who 'have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb' (v. 14), a characterization of all saints alike, cf. I5, 59. The vision then is a revelation of the whole Church brought in safety through the great tribulation into the blessedness of its finished salvation" (The Apocalypse of John, 539). I agree wholeheartedly with these statements.

[229]The parallel with God's judgments upon Pharaoh in Exodus 7-11 is apparent. Whatever God sends upon Pharaoh and Egypt-blood, flies, boils, hail, locusts, etc.-Israel is each time spared. Recall also the account in Ezekiel 9 where a mark is placed on the foreheads of those who "sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed" (v. 4) in Jerusalem; all others are to be slain. The command to the executioners: "Pass through the city … and smite; your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity … but touch no one upon whom is the mark" (vv. 5-6).

[230]The fact that the next mention of those sealed in Revelation 9 makes no reference to "Israel" but simply to "those who have not the seal of God upon their foreheads"; also the fact that the next reference to 144,000 in Revelation 14:1 -5 again makes no reference to "Israel" but speaks of them as "redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb" (v. 5) suggests that these are Christians, whether Jewish or Gentile. (Believers are called "first fruits" in James 1:18; also cf. Rom. 8:23.)

Furthermore, that Revelation 7 does not literally deal with the twelve tribes of Israel is apparent for a number of reasons: (1) not all the tribes are included (there is no mention of Dan or Ephraim; in their place are Levi and Joseph); (2) that exactly 12,000 from each tribe are numbered-the same from tribes large and small-seems improbable; (3) the tribes as such do not exist today; and (4) if Gentile Christians are not included in the 144,000 of Israel, they are nowhere spoken of as sealed at all. If 144,000 on the other hand is a symbolic number of completion-possibly 12 x 12 x 1000-then this would signify all Christians, Jews and Gentiles alike. Incidentally, if Paul's expression in Galatians 6:16, "the Israel of God," refers to Christians in general (which seems likely), then there is a significant parallel with Revelation 7. On Revelation 7:4ff., see Mounce, The Book of Revelation, NICNT, 168-70; Ladd, Commentary on Revelation, 11117.

[231]For example, Revelation 11:7; 12:11; 13:7; 14:13; 18:24.

[232]A basic theme in the Book of Revelation is the judgments of God as the expression of His wrath. The "seven bowls of the wrath of God" (16:1) are the climactic expression of this (they are "bowls full of the wrath of God" -15:7). Prior to this, however, with the opening of the sixth seal, people cry out to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come" (6:16-17). Similarly, when the seventh trumpet has sounded forth, there is the statement that "the nations raged, but thy wrath came" (11:18). Likewise, there is the picture of the angel who "gathered the vintage of the earth and threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God" (14:19). Following the pouring out of the seven bowls "full of the wrath of God," there is the awesome scene of One whose name is "the Word of God," who "will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty" (19:13, 15). The wrath of God is depicted throughout Revelation as the motivating reality behind the climactic judgments of God upon the evil world.

[233]The very fact that the imagery above moves from one-fourth to one-third to totality is evidence enough that these are not merely increasing natural incidents. Moreover, a literal understanding is impossible; for example, "a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars … a third of the day was kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night" (8:12). Besides the obvious fact that none of this makes literal

sense, the sun later, with a bowl of wrath poured on it in totality, scorches men with fire (16:8). Many other examples could be cited. Regarding 8:12 Beasley-Murray writes, “The astronomy is less important than the thing signified. John wishes to affirm that people will experience darkness in the day and intensified darkness in the night because of their sins. But the Lord is merciful in sparing them light both by day and by night-that they may forsake their moral darkness in the unending light of his presence” (Revelation, NCBC, 158).

[234]“When the conscience of man has been seared and deadened by deliberate and persistent sin, there is nothing softening or converting in the judgments of God…. The heart may become so hardened that even the torture of the burning sun of divine wrath cannot burn into it the saving fear of God which leads to repentance and confession of guilt” (D. W. Richardson, The Revelation of Jesus Christ, 97).

[235]Or “the hour of trial.” See earlier comments.

[236]Recall Revelation 6 (one-fourth), Revelation 8 (one-third), and Revelation 16 (totality).

[237]The gospel condemns no one: “God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world.” However, “he who does not believe is condemned already…” (John 3:17-18).

[238]This excursus will also briefly touch on midtribulationism. I will not by name deal with the other main tribulational view- posttribulationism- since what has been written in the previous section is from that perspective, namely that Christ will return after the Great Tribulation. However, in the critique that follows, the reasons for the posttribulational perspective should become still clearer. (A helpful study of all three tribulational positions may be found in Richard R. Reiter, ed., The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational? Proponents of each perspective describe their positions and then respond to one another. See also Millard J. Erickson, Contemporary Options in Eschatology, part 3, “Tribulational Views,” for a thoughtful presentation.)

[239]J. N. Darby (1800-1882), leader of the Plymouth Brethren movement, was largely responsible for promulgating the pretribulational viewpoint. Darby taught that Christ’s second coming would occur in two stages: first, before the Great Tribulation and, second, at its close. This was part and parcel of his “dispensational” teaching that divided history into several distinct eras or dispensations. The next to the last dispensation, according to Darby, is the present church age, which will climax with the

return of Christ to rapture the church prior to the Great Tribulation. The second coming will occur seven years later and usher in the Millennium and kingdom age. Dispensationalism as a scheme of biblical interpretation is best known today through the Scofield Reference Bible (seven dispensations are outlined in the footnote to the heading of Genesis 1:28). Dallas Theological Seminary is the chief center of dispensational teaching.

[240]Recall my earlier reference to the chapter title, “The Removal of the Church,” in Pache’s book, The Return of Jesus Christ.

[241]The Rapture Question, 48. Walvoord, former president of Dallas Theological Seminary, is a leading spokesman for pretribulationism. He, like all others to be quoted in this excursus (except Blackstone), is also a graduate of Dallas Seminary.

[242]Ibid., 69. Gerald B. Stanton writes similarly: “The Church is expressly promised deliverance from the wrath of God” (Kept from the Hour: A Systematic Study of the Rapture in Biblical Prophecy [see 4, 30-32, 43 quoted]).

[243]The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational? 70. In this volume Paul Feinberg writes chapter 2, entitled “The Case for the Pretribulation Rapture Position.”

[244]See Walvoord, The Rapture Question, 70, 142, 194. Feinberg has a more lengthy discussion of Revelation 3:10 in The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational? 63-72.

[245]In the earlier Scofield Reference Bible (1909), the footnote to this verse says, “This call [to John] seems clearly to indicate the fulfillment of 1 Thes. 4:14-17 [the rapture].” This statement in the present Scofield Bible has been modified to read, “the catching up of John from earth to heaven has been taken to be a symbolic representation of the translation of the church” (italics mine).

[246]The Rapture: Truth or Consequences, 90. Walvoord is more guarded, saying, “Though many pretribulationists find in the catching up of John a symbolic presentation of the rapture of the church, the passage obviously falls short of an actual statement of the rapture” (The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation, 136). Charles L. Ryrie more bluntly says that the words “come up hither” “do not teach the rapture of the church; however … the rapture of the church would occur at this point in the book” (Revelation, 33-34). It seems that pretribulationists would like to claim Revelation 4:1 as a prooftext for a pretribulation rapture of the church but are now

hesitant to take this as a valid exegetical interpretation.

[247]On all these passages, see Walvoord, The Rapture Question, 194 (also note index references to his previous fuller discussion of these passages). Paul Feinberg says, “The texts that express this promise [of deliverance for the church from wrath] are: 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9; Revelation 3:10; and possibly Romans 5:9; Ephesians 5:6; Colossians 3:6” (The Rapture, Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational? 52). Walvoord in The Rapture Question gives as a possibility 2 Thessalonians 2:3 with the suggested translation of apostasia as “departure” (instead of the usual “apostasy” or “rebellion”)-thus a departure from earth of the church before “the man of sin” is revealed. (See my earlier note 50 for a discussion of the translation of apostasia.) Later Walvoord came to recognize the error in such a translation and interpretation (see The Blessed Hope, 125).

[248]The Rapture Question, 61.

[249]See Revelation 5:8; 8:3, 4; 11:18; 13:7, 10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20, 24.

[250]The Revelation of Jesus Christ (a commentary on the Book of Revelation), 203-4.

[251]On “the future millennium,” see chapter 13, “The Millennium.”

[252]The Rapture Question, 38-39.

[253]Ibid., 47.

[254]The elect may be thought of primarily as Jews who will come to salvation during the tribulation. Charles Feinberg, referring to the days being “shortened,” says that this will be “for Israel’s sake” (Millennialism: The Two Major Views, chap. 10, “The Tribulation Period,” 164). Matthew 24 is “Israel’s age [not the church’s] depicted in its last stages” (pp. 288-89).

[255]Walvoord, The Rapture Question, 66.

[256]On “rapture,” see my chapter 12, “The Purpose of Christ’s Return,” page 407, notes 38, 39.

[257]The Blessed Hope, 163. The importance of this point for Walvoord is evidenced in the very title of his book.

[258]Ibid., 72.

[259]Or “the revelation.” See the early pretribulational book by W. E. Blackstone, Jesus Is Coming, chapter 9, “Rapture and Revelation.” Also see Charles Feinberg, Millennialism: The Two Major Views, chapter 17, entitled “The Rapture and the Revelation.” It is interesting that Feinberg admits that on the basis of the Greek words this distinction cannot be

demonstrated; but he then adds, “The differentiation between the rapture and the revelation is made clear by a comparative study of the Scriptures on the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ” (p. 287). It seems that pretribulationists would like to avoid the idea of a double Second Coming and thus prefer “rapture” for the church and “revelation” for the world. Accordingly, Charles Feinberg still uses the terminology despite its exegetical inadequacy. Paul Feinberg (his son) seems to have dropped the terminology of “rapture” and “revelation” and speaks instead of “rapture” and “second coming” (see his lengthy discussion entitled “The Differences between Rapture Passages and Second Coming Passages,” in The Rapture Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational? 80-86).

[260]The Rapture Question, 11. Also Walvoord later says, “The doctrine of imminency … is the heart of pretribulationism” (55).

[261]The Rapture, Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational? 80.

[262]Millennialism: The Two Major Views, 163. In this connection, Lindsey states that “those who say that the believers in the Church are going to go through all these horrors never really bring out what that means” (The Rapture, 24). Pretribulationalists ask, How can one really get excited about the return of Christ if all these terrors must first be faced? In Charles Feinberg’s words, “How can the church be looking for the blessed hope when she is looking for the Tribulation period?” (Millennialism: The Two Major Views, 161).

[263]Walvoord, The Blessed Hope, 55.

[264]The Rapture, 210.

[265]Dispensationalism Today, 159.

[266]The Rapture Question, 23.

[267]Ibid., 23-24.

[268]This program includes the rebuilding of the temple, the reinstitution of Old Testament sacrifices, etc. In Charles Feinberg’s words, “The land will be redistributed among the twelve tribes, and the Temple will be rebuilt with the sacrifices, as memorials, reinsti- tuted…. Israel will also rule over the nations” (Millennialism: The Two Major Views, 186).

[269]Walvoord, The Rapture Question, 65.

[270]See, e.g., J. Dwight Pentecost, Things to Come, chapter 18, “Israel in the Tribulation/’ Pentecost speaks of “the setting aside of the 144,000, the calling out of the believing remnant, and Israel’s ministry to the nations during the tribulation period” (p. 304).

[271]Ibid., 162.

[272]Millennialism: The Two Major Views, 164.

[273]The term is not exact, as will be seen in what follows. Moreover, persons who espouse a midtribulational viewpoint do not usually designate it as such.

[274]The End: Re-Thinking the Revelation, 111.

[275]Harrison speaks of "His [Christ's] pre-Tribulation coming" (ibid., 118).

[276]A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion, 2:391.

[277]See his article, "The Case for the Mid-Seventieth-Week Rapture Position" in The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?

[278]Ibid., 134.

[279]Another pretribulational view is known as "partial rapture." This minority view holds that only faithful and watchful believers will be raptured prior to the Great Tribulation. The rest will be raptured during or at the end of the Tribulation. See Erickson's Contemporary Options in Eschatology, 169-73, on this viewpoint. An additional view has recently emerged called the "pre-wrath rapture." This view is propounded by Marvin Rosenthal in his book The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church. Both pre-wrath rapturism and partial rapturism are summarized in Robert P. Lightner, The Last Days Handbook.

[280]Also in the critical rapture passage in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 the word "church" is not used. But surely this is the rapture of the church.

[281]See the previous discussion of this, pages 365-69, and note 224 (especially referring to John 17:15).

[282]By this I do not mean that these chapters make no reference to future events, for they surely do. However, these chapters were also a summons to the first-century church in Asia Minor to bear up under tribulation and persecution. It is these churches who were promised a blessing for reading and keeping the entire prophecy (1:3), not just chapters 1-3.

[283]See, e.g., Romans 8:33, 2 Timothy 2:10; Titus 1:1. Also note Jesus' words in Matthew 22:14: "Many are called, but few are chosen [or "elect"-eklektoi]." Why would "the elect" in Matthew 24 not also refer to God's "elect" in the present age?

[284]For a helpful discussion of Matthew 24 see Douglas J. Moo, "The Olivet Discourse" in *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* 190–95. Indeed, there is much of value in all of Moo's chapter, entitled "The Case for the Posttribulation Rapture Position."

[285]The Rapture Question, 69.

[286]As Revelation 7:14 shows, they "have come out of the great tribulation." This is true whether they are viewed as the church or as "tribulation saints" after the supposed removal of the church.

[287]Paul Feinberg erroneously states that "the means of protection is removal from this period by the Rapture" (italics his) (The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational? 59). Removal is not protection; sealing is.

[288]Recall that in the picture of the invasion of mankind by fiendish locusts who torture people so much that "they will long to die, and death will fly from them" (Rev. 9:6), not a single "sealed" person is affected. The locusts are "told not to harm the grass or the earth or any growth or any tree, but only those of mankind who have not the seal of God upon their foreheads" (v. 4). This sealing doubtless applies to all other woes that follow.

[289]Recall Hal Lindsey's words, "The hope of the rapture keeps me from despair."

[290]Some words in Isaiah may speak to this: "Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until the wrath is past. For behold, the Lord is coming forth out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity" (26:20-21).

[291]E.g., Paul Feinberg has a section entitled "The Differences Between Rapture Passages and Second Coming Passages" (The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational? 80-86).

[292]Pretribulationists also seek to distinguish between "the Rapture" as a secret coming and "the Second Coming" as public. It is hard to imagine anything more public than the scenario in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17-"a cry of command," an "archangel's call," and "the sound of the trumpet of God"!

[293]I might add that it is out of the question historically too, for until the nineteenth century there is no recorded reference to a pretribulational coming of Christ. George Ladd writes, "The hope of the church throughout the early centuries was the second coming of Christ, not a pretribulation rapture" (The Blessed Hope, 19). This is a quotation from Ladd's chapter entitled "The Historic Hope of the Church." This chapter and the next, entitled "The Rise and Spread of Pretribulationism," are well worth reading.

[294]Much else could be added on this point. For example, the parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13 about the mustard seed growing to become "the greatest of shrubs" (vv. 31-32) and the leaven in meal increasing "till it was all leavened" (v. 33) imply a lengthy period of time before Christ will return. Also the command of Jesus "You shall be my witnesses … to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8) requires many years, even centuries, to be fulfilled. Obviously Christ will not return until this task has been completed. Thus His return was not imminent in the first generation or in many thereafter. We are surely much closer to its occurrence now.

[295]Recall some of the things said in the preceding section on the Great Tribulation in answer to the question, "Are there signs that it is at hand?" (pp. 369ff.).

[296]Corrie ten Boom, who endured prison and persecution under the Nazis, has said, "I have been in countries where the saints are already suffering terrible persecution. In China the Christians were told, 'Don't worry, before the tribulation comes, you will be translated-raptured.' Then came a terrible persecution. Millions of Christians were tortured to death. Later I heard a bishop from China say, sadly, 'We have failed. We should have made the people strong for persecution rather than telling them Jesus would come first.' " Corrie ten Boom added, "I feel I have a divine mandate to go and tell the people of this world that it is possible to be strong in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are in training for the tribulation. …" This, I submit, is the voice of tried and true wisdom.

[297]Thomas S. McCall writes, "My hope is that you are rejoicing that, as a believer, you will not have to go through the awesome tribulation, and that you will be able to observe those events from a balcony seat in heaven. See you at the rapture!" (Hal Lindsey et al., When Is Jesus Coming Again? 41-42).

[298]Recall many scenes in the Book of Revelation of earth and mountains giving way and collapsing under the impact of God's judgments and wrath.

[299]The "desolations" could signify the sum total of the results of God's wrath and devastation in Revelation 6-19. God's people, totally protected, are invited to "come and see" them.

[300]A parallel to this may be observed in Peter's words, quoting the prophet Joel, on the Day of Pentecost: "I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke [perhaps from an earthquake]; the sun shall be turned into darkness and

the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes…" (Acts 2:1920).

[301]"In connection with this apocalyptic picture strict literalness must be avoided." So writes William Hendriksen regarding the language in Matthew (The Gospel of Matthew, NTC, 863). He then adds, "Until this prophetic panorama becomes history we shall probably not know how much of the description [in Matt., Mark, and Luke] must be taken literally and how much figuratively." Ladd writes in relation to the above passage in Revelation: "The language of cosmic catastrophe … is the Bible's picturesque way of describing the divine judgment falling on the world. The language is 'semi-poetic': i.e. it is symbolic language which can hardly be taken with strict literalness…. However, the language is not merely poetic or symbolic of spiritual realities but describes a real cosmic catastrophe whose actual character we cannot conceive. Out of the ruins of judgment will emerge a new redeemed order…" (The Revelation of John, 108). In sum, neither the word "literal" nor the word "symbolic" is adequate to describe the phenomena depicted as preceding the coming of Christ, for they are the immediate backdrop of the unimaginable day of the Lord, of the final irruption of God into history through Jesus Christ, and hence portray the dissolution of the old world in preparation for the coming of the new heavens and new earth.

[302]See the discussion on pages 354-56 particularly the quotations from Josephus.

[303]See earlier quotations, e.g., from Jeremiah 4:23-24 and Ezekiel 32:7-8.

[304]Cf. Revelation 1:7 (niv): "All the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him" (Christ "coming with the clouds"). Mounce writes, "The mourning of Revelation is the remorse accompanying the disclosure of divine judgment at the coming of Christ" (The Book of Revelation, NICNT, 72). This is also the case in Matthew.

[305]That this prophecy relates to all the earth is apparent from these later words: "In the fire of his [the Lord's] jealous wrath, all the earth shall be consumed; for a full, yea, sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of earth" (1:18). In some Old Testament instances "the day of the Lord" may refer to a more local action of God's judgment upon a people or nation; however, there is usually the implication of an ultimate day to which this action points. See, e.g., Isaiah 13 for a picture of both the final "day of the Lord" (vv. 1-16) and a local event (vv. 17-22) in regard to Babylon.

[306]Meaning God's decision (see nasb margin: "i.e. God's verdict").

[307]Recall, e.g., the discussion supra, pages 360-65.

[308]Or “in the sky” (nasb, niv). The Greek word ouranos may be translated either “sky” or “heaven.” However, “heaven” (also in kjv and neb) seems more appropriate in conveying the supernatural character of this great event.

[309]As stated in The Second Coming Bible Commentary, 344. Since Jesus says earlier in Matthew that His coming will be like a flash of lightning-“for as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming [parousia] of the Son of man” (24:27)-it is also possible that something like a flash of lightning is the sign. If this is the case, the glory (mentioned above) would not be a gradual “growing brighter and brighter” but a sudden, electrifying flash across heaven and earth!

11
The Manner of Christ's Return

We will now consider the manner of Christ's return. Our concern thus far has been with various names or terms used in the New Testament to express His return and with a number of signs that point to this great event. Thus we are ready to look at the actual event itself: What will the return of Christ be like?

I. THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN

Christ will return on the clouds of heaven. Following the words about "the sign of the Son of man in heaven" and the resultant mourning of "the tribes of the earth," the text in Matthew adds, "And they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven" (24:30). The exact wording varies within the Synoptic Gospels: "in clouds," Mark 13:26; "in a cloud," Luke 21:27;

and, according to Revelation 1:7, "he is coming with the clouds."[1] Whether "on,"[2] "in," or "with" "clouds" or simply "a cloud," all these are obviously variable expressions to declare the wonder and mystery of an event that transcends exact description.

Let us reflect for a moment on this latter point. The return of Christ will have no counterpart in anything in ordinary experience; hence no precise conceptualization is possible. It will not be a movement from cosmic space to earthly space (like the return of an astronaut) but *from heaven to earth;* thus whether on, in, or with one cloud or many clouds makes no difference, since this is a movement between heaven and earth of Him who is both God and man. It cannot be contained by the language of ordinary space or depicted on even a three-dimensional canvas: it is the incomprehensible transection of the mundane by the supramundane, the earthly sphere by the heavenly sphere.

This return of Christ from heaven to earth will end the long period between His ascension almost two thousand years ago and His Parousia. When Jesus departed from His disciples, the situation was the same except that the movement was in the opposite direction: *from earth to heaven.* "As they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight"[3] (Acts 1:9). Hence, it was not a trip from earthly to cosmic space, or even beyond, but from visibility to invisibility, from earth to heaven. Likewise it will be, in reverse, upon His return. Thus two angels said to the watching disciples, "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). As a cloud "took him" before, "in the same way" He will come back.

It is apparent that the clouds (whether one or many) in all these accounts are clouds of heaven. They are from heaven, and while they are beheld by human eyes, their origin is from beyond. Indeed the clouds are of the same order as the

clouds that are frequently depicted in the Bible as accompanying a divine visitation or action. For example, at Mount Sinai there is the memorable scene of the Lord coming to the mountain "in a thick cloud" (also with thunder and lightning) in the sight of all Israel and communicating His commandments (Exod. 19:9–19; 20). On another occasion the cloud covered the mountain, and God spoke with Moses "out of the midst of the cloud" (Exod. 24:15–18). Yet again, Moses went up Mount Sinai and "the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there" (Exod. 34:5). At the conclusion of Moses' building the tabernacle an extraordinary event occurred: "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Exod. 40:34). Thus God came in "the cloud." Similarly many years later when Solomon had finished the temple, "a cloud filled the house of the LORD" (1 Kings 8:10). Another vivid instance is that of the prophet Ezekiel; he beheld "a great cloud, with brightness round about it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming bronze" (Ezek. 1:4)—the awesome divine presence. In a memorable New Testament scene, while the close disciples of Jesus were on the top of a mountain, suddenly "a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him' " (Matt. 17:5). And so, in multiple ways, throughout both Old and New Testaments, clouds are frequently shown as vehicles[4] of the divine presence and activity.[5]

Thus Christ's return on the clouds of heaven will be in continuity with the past, but also it will be at the climax of history. The cloud will be like one never seen before. But more important than the cloud will be He who comes to bring history to its consummation. Even so, come Lord Jesus!

Finally, to come on (or with, or in) the cloud(s) means to *return in glory.* We have noted that in the Old Testament "the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle." Thus closely connected are the cloud and the glory. And that glory was so awesome that "Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting, because the cloud abode upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Exod. 40:35). In a similar manner, just after the cloud filled the temple built by Solomon, "the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD" (1 Kings 8:11). In the New Testament, Peter, looking back to that awesome day on the mount when God spoke out of the overshadowing cloud, declares that "the voice was borne to him [Christ] by the Majestic Glory" (2 Peter 1:17). The cloud is the emblem of the glory of God—a glory awesome and majestic.

So it is that when Christ returns "on the clouds," He will return in glory.

According to the apocalyptic narrative of Matthew 24, Jesus speaks of "the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (v. 30). At an earlier date in His ministry Jesus refers, according to the Lukan account, to His future coming "in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels" (9:26). Hence He will come both with "great glory" (Matthew) and in multiplied glory (Luke): His own, that of the Father, and also that of the holy angels!

What a source of blessedness and rejoicing is this return in glory for those who belong to Christ! Truly our blessed hope "is the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). Indeed, with this hope ever before us, we may gladly endure all present travail and pain. So Paul declares, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18). And Peter writes, "Rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed [literally, 'at the revelation of his glory']" (1 Peter 4:13). The revelation of that future glory is so full of blessedness and joy that in comparison any present trial or suffering pales into insignificance.

Such is the glory of Christ's presence as He comes "in clouds." But it is also *the glory of His power*. He will return "with great power and glory" (Mark 13:26);[6] thus the two are closely conjoined. It will take His mighty power to gather the elect by awakening the dead and translating the living, to destroy evil totally, and to bring all things to their consummation.

According to Paul, "the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command"[7] (1 Thess. 4:16), and it is that mighty "cry of command" that will set in operation all forces leading to the consummation. In the Book of Revelation, in the climactic scene of Christ's return, John says, "I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse!"[8] (19:11)—the horse representing power and might. Christ is followed by "the armies of heaven" (v. 14). Here the focus is on the fact that all power is at His disposal for the final destruction of everything evil.

Finally, Christ's coming in glory on the clouds has the dual effect of being so brilliant and bright as to destroy evil[9] by its very presence and power and to produce great marveling and glorification among believers. Regarding the latter, Paul speaks of the day "when he [Christ] comes … to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at in all who have believed" (2 Thess. 1:10).

Surely we cannot even begin to imagine the magnitude, the marvel, and the wonder of Christ's return in glory.

II. ACCOMPANIMENTS

It is apparent, first, that the return of Christ will be with *angels*. According to Mark 8:38, Jesus will come "in the glory of the Father with the holy angels."[10] Paul speaks of the Lord Jesus as "revealed from heaven with his mighty angels" (2 Thess. 1:7). The angels, accordingly, are "the angels of his power."[11] They come with Him to effectuate His purposes.

Paul also makes reference, in the context of Christ's return, to "the voice of the archangel." After saying that the Lord "will descend from heaven" with "a cry of command," Paul adds, "with the voice of the archangel" (1 Thess. 4:16 KJV).[12] Nothing is further stated regarding either the identification of the archangel or what he says.[13] The relevant point is that, in addition to mentioning the angels who accompany Jesus, Scripture also refers to the presence and activity of an archangel.

The return of Christ is also described as occurring in the company of the *saints'*, "the coming *[parousia*] of the Lord Jesus with all his saints"[14] (1 Thess 3:13). In the same connection Paul says that "through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep" (1 Thess. 4:14). Hence, the return of Christ will be in company with not only the holy angels but also those believers who have died.

There is one other passage of particular relevance here—Colossians 3:4: "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." The background for this appear ance with Christ "in glory" is the fact that, says Paul, "your life is hid with Christ in God" (v. 3). Hence when He appears, we will appear with Him because we are already with Him. The coming of the saints with Christ, accordingly, is the manifestation to the world that our lives are hid with Christ in God. He comes with His saints because they belong to Him; they are a part of Him, and hence will appear with Him in glory.[15]

It is also possible that the "armies of heaven" (mentioned earlier) signify the saints. We have observed that He who comes on "a white horse" is followed by "the armies of heaven." The armies are further described as "arrayed in fine linen" (Rev. 19:14). Nothing is said here specifically as to whether the armies are angels or people, but several verses earlier it was declared of the bride of Christ

that “it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen” (19:8). It would seem to follow that the “armies of heaven” are saints in glory who will be with Christ in the final victory over evil.[16]

Finally, the return of Christ will be accompanied by a great *trumpet call.* Following the statement in Matthew about the Son of man “coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory,” the text reads, “and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call [literally, ‘with a great trumpet’]” (24:31). Paul’s words about the Lord descending “with a cry of command, with the voice of the archangel” continue: “and with the sound of the trumpet of God” (1 Thess. 4:16). It will be a great trumpet call—indeed, the very trumpet of God.

Without referring directly to the return of Christ,[17] Paul speaks elsewhere of “the last trumpet” and adds, “for the trumpet will sound…” (1 Cor. 15:52). This “last trumpet” seems identical with the seventh trumpet in the Book of Revelation. After six trumpet calls have gone forth, the announcement is made “that there should be no more delay, but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God … should be fulfilled” (10:6–7). The climax comes when “the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever’ “ (11:15). Truly the last trumpet will have sounded, for the mystery of God will be complete and His kingdom come in power and glory.

This sounding of the trumpet at the return of Christ calls to mind the sounding of a trumpet at the awesome descent of God to Mount Sinai just before the giving of the Ten Commandments. In addition to thunder, lightning, and the “thick cloud,” there was “a very loud trumpet blast,” with the result that “all the people who were in the camp trembled” (Exod. 19:16). A short time later, “as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder” (v. 19).

The sounding of the trumpet, accordingly, is an announcement or declaration that God is at hand: He has drawn near.[18] In relation to Christ and His return, it is a proclamation to all the world that God’s final action in Jesus Christ is about to occur. The trumpet sound heard at Mount Sinai, growing ever louder and louder, is but a dim prefiguring of that final trumpet blast,[19] which will declare the consummation of all things.

III. TOTAL VISIBILITY

The return of Christ will be in total visibility. The Book of Revelation declares, “Behold, he is coming with the clouds! Every eye shall see him, and among them those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the world shall lament in remorse” (Rev. 1:7 NEB).[20] Since “every eye shall see him,” the return of Christ will be visible to the whole world.

Hence, the return of Christ is public; it is no hidden or secret coming. Indeed, there is a twofold purpose in His return: the redemption of His own and the destruction of His enemies. Thus there are two attitudes: one of lamentation (mourning, wailing) among “the peoples of the earth” (= the “earthdwellers”)[21] and one of rejoicing among believers. In the Gospel of Matthew we read, “Then all the tribes [’peoples’] of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven” (24:30). This text declares the lamentation of nonbelievers—” *they* will see… .” But following similar words in the Gospel of Luke is this affirmative message to Jesus’ disciples: “Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because *your* redemption is drawing near” (21:28). In the coming of Jesus there is both redemption and destruction, rejoicing and wailing: such is the day of the Lord’s visitation. But that the return is public, therefore visible to all, is unmistakable.

A further word of clarification: some New Testament passages so focus on one aspect of Christ’s return that they have led some biblical interpreters to claim a double return.[22] The first coming is usually said to be private, for believers only. A key scripture in this connection is 1 Thessalonians 4—the “rapture” passage—in which Christ’s Parousia is said (by these interpreters) to be unobserved by the world (although the effects, they say, will be experienced, e.g., the absence of many persons). However, although it is true that such a passage relates only to the resurrection and rapture of believers, it is hard to visualize the event as private. The “cry of command,” the “voice of the archangel,” the “sound of the trumpet of God”—can these events happen without the whole world being aware? A private, invisible rapture and a public, visible coming are clearly not two events, but two aspects of the *one* return that “every eye shall see.”

On the matter of the public visibility of Christ’s return, Jesus also speaks of it in connection with those who will claim that He has already come but His

presence is invisible to most of the world,[23] or, having come, He is in hiding and will soon reveal Himself.[24] All such thinking is totally erroneous even as Jesus Himself declared in a strong warning: "If any one says to you, 'Lo, here is the Christ!' or There he is!' do not believe it…. Lo, I have told you beforehand. So, if they say to you, 'Lo, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out; if they say 'Lo, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it" (Matt. 24:23, 25–26). Then Jesus adds, "For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming *[parousia*] of the Son of man" (v. 27). In other words, even as lightning flashes across the whole sky from east to west so that no one can fail to see it, so will the coming of Christ be. It will be wholly visible, a public coming: all will behold it as it happens.

Finally, the question is sometimes asked, How will it be possible for everyone to see the return of Christ? We today, many centuries after the New Testament was written, are far more aware of the wide expanse of the earth than early Christians were and, accordingly, may wonder how all people can possibly behold such an event. Moreover, we also know that the earth's curvature would seemingly rule out a visibility from all parts of the globe at the same time. A relatively small and flat earth—which we do not have—would seem to be a more probable arena for the viewing of this climactic event in history.[25]

The answer to this carries us back to some things said earlier about Christ's coming on the clouds. The clouds are "clouds of heaven," and therefore the return of Christ is not from cosmic space to earthly space, but from a supramundane dimension (heaven), invisible and inaccessible, that breaks into our earthly sphere. Moreover, since the clouds are not clouds of earth but of heaven, and heaven is *not* a place above the earth nor does it have any spatial relation to it, when Christ appears "on the clouds of heaven," He will truly be visible to all. This, to be sure, is presently unimaginable because of our three-(or possibly four-) dimensional consciousness. We are simply not accustomed to traffic between heaven and earth and the trans-spatial aspect of its occurrence.

One additional reflection: Since Christ will return in His glorified body (in which He now reigns "at the right hand" of the Father), a body no longer subject to the usual limitations of space,[26] it is quite possible that all could see Him at the same moment. In a way presently unimaginable to us—because we have no experience of a glorified or spiritual body—He will make Himself visible to every person on earth.

But however we seek to understand the total visibility of Christ at His return, we are inevitably stopped short by the realization that here, if anywhere, we see "through a glass darkly." There is simply no way prior to His appearing that we

can adequately conceive of the nature of an event that represents the unique and ultimate incursion of heaven into earth and the transition from the present age into the age to come. The return of Christ stands on the boundary line between the known and the unknown, hence it is now beyond our comprehension. “Every eye shall see him”—that we *know.* But to *understand* it remains for the day of His revelation.

IV. PERSONAL AND CORPOREAL

The return of Christ will be personal and corporeal. Let us note each of these aspects in turn.

A. Personal

It is important to emphasize that the future coming of Christ will be personal: He will return as the same Jesus who lived on earth many years ago. For example, to the disciples who had just observed the Lord's ascension into heaven the angels said, "*This same Jesus*, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back" (Acts 1:11 NIV). It will be the same person they had known.

Thus there is no Christ to come who is other than the Jesus who has come. To a Jewish audience that was still expecting a future Messiah, Peter declared, "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ [= Messiah] appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets…" (Acts 3:19–21). The coming Messiah is the one who has come, even Jesus Himself.[27]

Hence it will be the return of One whom we have already known as our Lord and Savior. In the words of Paul: "Our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await[28] a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20). For the believer who is already joined to Christ by faith, it will be a deeply personal occasion. Let us also recall the words of Jesus to His disciples: "Let not your heart be troubled…. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1–3 NASB). The first-person pronouns, the sense of closeness, the warm promise of the future—all point to the day of Christ's return as the day of personal reunion to be with Him forever.

Thus the Christ who returns on the clouds of heaven will be the same person who formerly walked on the earth. He will seem distant, even forbidding, to the unbeliever, but for those who belong to Him it will be a joyous occasion. In both cases, however, He will return in person: the Jesus of Nazareth being verily the Christ of glory.

B. Corporeal

We need also to stress that the return of Christ will be corporeal: He will come in the body. On the day of His ascension the disciples saw Him leave in the body, and so He will return. It will be in "the body of His glory" (Phil. 3:21 NASB)[29] —hence beyond usual earthly limitations.[30] Nonetheless, He will return in the body.

The return of Christ, therefore, will not be a spiritual coming. Truly He came in the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and so comes again and again. But coming in the Paraclete is quite different from His coming in the Parousia.[31] Through the Holy Spirit Christ is with His people in presence and power, but this is a spiritual presence.[32] The coming at the end of history is of a different order; it will be the coming of Christ Himself in His glorious body.

It has been popular in some circles to interpret the Parousia as wholly spiritual. What we therefore look forward to at the consummation of history, according to this view, is a greatly increased sense of the spiritual presence of Christ. At long last there will be the spiritual triumph of the gospel of Christ over the world—and this will be the Parousia. Indeed—as it is also sometimes urged —since *parousia* basically means "presence," we should not look for a bodily return but an intensified spiritual presence.

To respond to the latter point first: *parousia,* to be sure, does mean "presence." But it also carries the note of "arrival,"[33] hence an arriving presence. It refers to someone who comes, hence it is much more concrete than a purely spiritual presence. On the other point, it is simply incorrect to speak of a spiritual triumph of the gospel as the return of Christ. For one thing, the Scriptures depict no such triumphant climax of the gospel (although there will be a witness to all the nations). For another, the return of Christ is of a Person (as we have noted) in His corporeality, and not of a spiritual occurrence that has reached its consummation.

In conclusion, I would add that from the perspective of the believer, what is earnestly desired is the coming of the *whole* Christ—and this includes the body. "Without having seen him you love him," Peter writes (1 Peter 1:8). Indeed, we do. But the very fact that we love Him and believe in Him now without seeing Him only intensifies our desire to see Him in person. Hence, our earnest expectation—as well as the biblical assurance—is that at His return we will

behold Him in the body of His glory. For *that* we yearn—and pray, “Our Lord, come!”[34]

V. SUDDEN AND UNEXPECTED

Finally, Christ will return suddenly and unexpectedly. Jesus Himself makes it unmistakably clear that no one knows the exact time of His coming. In his Olivet address He declares, “Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only” (Matt. 24:36). In this extraordinary statement Jesus Himself claimed ignorance of the precise day and hour of His coming[35] and He included in this ignorance the angels in heaven as well as all mankind! Regarding mankind at large, Jesus compares the suddenness of His future coming with the suddenness of events in the time of Noah. Even as people then “did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming *[parousia*] of the Son of man” (v. 39). In like manner, Jesus adds, “two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left”; likewise “two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left” (vv. 40–41). To his own disciples Jesus then adds, “Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming” (v. 42). Similar are Jesus’ words in Mark: “Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will be” (13:33). Then, using the figure of a “thief” (Matt. 24:43) who unexpectedly breaks into one’s house, Jesus adds, “Therefore you must also be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (v. 44). The Parousia will be a sudden and unexpected event.

Paul carries forward this imagery of a thief, saying to the Thessalonians, “You yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:2). Peter echoes the same note: “The day of the Lord will come like a thief’ (2 Peter 3:10). Finally, in the Book of Revelation, as the battle of Armageddon is about to occur, a voice speaks from heaven: “Lo, I am coming like a thief’ (16:15). Just as a thief comes suddenly and unexpectedly, so the Lord Himself will return.

Nonetheless, there is a striking difference in this connection between believers and unbelievers. The same element of suddenness and unexpectedness exists for both; however, the difference lies in the element of surprise. Believers look forward to the day of the Lord’s coming and so will not be surprised when it happens; unbelievers will be caught completely off guard. So Paul writes to the Thessalonians, “You are not in darkness, brethren, for that day to surprise you

like a thief. For you are all sons of light and sons of the day ; we are not of the night or of darkness" (1 Thess. 5:4–5). Although a thief comes unexpectedly, believers will not be surprised when this occurs. In summary, the difference lies in being asleep (the world) and awake (believers). Paul adds, "So then let us not sleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober" (v. 6). If we are awake and alert, there will be no surprise in the returning of the Lord.

I have earlier discussed the Christian attitude toward Christ's return and noted such things as earnestly desiring that it happen, loving Christ's appearing, and patiently waiting.[36] Indeed, all of this belongs to the Christian hope, a hope that is solid and sure. So there will be no surprise—even if it happens suddenly and unexpectedly—when the hoped-for Lord returns. Moreover, believers are (or should be) aware of the various signs of the Lord's coming,[37] hence, although not knowing the exact time of the Parousia, they can be aware of the proximity of His return.

A further word: the sudden and unexpected return of the Lord does not necessarily mean a return at any moment.[38] Certain things must happen first (as we have seen); then the Lord will return. In our present day much is occurring that may point to a near coming, so that we may properly say that the Lord's return is impending.[39] Moreover, even if the event is yet future or indeed even if all signs seem totally fulfilled, the return of Christ will still be sudden and unexpected.

It is interesting to reflect on the fact that the Lord's first coming in the Incarnation was likewise sudden and unexpected. Although there were abundant Old Testament prophecies and signs, Christ came at a moment no one expected. This is a good warning to believers today not to be overconfident about the signs, and certainly not to seek to pinpoint the exact time or season.[40] Christ will return suddenly and unexpectedly.

A further illustration of this is the Day of Pentecost. As the disciples were gathered in one place, "suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind" (Acts 2:2). This refers to the Holy Spirit who came suddenly and unexpectedly. The disciples surely were not surprised, for they were faithfully awaiting His coming; but they had not been told the exact time. That was in the hands of the Lord, who sovereignly came in the Spirit when He willed. The disciples sought to calculate nothing;[41] but they were ready when the memorable day arrived.

Indeed, the very fact that Christ will return suddenly and unexpectedly adds to the majesty and wonder of the event. This will be *God's* sovereign action even as in the Incarnation and at Pentecost. Christ's coming on the clouds, accompanied

by angels and saints, in total visibility, personally and corporeally, is such an incomprehensible incursion of heaven into earth that there is no way, prior to the event, that we can fully comprehend what it will be like or know its exact moment of occurrence. When eternity invades time, all human calculations come to nought. Nor, I submit, should we want it otherwise, for it will be the Day of the Lord, His day not ours, that will suddenly break forth across the earth.

Suddenly, unexpectedly—therefore we can only give God all the glory.

[1]The Book of Daniel uses similar language: "Behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man" (7:13). However, rather than moving toward earth, he "came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him." Nevertheless, the background (v. 11) is similar to that of the New Testament in that there is the slaying of the beast-"the beast was slain" (a prototype of the beast[s] of Revelation and the "man of sin" of 1 Thessalonians, et al.) prior to the reign of the "son of man."

[2]Revelation 14:14, similar to Daniel (see note 1) in its use of the "son of man" terminology, has the preposition "on": "Lo, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man." This passage does not specify His coming on the cloud, although it is unmistakably a depiction of Christ's final action, for afterward He is described with a sickle in hand to reap the earth (vv. 14-16).

[3]See the discussion of this in Renewal Theology, 1:390-95.

[4]The psalmist puts it in beautiful poetry: "O Lord my God, thou art very great! Thou art clothed with honor and majesty, who coverest thyself with light as with a garment… who makest the clouds thy chariot, who ridest on the wings of the wind" (104:1-3).

[5]Paul Minear says it well: "The cloud on which the Son of man returns is continuous with the cloud that hovered over men in the Deluge, the Exodus, the wilderness, the Temple, the prophet's [i.e., Ezekiel's] ecstasy, and the Messiah's ministry" (Christian Hope and the Second Coming, 129).

[6]In Mark the word "great" relates to "power"; in Matthew, to "glory" (supra).

[7]The kjv and nasb have "shout." If "shout" is used, it means a "shout of command" (see TDNT, 3:657). The "cry" or "shout" in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 is particularly related to the resurrection and translation of believers. However, in a broader sense it refers to all the dead, for, according to the

words of Jesus in John 5:28, “the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice. …” (Some of these points will be discussed later in this chapter.)

[8]No mention here is made of the “white cloud” (as in Rev. 14:14), for the emphasis in this passage is wholly on Christ’s coming in power.

[9]Recall the words of Paul that “the man of sin” will be destroyed by the epiphaneia, the outshining, of Christ’s parousia (2 Thess. 2:8).

[10]The parallel account in Matthew 16:27 speaks of the Son of man coming “with his angels in the glory of his Father.” The angels are His angels: they represent and serve Him.

[11]This is the literal reading of 2 Thessalonians 1:7.

[12]Also nasb, niv; rsv has “with the archangel’s call.” The archangel possibly is Michael. The only other references in the New Testament to an archangel by name are in Jude 9 (“the archangel Michael”) and Revelation 12:7 (“Michael and his angels”). According to EGT in loco, “Michael… in Jewish tradition not only summoned the angels but sounded a trumpet to herald God’s approach for judgment (e.g., in Apoc. Mosis, xxii).” It is also noteworthy that Daniel’s prophecy of the tribulation and resurrection in chapter 12 begins: “At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people” (v. 1).

[13]It is possible that the “voice of the archangel” is a summons to all the other angels.

[14]The Greek word is hagion. The niv translates it “holy ones”; the kjv and nasb (like rsv) read “saints.” “Saints” here, as elsewhere in the New Testament, ordinarily refers to believers in general. Robert L. Thomas writes that “universally in Paul and perhaps the entire NT (Jude 14 is debatable) it is a term for redeemed humanity” (EBC, 11:268). Leon Morris, while affirming that hagioi “seems always elsewhere to refer to men,” adds that “it is best to understand the ‘holy ones’ as all those bright beings who will make up His train, be they angels or the saints who have gone before” (First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians, NICNT, 115). I submit that, whereas it is true that angels will accompany Christ in His return, the hagioi are distinctively believers (see especially 2 Thess. 1:10, a somewhat parallel passage, where “his saints” are unmistakably people).

[15]See also Paul’s words in 1 Thessalonians 4:14: “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.”

[16]The admitted difficulty of this interpretation is that if "the armies of heaven" are the saints, there seems to be no reference in this passage to the angels who (as we have earlier observed) are clearly said to accompany Christ. Moreover, since the angels are elsewhere described as "mighty" (as in 2 Thess. 1), they could well be spoken of as "armies." (Indeed, there are many references in the Scriptures to angels as warriors, fighters, etc.) However, on the other side, an earlier scene in Revelation shows Christ along with saints in the final victory over the forces of evil: "The Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful" (17:14). A possible resolution of the difficulty is that both angels and saints are included in the "armies of heaven" that accompany Christ in His return.

[17]That the return of Christ is the context, however, is apparent, for Paul is writing about the resurrection to come and the changes that will occur at that time (see later discussion).

[18]In the Old Testament the coming day of the Lord is also depicted as a day of trumpet sounding: "The great day of the Lord is near. … A day of wrath is that day … a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry…" (Zeph. 1:14-16).

[19]Since this is, ultimately, "the trumpet of God" (as in 1 Thess. 4:16), the sounding forth will go far beyond that of any earthly trumpet. Much like "the clouds of heaven," "the trumpet of God" belongs to the realm of the presently unimaginable. But when it sounds, all will know it!

[20]The rsv translation, I believe, is misleading at a critical point in this verse above. It reads, "Every eye will see him, every one who pierced him." This suggests that the visibility will be limited to those who "pierced him." The niv and nasb make the limitation more pronounced: "Every eye will see him, even those who pierced him." Granted, "even those" is a possible translation of the kai hoitines of the Greek text. However, the primary meaning of kai is "and," and hoitines-"such as," "among them those who" (as above)- suggests in addition a second, more limited group. Exegesis is an important matter here, for if rsv, niv, and nasb are correct, there will not be total visibility (unless "those who pierced him" is given universal application-which seems to strain the text). The kjv puts it well: "Every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him."

[21]Recall that in Revelation the "earth-dwellers" are those who are not believers.

[22]Recall my reference to this in note 35, page 309, in terms of "two stages

in Jesus' second coming" (Lindsey), hence the view of a double return. See also my critique of the pretrib- ulationist view that Christ's return will be in two stages (pp. 378-79).

[23]Jehovah's Witnesses claim that Christ came in a.d. 1914 invisibly and is directing His organization from theocratical headquarters in Brooklyn, New York. E.g., see Let God Be True (publication of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1952), "Christ Jesus came to the Kingdom in a.d. 1914, but unseen to men" (p. 300).

[24]See the discussion (p. 332, n.62) of the declaration by some in the New Age movement that Christ (or "Lord Maitreya") has now come but in secret (with location known to only a few of His disciples) before His imminent manifestation and declaration to the world.

[25]In our modern age of television, it is, of course, now possible for people any place on earth to view live by satellite what is happening anywhere else. Hence-it is sometimes suggested-the return of Christ could be seen through television by "every eye." This suggestion has many obvious problems (TV sets are hardly available to everyone, such viewing would not have the directness of "every eye will see him," etc.). I might add that modern television, which has actually made possible the viewing of any event on our globe as it happens, could well be an earthly sign of the far greater, television-transcending, event of the return of Christ. Total disclosure and instant communication, which are aspects of this late twentieth-century video era, may well be preparation for the Parousia.

[26]See the discussion of this in Renewal Theology, 1:381-413.

[27]This, of course, distinguishes the Christian faith from Judaism. Both Christians and Jews look forward to the coming of Christ (or the Messiah)-indeed, among many on both sides there is a growing conviction of its imminent occurrence-but for Jews it is surely not Jesus. For Christians it is the Jesus who came before who will come again.

[28]Or "eagerly await" (as in niv, cf. nasb). The Greek word is apekdechometha.

[29]"Or "his glorious body" (kjv, rsv, niv).

[30]As we noted above.

[31]I like the words of A. J. Gordon: "Observe this difference: In the Paraclete, Christ comes spiritually and invisibly; in the Parousia, he comes bodily and gloriously" (The Ministry of the Spirit, 49).

[32]This is true also of the "real presence" of Christ in the Eucharist. He is

truly present not corporeally but spiritually.

[33]See the earlier discussion of this.

[34]First Corinthians 16:22-the expression is in Aramaic: Marana tha.

[35]Jesus, of course, said this in the days of His kenosis (self-emptying) on earth. Now in His glorification He surely shares this knowledge with God the Father.

[36]Recall pages 297-302, concerning the Christian attitude to the return of Christ.

[37]"Chapter 10 deals with these.

[38]See pages 379-80 regarding the pretribulational view of imminence.

[39]"Impending" is a better term than "imminent." "Imminent" implies the idea of an any- moment return; "impending" implies the idea of approaching, or being near at hand.

[40]History is laden with the miscalculations of those who have sought in vain to calculate and name the time. One attempt, among many, in the recent past was that of the man who claimed he had irrefutable proof that Christ would return in the fall of 1988. When this did not happen, he changed the date to September, 1989, all of course to no avail. Frequently, those who make such predictions seek to avoid Jesus' words about not knowing the "day and hour" by claiming "only" to know the season and the year. However, Jesus' words include all predictions of time (recall also His words: "You do not know when the time will be"). We may by virtue of the signs believe the time is near, but we will not seek to be too specific about what ultimately belongs to God's hidden counsel. Beware, then, of anyone who claims to know more than the Lord intends for us to know!

[41]The disciples did not even calculate when the Day of Pentecost it was likely to happen! How different were they from some of our modern day calculators about the Parousia.

12
The Purpose of Christ's Return

The return of Christ will be for the purpose of bringing all things to their consummation. In order to accomplish this end there will be the final redemption of believers, the total destruction of all that is evil, and the last judgment of the living and the dead. Whatever happens will be an aspect of God's climactic purpose in the consummation of His kingdom.

I. FINAL REDEMPTION

In relation to believers the purpose of Christ in His return is to bring about their *final redemption*. Christians, to be sure, have received redemption through Jesus Christ, as Paul says, for example, in Ephesians 1:7: “We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.” But there is also the final redemption yet to come. Here we may recall the words of Jesus in Luke 21:28 that follow a depiction of various eschatological events that climax in the coming of Christ from heaven: “Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

The return of Christ means the “drawing near” of our redemption. Let us examine in some detail what this signifies and how it is accomplished.

A. Gathering

We may observe, at the outset, that Christ returns for the gathering of His own. This is declared particularly in these words: "He will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds,[1] from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt. 24:31).[2] These words immediately follow the statement that "they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (v. 30).[3] This gathering of God's "elect" will be the climactic gathering at the final advent of Jesus Christ.

In the Old Testament God had promised Israel, "If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you" (Deut. 30:4). Also the psalmist prayed, "Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the nations" (106:47); and again: "The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel" (147:2). Isaiah also wrote, "Thus says the Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered" (56:8). Such passages as these, which point to the gathering of Israel, could surely have been fulfilled during Jesus' ministry on earth. But the nation of Israel would not allow it to happen. So Jesus cried, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate" (Matt. 23:37–38). Hence, Israel as a nation is no longer truly God's people; others will be gathered to Christ who receive Him in faith.

One of the most extraordinary scriptures concerning Christ's role in gathering is a New Testament prophecy by Caiaphas, the high priest, followed by John's comment. Caiaphas spoke to the Jewish council: "'It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish.'" Then follows John's comment: "He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (John 11:50–52). Thus the gathering of God's people will move far beyond what Caiaphas and his fellow Jews understood.

With the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Israel's "house"—as Jesus Himself prophesied—was made "forsaken and desolate." This was shown publicly not only in Christ's coming in power to devastate the unbelieving Jewish nation, but also in His launching a new era of gathering "the children of

God … scattered abroad." Thus, in part, the prophecy that "they will gather his elect from the four winds" was fulfilled in the aftermath of the desolation of Jerusalem and has continued to be fulfilled down through the ages.

The climax of this gathering will be at the return of Jesus Christ. This is the gathering of "the wheat" into "the barn." John the Baptist early declared about Jesus: "He will gather His wheat into the barn" (Matt. 3:12 NASB). And Jesus Himself in a parable says, "At harvest time[4] 1 will tell the reapers … Gather the wheat into my barn" (Matt. 13:30). In John's language it will be a separation of wheat from chaff; in Jesus' words it will be a separation of wheat from tares (or weeds). For John adds, "but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12), and Jesus says, "Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned" (Matt. 13:30). Whoever they are, and wherever they are, they will be gathered into the presence of the returning Lord. "Then," as Jesus so beautifully puts it, "the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:43).

It is this gathering that Paul speaks of in a statement beginning, "Concerning the coming *[parousia*] of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him…" (2 Thess. 2:1 NIV). This is the great gathering at the end of the age when the Christ of glory will send forth His angelic messengers to "gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven" (Mark 13:27). This, indeed, will be the climactic and glorious gathering of all believers at the Parousia of the Lord.

Finally, this gathering is possibly referred to in the Book of Revelation where John beholds "a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand" (14:14). With "the harvest of the earth … fully ripe," Jesus swings His sickle "on the earth, and the earth was reaped" (vv. 15–16). That this occurs through Him "on the cloud" and at harvest time clearly relates it to the return of Christ.[5] If this refers—as I believe it does—to the "reaping" of Christians at the end, then this final book in the Bible points to the gathering of the true people of God.

B. Resurrection

At the return of Christ there will be the resurrection of those in Christ who have died.[6] For, says Paul, “the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise” (1 Thess. 4:16). Similarly Paul writes elsewhere, “The trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable” (1 Cor. 15:52).

The resurrection of believers is affirmed by Jesus particularly in the Gospel of John. On one occasion—after the feeding of the five thousand—Jesus repeats three times that He Himself will perform this resurrection: “I will raise him up at the last day” (6:40, 44, 54). The context in each instance makes clear that this concerns the believer, for example, “This is the will of the Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life ; and I will raise him up at the last day.”[7] This resurrection will take place “at the last day”—the day of Christ’s return.

The Gospel of John makes a further statement about resurrection. Lazarus had died, and Jesus said to Martha, “Your brother will rise again.” After Martha’s reply, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day,” Jesus responded, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die” (11:23–26). There is a significant difference here, however: resurrection does not refer to the “last day” (as in the prior verses quoted and in Martha’s words) but to the fact that through belief in Christ there is resurrection life even now—hence “though he die, yet shall he live.” “Resurrection” in this case does not refer to “the last day,” but to a living in the present. Since this is true, death, although still a fact, is of no consequence—for “whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.” To sum this up: in addition to—actually prior to—the resurrection of the last day, there is a spiritual resurrection for the one who believes, because death is no longer a barrier. For Christ Himself is “*the* resurrection and the life.”

Before returning to “the last day,” I must emphasize the important New Testament teaching that a believer also is alive in the period between his own physical death and “the last day”; for the resurrection life of Christ continues to animate him. Thus Paul could write, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain,” because death is “to depart and be with Christ” (Phil. 1:21, 23). It is not

merely a living on after death, but living *with* Christ; it is, as Paul puts it elsewhere, to be "at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). This calls to mind the promise of Christ to the repentant thief on the cross: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise"[8] (Luke 23:43). Those who believe in Christ, who belong to Him, are "with" Him immediately upon death.

We must further recognize that the resurrection life after death is *not* that of the body. Bodily resurrection (as I will discuss more fully later) belongs to the day of Christ's return—"the last day." To be with Christ after death is to be "away from the body," but says Paul, "we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8).

Thus at death the believer is in heaven without his body; he is there in his spirit or soul.[9] According to Hebrews, heaven—"the heavenly Jerusalem"—is the abode of "the spirits of righteous men made perfect" (12:22–23 NASB). Hence, believers ("righteous men" through what Christ has done for them) at death are made perfect in their spirits.[10] As spirits, they are present with the Lord.[11] In Revelation 6:9–11 the souls of those who have been slain for their witness are depicted as being "under the altar,"[12] thus living on and crying out for God's judgment upon the earth. They are given "a white robe," possibly denoting blessedness, and told to "rest a little longer," thereby suggesting that rest is an important aspect of the believer's life after death. To sum up, the spirit or soul of the believer at death is in heaven.

Accordingly, there is no thought of "soul sleep" in the biblical record. After death, the believer is fully conscious and knows the presence of the Lord in heaven.[13] The Bible speaks of death as "falling asleep,"[14] and this implies that death, like sleep, is not a permanent matter. From sleep one awakens—and so it will be for those who know the sleep of death.[15]

Hence, there is an interim period between death and the final resurrection. Those who have died in Christ are present with Him in their spirits[16] (or souls), but they have not experienced the final resurrection, which, accordingly, must be of the body. In this sense, for all the joy and rest in heaven that believers know after death, they yet look forward to "the last day" when their bodies will likewise be raised.[17]

Although countless numbers of believers are already "with Christ" (in Paradise, in heaven), having preceded those alive today, all, both living and dead, may look forward to the same great day when together they will experience the resurrection or transformation[18] of the body. For all the joy to be known after death—fellowship with Christ, rejoicing, and rest—that climactic

moment when all things are complete and every "elect" person comes to faith and salvation cannot occur until spirit and body are rejoined in preparation for entrance into His glorious and eternal kingdom.

As we next consider the last day and the resurrection of the body, it is apparent that when Paul says that "the dead in Christ will rise," he is referring to their bodies. For already their spirits are with Christ in heaven. What will happen on that glorious day is a dual operation: believers will both come with him from heaven in their spirits and be raised from the dead in their bodies! Earlier we observed that Christ will return "with all his saints" (1 Thess. 3:13), and that "through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep" (1 Thess. 4:14). The "saints" are those who "have fallen asleep," who as spirits are in heaven with Christ, and as such they will return with Him. Shortly after that and immediately following other words that describe the return of Christ, Paul says, "And the dead in Christ will rise…" (v. 16). Accordingly, the last day is portrayed as the time when the spirits of the returning saints are reunited with their resurrected bodies.

Thus as rich as the time in heaven with Christ is now, there will finally be the completion, the fullness. No longer will the martyrs cry "How long?"; no longer will there be the wait for the full number of the faithful to come in; no longer will saints be separated from the bodily aspect of their nature.[19] At last the glorious realm of the new heaven and the new earth can be entered. For it is in this eternal realm of the spiritual and the corporeal that spiritual bodies will live forever!

Let me now make several summary statements about the resurrection of the body:

1. Christian faith holds vigorously to the resurrection of the body and not simply to spiritual immortality. In the beginning God made man soul and body (or spirit-soul and body); accordingly God's purpose includes both soul and body in the consummation. The body is neither "the prison-house of the soul," nor is it simply a shell containing "the real thing" (i.e., the spirit), nor is it somehow—being matter—less pure than the soul.[20] God made the body, He also took on the human body in Jesus Christ, and it is in the body that the Holy Spirit tabernacles in believers—the body therefore has a highly significant place in God's future for His creation.

The body is not just a part of man, but it is his totality under the aspect of his relationship to the given order of creation. Man is not man in the earthly sphere without a body that relates him to it: he is an earthling. The heavenly sphere has no place or need for a body (hence the believer's existence as spirit there). But

on this earth there is, *and* on the new earth there will be, a proper and essential place for the body. Thus do we look forward to the resurrection of the body for the life of the world to come.

2. Christian faith affirms that the body of the resurrection to come is not a natural body but a spiritual one. In the language of Paul, "it [the body] is sown [in death] a natural[21] body; it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:44 NASB). It will be a body adapted to the new order of things that lies beyond.

We note next that there is both continuity and discontinuity between the natural body and the spiritual body. On the one hand, it is still the same body: the person raised from the dead is not a different person; he is the same individual as before.[22] He will not assume another body.[23] On the other hand, the resurrection body will be different, for it will be spiritual, not natural (or physical). There will be qualities of the body appropriate to the new order: not those of the present earth and earthly relationships but of the world to come.

Jesus made precisely this point with the Sadducees who, not believing in a resurrection, tried to trap Him with a question concerning a complex marriage situation in which one woman was married, in sequence, to seven brothers (each in turn having died). "In the resurrection, therefore, to which of the seven will she be wife?" (Matt. 22:28). By this question the Sadducees craftily attempted to demonstrate the absurdity of a resurrection. Jesus' reply—doubtless to their complete surprise and discomfiture—was, in part: "In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (v. 30). The error of the Sad-ducees was to view life in the (supposed) resurrection as being under the same conditions of corporeality as it is on earth. However, while marriage is a constituent of earthly relationships and serves as the God-given vehicle for procreation, it is transcended in heaven by the new order of things.

Now returning to the matter of identity and difference in the resurrection, we observe both in Jesus' own resurrection appearances.[24] He was the same Jesus the disciples had known; indeed, He strongly emphasized that by appearing to them and saying, "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have" (Luke 24:39). Hence there was identity and continuity with the past—underscored further when Jesus took a piece of broiled fish and ate it "before them" (v. 43). He had not become a spirit (e.g., an angel); He was the same Jesus with a human body. However, there was also a great difference. Although He unmistakably was still corporeal, it was a strange, unexperienced form of corporeality. Indeed, two of the disciples walking earlier on the road to Emmaus had been accompanied by the risen Jesus for some time. But they did not recognize Him until He broke

bread with them. Then He suddenly "vanished out of their sight" (Luke 24:31). Later they began to share this strange and obviously mysterious experience back in Jerusalem with the other disciples. But "as they were saying this, Jesus himself stood among them" (v. 36), appearing suddenly through closed doors. As John's Gospel puts it, "The doors being shut … for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them" (20:19). Although Jesus' body in the resurrection was the same as before—He had not become a spirit—He was operating in a new dimension that transcended the previous mode of earthly limitations. Thus His body had become, in the language of Paul, "a spiritual body."

From this background of Jesus' own resurrection body, we can better perceive the meaning of a "spiritual body."[25] Believers will be the same persons with the same bodies in the age to come. But these bodies will have qualities representing a different, even higher, mode of existence. Believers will not become angels. While finite like human beings, angels have no bodies at all because they are incorporeal, purely spiritual beings. Yet believers will be akin to angels in that their bodies will be spiritual, or pneumatic. Believers in their spiritual bodies will be inhabitants of a sphere *never* before existing—not simply heaven (the sphere of God and the angels), but "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1)! Thus being both spiritual (heavenly) and corporeal (earthly) in their nature, they will be adapted to live forever in this wondrous new creation.

This leads to a final point: although the present, natural body passes away, the future body of the resurrection remains forever. For, says Paul, "the dead will be raised imperishable…. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:52–53). Since the body will not perish, all sickness, all debilitation, all decay will be no more. Moreover, since mortality will be a thing of the past, all that surrounds the misery of death will be gone. By God's grace we shall thus live forever!

3. Christian faith also attests to the fact that the resurrection of the body occurs wholly by the action of the Triune God. It will not take place by virtue of some resident vitality or force in the human person, nor is it the result even of the new life in Christ. Regarding the latter, surely the redemption of the soul (or spirit) has occurred—we are freed thereby from spiritual death—but the body has not yet been changed. Paul says that we "groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies"[26] (Rom. 8:23). Redemption is an act of God, whether of the soul now or the body on the day of Christ's return.

First, the resurrection of the body will be brought about by God the Father. In the words of Jesus, "the Father raises the dead" (John 5:21). He does this by His power, and because He is the living God. Jesus, in His response to the Sadducees

(discussed previously), not only demonstrated the total inadequacy of their understanding of the resurrection, but he also spoke to their condition of disbelief: “You know neither the scriptures nor the power of God…. He is not God of the dead, but of the living” (Matt. 22:29, 32). The power of God, almighty and unlimited, will raise the dead: He alone can do it. Since by His very nature He is the living God,[27] He is God of the living. To know these things about God is to know that there will be a resurrection from the dead. Truly God is behind it all: “the Father raises the dead.”

Second, Jesus Himself is the means or instrument of this resurrection. As we have earlier observed, Jesus three times says, “I will raise him [the believer in Christ] up at the last day.” Then, also as noted, Paul speaks of the Lord (Jesus) descending from heaven with a “cry of command” that—along with the archangel’s call and the trumpet sounding forth—immediately precedes the resurrection of “the dead in Christ” (1 Thess. 4:16). Jesus is unmistakably the “command-er”—as His cry of command rings forth.

Jesus displayed this commanding voice at the grave of Lazarus. Once the gravestone had been removed, Jesus “cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come forth’” (John 11:43 NASB). The next line reads, “He who had died came forth.” Doubtless this is, in part, a preview[28] of what will happen at the last day. Indeed, we may recall an earlier statement of Jesus: “The hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judg ment” (John 5:28–29).[29] ‘ It is the commanding voice of Jesus that will be instrumental in bringing about the resurrection.

We can sense in all of this the authority of Jesus as the Word of God. Even as in the beginning God created all things through the Word (John 1; cf. Gen. 1), and through the word of Christ new resurrection life occurs now—“Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live”[30] (John 5:25)—so at the end it is that same Word (word) that will bring about the resurrection of the dead. For Christ truly is “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev. 22:13).

Third, the resurrection will occur through the enlivening power of the Holy Spirit. One of the great empirical facts of the Christian life is that believers are indwelt by the Spirit of God. When we become children of God by faith, the Holy Spirit becomes the inner reality of our being—“Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying ‘Abba!

Father!’” (Gal. 4:6). According to Paul, it is this same indwelling Spirit who

will some day move upon our mortal remains and bring immortality to them: “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you” (Rom. 8:11).

When the Lord comes back and the summons goes forth for the dead in Christ to be raised, the great event will occur by the inward efficacy of the Holy Spirit. Thus—it is important to add—the natural body will become a spiritual body, which signifies in a profound sense a body totally enlivened[31] by the Holy Spirit. On the last day when the voice of the Lord goes forth calling people from the grave, the Holy Spirit will simultaneously move upon our mortal remains,[32] invigorating and empowering them to rise to meet the Lord as He comes. Such is the marvel and wonder of the resurrection.

C. Translation

When Christ returns, believers who are living will be translated, that is, conveyed into the life of the age to come, without ever dying physically.[33] In the words of Paul: “We who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them [the dead in Christ] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air ; and so we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17). “We shall not all sleep,” says Paul elsewhere (1 Cor. 15:51). Thus believers living when Christ returns will never experience death: they will be translated.

This translation involves, first, a basic change. After Paul said, “We shall not all sleep,” he writes, “but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed” (15:51–52). The change for the living will be the same as for the dead: as earlier noted, “this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality” (v. 53). In another place Paul writes, “We await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself’ (Phil. 3:20–21). The change thus beautifully depicted is the transformation of our bodies into the likeness of “his glorious body.”

Hence, living believers at their translation will go through a transformation[34] from their natural bodies to spiritual bodies. When Christ returns, even as the dead in Christ will rise in their spiritual bodies, so living believers will be translated in their spiritual bodies. This latter point needs special emphasis, namely, that living believers will not simply be translated in their natural bodies. They will be translated in transformed bodies.[35]

Second, this transformation will occur instantaneously. The transformation that, for example, takes place in sanctification covers a believer’s lifetime and is not complete until glory. But the transformation into the new spiritual body will take place “in a moment.” The word for “moment” in the Greek points to a time so brief as to be indivisible into a shorter period![36] It will occur “in the twinkling of an eye”—another way of stating an extremely brief moment. Hence, there will be utterly no time of transition from the natural body of the living believer to the spiritual body: it will happen suddenly and instantaneously.

Third, it is important to add that in the relation between resurrection and

translation, the former has priority. Before the words "we who are alive," Paul says, "The dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thess. 4:16). A little earlier, Paul had stated, "We declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not[37] precede those who have fallen asleep" (v. 15). Indeed, Paul is here primarily referring to those who, "through Jesus, God will bring with him" (v. 14), that is, the spirits of believers who at last are to have their bodies raised from the dead.[38] His point is that the translation of living believers will not precede this resurrection.

There is undoubtedly a sense of divine proportion in this arrangement. Those who have long looked forward to the day of resurrection will be afforded priority over those who are living at that time. This is also a salutary arrangement because it is far too easy to assume that being alive when Christ returns is a preferential position.[39] But this is not at all the case: those who are living will not precede believers of the past.

This matter of priority, however, seems to be more of a logical than a chronological matter. For we are next told by Paul that the translation of living believers will occur in connection with the resurrection of dead believers. After saying that "the dead in Christ will rise first" he declares, "Then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17). The word "*then*" implies sequence no doubt, but "*together with them*" denotes simultaneity. Since all this happens at the sudden Parousia of the Lord, and since both the resurrected dead in Christ and transformed living believers go to meet Him, it seems apparent that it is essentially one great event with various aspects.

Fourth, the translation of living believers will be that of a "catching up": "We … shall be caught up."[40] This is often referred to as "the rapture."[41] This "catching up" points to the sovereign action of God and the passivity of the believer. It is totally of God in Christ—His doing, His timing, and we contribute absolutely nothing. The pic ture, then, is of living believers at the time of Christ's return. They will have been immediately changed—transformed—and in their changed bodies will be "caught up" at the Parousia of the Lord.

This "catching up" is possibly referred to by Jesus in His words to the disciples in the Upper Room: "In my Father's house are many rooms…. I go to prepare a place for you. And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:2–3). The "taking to"[42] is an idea similar to "catching up." Since it is Jesus who is described as the agent in both passages, the reference could also be to what occurs at His return.[43]

We also should note the use of the same word “take” in Jesus’ discourse concerning His Parousia. The background relates to the time of Noah—“As were the days of Noah so will be the coming of the Son of man”; also as “Noah entered the ark” but people in general “did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man” (Matt. 24:37–39). These relevant words follow: “Then two men will be in the field; one is taken[44] and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left” (vv. 40–41). The “taking” can scarcely mean to “sweep away” or “take away” in the sense of destruction,[45] but a “taking to” someone. That someone is the Lord Himself, especially in light of the warning that follows: “Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming” (v. 42). The overall picture is that of Noah entering the ark—hence in a sense “taken to” the Lord—as the prototype of believers who are “taken” at the Parousia. The “all” who are “swept away” in the Flood represent those who are “left” for the judgment at the end.[46]

Fifth, returning to the passage in 1 Thessalonians, we observe that the “catching up” will be “together with them.” Living believers, while second in order to the resurrected dead, will not be a later group to go to the Lord. Rather, they will be fully a part of the one great company of the dead and living who are gathered[47] to meet the coming Christ. Such a picture is truly a marvelous one: all the saints of all times, past and present, as one vast multitude totally united at the glorious Parousia!

I must emphasize again that all of this will take place in resurrected and transformed bodies. This means spiritual bodies that are no longer subject to past earthly restriction (recall Christ in His resurrection body), hence now moving together in a supramundane dimension of existence. Thus the “togetherness” will be of a kind that utterly transcends our present imagination.

Sixth, we observe that this “catching up” will be “in the clouds.” This is another beautiful touch; for even as Christ comes “on the clouds,” or “in clouds,”[48] believers will also be taken up “in the clouds.” The clouds undoubtedly are clouds of glory,[49] and are depicted here as vehicles[50] carrying believers to their meeting with the Lord. Again, we are dealing with the realm of the presently inconceivable, for these are heavenly clouds that alone can convey these glorified saints.[51]

There is a possible allusion to the “catching up” of the saints in the clouds in Revelation 11:11–12. In this passage the “two witnesses” who prophesied on earth have been slain.[52] But after a brief period they come to life and hear a heavenly voice saying, “Come up here.” Then the text continues, “And they

went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies beheld them" (NASB). Since the two witnesses likely represent the witnessing church that is outwardly overcome by evil[53] but is victoriously taken up by the Lord, this may be a symbolic reference to the "rapture." However, in this case (not so specified in 1 Thessalonians), the going up "in the cloud" is beheld by the believers' foes.[54] Still this could be a part of the total picture; for even as "every eye" will behold Christ in His return, it is quite possible that the going to meet Him will be visible to all.[55]

Seventh and finally, the catching up will be to "meet the Lord in the air." Here truly is the high and glorious point in the resurrection of the dead and the translation of the living: as one vast multitude they go to meet the Lord! Not having seen Him, they nevertheless have believed in Him and have yearned to behold Him. Now at last in the company of all God's saints of all ages they see Him face to face. Never again will there be a separation; for the climax is—"so we shall always be with the Lord."

But now a critical question relates to this meeting. It is said to be "in the air," which refers, it would seem, to the space immediately surrounding the earth.[56] Does the Scripture mean that the Lord takes us from there into heaven, so that we will "always" be with Him? But this hardly seems right because the Lord is depicted as descending "from heaven," bringing those "fallen asleep" with Him. It thus points to a continuing movement of descent.

Here it is relevant to turn back for a moment to what may be further implied in meeting the Lord. "To meet the Lord" is literally "to a meeting of the Lord."[57] The word "meet" is used elsewhere in the New Testament in only two places—Matthew 25:6 and Acts 28:15. In Matthew 25 it occurs in the parable of the bridegroom who comes at midnight when the ten virgins are asleep. A cry rings out, "Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet ['to a meeting'][58] him" (v. 6). Then the virgins who have oil for their lamps are prepared and go "in with him to the marriage feast" (v. 10). In Acts 28, some Christian brethren who have invited Paul's company to stay with them in Rome "came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet ['to a meeting'][59] us" (v. 15). Then they accompanied Paul into the city. In both Matthew and Acts the implication of the word "meeting" is that of joining the person (the bridegroom or Paul) on his continuing journey (to a marriage feast, to Rome).[60] From this brief word study alone, it seems clear that the meeting with the Lord in the air is to join Him in His continuing descent.[61] Further, the fact that Paul had earlier said, "The Lord himself will descend from heaven," hardly suggests that the descent will be only

to “the air” (where the saints meet Him). Rather, they will accompany Him in the final stage of His journey to the earth itself.

Thus, from this perspective, to “always be with the Lord” after meeting Him does not mean an immediate return to heaven, certainly not a long continuance in the air, but includes being with Him in His mission to earth and forever thereafter.

Now all that has been said in the preceding pages about *translation* and *resurrection* relates to the matter of *gathering*. I began with “gathering” as the basic term because in many ways it is the most inclusive, for it signifies the bringing together of believers from every place in heaven and on earth. According to Mark 13:27 (as we observed earlier), Christ “will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.” This is allinclusive—saints in heaven and saints on earth—all will be gathered to Him. It includes the dual aspects of resurrection and translation, but the important thing is that the saints are gathered to Him.

One further word: in reviewing the discussion about resurrection and translation, I am aware that little was said about the role of angels. Yet at the Parousia it is the angels, according to Christ, who will gather the elect, whether in heaven or on earth, whether “dead in Christ” or alive. Why are they not mentioned in such key Scripture teachings on resurrection and translation as 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4? The answer, I believe, is that indirectly they are mentioned by the references to the sounding of the trumpet (1 Cor. 15:52: “for the trumpet will sound”; 1 Thess. 4:16: “with the sound of the trumpet of God”). For according to Matthew 24:31 (the parallel to Mark 13:27), Christ “will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect.” Thus by implication, the angels are involved in both resurrection and translation (without the manner being described) in gathering the saints to the returning Christ.

Further, as I have suggested, all these terms—*gathering*, *resurrection*, *translation*—may appropriately be subsumed under the heading of *redemption*. For in the same context, according to Luke 21:28, “when these things [things leading to and climaxing in the return of Christ] begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” Now we need to stress, in a larger sense, that this redemption has to do with deliverance from the world before its final destruction.[62]

Accordingly, the word *salvation* is also appropriate here. Salvation has already been accomplished in the life of the believer, but there is also a salvation yet to come.

Let us call to mind a few relevant Scripture passages. According to Hebrews 9:28, “Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save [literally, ‘unto salvation’][63] those who are eagerly waiting for him.” Patently salvation here has nothing to do with Christ’s first coming, but His second (or final), and therefore must signify a salvation in relation to what happens at His appearing. Peter declares concerning those “born anew” that by God’s power they are “guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:3, 5). What that salvation is Peter does not say, but it unmistakably belongs to the “last time” of final revelation—i.e., the revelation *(apokalypsis*) of Christ. Paul is the most specific, for he writes to the Thessalonians, shortly after his words about the resurrection and translation of believers: “God has not destined [or ‘appointed’][64] us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:9). The salvation to which we are destined, or appointed, is deliverance from the coming wrath of God.[65] The implication is that even as we have been saved eternally from God’s wrath, we will also be saved from its final expression at the end of the age.

D. Glorification

The climax of what happens to believers at Christ's return is their *glorification.* For in going to meet the Lord they will be glorified in His presence.

Paul speaks of our being "glorified[66] with him" (Rom. 8:17). Christ has already been glorified in His resurrection, ascension, and exaltation at the right hand of the Father and will manifest that glory at His Parousia. But when He returns, we will participate in that glory. Indeed, says Paul elsewhere, one aspect of Christ's return is that He "comes on that day to be glorified[67] in his saints, and to be marveled at in all who have believed" (2 Thess. 1:10). Thus the saints at His return in glory will share and reflect that glory. Here we may recall Paul's beautiful words in Colossians 3:4: "When Christ, who is our life, is manifested, then you too will be manifested with him in glory" (NEB). Therefore when Christ —in whom our lives are hid—appears, His glory will be manifested through us. Christ will glorify[68] His own at His coming.

Hence all our previous discussion about resurrection and translation may be summed up as glorification. In regard to resurrection, this is the glorification of the body that has died. Paul, comparing death of the body to the sowing of a seed in the ground, writes, "It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory" (1 Cor. 15:43). Thus the bodies of dead believers will be raised to glorification. In regard to translation, this is the glorification of the living body. Let us recall again the striking statement "Our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body" (Phil. 3:20–21). Thus the bodies of living believers will be transformed into the likeness of Christ's glorious body.

The total picture, however, goes far beyond the body, because glorification is of the total person—body, soul, and spirit. This means another thing of signal importance, namely, that glorification will include the final *sanctification* of believers living at the return of Christ. I have spoken at some length about the transformation of the body from a natural to a spiritual one at the Parousia. Now I must add that this also includes the perfecting of holiness. The saints in heaven have already been perfected (recall that presently in heaven there are "the spirits of righteous men made perfect" [Heb. 12:23 NIV]). But living saints on earth, whatever their state of sanctification, are not completely free of sin[69] at death.

This obviously is a critical impediment, since the believer with sin remaining in him will not be able to face the coming holy Lord. Thus Paul, shortly after his teaching on the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4, writes, “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:23 NIV). There Paul adds—and this is our assurance—“The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it” (v. 24 NIV).[70] Even as “the spirits of righteous men” now in heaven have been made perfect by God’s action and not by their own doing, so it will be at the Parousia of Christ: God will do it again! On this point I conclude with the praise benediction of Jude 24: “Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing [literally, ‘exultation’],[71] to the only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen.” He is able not only to keep us, but also to present us blameless—and it will be with great rejoicing, even exultation. What a glorious God!

Such is something of the picture of the glorification of believers that will occur at the return of Jesus Christ: the resurrection of bodies, the translation of those bodies into the likeness of Christ’s glorious body, and the sanctification of spirit for those who go to meet Him. But, most of all, our glorification will be the reflection of His glory. Even as in this life—in Paul’s words—“we all … beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3:18), so when we behold Him face to face at His coming, our glory will be complete: we will reflect Him totally.

I close with the words of Peter who speaks of being “a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed” (1 Peter 5:1). This is God’s gracious intention for all who belong to His Son Jesus Christ.

II. TOTAL DESTRUCTION

A second aspect of Christ's return is His coming for *total destruction*. Christ comes to destroy all that is evil and to usher in the kingdom of righteousness.

In the Scriptures, "the day of the Lord" is frequently depicted as a day of destruction. The prophet Joel laments, "Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes" (Joel 1:15). Similarly Isaiah cries, "Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come!" (Isa. 13:6). Jesus speaks of "that day" as one similar to the time of Noah when "the flood came and swept them all away" (Matt. 24:36, 39). Paul calls "the day of the Lord" a day of "sudden destruction" (1 Thess. 5:2–3). According to Peter, it will be "the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (2 Peter 3:7).

In the Book of Revelation when the seventh angel blows his trumpet and voices in heaven proclaim the victory of Christ's kingdom, then others cry forth, "The nations raged, but thy wrath came, and the time for …[72] destroying the destroyers of earth" (11:18). We have previously observed that the blowing of the (last) trumpet is directly associated with Christ's return—the gathering, resurrection, and translation of believers. In Revelation it is also unmistakably related to destruction: "destroying the destroyers of earth." Christ will return to bring about total and final destruction.

The most frequent biblical depiction of this destruction is its occurring by *fire*. Isaiah prophesies, "For behold, the LORD will come in fire … to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire will the LORD execute judgment…" (Isa. 66:15–16). In the words of Zephaniah, "the great day of the LORD" is "a day of wrath … a day of ruin and devastation … a day of trumpet blast," and, the prophet adds, "In the fire of his jealous wrath, all the earth shall be consumed; for a full, yea, sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth" (1:14–18). Malachi, in the closing chapter of the Old Testament, declares, "For behold, the day comes, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up … it will leave them neither root nor branch" (Mai. 4:1).[73] It is apparent that the fire of God's wrath, while executed upon all the earth, will actually be upon "the

arrogant" and "evildoers," and of them nothing will be left ("neither root nor branch").[74] As the New Testament opens, John the Baptist proclaims about Jesus that He will "thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12 NASB). Hence whatever is not gathered[75] will be burned up, consumed by an unquenchable fire—thus utterly destroyed. John the Baptist does not say when this conflagration will occur; but Jesus does. In His parable about the good seed (or wheat) and the tares (or weeds), Jesus concludes, "Let both grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, 'Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned…'" (Matt. 13:30). "Harvest time" (as earlier discussed) will occur at the return of Christ, for Jesus later adds, "Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so it will be at the close of the age. The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin[76] and all evildoers, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth" (Matt. 13:40–42). Similarly Jesus, using the imagery of sorting good and bad fish from a full net, declares, "So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil [men] from the righteous, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth" (Matt. 13:49–50). In these various instances, whether the figure is chaff, tares, or bad fish, evildoers will be consumed by fire.

Turning to the Epistles, we find that when Paul speaks of "eternal destruction" in 2 Thessalonians, he also describes Christ as coming in "flaming fire." "Affliction"[77] will come upon "those who afflict" believers "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They shall suffer the punishment[78] of eternal destruction and exclusion from[79] the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (1:6–9).

Regarding Paul's account, several comments may be made. First, fire is related directly to Christ Himself: He will be revealed from heaven with His angels in "flaming fire" bringing vengeance. The "flaming fire" will come "from heaven" upon the evil world. In the Gospel accounts of the chaff, tares, and bad fish, the fire relates more to the result of Christ's action—a gathering out and then burning. However, there is basically no difference: fire and destruction are elements in both the Gospel and Epistle narratives. Fire—burning—is the result (Gospel), but it is also present in the very action of Christ Himself who comes in flaming fire (Epistle). This, then, is similar to the Old Testament accounts, which frequently show the Lord as coming in fire and thereby bringing destruction.

Second, vengeance is inflicted on those who bring "affliction" to believers: God will repay them with "affliction" at the end. Then Paul adds the broader categories of "those who do not know God" and "those who do not obey the gospel." At first thought, such persons might seem less reprehensible than the "afflicters," and those who—in the language of Matthew—are "causes of sin" and "evildoers" (supra). Yet, in speaking of these broad categories, Paul includes all sinful humanity. For, as he says elsewhere, the root problem of the human race is its turning from the knowledge of God, indeed suppressing that knowledge, with the result that all manner of evil follows.[80] Hence, Paul pinpoints the origin of sin and evildoing as mankind's lack of knowledge of God, which lack is the given situation of all people. Thus blatant "afflicters" and "evildoers" are not by any means the only practitioners of evil. Rather *all persons* are guilty, for all humanity has turned aside from the true knowledge of God. "Those who do not obey the gospel" doubtless are those who spurn the gospel, even when it is offered to them:[81] they will suffer vengeance. Thus, afflicters of Christians, despisers of the gospel, and those who do not know God —all will be subjected to the vengeance of God in Jesus Christ.

Third, it is apparent, in Paul's account, that the "flaming fire" is the very presence of Christ Himself that inflicts vengeance. Thus vengeance is not only His action—which to be sure it is—but also an outflow from the fire of His presence. It is the awesomeness and brilliance of His sudden coming upon people that in itself strikes terror. Here we may again call to mind the cries of the "earth-dwellers" in Revelation to the mountains and rocks: "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb" (6:16). The "face" of God in the coming of Christ, far more terrifying than falling mountains and rocks, brings vengeance and retribution. Also recall this statement in Hebrews: "Our God is a consuming fire" (12:29). Hence the very revelation of Christ from heaven in "flaming fire" consumes all things evil.

This becomes even more apparent in Paul's vivid depiction in 2 Thessalonians of the visitation of Christ upon "the man of sin"[82] (lawlessness, wickedness, iniquity, evil) who is the very incarnation of evil.[83] The text reads, "The Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his *parousia*" (2:8)— or "by the brightness[84] of his *parousia*" (KJV). The climactic fact, set forth in the latter part of the statement, is that Christ's very presence (his Parousia—"arriving presence") is of such overwhelming brightness that "the man of sin" is totally destroyed by it.[85]

This, then, is the analogue to Paul's earlier picture of Christ's being revealed "in flaming fire." The "flaming fire" and the "brightness" (splendor, brilliance)

of His person are one and the same. For both humanity at large and "the man of sin," it is destruction by fire: the fire of God's arriving presence. In the intensity of that fire nothing, absolutely nothing impure, evil, or unholy can remain. Our God is, and will be, a consuming fire.

All this destruction is powerfully captured in the final scene of the Book of Revelation. Satan has worked his deception upon the nations, gathered them in number "like the sand of the sea" for battle. But when they surrounded "the beloved city," suddenly "fire came down from heaven[86] and consumed[87] them" (20:7–9). There is utterly nothing left of them.[88]

The "flaming fire" of "the Lord Jesus from heaven" upon sinful mankind at large (2 Thess. 1), "inflicting vengeance" and causing "eternal destruction"; the fiery "brightness" of the Parousia bringing to total destruction "the man of sin" (2 Thess. 2); and now, climactically, "fire from heaven" (Rev. 20) upon the nations: it is all of a piece—a terrifying one. It is the fire of God's total destruction.

Now I must add a sobering word. For, according to the New Testament, the fire will also come upon those who affirm the gospel, but thereafter sin willfully and deliberately. The same Book of Hebrews that speaks of "our God" as a "consuming fire" also has strong words to believers to "encourage one another … all the more as you see the Day approaching"; and then the following: "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire[89] that will consume the enemies of God" (10:25–27 NIV). If we who have received knowledge of the truth—through the blessing of the gospel—deliberately and willfully continue to sin, the prospect is fearful indeed. The raging fire of God's fury that will consume His enemies will likewise fall upon us.[90]

This leads us to a further—and truly more joyful—reflection. When Christ returns, there will indeed be consuming fire upon mankind at large, the "man of sin," the nations of the earth, and upon deliberate sinners. None of these will escape the fearful brightness of His Parousia: all will be destroyed. But—and here we return to things said earlier—the fury of fire will not be upon those who are found in Him. For as He comes, faithful believers will go to meet Him, to be transformed bodily and spiritually into His likeness, then to glorify Him and He in turn to be glorified in them. The antithesis is total: the same day when Christ is "revealed from heaven … in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance," He also "comes on that day to be glorified in his saints and to be marveled at in all who have believed" (2 Thess. 1:7–8, 10). His awesome presence, which is a

consuming fire against every force and trace of evil, will be for the saints of God a reality of inexpressible glory and marvel.

Let us proceed to note two terms in the Scripture often associated with the fiery destruction that Christ will perform: *word* and *breath.* A background text for both of these may be found in the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 11:4: "He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked." We will consider these in order.

First, the reference to "the rod of his mouth": this rod is unmistakably His tongue or, more specifically, the word proceeding from it. By such a "rod" the Messiah will "smite the earth." Another comparable, and quite graphic, picture is later given by Isaiah: "See, the Name of the LORD comes from afar, with burning anger and dense clouds of smoke; his lips are full of wrath, and his tongue is a consuming fire…. He shakes the nations in the sieve of destruction" (Isa. 30:27–28 NIV). His lips, His tongue, hence His word, goes forth in destructive power against the nations. Thus it is a rod to smite the earth. Psalm 2, in which the Lord speaks to His "anointed," similarly declares, "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel" (vv. 8–9). Thus in a composite picture "the rod of iron" becomes "the rod of his mouth"—His mighty word.

Now all of this comes to a focus in the Book of Revelation where Christ is shown returning from heaven with His armies to make war against the kings of earth and their armies (19:11–21). His name is "the Word of God" (v. 13), and "from his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule[91] them with a rod of iron" (v. 15). The kings of earth and their armies—indeed "all men, both free and slave" (v. 18)—are gathered for battle against Christ and His heavenly armies, but utterly to no avail. For the beast and the false prophet, who had assembled the enemy host, are "thrown alive into the lake of fire" (v. 20). Then comes the conclusion: "And the rest [i.e., 'all men'] were slain by the sword of him who sits upon the horse, the sword that issues from his mouth" (v. 21). The destruction is total: no one is left alive, except Christ and those with Him.

It is clear from this picture that not only are Christ and the Word of God one, but also that the sword of victory is none other than the word. The sword is not swung by the hand, as in an earthly battle, but issues from the mouth.[92] Again, although "the armies of heaven" come with Christ, there is no mention of their participating in the battle: the total victory belongs to the Word. Further, there really is no battle or struggle; all, however, are immediately slain. Christ does

not move around the vast multitudes of the nations gathered against Him, slaying one and then another. The destruction is a single, undivided, instantaneous event.

Actually, therefore, it is the very presence of Christ, the Word of God, that destroys everything contrary to truth. His word, proceeding from His mouth, is Christ Himself in His movement against evil. Even as all good things were created through the Word (Genesis 1 and John 1), so all evil things will be destroyed by the same Word. Even as the "Word became flesh" for mankind's salvation from sin, so the Word will finally return for the obliteration of all that is sinful and evil.

Second, we may now reflect on the other image—"the breath of his lips." And here also is an approximation to the word. For, "with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked." Two other passages may be mentioned: Job 4:9, referring to those who "plow iniquity and sow trouble" (v. 8), reads, "By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are consumed"; and Isaiah 30:33, where "the breath of the Lord" is described as being "like a stream of brimstone." Thus the breath of God the Lord can cause all to perish:[93] it is itself a consuming fire.

This brings us again to the description of the destruction of "the man of sin." For, according to Paul, when Christ returns, He will "slay him with the breath of his mouth." I have already commented on the words that follow: "and destroy with the brightness of his coming" (2 Thess. 2:8 KJV). Actually, from this description we can see that there is no real difference between the two statements: "slaying" and "destroying"[94] can hardly be distinguished. Thus, "the man of sin" is destroyed *both* by "the breath" of Christ's mouth *and* by "the brightness" of His coming. The former—which we are now discussing—does, however, reiterate the fact that no battle or concerted effort is involved: simply the breath of the returning Lord upon him. Yet that very breath, like "a stream of brimstone" (to use the language of Isaiah), brings about the total destruction of the wicked.

In the beginning of creation it was the breath of God that brought man to life —He "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7). It was the breath of God upon dry bones that made them live —"breath came into them, and they lived" (Ezek. 37:10). It was the breath of Christ that brought new life in the Spirit—"he breathed on them, and said … 'Receive the Holy Spirit' " (John 20:22). It will be that same divine breath in the end that—so powerful, so near, so holy—will consume the very incarnation of evil: "the man" of utter wickedness.

In reflecting on the *word* by which all evil persons—"all men, slave and

free”—are to be slain (Rev. 19), and the breath by which the evil man—“the man of sin” is to be destroyed (2 Thess. 2), it is evident that both word and breath are inseparable from the Parousia: the awesome “arriving presence” of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whether it is the *totality* of evil (Revelation) or the *concentration* of evil (Thessalonians), nothing evil can stand before the Lord on the day of His return in glory.

Let us look again at the imagery of fire. For whether we speak of Christ Himself, His word, or His breath in relation to the coming destruction, it is all a fearsome and fiery consuming of evil. This recalls the words of the psalmist: “Our God comes … before him is a devouring fire” (50:3). Again, “Fire goes before him, and burns up his adversaries round about” (97:3). So Christ Himself will return “in flaming fire”; it goes “before him” and “burns up” His enemies. Also, His word and breath are a flame of fire. “The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire” (Ps. 29:7), and “the breath of the LORD” is “like a stream of brimstone” (Isa. 30:33). So Christ in His return, through a voice that flashes forth flames of fire and a breath that streams forth brimstone, will utterly destroy every trace of evil on the earth.

Although this coming event transcends our capacity to understand how it will occur, there could be some parallel to it in the approach of a celestial body—a star, the sun itself, a huge flaming meteorite—that would burn away everything living on the earth. Or in this age of a potential nuclear holocaust, it might not be unlike the explosion of nuclear warheads with such vast force as to obliterate the human race and all other life.[95] Yet neither of these—the approach of a celestial body nor the explosion of nuclear warheads—for all their vast force and resulting devastation, would approximate the return of God in Christ. For this is the Almighty Himself, not some cosmic body that He has made or some forces resident in the nucleus of the atom, who will be coming in judgment and destruction.[96]

Now a final note is in order concerning the situation of those who belong to Christ—“the saints,” believers—at His coming in destruction. As earlier discussed, there will be the resurrection of “the dead in Christ” and the translation of living believers. Both groups will be “caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” to be forever with Him.[97] Since, however, this glorious occasion is at the outset a meeting with continuing descent to the earth, the saints will accompany Him in His coming. Thus they—all the saints of all ages—will be in His company as Christ comes to earth to bring about the final and total destruction of all evil.[98]

The saints, of course, will not be consumed by the fire of His presence, for

there will be no evil in them. They will come with Him as the "spirits of righteous men made perfect" and in bodies now "like his glorious body." They will be wholly like Him.

Further, since Christ returns to make war against all evil powers, the saints who will attend Him are doubtless included in "the armies of heaven."[99] Hence they will be present at the final conflict, even as the "kings of earth" seek to do battle against them and their Lord.[100] However, the saints are merely there; they are not touched by the forces of darkness any more than Christ is. And He alone wins the victory.

No scripture perhaps puts it more vividly than that concerning the "ten kings": "They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful" (Rev. 17:14). "With him" in the last battle—but the victory is the Lord's!

[1]The four winds" signifies all points of the compass (on "the four winds," cf. Jer. 49:36; Ezek. 37:9; Dan. 7:2; 8:8; 11:4; Zech. 2:6; 6:5).

[2]Mark 13:27 reads, "…from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven." Thus the "gathering" will be from all over heaven and earth.

[3]I earlier commented on the primary applicability of these words to the judicial visitation upon Jerusalem in a.d. 70: "they will see" referring to the Jewish nation. However, it is clear now that the words of Jesus that refer to the gathering of "the elect" "from the four winds" move beyond the first century and a Jerusalem locus to the final advent and a worldwide scene.

[4]'Harvest time" is "the close of the age" (Matt. 13:39).

[5]There is a second reaping in this picture in Revelation (vv. 17-20), which unmistakably refers to the reaping of evil ("the vintage of the earth," which is afterward thrown into "the great wine press of the wrath of God"). Some commentators hold that the first reaping (mentioned above) refers to the same category of people as the second, since the Book of Revelation focuses largely on the Day of the Lord as a day of wrath and judgment. Also, in this passage Christ does not send forth angels to do the reaping, but does it Himself. This seems to me of little consequence, especially since Christ is the ultimate Reaper either way. I am strongly inclined to the interpretation that the first reaping is of the good.

[6]I will discuss the resurrection of unbelievers later.

[7]John 6:40. The other verses, 44 and 54, vary somewhat in background statements, but the reference is unmistakably to believers.

[8]For other references to "Paradise," see also 2 Corinthians 12:3 and Revelation 2:7.

[9]"Spirit" and "soul" in many cases are interchangeable terms. See the discussion of this in Renewal Theology, 1:197-219.

[10]This, incidentally, contravenes any idea of a "purgatory" (as in Roman Catholic teaching) after death before the believer can enter heaven. There is no need for an extended period of purgation of sin, since at death the believer's spirit is "made perfect."

[11]"Recall also the similar words of Jesus and Stephen at their deaths: "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:46); "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59). The spirit unmistakably continues after death.

[12]"Under the altar" signifies both that they have given their lives as a sacrifice and that they are in the heavenly realm. The altar in Revelation stands before the throne of God (cf. 8:3; 9:13; 14:18; 16:7).

[13]Seventh-day Adventists thus err in their teaching that death is "a state of temporary unconsciousness while the person awaits the resurrection" (Seventh-day Adventists Believe…, 352). They interpret "sleep" literally rather than figuratively, as the biblical writers use it in speaking of death.

[14]See e.g., Psalm 90:5 (niv); Daniel 12:2; Matthew 27:52; John 11:11; Acts 7:60; 13:36; 1 Corinthians 15:6; 1 Thessalonians 4:13.

[15]This applies to both believer and nonbeliever. I will later discuss the situation of the unbeliever at death.

[16]The spirit is not simply a part of man, so that at death the believer is only partly present with God. No, the spirit is the whole person in his inwardness (the "inner man" of 2 Cor 4:16 [nasb]), hence his essential reality. So it was with Jesus, who was "put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit; in which [spirit] he went and preached to the spirits in prison" (1 Peter 3:18-19). Jesus-not just a part of him-preached to the spirits; but He did it as spirit.

[17]On the interim period see particularly Oscar Cullmann, Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? chapter 4: "Those Who Sleep."

[18]This will be discussed in the next section.

[19]Paul speaks in 2 Corinthians 5:4 of his desire not to be "unclothed" in the life beyond but to be "further clothed, so that what is mortal may be

swallowed up by life." Hence, despite all the joy of going to be "with Christ" (as Paul expresses elsewhere), there is a yearning-which, by implication, will continue to be felt after death-for being "further clothed." Paul speaks of this as being "clothed with our dwelling from heaven" (v. 2 nasb).

[20]That this "dwelling" (oiketerion) is a body is clear from the overall context. According to BAGD, oiketerion refers here to "the glorified body of the transfigured Christian."

[21]All of these are basically non-Christian (particularly Greek) views of the nature of the body.

[22]The Greek word is psychikon, also translated in kjv and niv as "natural." The rsv has "physical"; neb, "animal." Whatever the translation, psychikon refers to man's earthly existence. "Man … is essentially faxy under the present order, and his body throughout is essentially i/wxikov as determined by that order" (EGT, 2:937).

[23]"Every man will rise again in his own likeness, his own unchangeable individuality" (E. Brunner, Eternal Hope, 149).

[24]As is held by those religions and philosophies that teach reincarnation (rebirth in a new body or other form of life). This false teaching abounds in the New Age movement of our time.

[25]See also Renewal Theology, 1:382-90.

[26]That it is proper to move from Christ's resurrection to the believer's is due to the fact that Christ is "the first fruits": "Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20). Again, Christ is "the first-born from the dead" (Col. 1:18; cf. Rev. 1:5).

[27]"Bodies" is simply "body" in the Greek text (so the kjv, nasb, and neb translate).

[28]The "I am." Jesus prefaces His statement that God is the God of the living by the words of Scripture, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Matt. 22:32)-hence the God of the living.

[29]I say "in part, a preview" because Lazarus's being raised from the dead was actually more of a resuscitation than a resurrection. Lazarus's body was revived from death; he did not receive a spiritual body; and he died again. Nonetheless, the authority of Jesus over death and the grave that was demonstrated in the raising of Lazarus is a presage of the resurrection yet to occur.

[30]These words affirming a present spiritual resurrection-“now”-were spoken just before Jesus’ words about the resurrection to come: “All who are in the tombs … will come forth.”

[31]Hence, the spiritual body of the resurrection not only operates in a new dimension (beyond our spiritual world)-which I have discussed-but it is also a body that has been quickened by the Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit who gave life to dead spirits in regeneration will some day give life to dead bodies in the resurrection!

[32]We may add, wherever these remains are and whatever they have become. It is, of course, a fact that the mortal remains of countless believers have been scattered far and wide. But surely the Holy Spirit is not dependent on enlivening intact bodies (every part in place, as in a grave), or even putting scattered parts together. For the resurrection body will not be a rejuvenated material body (hence dependent on intact remains-as in the resuscitation of Lazarus) but a spiritual body in continuity with the past (the same essential self, i.e., spirit or soul). Yet there will be a radical difference: the body will be “pneumatic”-not constituted by past material. So Paul can say, “What you sow [in death] is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel…. God gives it a body as he has chosen” (1 Cor. 15:37-38).

[33]The Old Testament depicts two persons, Enoch and Elijah, as likewise not passing through death; both were translated. “Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him” (Gen. 5:24; cf. Heb. 11:5), and “Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (2 Kings 2:11). Enoch’s translation is not described; it is said simply (and movingly) that “God took him.” Elijah’s going “into heaven” is vividly described in 2 Kings 2:12, though only Elisha saw it happen.

[34]In the quotations above from 1 Corinthians 15 and Philippians 3 containing the word “change,” the former is from allassô, meaning to “change” or “alter,” and is used in the New Testament also in relation to the heavens: “as a garment they will also be changed” (Heb. 1:12 nasb); the latter is from metaschêmatizô, meaning literally to “change the form of’ (schéma = “form”). Hence, “trans-formation” of a radical, though external, kind is the meaning (on schéma cf. 1 Cor. 7:31-“the form of this world [to schéma tou kosmou toutou] is passing away”).

[35]In contrast to some popular pictures of believers being translated in natural bodies.

[36]In a moment” is en atomô. This means “indivisible because of smallness”

(BAGD). Compare our English word atom (from the Greek word). No separation, or cutting apart (atomos = a [not] + temnein [to cut]) is possible.

[37]Or “by no means” (ou me); “certainly not” (niv).

[38]This means that those “fallen asleep” (who live on as spirits in heaven) are the same as the “dead in Christ” (whose bodies have died).

[39]It is clear that the Thessalonians actually grieved over the situation of fellow believers who had passed on, so much so as to question whether they would share in the event of Christ’s return. Paul responded, “We would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope” (1 Thess. 4:13). This is the background statement for Paul’s succeeding words about Christ’s resurrection and how God would bring through Jesus those who have “fallen asleep.” Not only was that true, but also those alive would “by no means” precede those who had passed on.

[40]The Greek word is harp age sometha. The verb harpazo can signify violent seizure-a stealing, carrying off, a snatching. However, here and in a number of other places the word conveys the note of simply being “caught up” nonviolently. Cf. Acts 8:39: “The Spirit of the Lord caught up [herpasen] Philip”; 2 Cor. 12:2: “a man … caught up [harpagenta] to the third heaven”; Rev. 12:5: “her child [Jesus] was caught up [herpasthe] to God and to his throne.” Hence, one should avoid the language, sometimes heard, of this being a “great snatch” or “seizure” (often thought of in the sense of snatching one out of some threat or danger). Since this “catching up” accompanies the resurrection of the dead in Christ, which surely has no relation to a violent seizure (or a desperate situation), all the more reason exists to avoid such misleading language.

[41]In the Latin text “we shall be caught up” is rapiemur, hence “rapture.” Although “rapture” is the usual designation for this extraordinary event, two possible misimpressions should be guarded against: (1) forcible seizure (akin to the root idea of “rape”) or (2) mystical or ecstatic delight. It is neither of these.

[42]The Greek word is paralempsomai, a form of paralambano.

[43]Also, the statement in 1 Thessalonians 4 concludes with the words “and so we shall always be with the Lord” (v. 17). This is not unlike the picture conveyed in the wording “that where I am you may be also.”

[44]“The Greek word is paralambanetai (like paralempsomai, a form of paralambano).

[45]Some interpreters view the “swept away,” or “took away” (kjv, nasb, niv) of verse 39 as being the same as the “taken” of verses 40-41. However, the Greek words are quite different, the former being eren (from airo) pointing to forcible removal, hence “swept away” (or “took away”), the latter, paralambanetai, signifying “taken” for the purpose of blessing (cf. Matt. 1:20; 17:1; 20:17). According to R. H. Gundry, “ ‘One will be taken’ in rapture and ‘one will be left’ for judgment” (The Church and the Tribulation, 138).

[46]“In the parallel passage in Luke 17:26-37, in addition to Noah and the Flood, Lot and Sodom are also mentioned, with Lot (like Noah) being saved and the Sodomites destroyed. There is one addition regarding the taking-the Lukan text also gives another example: “There will be two men in one bed; one will be taken and the other left.” Again the word for “taken” is a form of paralambano: paralemphthesetai.

[47]Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians about “the parousia of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him” (2:1 nasb). (See the earlier discussion of “gathering,” pp. 39799.)

[48]Recall that the New Testament has various ways of depicting Christ’s relationship to the cloud(s).

[49]See the earlier discussion of Christ’s return in the clouds.

[50]The psalmist speaks of the clouds as the “chariot” of the Lord (104:3).

[51]For their “lowly” bodies have now been made “like his glorious body” (see Phil. 3:2021).

[52]See the Excursus, “The Beast in Revelation 11 and the Two Witnesses,” pages 351-53, especially note 160.

[53]As depicted by “the beast from the bottomless pit.”

[54]Hendriksen in his book More Than Conquerors views this passage in Revelation as referring to the church at the return of Christ: “The church-still under the symbolism of the two witnesses-now hears a voice: ‘Come up hither.’ Thereupon the church ascends to heaven upon a cloud of glory. ‘And their enemies beheld them.’ No secret rapture!” (p. 158).

[55]“Incidentally, viewing Revelation 11:11-12 as referring to the rapture of believers (or in connection with it) is often done by those who affirm a mid-tribulation rapture and thus do not see the church as being on earth during the visitations of wrath and judgment in the latter portion of the book (recall the earlier discussion). Although I myself do not hold a mid-tribulation viewpoint (rather, I believe that Christians will be on earth

during the full period of tribulation), I believe there is a strong possibility that Revelation 11:11-12 does symbolically refer to the “catching up.”

[56]Air,” however, may signify more than the surrounding atmosphere. Satan is spoken of by Paul elsewhere as 44the ruler of the kingdom of the air” (Eph. 2:2 niv), hence air is not merely a physical but also a spiritual realm. Morris makes this interesting comment: 4The fact that the Lord chooses to meet His saints there, on the demons’ home ground so to speak, shows something of His complete mastery over them” (The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians, NICNT, 146). 44Air,” like 44clouds,” may refer to more than a natural sphere. BAGD, under aer, speaks of 44the kingdom of the air.”

[57]The Greek word for “meeting” is apantesin.

[58]Again, apantesin.

[59]Again, apantesin.

[60]Concerning the word apantesis, Bruce says, 44When a dignitary paid an official visit (parousia) to a city in Hellenistic times, the action of the leading citizens in going out to meet him and escort him back on the final stage of his journey was called the apantesis” (7 & 2 Thessalonians, WBC, 102). According to the Interpreter’s Bible, 44the word meet is found in the papyri in the sense of an official welcome” (11:307).

[61]Bruce, despite his statement (in the preceding note) adds that 44there is nothing in the word apantesis which demands this interpretation … whether the Lord (with his people) continues his journey to earth or returns to heaven” (1 & 2 Thessalonians, 103). However, because of both the Hellenistic background and the Scriptures (Matt. 25:6 and Acts 28:15), I believe that apantesis strongly suggests meeting Christ in His continuing descent. (See also Ladd, The Blessed Hope, 91-92, and Gundry, The Church and the Tribulation, 103-5).

[62]“Redemption of the soul and body applies to most of what has been written in the previous pages. Redemption may also take on a broader meaning in relation to the situation of the world at the return of Christ.

[63]The Greek phrase is eis soterian.

[64]The Greek word is etheto, translated “appointed” in kjv and nasb.

[65]See also 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, where Paul speaks of turning away from idolatry “to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven … Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”

[66]The Greek word is syndoxasthdmen-to be “glorified together … to be

exalted to the same glory to which Christ has been raised" (Thayer).

[67]The Greek word is endoxasthenai-"to be adorned with glory." Christ will come "that this glory may be seen in the saints, i.e. in the glory, blessedness, conferred on them" (Thayer).

[68]The word "glorify," doxazd, may be defined as "to clothe in splendor" (BAGD). Such a definition vividly expresses the marvel of what is to occur.

[69]See the discussion of sanctification in Renewal Theology, 2:83-117.

[70]Shortly before the rapture passage, Paul writes, "May the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all men … so that he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints" (1 Thess. 3:12-13). Without the further reading of 1 Thessalonians 5:24 (above), the matter of complete (unblamable) holiness might seem dependent on the measure of our love ("to one another and to all men"); however, the climax in chapter 5 vigorously affirms that God Himself "will do it." How eternally grateful we may be, for whatever depends on us will surely prove inadequate.

[71]The Greek word is agalliasei, "exultation" (BAGD). The kjv translates it as "exceeding joy"; niv and nasb, "great joy"; neb, "jubilation."

[72]I have omitted a portion that reads, "[The time came] for the dead to be judged, for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints. …" I will deal with these matters later.

[73]The Old Testament closes with these words: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse [or 'ban of utter destruction' rsv mg.]" (Mai. 4:5-6). Elijah did come, in the figure of John the Baptist, and through his message that prepared the way for Christ's gracious first advent, "utter destruction" was restrained until the final "great and terrible day."

[74]For other Old Testament Scriptures that depict the fire of God's judgment, see, e.g., Psalms 50:3; 97:3; Isaiah 24:6; Jeremiah 5:14; Nahum 1:6.

[75]Recall the earlier discussion of the "gathering" of believers (pp. 397-99).

[76]The Greek word is skandala-"stumbling blocks" (nasb), "everything that causes sin" (niv), "whatever makes men stumble" (neb), "all things that offend" (kjv).

[77]Or “tribulation” (kjv; see the prior discussion of the Great Tribulation, pp. 360-70).

[78]Or “penalty” (nasb). The Greek word is diken.

[79]The Greek reads simply apo-“from.” The word “exclusion” may, however, be implied.

[80]Recall the picture that Paul sets forth in Romans 1:18-32, beginning, “for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth” (v. 18). Thus, not honoring God, their thinking becomes vain, their hearts darkened, their desires and actions immoral; they become “filled with all manner of wickedness” (v. 29) and cause others to sin.

[81]Paul may have had primarily the Jews in mind; however, his language could surely include Gentiles as well.

[82]Chapter 2, verse 3. See the earlier discussion of this “man” on pages 334-39.

[83]The same word, anomia, is used in the Greek for this man-ho anomos, “the evil one” (2 Thess. 2:8) as for “evildoers” (see e.g., Matt. 13:41)-tous poiountas ten anomian (“the ones doing evil”).

[84]The Greek word is epiphaneia-“splendor” (niv), “radiance” (neb). See the earlier discussion.

[85]The word translated “destroy” above is katargesei, which means also “bring to an end” (nasb).

[86]According to the rsv margin, “other ancient authorities read from God, out of heaven, or out of heaven from God.” The kjv has “from God out of heaven.”

[87]The Greek word is katephagen. “Devoured” (kjv, nasb, niv) means totally consumed.

[88]The “destroyers of earth” (Rev. 11:18) have been destroyed. Also, this fulfills the words of the prophet Zephaniah: “In the fire of his jealous wrath … a full, yea, sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth” (1:18).

[89]Or “a fury of fire” (rsv). Puros zelos is the Greek phrase.

[90]One thinks also of these very sobering words of Jesus: “If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned” (John 15:6).

[91]“Rule”-from the Greek word poimaino-here does not mean to govern but to break or destroy. “To rule with a rod of iron means to destroy rather

than to govern in a stern fashion. The shepherd not only leads his flock to pasture but defends the sheep from marauding beasts. His rod is a weapon of retaliation. The Messiah's rod is a rod of iron; that is, it is strong and unyielding in its mission of judgment" (Mounce, The Book of Revelation, 347). The truth of this is further confirmed by the words in Psalm 2 (as quoted): "You shall break them with a rod of iron," and by the words in Isaiah 11 (as quoted): "He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth." Accordingly, the statement in Revelation about the "sharp sword" and "rod of iron" do not refer (as many have interpreted) to separate events-i.e., a smiting of the nations with the sword and an iron rule after that, but to the one event of their being smitten and broken (or destroyed). Incidentally, this is clarified in the next statement: "He will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty" (19:15). This is surely not a description of a later event (after a supposed iron rule, or even during it), but one further portrayal of what will happen when Christ returns. He will smite the nations, break (destroy) them, and tread upon them in His fury.

[92]This picture calls to mind this messianic statement in Isaiah: "He made my mouth like a sharp sword" (49:2).

[93]Another verse from Isaiah: "The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people is grass" (40:7).

[94]"Slay" is from the Greek word anaired, which can also be translated "destroy" (as in neb). Like the word above translated "destroy" (katarged), anaired can also mean to "do away with" (BAGD). So there is no basic difference.

[95]In an article, "Living with Mega-Death," Time magazine predicted that if most of the strategic warheads that are at the disposal of Russia and the United States were discharged in a nuclear war exchange, "the earth would momentarily flicker back at the distant stars- and then perhaps go out, the very life of the planet extinguished" (March 29, 1982, p. 19).

[96]This by no means rules out the possibility that God could make use of a celestial body or a nuclear explosion as a cosmic or earthly counterpart to His own activity. In the instance of "mega-death," the human race through the accumulated result of its own evil would self- destruct. The "fiery flame" of Christ's appearing would be at one with the "fiery holocaust" of man's own devising.

[97]I will not here repeat matters discussed in some detail earlier, such as the transformation of the natural body to a spiritual body, the spirits of

believers in heaven being reunited with new bodies, and the perfecting of holiness in raptured believers.

[98]In Jude we find this prophecy of the ancient Enoch: “Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands [or ‘myriads’-an innumerable multitude’] of his saints, to execute judgment upon all” (vv. 14-15 kjv). This is similar to Paul’s statement in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 concerning “the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.” Some commentators, however, hold that the reference in Jude is to angels (e.g., Michael Green, The Second Epistle of Peter and the Epistle of Jude, TNTC, 177) or to angels and men (e.g., John Calvin: “By saints he means the faithful as well as angels; for both will adorn the tribunal of Christ, when he shall descend to judge the world” [Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles, 443]). The text is debatable; however, since the critical word hagioi is used regularly in the NT to refer to believers, I am inclined to affirm the same for Jude 14. (See p. 388, n. 14, on hagion.) This, of course, does not mean that only believers will accompany Christ, for, as we have earlier noted, the holy angels will also be in the company.

[99]“Revelation 19:14 (see the earlier discussion of Revelation 19:11-21 on p. 389).

[100]“And I saw the beast and the kings of earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who sits upon the horse and against his army” (Rev. 19:19).

13
The Millennium

Before considering the third purpose of Christ's return, namely, to execute the Last Judgment,[1] we may here address the question of the Millennium. I do this because interposed between Christ's return in reference to destruction in Revelation 19:11—21 and the Last Judgment in Revelation 20:11–15 is the depiction of a thousand years, or millennium, in Revelation 20:1–6, with subsequent related events in verses 7–10. Satan is bound for a thousand years (vv. 1–3); there is a reign with Christ for a thousand years (vv. 4–6); and after a thousand years the final battle is fought (vv. 7–10). The question is: How are we to understand all this?

It hardly needs saying that the question of the Millennium has been one of the most perplexing biblical and theological issues in the history of Christendom. So it is in all humility that I will set out a pattern of interpretation that I hope will be of value. I will be straightforward while at the same time mentioning some of my differences with other interpretations. At the end of this chapter, an Excursus will focus more directly on alternative interpretations. I urge the reader—especially if another pattern is more familiar—to follow my words closely in the attempt to understand God's truth in this important matter.

At the outset I suggest that Revelation 20:1–10 is to be viewed as relating to the entire Christian era, namely, from the initial coming of Christ to His return. Accordingly, from this perspective these events do not chronologically follow Revelation 19:11–21,[2] which depicts the final destruction wrought by Christ. Revelation 20:1–10, I submit, concludes with this destruction, but goes back to prior events.[3]

Before detailing these events, it is important to note that Revelation 20:1–10 opens with the words "And I saw."[4] This suggests a succeeding vision, not necessarily a succeeding event or series of events.[5] Indeed, even as Revelation 12 is a vision[6] that goes back to the birth of Christ and then forward to the last days[7] and is immediately preceded by 11:18–19, which declares total destruction ("destroying the destroyers of earth"); so Revelation 20 and 19 are related. Chapter 19 likewise depicts total destruction, and chapter 20 goes back to the

beginning of the Christian era and forward to the end times. This may be seen by a careful study of Revelation 20:1–10.

I. THE BINDING OF SATAN

According to Revelation 20:1–3 Satan is bound for a thousand years. The key words are "And he [an angel] seized the dragon … who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years and threw [or 'cast' KJV] him into the pit, and shut and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years were ended. After that he must be loosed for a little while" (vv. 2–3).

First, we are to understand the binding of Satan as having occurred during the ministry of Jesus Christ. On one occasion when Jesus was casting out demons, He said, "How can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds[8] the strong man? And then he will plunder his house" (Matt. 12:29 NASB). The "strong man"[9] undoubtedly represents Satan,[10] for it is only by first binding him that his "house" may be plundered, that is, his demons cast out. The work of binding Satan actually began in the wilderness of temptation when at the beginning of Jesus' ministry He rebuffed Satan at every point; it continued through His ministry as demons were again and again cast out and Satan spurned; it climaxed in Jesus' death when He rendered Satan powerless. On the latter, we may recall the words in Hebrews how Christ partook of our flesh so that "through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (2:14 NASB). To "render powerless" is to "bind": it is to relativize Satan's power, indeed essentially to nullify it. According to Revelation 20, this was done for a thousand years—"bound him for a thousand years," which means that throughout the whole Christian era Satan remains bound[11] and rendered essentially powerless by Jesus Christ.[12] This, of course, does not mean that Satan has become inactive—far from it. But a critical limitation has been placed on his power.

Second, the statement that Satan was "cast" into the pit (or "abyss") likewise is to be understood as happening through the work of Christ in His first coming. Speaking of His own imminent death, Jesus declares, "Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out;[13] and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself' (John 12:31 — 32). This signifies that by Christ's death on the cross Satan will be deposed from his high position

and cast out of his place as world ruler. As a result, from that same cross Christ will be able to draw "all men" to Himself. Satan will be "cast out" with utterly no power to stop the successful proclamation of the gospel. It will reach out to all people, Jew and Gentile alike.[14] In that sense Satan has been cast into the pit,[15] and totally confined in it, for, as Revelation 20 puts it, the pit has been "shut … and sealed … over him." Whatever else Satan may do, he cannot prevent Christ's drawing people to Himself: he cannot destroy the gospel witness. The restraint—the "shutting" and "sealing"—of him in this regard is total.

Third, because of Christ's victory over Satan and His present rule, the nations will all hear the gospel! In the Great Commission, Jesus had declared, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go … and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:18–19). This command can be fulfilled because of the powerlessness of Satan. Surely Satan would like to maintain his former deception over the nations—that he, not Christ, is the ultimate ruler—but he is utterly incapable. For Satan has been confined by Christ (as Revelation 20 continues) so "that he should deceive the nations no more." The nations, whatever Satan may attempt, will hear the gospel. As Jesus again said, "This gospel of the kingdom *will be preached* throughout the whole world, as a testimony to *all nations"* (Matt. 24:14). Since Christ has been given all authority in heaven and *on earth*—and Satan has been cast out—the gospel will be proclaimed, whatever Satan's attempted deceptions, to all mankind!

It is important to recognize that this casting out of Satan, his being shut and sealed in the pit, and his inability to deceive the nations relates essentially to only one thing: the proclamation of the gospel. Satan may, and does, continue to pervert mankind, and many a nation has granted him a false[16] dominance, but none of this can really hold out against the powerful gospel witness. In that all-important matter Satan is totally impotent: he is in the "pit," wholly "shut" and "sealed" away. For since Christ deposed Satan, and was Himself "lifted up" on the cross, the former deception of the nations[17] has been done away during all the time of the final sending forth of the gospel proclamation.[18]

Finally, according to Revelation 20:1–3, Satan will be released for a short time. As we have noted, his inability to deceive the nations extends "till the thousand years were ended. After that he must be loosed for a little while."[19] As the Scriptures declare in countless and various ways, our present age is to witness an unparalleled breaking forth of evil at the conclusion of the proclamation of the gospel. Revelation itself depicts this (as we have earlier observed) in the emergence of "the beast" from the "bottomless pit" after the

"two witnesses"[20] have ended their testimony: "And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that ascends from the bottomless pit will make war upon them and conquer them and kill them" (11:7). This ascent from the "pit" correlates with Satan's "loosing"; moreover, it is only for a brief period. According to Revelation 13, where the two beasts emerge from sea and land, their destructive power is limited to a short time: forty-two months[21] —hence a "little while." Thus there is an unmistakable parallel between the loosing of Satan at the end of a thousand years and his breaking forth at the climax of our present age.

In Matthew 24 it is significant to observe that just *after* the statement that the "gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to the nations; and then the end will come," "the desolating sacrilege" (or "the abomination of desolation") stands "in the holy place" (vv. 14–15). This parallels the loosing of Satan at the end of the age of gospel proclamation to the nations during which time Satan is powerless to "deceive" the nations and thereby prevent its happening. With restraints removed, he enters upon his final time of deception. Similarly, Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians 2:3–10 that the "man of sin" is under restraint now (paralleling Satan's present "binding"). But when the restraint is removed (paralleling Satan's "loosing"), "the lawless one will be revealed," and it will be with "all wicked deception." The deceiver, no longer under restraint, will then be fully upon the scene. But this loosing and deception will occur only a little while before final destruction: "the lawless one" slain by the Lord—by "the breath of his mouth … his appearing and his coming."

In our discussion of Revelation 20:1–3, it is apparent that this Scripture does not refer to a future thousand years. Rather, the text covers the era of gospel proclamation extending from Christ's binding of Satan to the conclusion of the gospel witness. During this time Satan—whatever else his diabolical machinations—is incapable of preventing the gospel message from getting through to the nations. Hence, his loosing at the end of the gospel era has no reference to a period after a future reign of Christ on earth,[22] but to the climax of the present age when, restraints removed, he will be set free for a short season. Indeed, that time could be near at hand.[23]

II. REIGNING WITH CHRIST

The next verses, Revelation 20:4–6, depict a reigning with Christ for a thousand years. The last words climax the passage: “They shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years” (v. 6). The passage begins, “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them” (v. 4 NASB). This opening statement also depicts reigning: sitting upon “thrones”;[24] and the fact that “judgment was given to them” indicates that rule[25] belongs to them. Thus the passage both opens and closes with the picture of people reigning.

Let us continue with verse 4: “And I saw the souls [or ‘lives’][26] of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and such as worshiped not the beast, neither his image, and received not the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they lived,[27] and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (v. 4 ASV).[28] Here we are told that those who lived and reigned with Christ for the thousand years were martyrs for the sake of Christ and “such as” did not worship the beast nor receive his mark.[29] Neither the most brutal martyrdom (by beheading) nor the most vicious temptations and attacks from “the beast” cause them to waver. To use the words of Paul, they “reign in life” (Rom. 5:17), whatever the suffering and death they have to endure—or, to use John’s words in Revelation, they “sat” upon “thrones.” Hence, “they” who reigned seem to include all believers of all ages who remained faithful to Christ to the very end.[30]

For further specification of those who lived and reigned with Christ, we may next observe that they are participants in “the first resurrection.” Looking ahead to verse 6 we read, “Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years.” What, then, is “the first resurrection”? Because “the second death has no power” over such persons, the most obvious answer is that it refers to those who no longer have to face eternal death[31] but who have come into eternal life—indeed have been “resurrected” from death to life. Here we may refer to the Gospel of John where Jesus says, “For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life

to whom he will … he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.[32] Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (5:21, 24–25). This is clearly a resurrection, the same that Jesus refers to later in saying, "I am the resurrection and the life … whoever lives and believes in me shall never die"[33] (John 11:25–26). Such words refer to a "first resurrection"—a spiritual one, from spiritual death—over which "the second death" will *never* have any power. There will also be a second resurrection, a bodily one. To this Jesus refers in saying, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice … those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28–29).[34] Concerning the spiritual (first) resurrection Jesus declares (as noted), "The hour is coming, and now is …"; concerning the bodily resurrection, he does not add, "and now is," because it belongs to the future when all the dead shall be bodily raised.[35]

Let me add a further word about "the first resurrection." Since it is a spiritual resurrection, those who are not so raised remain spiritually dead. Thus the next verse reads, "The rest of the dead lived not[36] (ASV) until the thousand years were ended" (Rev. 20:5). They did not live spiritually:[37] they remained dead, as do all persons whom Christ has not yet made alive. Throughout the thousand years such persons never saw life—and this was true all the way to the end: "until the thousand years were ended."[38]

To return to the matter of reigning, it follows that the reign of the saints in Revelation 20 is another way of describing the present victorious living of Christian believers. *Made alive by Christ* and *reigning in life* are specified in the statement "They lived, and reigned with Christ a thousand years." This is hardly a future event, even though the subsequent words affirm, "They shall reign with him a thousand years." This latter statement is similar to the words in John 5:25: "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live." The "will live" by no means refers to a future period, but to the present ("now is")— so likewise the "shall reign."

That this reigning refers to the present is further attested by earlier statements in Revelation. In the opening chapter John joyously speaks about Jesus: "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (vv. 5–6). He "*made us* a kingdom," which means that all who have been freed from sins *are* also a kingdom, hence they reign as kings[39] even now. John is not so much saying that we are *in* His kingdom (however true that

is) but that we *are* a kingdom.[40] Thus, we reign in life—*now*. Later in this chapter John declares, "I, John, your brother … share with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance" (v. 9). This is not the kingdom to come, but the present situation of his—and of all saints—victoriously reigning over every earthly trial and tribulation with "patient endurance."

Note also the imagery of "priests." We have not only been "made … a kingdom" but we have also been made "priests" to His God and Father. Hence, as believers we are presently both a kingdom (or kings, reigning) and priests to God. Now we turn again to Revelation 20 and observe that "they" are also called priests: "They shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years" (v. 6). It seems unmistakable, therefore, that both kingdom—reigning—and priesthood refer in both Revelation 1 and 20 to the present victorious lives of all who have been freed by Christ from their sins. It is not a fact of the future, but a present joyous reality.

One further scripture relating to kingdom and priests and their victorious reigning is found in Revelation 5. In heaven a "new song" is sung to "the Lamb": "Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon [or 'over'][41] the earth" (vv. 9–10 ASV).[42] In accordance with Revelation 1:5–6 (which, as noted, likewise speaks of salvation by the blood of Christ and being "made a kingdom, priests …") this reigning refers to the present. Reigning over the earth therefore signifies the victorious reign of believers "in life" over everything that formerly held them captive. It is—in the language of Paul—to be "in all these things … more than conquerors" (Rom. 8:37).

One further matter: The reign of the saints with Christ is said to be for a thousand years. How are we to understand the figure of a thousand? Does this refer to a literal calendar period? In light of the symbolic use of figures in the Book of Revelation,[43] it is more likely to express a complete but indeterminate period of time.[44] Indeed, the reference to a thousand years in regard to the reign of the saints sets it apart from the age to come when "they shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 22:5), and places it within the limits of the present age. Hence, the thousand years specifies the period of reigning with Christ between His first coming and His final advent—that is, the gospel age. Upon Christ's return the thousand years will be complete, and the eternal reign begun.

The thousand-year period—or "the Millennium"—is therefore a *present*

reality. It cannot be placed in a future time prior to the eternal kingdom. The Bible is silent regarding an interim age; it speaks only of the present age and the age to come. The teaching of Jesus is unmistakable in this matter;[45] likewise Paul[46] and other New Testament writers give scant reason[47] for any other view. The Old Testament has many beautiful pictures of a coming messianic age, but it is very difficult—if not impossible—to discover a future earthly millennial period.[48] Indeed, the whole idea of such a future earthly reign seems out of harmony with the rest of Scripture. But when the thousand years is viewed as a present reality, all Scripture fits together in its basic portrayal of two ages *(not* three): the present age and the age yet to come.

When it is also realized that Revelation 20:4–6 does not call for a future millennium, but emphasizes, along with Revelation 1 and 5, the present reign of the saints with Christ, then everything falls in place. Moreover, such an understanding highlights the victory that saints down through the years, even to the present day, have in Christ. They have sat on thrones—hence reigned—and by their lives the world has been judged. Many have been martyred, but this has not prevented them from living and reigning with Christ. Indeed, whatever the persecution, the saints have not bowed before the beast or received its mark on forehead or hand. They have reigned victoriously. Death has meant nothing, for they have already known the “first resurrection” from spiritual death; hence over them the “second death”—eternal death—has utterly no power. What a blessing to share in the resurrection to life, and thereby to become “priests” of God and of Christ and to reign with Him throughout the thousand years!

III. FINAL DESTRUCTION

Finally, we come to Revelation 20:7–10, which climaxes with the destruction of the nations and Satan himself. The passage begins, “And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations … .” Revelation 20:1–3 ended with the preview that after the thousand years Satan “must be loosed for a little while.” This loosing—to review for a moment—will bring about the final flood time of evil in the world, vast and widespread persecution of the saints, and the seeming destruction of the gospel witness. Further, the nations formerly open to the proclamation of the gospel (recall verse 3) will be totally closed, and Satan will have them wholly at his disposal. The Deceiver, frustrated during the thousand years by the reign of Christ and the saints, will at last be freed for a short time to work his deception among the nations.

And what is that deception? The answer is unmistakable: “The nations” will attempt to make a final assault upon Christ and His saints that will bring about their seeming overthrow and destruction. We have already seen depicted Satan’s ascending from the pit and the resultant killing of the “two witnesses”; we have also seen the emergence of the first and second “beasts” with their conquering and slaying of the saints. All of this is part and parcel of the final picture of the nations—the peoples of earth (the “earth dwellers”) who are captivated by the delusions of Satan[49] and are now seeking total obliteration of Christ and those who belong to Him. The tragic thing is that Satan will be able to deceive them into thinking it can be done.

Let us now read Revelation 20:7–9: “And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle [literally, ‘the battle’];[50] their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city; but fire came down from heaven and consumed them.” The nations across the earth will be totally deceived into thinking they can destroy the “camp of the saints and the beloved city,” that is, the community of true believers.[51] However, when they gather for the battle and success seems all but assured, suddenly fire from heaven will come down and totally consume them.

Actually there is no final attack, no assault upon "the beloved city": the invading forces of the nations will simply be wiped out.

This immediately calls to mind two earlier pictures in Revelation of "the battle." In Revelation 16 Satan ("the dragon") and his henchmen, the first and second beasts, through demonic and deceptive spirits, "go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle [literally 'the battle'][52] on the great day of God the Almighty" (vv. 13–14). In Revelation 19 "the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war [literally, 'the battle'][53] against him who sits upon the horse [Christ] and against his army" (v. 19). But there is actually no battle; all "were slain by the sword of him who sits upon the horse, the sword that issues from his mouth" (v. 21). These statements—along with Revelation 20—are all unmistakably pictures of the same final assault —"the battle," indeed the one climactic battle on "the great day of God the Almighty." The final destruction is portrayed in Revelation 19 through the sword issuing from Christ's mouth, that is, the word of God, and in Revelation 20 through fire coming down from heaven.[54] The result is complete: all men and nations will be totally destroyed.[55]

A review of Revelation 20:7–10 indicates that this passage again represents the final activity of Satan at the end of the present age. This clearly is not an occurrence after a future thousand-year rule of Christ and the saints on earth. It is *the* battle—not a second battle—but the same battle as in Revelation 16 and 19.[56] According to the Book of Revelation (as everywhere else in the New Testament), Christ will not return to establish a "rod of iron" rule[57] for a thousand years at the close of which there will be a worldwide assault of the enemy. Rather, He will come back to redeem His own, destroy all forces of evil, sit upon His throne of judgment, and usher in the eternal kingdom in a new heaven and a new earth.

Incidentally, the whole concept of a future reign of Christ on earth with His saints for a thousand years and Satan's leading a multitude of nations finally in attack is laden with difficulties. First, it depicts Christ as an earthly, even political ruler—the role Christ never claimed for Himself while on earth two thousand years ago. It is hard to imagine that what He turned down, namely earthly kingship[58] and worldly dominion, He would some day exercise for a thousand years. Second, it is difficult to conceive how, after a thousand years of Christ's rule on earth, there would be multitudes of nations and people—"their number … like the sand of the sea"—who would make an assault on "the beloved city." This scarcely seems like a glorious reign when rebellious people, presumably long held in check, become vast in number and powerful enough to

make a worldwide attack. Third, and even more problematic, where do all these nations come from? According to Revelation 19, when Christ returns with the armies of heaven, everyone is killed.[59] It will not do to say that some escaped, perhaps distant nations, whom Satan at the end of a thousand years will assemble from the "four corners of the earth." *None* escaped—and the "four corners" does not mean far distant people, but the *totality* of people.[60] Fourth, assuming that somehow there are nations on the earth that Satan will assemble at the end of a future millennium, how could there possibly be a battle? Christ and His returned saints would be in their glorious bodies—all existing in a spiritual/corporeal dimension. How could they be attacked by earthly weapons or foes? Indeed, the whole picture of a future millennium in which glorified and sanctified saints in resurrected and spiritual bodies, fitted for a new order of existence, share the same earth with unholy sinners in natural bodies is so bizarre as to strain credibility to the limit. Fifth, and finally, it seems increasingly apparent that this idea of a Satanic attack at the end of the Millennium (viewed as earthly and future)— with all its attending difficulties (a few just mentioned)—is a case of what may be called double vision. It makes a double image of the Satanic period of evil that precedes the return of Christ and recurs after Christ has returned: thus the picture is out of focus.[61] The New Testament, contrariwise, throughout depicts only *one* climactic period of evil and that *before* Christ returns. There can be no other such period; for in His return Christ destroys all evil upon the earth.

Let me add a brief further word about the Old Testament and millennialism.[62] One of the reasons often cited for a future earthly reign of Christ and the saints is that many Old Testament prophecies speak of an earthly fulfillment. Hence, whatever may be the difficulties in finding other New Testament teaching of an earthly millennium, Revelation 20 would seem to provide an opportune context. Several objections, however, may be raised.

First, Old Testament passages concerning a future messianic reign nowhere depict this as a limited period of time. The kingdom to come, the reign of God, His blessing on the world will be without end. Second, these same Old Testament pictures, which exhibit an earthly fulfillment of blessing, do not fit well in Revelation 20. Verses 4–6 do not actually depict a time in which God's promised blessings abound on earth.[63] One may claim such for the thousand years, but without exegetical justification. Third, there is no suggestion in the Old Testament that the future messianic reign will occur *after* an overthrow of God's enemies and *before* a final destruction. The "day of the Lord" is the one eschatological day that leads to the eternal messianic reign. Fourth, Old

Testament passages about such matters as the coming of the kingdom, the reigning of the Messiah, and the rebuilding of the temple[64] point either to the present gospel era or the eternal age to come, but not to an intervening thousand years. Fifth, those promises that point to a future age and call for an earthly fulfillment must be seen as fulfilled some day not on the *present* earth but on the *new* earth (in the new heaven and new earth). The Old Testament depiction of the future is far too earthly to be satisfied by the common view of a heaven to come devoid of all earthly substance. This is a strong reason why earthly millennial themes so often (even stubbornly) persist: heaven alone scarcely seems to satisfy. But when it is understood that God's ultimate purpose includes earth, the Old Testament concern is then totally fulfilled.

In summary, there definitely is a millennium, but it is not a future period of a thousand years during which Christ and the saints reign on earth. The millennium rather is a *historical* and *present* reality spanning the whole of the gospel era. Throughout this time, because of Christ's death on the cross and His triumph over Satan, the saints have been reigning with Him. It does not matter whether they, like their Lord, suffer trial and persecution even unto death. They are still "more than conquerors": they reign with the crucified and risen Christ!

But, finally, let us change the "they" to "we," for by His grace we have been raised from death to life, so that whatever has to be endured, we reign victoriously now and forever with Him. I close with the beautiful words of praise in Revelation 1:5–6 to our Lord:

"To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

EXCURSUS: POSTMILLENNIALISM AND PREMILLENNIALISM

Views about the Millennium have often gone in the direction of either postmillennialism or premillennialism.[65] A common theme in both is that the Millennium is a *future period on earth.* The figure of one thousand may be viewed symbolically or literally, but in either case the Millennium is seen as a coming time of blessing on earth. Thus the Millennium is understood to be an interim period on earth prior to the final consummation in the eternal age. Postmillennialism, however, holds that Christ will return *following* (post-) the Millennium; premillennialism affirms rather that Christ will return *before* (pre-) the Millennium.

I will quote some representatives of both camps, observe in more detail what the various positions are, and make a few additional comments.

Postmillennialism

A. H. Strong wrote at the end of the nineteenth century: “Through the preaching of the gospel in all the world, the kingdom of Christ is steadily to enlarge its boundaries, until Jews and Gentiles alike become possessed of its blessings, and a millennial period is introduced in which Christianity generally prevails throughout the earth.”[66] Christ will return after this.

World Wars I and II signaled for many the demise of this way of thinking (at least, as some have said, postmillennialism became an “endangered species”!). However, Loraine Boettner wrote in 1957 that “the world eventually is to be Christianized, and the return of Christ is to occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace called the ‘Millennium.’ “[67] In his words the double motif of postmillennialism is clearly stated: a future period of blessing (“righteousness and peace”) and then Christ will return. The Millennium, further, will be “a golden age of spiritual prosperity”; “the changed character of individuals will be reflected in an uplifted social, economic, political and cultural life of mankind” ; “evil will be reduced to negligible proportions”; and “Christ will return to a truly Christianized world.”[68] J. J. Davis has recently gone on record affirming postmillennialism as “a period of unprecedented revival in the church prior to the coming of Christ … the world as a whole is expected to experience conditions of significant peace and economic improvement.”[69]

Postmillennialism has also enjoyed resurgence in the recent Reconstructionist[70] movement. R. J. Rushdoony, acknowledged leader of the movement, writes, “People out of every tongue, tribe, and nation shall be converted, and the word of God shall prevail and rule in every part of the earth.”[71] Similarly David Chilton says: “It is a solid, confident, Bible-based assurance that before the Second Coming of Christ, *the gospel will be victorious throughout the entire world*“ (italics his).[72] Again, “through generations of obedience, the godly will increasingly become competent and powerful, while the ungodly will grow weak and impotent.”[73] This idea of “the godly” becoming “competent and powerful” is a distinctive feature of Reconstructionist postmillennialism, which, unlike traditional postmillennialism, envisions Christians taking dominion over the structures of society.[74] Not only is the gospel to be universally victorious but also all of society will be governed by biblical law.

My basic observation is that postmil-lennialism represents an exaggerated optimism. Postmillennialism is a heady, even enthusiastic doctrine, and surely much better than a negative one of doom and gloom on every hand. Also, it undoubtedly captures an important aspect of New Testament teaching, namely, that the kingdom of God will grow continually. According to Matthew 13:31–33, "the kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed … it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs…. The kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened."[75] Surely optimism is appropriate here, but there is also the needed balance of other statements in Matthew 13:24–50. Wheat and tares will "both grow together until the harvest" (v. 30), and the good fish and bad fish will only be sorted out "at the close of the age" (v. 49). The tares will not be increasingly rooted out, i.e., the world "eventually Christianized" (Boettner) or the Word of God prevailing and ruling "in every part of the earth" (Rushdoony) before Christ returns. To be sure, we are to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth and expect many to come to salvation, and surely by the power of the Holy Spirit much more can be done. But there is utterly no biblical assurance that the world will be converted to Christ before He returns (even less that there will be a reconstructed social order). We are to preach the gospel throughout the whole world as a *witness* to all the nations (Matt. 24:14), giving all peoples a chance to hear and believe. Then the end will come. Total evangelization to which we are indeed called does not equal total conversion!

Once postmillennialism leaves Matthew 13:31–33, the going gets rougher and rougher. For example, in Matthew 24 prior to the statement about the gospel being preached throughout the whole world, Jesus speaks of wickedness being multiplied and apostasy occurring ("most men's love will grow cold" [v. 12]). After that, great tribulation is depicted before Christ's return (vv. 15–30). In Luke 18:8 Jesus even asks, "When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Paul speaks of "the apostasy" (2 Thess. 2:3 NASB) and then of the coming of "the man of sin" before Christ's return: "The Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming" (v. 8). And the Book of Revelation climactically depicts an earth in which all except the faithful bow before the beast and the false prophet, who are finally destroyed only when Christ returns (the climax in 19:17–21).

In regard to Revelation 19:17–21, postmillennialism demonstrates a very serious weakness. Postmillennialists generally view this section, *not* as the return of Christ in destruction of evil, but as the widespread propagation and victory of the gospel. Thus Boettner, for example, declares, "Revelation 19:11–21 describes not the Second Coming of Christ… rather it describes the progress of

the church between the first and second comings of Christ… it results in an overwhelming victory for him and his church."[76] Chilton writes, "He [Christ] is riding out on His warhorse, followed by His army of saints, conquering the nations with the Word of God, the gospel, symbolized by a sword proceeding from His mouth…. This is not the Second Coming; rather, it is a symbolic declaration of hope, the assurance that the Word of God will be victorious throughout the world, so that Christ's rule will be established universally."[77] From such perspective, Revelation 20:1–6 represents the succeeding millennium of peace and prosperity to be followed by the return of Christ (as seen in Rev. 20:9). Thus the postmillennial scheme fits together—*except* for the fact that it is hard to avoid the scriptural evidence that Christ is already shown as returning in Revelation 19 and that the overall picture is not the victorious progress of the gospel but the final destruction of all who oppose it. Postmillennialism thus is weak in this critical area of the New Testament witness.

If postmillennialism is right, we are a long way from the Lord's return. Exhortations such as "Watch" and "Be alert" mean little: there can be no expectation of a soon return. But what if postmillennialism is blind to the signs of the times that may point to a return in the near future? Could this not be a misleading theology? Moreover, if things do not get better and evil rapidly increases, there would be little preparation for persecution and tribulation. Disillusionment could be the result. Optimism is much to be desired, but it surely needs the balance of a sober and valid biblical realism.

Finally, we should applaud postmillennial thinking in its concern to blanket the world with the gospel and to seek Christ's rule in every sphere of life. Christ *is* Lord, and His kingdom already established is growing with increasing witness to all peoples. However—and here is the needed balance—as surely as the gospel of the kingdom reaches further into the life of nations, there will be a counter thrust of evil. Indeed, evil forces will become even more virulent and antagonistic to all things Christian. But, praise God, when evil is released to do its worst and is thereby exposed in all its demonic nature, Christ will then return to destroy it utterly and consummate His glorious, eternal kingdom. At that time all that the postmillennialist has ever imagined—and far more—will come to pass—not in an earthly millennium but in a new heaven and a new earth!

Premillennialism

G. E. Ladd defines premillennialism thus: “Premillennialism is the doctrine stating that after the Second Coming of Christ, he will reign for a thousand years over the earth before the final consummation of God’s redemptive purpose in the new heaven and new earth of the Age to Come.”[78]

Premillennialism has had a long and checkered history. Some of the early church fathers—including Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian—held a premillennial viewpoint.[79] This belief, at least in part, was a continuation of Jewish apocalyptic thinking that expected an earthly messianic kingdom, often depicted as a restoration of Paradise. However, Augustine, in his classic fifth century work *The City of God*, affirmed a nonfuturist view of the Millennium, holding instead that the Millennium refers to the present, ongoing rule of Christ in the church with the saints. Throughout the Middle Ages and the Reformation, Augustine’s view largely prevailed, and premillennialism went into eclipse. In the seventeenth century there was some renewal of premillennialism, especially in England; however, postmillennialism soon came into prominence.[80] It was not until the nineteenth century that premillennialism once again became popular.

The dominant type of premillennialism through the influence of J. N. Darby came to be “dispensational.” The Millennium was viewed as the final dispensation of the kingdom, which will follow the present dispensation of the church. Entirely separate programs for the church and for Israel came to be envisioned, including a secret pretribulation rapture of the church and a postponed kingdom for Israel. This kingdom will include a rebuilt temple and restoration of various Old Testament sacrifices. This dispensational form of premillennialism has been popularized through the Scofield Reference Bible and is now dominant in many evangelical circles. Presently a tension exists within the premillennial camp between those who hold to a more traditional church-centered premillennialism and those who subscribe to a dispensational formulation that highlights the rule of Israel in the Millennium.[81]

For dispensational premillennial thinking, the reign of Christ on earth in the Millennium is essential to the fulfilling of Old Testament prophecies for Israel. John F. Walvoord, for example, declares, “The millennium will fulfill literally the glowing expectations of Old Testament prophets for a kingdom of God on earth embracing all nations.” Again, “Christ will reign on the throne of David on

earth over a restored Israel as well as the Gentile world. ‘ ‘ Dispensational premillennialism thus tends to emphasize “the governmental and political character of the millennium itself.”[82] (We may note here a certain parallel to the contemporary Restorationist brand of postmillennialism, which likewise has a strong governmental and political orientation [the two extremes meet!].) Ladd and other traditional (historical) premillennialists, whose basic concern is the church and not Israel, tend to emphasize more the spiritual blessings of the Millennium. They do not deny the political aspect but seek to avoid the strong dispensational Israelitish cast of the Millennium.

Before commenting on premillennialism in general, I want to emphasize that one should not simply identify its historic (or traditional) form with its dispensational form. *All dispensationalists are premillennialists, but not all premillennialists are dispensationalists.* For example, among contemporary scholarly commentators on the Book of Revelation who are premillennial almost all are nondispensational.[83] Unfortunately, because of the strong influence of dispensationalism in many circles, people frequently tend to identify dispensationalism with premillennialism. As we have seen, dispensationalism is a fairly recent nineteenth-century arrival on the scene, whereas historical premillennialism dates back to the early church. Dispensational motifs such as the sharp distinction between Israel and the church, the postponement of the kingdom, the secret coming of Christ for the church, a pre-tribulation rapture of believers, and a millennium in which temple sacrifices are reinstituted, have never been part of historical millennialism. So one may validly be a premillennialist without holding these accessory dispensational views. Having said this, I quickly add that the common thread uniting both forms of premillennialism is simply that Christ will return before the Millennium and reign on earth with His people. It will be a time of blessedness on this present earth before the final judgment and the dawn of the eternal kingdom.

Let me summarize the main points in premillennial teaching[84] in regard to Revelation 20.

1. Revelation 20 chronologically follows Revelation 19. The return of Christ and the destruction of evil (including the two beasts) will be followed by the establishment of Christ’s millennial kingdom.

2. Satan at the outset of the thousand years will be bound, cast into the pit, and he will be so sealed off during this future period that he can “deceive the nations no more” (20:3). Since both of the beasts have already been thrown into “the lake of fire,” this means an unparalleled era of freedom from evil on the earth.

3. Christ will then reign upon earth with His people. They will be on thrones and will include the martyrs and those who did not succumb to the beast. They all bodily "came to life" (20:4),[85] which is the same as "the first resurrection" (v. 5). Believers in their resurrected and glorified bodies will reign with Christ for a thousand years.

4. The millennial reign, while being a period of universal blessedness, will include "a rod-of-iron rule" by Christ and His saints. According to Revelation 19, "he [Christ] will rule them with a rod of iron" (v. 15). For in Revelation 2:26–27 Jesus had declared, "He who conquers and keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron." Rebellious nations will be sternly and totally kept in submission by Christ and His saints.

5. Not until the close of the thousand years will unbelievers be raised from the dead. For, according to Revelation 20:5, "the rest of the dead did not come to life[86] until the thousand years were ended."

6. At the end of the Millennium Satan will be released to deceive and gather recalcitrant nations that are at the "four corners of the earth" to attack (v. 8) the beloved city. All the attacking nations will be destroyed and Satan cast into the lake of fire.

I will comment on each of these points:

1. If Revelation 19–20 actually teaches a return of Christ followed by a thousand-year millennial reign on earth, this seems to be at variance with all other biblical testimony. The Old Testament does indeed in many places depict a coming messianic reign. But it is by no means limited to a thousand years or any other temporal period: the kingdom will continue forever.[87] The New Testament undoubtedly distinguishes between this age and the one to come, but there is no mention elsewhere of an interim messianic kingdom. Christ in many statements declares His return, and with it He will bring about the final redemption of the righteous, the complete destruction of evil, the judgment of all people, and the beginning of the new age. But nowhere does He suggest an interim period between His return and the eternal kingdom.[88] The same is true for Paul. He often speaks about the return of Christ, but always Christ's return is for the purpose of bringing about the final consummation. For example, says Paul, after Christ returns, rather than reigning with Him a thousand years, "we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17). Peter similarly speaks of the Parousia of Christ (2 Peter 3:4) as identical with "the day of the Lord" (v. 10), in which day the present heavens and earth will pass away and the new heavens and earth

come into being (vv. 10–13). There is no place in this picture for a thousand-year period on earth between the return of Christ and eternal life in the new heavens and the new earth. Also—and this is quite significant—in the Book of Revelation itself there is no other possible reference to a millennium. For example, in Revelation 11:15 there is this joyous declaration: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.” “For ever and ever” precludes an interim, limited reign.

It is possible, of course, to argue, since Revelation 19–20 is near the close of the New Testament canon, that as a matter of progressive revelation a future thousand-year kingdom is at last unfolded and therefore should be affirmed regardless of its uniqueness in biblical witness. Surely one may rightly speak of progressive revelation, but if there is another possible interpretation other than the premillennial that is more harmonious with the rest of Scripture, it would surely seem wise to investigate that interpretation closely. Moreover, a real danger in adopting the premillennial view is that relevant Scripture elsewhere may be forced into an uncongenial mold and accordingly be seriously distorted. Progressive revelation is one thing; misunderstood revelation is another.

One of the basic rules of biblical hermeneutics is that difficult and obscure passages should be viewed in the light of clear passages and the overall analogy of Scripture. This fundamental principle is sadly overlooked when a difficult and obscure passage becomes the determinant for biblical understanding elsewhere.

Having said all this, I am convinced that there is a better way of understanding Revelation 19–20, one that is more congenial to the overall biblical witness. I have earlier sought to demonstrate that this passage is in a nonchronological sequence: a succeeding vision, not a succeeding period. So I will not repeat my discussion here, except to emphasize that such an understanding is in full accord with other Scripture, including the overall witness of the Book of Revelation.

2. The binding, casting out, and sealing of Satan—again in harmony with the larger scriptural testimony—occurred through Christ’s victorious life and death. As I have previously noted, Jesus spoke of binding Satan during His ministry and declared that on the night of His death Satan would be cast out. Also we have observed that Satan’s inability after his sealing to deceive the nations refers to the new situation *after* Christ came: the gospel *will* get through to all the nations.

Incidentally, but importantly, Revelation 20:1–3 cannot chronologically follow Revelation 19:11–21 because those verses declare that all people on the earth have been slain (19:21), so there would be no nations left not to be deceived if the thousand years followed the destruction wrought by Christ!

3. Revelation 20:4–6 says nothing about Christ’s reigning on earth. It tells of a

reigning of the redeemed with Christ (vv. 4, 6), and the location is not given. Those who reign with Him are on "thrones," signifying their spiritual dominion: they are those who have experienced "the first resurrection," which is not a bodily resurrection but a spiritual one. They "lived" (better than "came to life") —even if put to death as martyrs—and will never know "the second death," namely, spiritual death, or hell. There is no reference in this passage to a second physical resurrection of unbelievers: they "did not live" (better than "did not come to life") refers to the spiritual condition of unbelievers throughout the whole gospel era. This passage accordingly has nothing to do with physical resurrections but totally relates to a spiritual resurrection both experienced and not experienced. It is a critical mistake therefore to speak of two physical resurrections separated by a thousand years. The Bible *never* depicts such. There is, to be sure, a separation in time between the spiritual resurrection of believers ("the first resurrection") and the later resurrection of both believers and unbelievers (recall John 5:21–25, 28–29), but a separation of bodily resurrections is contrary to both the total biblical witness and the teaching of Revelation 20.

Incidentally, if the first resurrection is thought of as the bodily resurrection of believers, and it is they who will reign on earth with Christ, this seems to leave out all believers who will not die but be translated when Christ returns. Surely they too will reign with Christ; however, they never experienced bodily resurrection.

4. The "rod of iron" rule during the thousand years is a total misunderstanding for several reasons. First, Christ's ruling the nations with a "rod of iron" in Revelation 19:15 does not mean to govern but to break and de stroy.[89] When Christ returns with His armies, He will smite the nations, the people of earth, so that all evil is destroyed. Hence during the succeeding thousand years there will be no nations to rule over with a "rod of iron." Second, if, however, there were such nations, it would hardly be a glorious messianic kingdom if both Christ and His saints are ruling over and holding in check rebellious peoples across the face of the earth. Indeed, it would be quite inglorious both for Christ after being glorified at the Father's right hand, and for the untold numbers of saints who have long known the glories of heaven, to return to this old earth still latent with rebellious forces. Third, this whole picture of a rod-of-iron rule on earth can by no means be coordinated with the view of the Millennium as a future golden age. Indeed, this picture is a reversion to the idea of an earthly messianic rule held by many in Jesus' own day, often including His own disciples. Fourth, as I earlier suggested, this is gross admixture of Christ and saints operating with spiritual bodies ruling over a world of people in their natural and physical bodies.

5. The premillennial idea of the resurrection of the unbelieving dead to follow after a thousand years is foreign to Scripture. Elsewhere the biblical witness unmistakably declares that the resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous occur on the same day of the Lord. The better translation for Revelation 20:5 is "the rest of the dead did not live [rather than 'did not come to life'] until the thousand years were ended." That is to say, all the way to the end of the present millennium unbelievers have remained spiritually dead. They did not experience "the first resurrection" to eternal life.

6. The final picture of Satan, after the thousand years of Christ's earthly reign, gathering "the nations" for battle—their number "like the sand of the sea"—to attack "the beloved city," is even more incredible. First of all, according to Revelation 19, Christ had already destroyed them all, so where will the nations come from? Second, this hardly sounds like the climax of a glorious reign of Christ on earth when evil people are so many as to be beyond numbering! With such a vast multitude of peoples it appears that, underneath, the Millennium will be a period of evil just as now; in fact, it appears that it will be even worse[90] than when Christ first returns. What is even more extraordinary, all this will transpire while the Devil is locked away in the bottomless pit! When Satan is released, evil multitudes long held in check will join his attack on "the beloved city." All of this strains credibility almost past limits.

Let me say a final word on chronological sequence. Premillennialists sometimes emphasize that when Satan is finally defeated, he will be "thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet [are]" (Rev. 20:10). Since the latter two were thrown into that same "lake of fire" at the return of Christ in Revelation 19:21 and are not referred to as functioning in Revelation 20 (only Satan is mentioned), then the thousand years must follow the return of Christ and precede the Millennium. The answer to this line of reasoning is the same as earlier suggested, namely, that Revelation 19:11–21 and 20:1–10 are chronological visions rather than chronological occurrences. The center of attention in Revelation 19 is the final destruction of Christ's and believers' enemies as represented by the first and second beast (or false prophet), whereas in 20:1–6 (and climaxing in vv. 7–10) the focus is on the inability of Satan to deceive the nations, hence the victorious witness of the gospel. Moreover, what occurs in Revelation 19:11–21 does *not* belong to a time prior to the Millennium, but to the last days when *after* the thousand years Satan is turned loose. Hence, Revelation 20:7–10 corresponds to Revelation 19:11–21 and is another (and last) depiction of the same final battle.[91]

Postmillennialism and premillennialism share a common fallacy that regards the Millennium as a future period in history. Because of this, neither system can adequately cope with the outbreak of evil at the end of the millennial period. Postmillennialism, which depicts a coming golden era of righteousness and peace, with evil reduced to negligible proportions, is hard-pressed to account for the violent resurgence of Satanic forces after that. Premillennialism is likewise hard-pressed to explain that same evil resurgence after Christ has been reigning on earth for a thousand years. The solution, however, is readily at hand when the Millennium is viewed as presently occurring and the reign of Christ as an ongoing reality.

Let me summarize this briefly. The Millennium is *now*. Christ is presently reigning, and His people reign with Him. In the words of Paul we "reign in life" (Rom. 5:17), or in the words of John we *are* "a kingdom" (Rev. 1:6) and sit on "thrones" (Rev. 20:4). This refers to all believers, including martyrs and those who have not "bowed to the beast": all have reigned, and do reign, victoriously with Christ. During this whole millennial era Satan has been "cast out" (John 12:31; Rev. 20:3) in the sense that he is utterly incapable of stopping the gospel from getting through to "the nations" (his former deception is over). Thus the gates of hell cannot "prevail" (Matt. 16:18) against the church's fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt. 24:14; 28:18–20). When at last the church has completed its task of witness, the Millennium will end and Satan will be released and allowed through deception to gather "the nations" for the final attack on Christ's spiritual kingdom. It is then that Christ will return—*after* the Millennium—to utterly destroy Satan and all his minions and to usher in the Day of Judgment and the age to come.

The interpretation of the Millennium that I have presented in the preceding pages is sometimes called "amillennialism." I am hesitant to use this nomenclature for two reasons.

First, the word may suggest negativity, i.e., "no millennium." This could imply that my position simply disregards Revelation 20. I surely do not—as should be fully apparent by now. One may more properly speak of many of the major creeds and confessions of Christendom as being amillennial, in that they make no reference to a millennium. The Apostles' Creed, for example, after affirming that Christ "sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty" declares that "from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead." No reference is made to Christ's coming to establish a millennial kingdom prior to His judging. The Nicene Creed states, "He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end." The emphasis is

on Christ's coming in judgment and the fact that His kingdom is eternal—nothing about an interim kingdom or period of time. The Westminster Confession of Faith in its last two chapters moves from "The Resurrection of the Dead" to "The Last Judgment," with nothing in between about a millennium. Such statements are "amillennial," not necessarily in denying a millennium but in making no reference to it. My position does not contradict such creedal and confessional statements, but rather goes beyond them in seeking to define the true biblical meaning of the Millennium. Since I vigorously affirm a millennium, I am not in this sense amillennial.

Second, some today who are known as amillennialists view the Millennium as having to do essentially with heaven not earth. While denying (as I do) a future millennium (either post-or pre-), they speak of the present reign of believers as that of departed saints in heaven. Over against premillennialists, who speak of "the first resurrection" as a bodily resurrection, these amillennialists claim that the expression refers to the "souls" of those who have passed on into glory. Thus the reign is in heaven, not upon earth. I have already made reference to this in notes 30 and 35. There I included quotations from William Hendricksen and Anthony A. Hoekema, both of whom hold this amillennial position.[92] In these footnotes I have commented that Scripture nowhere, including Revelation, depicts a heavenly reign of disembodied souls or spirits and that there is no adequate scriptural basis for viewing the believer's presence with the Lord in heaven as a resurrection. Nonetheless, this amillennial view, I submit, is much closer to the biblical picture than either postmillennialism or premillennialism for the reason that the Millennium is *not* viewed as a future interim kingdom.

I prefer to speak of a *present* and historical millennium on earth and not in heaven. To be sure, it is a heavenly existence while yet on this earth, for truly we are blessed "in Christ with every spiritual blessing *in the heavenly places*" (Eph. 1:3). Even now we "*reign in life* through the one man Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:17). Throughout the whole Christian era, whatever their lot, the saints live and reign "with Christ a thousand years." A present millennium is totally other than "no millennium": it is the reality of the *present* kingdom of God.[93]

Truly in Christ we live and reign now—and shall throughout eternity.

[1]The first two purposes, as already discussed, are for final redemption and total destruction.

[2]If my thesis is correct, a chapter on the Millennium should not necessarily appear at this point in Renewal Theology. However, because of the locus

in the Book of Revelation, I will now turn to the “thousand years.”

[3]For a similar viewpoint to that expressed in the paragraph above see, e.g., R. H. Lenski: “[The] 1000 years extend from the incarnation and the enthronement of the Son (12:5) to Satan’s final plunge into hell (20:10), which is the entire New Testament period” (The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation, 564-65). Philip E. Hughes similarly states that “the thousand years may be defined as the period between the two comings of Christ, or, more strictly, between the return of the ascended Son to glory, his mission to earth completed, and the loosing of Satan for a little while” (The Book of Revelation, 212).

[4]As in kjv, niv, and nasb. The Greek phrase is kai eidon.

[5]Henry B. Swete writes: “The formula Kai eldov [’and I saw’] does not, like fiera ravra eidov [’after these things I saw’], determine the order of time in which the vision was seen relative to the visions which precede it…. It must not, therefore, be assumed that the events now to be described chronologically follow the destruction of the Beast and the False Prophet and their army” (Commentary on Revelation, 259). Incidentally, ixera ravra eidov occurs in Revelation 4:1; 15:5; 18:1. In regard to order of time Leon Morris writes that “John says nothing to place this chapter in the time sequence” (Revelation, TNC, rev. ed., 228).

[6]Revelation 12 begins, “And a great sign was seen [ophthe] in heaven” (asv). This language is quite similar to Revelation 20:1, “And I saw.” Both accounts are visions.

[7]Revelation 12 depicts the birth of “a male child, one who is to rule all the nations” (v. 5) and then the attempt by the dragon (Satan) first to devour the child and afterward to destroy “those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus” (v. 17). This carries us to the end times when, in Revelation 13, the two beasts appear on the scene.

[8]The Greek word is dese, from the verb deo. In Revelation 20 where Satan is said to be bound, the Greek word is edesen, likewise from deo.

[9]Actually there is no “man” in the Greek, only “strong” (ischyron). Thus it would be better to translate the word as “the strong one” (so asv).

[10]See also Mark 3:26-27, where Satan is specifically mentioned by Jesus. In Luke 11:2122 Jesus declares himself “stronger” than “the strong man.”

[11]In regard to the figure 1000, see note 44 below.

[12]In Revelation it is said that “an angel” (20:1) did the binding. An angel as representing Christ is also found in Revelation 14:19: “So the angel

swung his sickle on the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth, and threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God." Ladd comments, "In apocalyptic thought angels often play a role which we might attribute to the Messiah" (A Commentary on the Revelation of John, 199). Ladd also refers to Revelation 12:7ff., commenting, "It is Michael and his angels who win the victory over the Dragon … , although in the rest of the New Testament, the victory is won by Christ."

[13]The Greek word for "cast out" is ekblethesetai, from the verb ekballo. In Revelation 20 where Satan is said to be "cast," the word is ebalen, from ballo. It is the same root except for the ek-"out."

[14]Quite significantly, Jesus speaks the words about casting out Satan and drawing all men to Himself (John 12:31-32) after some Greeks had come to one of Jesus' disciples saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus" (John 12:21). Thus will all people-Gentiles included-be able to come to Christ.

[15]According to Revelation 12:9, there is another casting of Satan not to the "pit" but to the "earth": "And the great dragon was thrown [or 'cast'-eblethe-from ballo] down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world-he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him." It is significant here again that Satan as "deceiver" is "cast," and this action is described as occurring by angelic force ("Michael and his angels" [v. 7]), similar to Revelation 20 ("an angel" [v. 1]), hence ultimately occurring by Christ's power and victory. But in Revelation 12 the picture is of "earth" and primarily relates to Satan's ongoing attack against the church. However, Satan is totally incapable of a victory. On the one hand, we read that believers, even should they die as martyrs, are really the victors: "They have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death" (v. 11). Again, Satan (the dragon) is portrayed as continuously pursuing and fighting the church but not able truly to conquer (vv. 13-17). Thus whether Satan is depicted as on earth or in the pit, he is equally unsuccessful in overcoming God's people and God's message. One may recall also the relevant and powerful words of Christ in Matthew 16:18: "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (kjv).

[16]"False" because Christ is now over all the nations; hence nations or people that surrender to Satan do so to a defeated foe who no longer has any real dominance.

[17]From the fall of man until the coming of Christ the truth of God had got

through to no nations (including Israel who never really could cope with it). They lived under Satan's grip and deception. With Christ's victory everything is essentially changed.

[18]For further helpful reading on the binding and casting of Satan, as depicted in Revelation 20:1-3, see W. Hendriksen, More Than Conquerors, 222-29; D. W. Richardson, The Revelation of Jesus Christ, 166-70; W. E. Cox, Biblical Studies in Final Things, 160-64; R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation, 574-77; Floyd E. Hamilton, The Basis of Millennial Faith, 129-31; Anthony A. Hoekema, The Bible and the Future, 228-29. St. Augustine's City of God, 20. 7-9, is a valuable early presentation.

[19]The Greek phrase is mikron chronon; kjv, "little season"; nasb, niv, "short time"; neb, "short while."

[20]Mounce speaks of the two witnesses as "a symbol of the witnessing church in the last tumultuous days before the end of the age" (The Book of Revelation, NICNT, 223). Morris writes that "the words have relevance to every persecution the church has suffered, though especially that in the last days" (Revelation, TNTC, 145).

[21]Recall the earlier discussion regarding the significance of "forty-two months."

[22]As is the case in much millennial thinking. We will return to this later.

[23]Recall the previous discussion in chapter 10 of the many signs.

[24]Thrones" is a figure of speech signifying reigning.

[25]The Greek word krinô, usually translated "judge," can also have the meaning of4'rule." See TDNT, 3:923, especially note 4: "In Rev. 20:4 the activity of those who sit on thrones and hold Kpifia is potcrikeveiv, 'reigning.' "

[26]The Greek word is psychas. "Lives" may be preferable here. Cf., e.g., Revelation 12:11: "they loved not their lives [lit. 'the life of them'-tên psychën auton] even unto death." See also Revelation 8:9 and 16:3. In the Gospel of John psyché is most often used for life: see John 10:11, 15, 17; 12:25; 13:37, 38; 15:13. Also see 1 John 3:16; cf. 1 Peter 3:20. Psyché in none of these instances refers to "soul" as distinct from the body-hence disembodied-but to the person, or creature, as a living being.

[27]The Greek verb is ezésan. The rsv, nasb, and niv read "came to life"; however, ezésan, from zaô, basically means "lived" (as in asv above; also in kjv). Cf. Revelation 13:14-"the beast which was wounded by the

sword and yet lived [ezésan]."

[28]I use the asv here because it not only (as also kjv) translates ezésan as "lived" (rather than "came to life") but also because it properly translates prosekynésan as "worshiped not" and elabon as "received not" (both are in the aorist tense) and accordingly places them in the same time reference as the "lived" and "reigned" (also both aorist). Thus as Marcellus Kik writes, "The time of sitting on the thrones and reigning with Christ is the same as that of not worshiping the beast" (An Eschatology of Victory, 45).

[29]While worshiping the beast and bearing its mark will culminate in the period immediately before the end (as we have seen), they are prefigured throughout Christian history. Hence, the saints who do not capitulate to the "beast" are saints throughout the centuries-even as martyrs belong to every period of time since Christ first came. Also the expression "such as" (hoitines), if nothing else, broadens the statement to include all true believers.

[30]I realize that some interpreters view Revelation 20:4 as referring to disembodied "souls" of believers-martyrs especially-and view this as their reigning in heaven. William Hendriksen, e.g., says that John in Revelation "describes these souls [i.e., martyrs]- together with those of all departed Christians who had confessed their Lord upon earth-as reigning with Jesus in heaven" (More Than Conquerors, 230). The difficulty with this interpretation is that there is no other biblical warrant for a present heavenly reign of disembodied souls or spirits. Indeed, according to Revelation 6:9-11, souls of martyrs are depicted as "under the altar" and, crying out for vengeance; they are told to "rest a little longer." This is hardly a portrayal of reigning. Also, in Revelation 14:13 the picture is likewise of "rest" for the "blessed" dead. Incidentally, this interpretation-namely, of souls as presently reigning in heaven-obviously does not visualize a future thousand-year period of reigning on earth.

[31]"This is the second death, the lake of fire; and if any one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14-15).

[32]The Greek word is zoen. This is a cognate of zad and ezesan. Hence, we may say that the ones who "lived" (ezesan, Rev. 20:4) are those who had "passed from death to life" (zden, John 5:24).

[33]"Die" here refers to "the second death."

[34]Augustine in The City of God puts it vividly: "Oh, rise then in the first

resurrection all you who will not perish in the second!" (20.9). Chapter 9, from which this quote is taken is entitled "What the first resurrection is, and what the second"; it is invaluable reading.

[35]There are many students of the Scriptures who view "the first resurrection" as a bodily resurrection; however, this seems unlikely in light of the overall context. Such a view usually designates "the first resurrection" as of believers who are to be raised bodily to reign with Christ in a future millennium. The Greek word ezesan is understood to mean "came to life" (so rsv, nasb, niv translate, as noted before) in a bodily sense, hence after physical death at a future time. The immediate difficulty of viewing this as a bodily resurrection is that "souls" are thereby perceived as "coming to life." This, of course, is impossible, since "souls" continue to live on in spite of death.

Many other students of Scripture view the "first resurrection" as the immediate translation of the believer at death to heaven, there to reign with Christ in his soul (spirit) even now (see previous note 31). A. A. Hoekema, for example, says in regard to "the first resurrection" that "we must understand these words as describing not a bodily resurrection but rather the transition from physical death to life in heaven with Christ" (The Bible and the Future, 236-37). The critical difficulty with this view is that it depicts the believer's presence with Christ in heaven as a resurrection. There is, to be sure, a spiritual resurrection of believers now, and a future bodily resurrection of both believers and unbelievers. But there is no Scriptural basis for viewing the believer's presence after death with the Lord as a resurrection.

[36]The rsv, nab, niv, and neb read, "The rest of the dead did not come to life." However, the critical Greek word again is ezesan, meaning basically "lived" (kjv reads, "lived not again"; however the "again" is superfluous and misleading). Hence, the better translation is that of asv, "lived not," or "did not live."

[37]They are the "dead," according to John 5:21, 24-25; they have not "passed from death to life."

[38]Hence the text should not be read as meaning that they "lived"-or "came to life"- after the thousand years. "Until" does not here refer to a time beyond but to a time within. Hoekema puts it well: "The Greek word here translated 'until,' achri, means that what is said here holds true during the entire length of the thousand-year period" (The Bible and the Future, 236). A further illustration of this may be observed in Romans

11:25: “A hardening has come upon part of Israel, until [achri] the full number of the Gentiles come in.” The achri does not point to a hardening after the Gentiles come in, but throughout and up to the time when the full number of Gentiles have come to Christ. In like manner the (spiritually) dead remain so even to the end of the thousand years. So did Augustine write, “ ‘Until the thousand years be finished’ implies that they were without life all the time that they should have had it, attaining it by passing through faith from death to life” (The City of God, 20.9).

[39]The kjv reads, “made us kings.” Although “kingdom” (basileian) is a more literal rendering of the text, the kjv well conveys the idea of reigning as “kings.”

[40]The kingdom, in this context, is not so much realm as it is reign.

[41]The more likely translation (as in Weymouth). The Greek preposition epi can mean “upon” or “over”; however, in a similar later passage that also relates to reigning-“And the woman whom thou sawest is the great city, which reigneth over [epi] the kings of earth” (Rev. 17:18 asv)-the only possible translation is “over” (all translations). Also cf. Luke 1:33: “He will reign over [epi] the house of Jacob for ever,” and Luke 19:14: “We do not want this man to reign over [epi] us.” “Upon” would make no sense. BAGD translates epi as “over” in Revelation 5:10.

[42]In regard to the asv translation “they reign,” we must recognize, as Mounce says, that “textual evidence is rather equally divided between ‘they reign’ (asv) and ‘they shall reign’ (rsv)” (The Book of Revelation, NICNT, 149). My preference is the asv rendering because it points more clearly to the reign as being in the present. However, the translation “shall reign” (most commentaries) does not necessarily call for a future reign any more than the “will live” of John 5 (as discussed earlier) points to a future situation.

[43]See, e.g., the previous discussion of 3½ years (also 42 months or 1,260 days). Recall also the 144,000 “sealed” in the time of “the great tribulation.”

[44]“Ladd speaks of “the symbolic use of numbers in the Revelation.” Then he adds, “A thousand equals the third power of ten-an ideal time. While we need not take it literally, the ‘thousand years’ does appear to represent a real period of time, however long or short it may be” (A Commentary on the Revelation of John, 262). This is what Hoekema speaks of as “indeterminate length.” In a statement similar to Ladd’s, he writes, “Since the number ten signifies completeness, and since a thousand is ten

to the third power, we may think of the expression ‘a thousand years’ as standing for a complete period, a very long period of indeterminate length” (The Bible and the Future, 227).

[45]It is interesting that Ladd, who himself affirms a future millennium, writes, “I can find no trace of the idea of either an interim earthly kingdom or of a millennium in the Gospels” (Robert G. Clouse, ed., The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views, 38).

[46]In regard to Paul, Ladd states, “There is, however, one passage in Paul which may refer to an interim kingdom if not a millennium. In 1 Corinthians 15:23-26 Paul pictures the triumph of Christ’s kingdom as being accomplished in several stages” (ibid.). The stages are Christ’s resurrection, the resurrection of believers, and after that the end. In addition, says Ladd, there is “an unidentified interval… between Christ’s resurrection and his parousia; and a second undefined interval … between the parousia and the *telos*, when Christ completes the subjugation of his enemies” (p. 39). Ladd’s delineation of an interval between the Parousia and the *telos* (end), however, is hardly Paul’s teaching. The subjugation of Christ’s enemies climaxes at the Parousia, not afterward. When Paul says, “For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet,” this is better understood not as referring to a future reign but to a present reign that will end *at* His Parousia with the final subjection. (On this see particularly G. Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology*, 244–46.) It is significant that Mounce, also a premillennialist, writes that “the attempt to attribute to Paul a belief in the millennium on the basis of 1 Cor. 15:20–28 is unconvincing” (*The Book of Revelation*, NICNT, 357, n.15).

[47]Revelation 20 is the only conceivable possibility! However, as Richardson says, “If verses four, five, and six had been omitted from this chapter no one would ever have dreamed of a literal thousand years of Christ’s reign on earth; of his setting up a temporal kingdom and inaugurating a millennial reign as an earthly monarch” (The Revelation of Jesus Christ, 157). Both the very limited evidence and the even more serious disharmony with other Scriptures makes highly questionable a future millennium.

[48]According to the Old Testament, there is surely an age to come, but it is essentially undifferentiated. Indeed, there is depicted only one coming of the Messiah, and His reign will by no means be for a thousand years but forever. Some of the earthly images of the coming messianic reign are

frequently viewed as referring to a limited reign, but this is quite unwarranted. The reason for such a view, incidentally, is not hard to find. Since the Messiah did not literally reign on earth in His first coming, nor will this happen in the eternal kingdom, there must be then a limited period in between when Old Testament pictures and promises will be fulfilled. Thus the Millennium as such a period seems to be the solution. However, the Old Testament in no instance has such a limited prospect in view. It is far better to understand the Old Testament messianic blessings as fulfilled both in the church age and in the age to come. This includes both spiritual and material blessings. In regard to the latter (which the Old Testament often mentions), it is better to view many of them as fulfilled eternally in "the new heaven" and "the new earth" of Revelation 21-22 rather than in a limited thousand-year period.

[49]The man of sin" being the epitome of Satan's final deluding power.

[50]The Greek phrase is ton polemon.

[51]"The camp of the saints" and "the beloved city" are the same. Together the terms signify the totality of those who belong to Christ: His people, His true church. "Camp of the saints" calls to mind a pilgrim people, for this is always what the saints of God are in this world; "the beloved city" signifies the community of God's people on earth. In the Book of Revelation there is also "the great city which has dominion over the kingdoms of the earth" (17:18). This is "Babylon the great" (17:5)-the concentration of all evil. In total contrast is "the beloved city," which has God for its Maker (recall Heb. 11:10: "the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God"); it is the beloved church of Christ (recall Eph. 5:25: "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her"). Incidentally, to view either of these cities-"the great city" or "the beloved city"-as particular geographical localities, such as Babylon and Jerusalem, would be an egregious mistake.

[52]As in Revelation 20:8, ton polemon.

[53]As in Revelation 20:8 and 16:14, ton polemon.

[54]Recall the earlier discussion of the final destruction under the imagery of "word" and "fire." It might further be suggested that both "word" and "fire" are caught up in the figure of "the breath of his [Christ's] mouth" (2 Thess. 2:8), by which "the man of sin" will be destroyed.

[55]The two beasts and the dragon (Satan) are not slain (such is impossible because they are evil forces, not human beings), but are "thrown" into "the lake of fire" (Rev. 19:20; 20:10). This occurs in separate scenes of

destruction by the sword and fire. Incidentally, this does not point to separate occasions (as some millennialists urge) but to different aspects of God's final riddance of all evil forces that have long wrought havoc with mankind. The forces under Satan's command (Satan's henchmen) go first to their eternal destruction, followed by Satan himself.

[56]Indeed, the same as also in Revelation 17 (not discussed above) where it is said that the beast along with ten kings "will make war [or 'do battle'-Gr. polemesousin] on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful" (vv. 12-14).

[57]Recall the previous discussion of the "rod of iron."

[58]Recall that of Jesus said, "My kingship is not of this world" (John 18:36).

[59]"The rest were slain" (Rev. 19:21). "The rest" does not mean that some remained alive. The background is that after the two beasts (or beast and false prophet) were thrown into the lake of fire, "the rest" were killed. "The rest"-as a still earlier verse says-includes "kings … captains … mighty men … horses and their riders … all men, both free and slave, both small and great" (v. 18). "All men" is all-inclusive.

[60]Mounce writes that "this figure of speech is … intended to … emphasize universality" (The Book of Revelation, NICNT, 362).

[61]Jay Adams speaks of premillennialism as "a system suffering from exegetical diplopia, i.e., double vision, wherein things get out of focus" (The Time Is At Hand, 7). "Exegetical diplopia" (an apt expression!) may also be illustrated in the case of those who view "Gog" and "Magog" as involved in two battles-before the Millennium and also at the end of it. According to Ezekiel 38 and 39, "Gog of the land of Magog" comes against Israel and is destroyed by fire-an event understood by many millennialists as happening prior to the Millennium. In Revelation 20, "Gog and Magog" (symbolic names of the nations that gather for battle) come against "the beloved city" and are also destroyed by fire-and this event is seen to follow the Millennium. Hence, it would seem that there must be two battles of Gog (and Magog), with destruction by fire each time! This indeed is "exegetical diplopia," a case of double vision, brought on by confusion about the Millennium.

[62]Recall note 48 in this connection.

[63]Even if one were to hold that this is a future earthly period, nothing is said in Revelation 20 that would equate it with Old Testament descriptions of abundant blessings.

[64]E.g., the prophecy in Amos 9:11-12: “In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen … I will build it as in the days of old: that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen…” (kjv), which might suggest a future messianic period in which the temple is rebuilt, is interpreted in the New Testament as referring to the initial outreach of the gospel to the Gentiles, hence the present era (see Acts 15:12-18). Another example is the vision in Ezekiel about a future temple (chaps. 40-48), which is sometimes viewed as a physical temple to serve during the Millennium. However, since many of its features appear in the temple symbolism of Revelation 21-22, the fulfillment should rather be seen in “the new heaven and new earth.” See the final chapter of this volume: “The Consummation.”

[65]Some of this will already have been noted in my previous exposition, particularly in reference to premillennialism. However, I intend here to be more direct in presenting these alternative positions.

[66]Systematic Theology, 1008. The postmillennial viewpoint was common on the American scene in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During that time other eminent conservative theologians such as C. H. Hodge, R. L. Dabney, and B. B. Warfield were also postmillennialists. Various Puritan scholars in the seventeenth century (e.g., John Owen) had earlier propounded a postmillennial viewpoint. The classical formulation was made by the Anglican scholar Daniel Whitby in 1703. In the eighteenth century Jonathan Edwards in America became an outstanding proponent of postmillennialism.

[67]The Millennium, 14.

[68]Ibid.

[69]Christ’s Victorious Kingdom: Postmillennialism Reconsidered, 129.

[70]Leading figures are R. J. Rushdoony, Greg Bahnsen, Gary North, and David Chilton. Other terms, frequently used in addition to Reconstructionism, are Dominion Theology and Theonomy Movement.

[71]God’s Plan for Victory: The Meaning of Postmillennialism, 12.

[72]Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion, 5.

[73]Ibid., 223

[74]Chilton writes, “The Christian goal for the world is the universal development of Biblical theocratic republics, in which every area of life is redeemed and placed under the lordship of Christ and the rule of God’s law” (ibid., 226).

[75]Chilton comments, “After looking at this parable [of the leaven], you might wonder how in the world anyone could deny a dominion eschatology” (ibid., 74). The problem, however, is that Chilton does not balance this parable with others, as I will point out.

[76]R. G. Clouse, ed., The Meaning of the Millennium, 200.

[77]Paradise Restored, 191-92.

[78]The Meaning of the Millennium, 17.

[79]According to D. H. Kromminga, “The evidence is uniformly to the effect that throughout the years from the beginning of the second century till the beginning of the fifth chiliasm, particularly of the premillenarian type, was extensively found within the Christian church, but that it never was dominant, far less universal; that it was not without its opponents, and that its representatives were conscious of being able to speak only for a party in the Church” (The Millennium in the Church, 27-28).

[80]See the earlier discussion.

[81]For a helpful discussion of these similarities and differences, see the articles and responses by Ladd, entitled “Historic Premillennialism,” and H. A. Hoyt, entitled “Dispensational Premillennialism,” in Robert G. Clouse, ed., The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views. This valuable book also contains articles and responses on postmillennialism by Boettner and amillennialism by A. A. Hoekema.

[82]Quotations from an article by Walvoord, “Dispensational Premillennialism,” in Millard J. Erickson, ed., The New Life, 523.

[83]I refer here to such recent commentators as R. H. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, NICNT; G. R. Beasley-Murray, Revelation, NCBC; Morton Kiddle, The Revelation of St. John; and George E. Ladd, A Commentary on the Revelation of John. John F. Walvoord, and his commentary The Revelation of Jesus Christ, is, of course, dispensational.

[84]This will follow the historical (traditional) pattern.

[85]Also niv and nasb. The kjv and asv translate the Greek word ezesan as “lived.”

[86]As earlier noted, kjv translates this phrase as “lived not again”; asv, “lived not.”

[87]R. H. Charles writes, “Before the year 100 b.c. it was generally believed in Judaism that the messianic kingdom would last for ever on the present earth. …” (italics his). Thus it is that the idea of a limited period “is really a late and attenuated form of the old Jewish expectation of an

eternal kingdom on earth" (The Revelation of St. John, ICC, 2:142). I will discuss the Old Testament view a little later.

[88]Recall Ladd's remark, "I can find no trace of the idea of either an interim earthly kingdom or of a millennium in the Gospels" (The Meaning of the Millennium, 38).

[89]See page 418, n.91.

[90]Actually there are some premillennialists who say this. Donald G. Barnhouse, for example, has been quoted as stating that "the millennial age will be the most iniquitous of all" (A. H. Lewis, The Dark Side of the Millennium, 15). John Phillips declares, "As children of believing parents today become gospel hardened; so during the millennium many will become glory hardened; they will render only feigned obedience" (Exploring Revelation, 282; see Lewis, Dark Side, 16). What an inglorious situation!

[91]Recall the previous discussion of how the same battle is described from different angles several times in the final chapters of Revelation.

[92]Some others who hold this amillennialist view are R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation; Leon Morris, Revelation (TNTC); and Henry B. Swete, Commentary on Revelation. A somewhat modified position is found in Floyd Hamilton, The Basis of Millennial Faith.

[93]In the words of W. E. Cox, "The present phase of the kingdom and the millennium are synonymous terms…. The millennium, like the kingdom, was instituted by our Lord" (Biblical Studies in Final Things, 171). Although Cox speaks of himself as an amillennialist, his view is much more in accord with my own position.

14
The Last Judgment

Christ will return also for the purpose of rendering judgment: it will be the *Last Judgment*,[1] In Revelation 20, just following the picture of the destruction of the evil forces of mankind and Satan's being thrown into eternal torment (vv. 7–10), there occurs the scene of One seated on "a great white throne"—the throne of the Last Judgment (vv. 11–15). A similar picture is given in Matthew 25:31–46, which begins, "When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne" (v. 31). The throne so depicted is the seat of judgment, and the language of "great white"[2] and "glorious" designates it as the final judgment upon the world.[3]

I. THE JUDGE

The judge will be God in the person of Jesus Christ. Paul speaks of "the day when … God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus" (Rom. 2:16 NASB). Again, in his address to the people of Athens Paul declares that God "has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31 NASB). God will render final judgment through Jesus Christ.

There are also references in the New Testament simply to God's being the Judge. For example, Paul speaks directly of God as judge: "The day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed" (Rom. 2:5). Later in the same letter Paul states that "we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God" (14:10). In Hebrews reference is made to "a judge who is God of all" (12:23). Peter writes about the "Father … who judges each one impartially" (1 Peter 1:17). In the Book of Revelation is the declaration "Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come" (14:7).[4]

However, it is apparent in these passages that God the Father renders judgment through Jesus Christ. Indeed, Jesus Himself declares, "The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22). Hence, Paul's language about "the judgment seat of God" that "we shall all appear before" is made more specific elsewhere in the similar statement that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:10). The judgment seat of God *is* the judgment seat of Christ.[5] Another direct reference to Christ the Lord as the judge is found in a statement of Paul to Timothy: "Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8).

It is fitting, indeed, that Christ Himself will be the One who occupies the throne of judgment. As the Son of God, thus God Himself, He will be wholly qualified with all wisdom and knowledge, justice and mercy. Also, says Jesus on one occasion: "My judgment is true, for it is not I alone that judge, but I and he ['the Father'] who sent me" (John 8:16).[6] Hence the judgment, as that of Son

and Father, will be absolutely just and true.[7] Also He will judge as the Son of man. Earlier Jesus had said that the Father had "given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man"[8] (John 5:27). He will do so with the inner knowledge of the human condition—the temptations, travails, even weaknesses of the flesh. This does not mean leniency, or an alleviation of judgment upon evil; rather, it means that the Son of man will have an intimate and personal knowledge of every human being.

So it is that God Himself in the person of Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of man, will sit upon the throne of judgment.[9]

Finally, that coming event will be awesome. Christ will sit upon "his glorious throne."[10] The word "glory" is an expression of His majesty, sublimity, and grandeur. Even as He will come in glory—"his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26)—so will be the glory of the throne upon which He will sit. The very appearance of Christ on that occasion will be so glorious in majesty that, as the Book of Revelation describes it, "from his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them" (20: ll).[11] Indeed, the throne of Christ's glory will be utterly beyond all imagination.

II. SUBJECTS

The judgment will be of both angels and human beings. It will include all fallen angels as well as the whole of humanity. The very statement that this will happen further heightens the awe-someness of this occasion and its incalculable importance. Angels *and* people!

Regarding the angels, we are told in Scripture that "angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness[12] for the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6 NASB). Similarly we read that "God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell[13] and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for [or 'being kept for'] judgment" (2 Peter 2:4 NASB). We are not told in either passage of the time or circumstances of this angelic sin and fall,[14] but only that their present state is that of being kept in the darkness of hell for the coming day of judgment. In any event, these evil angels will be arraigned on that final day.

The focus of Scripture, however, is on mankind. On the day of judgment all persons—every human being—will be present. I have already quoted such Pauline statements as "[God] will judge the world in righteousness," and "we shall all appear before the judgment seat of God." In addition, Paul's statement about "the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment is revealed," continues: "For he will render to every man according to his works" (Rom. 2:6).

Let us also observe that "the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done" (Matt. 16:27). Likewise, we now note that after Jesus said, "When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne," He added, "Before him will be gathered all the nations [the *ethneT*[15] (Matt. 25:32). "Every man"—"all the nations,"[16] such phrases graphically show that the totality of humanity will be included.

In the final scene of the day of judgment in the Book of Revelation, John writes, "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne" (20:12). "The dead" refers comprehensively to all persons; and "great and small" includes everyone "standing before the throne," regardless of position or stature in life. All persons of all times and places—since the beginning of creation—

will be present.

"The dead," accordingly, will consist of both unbelievers and believers, the lost and the saved. For Revelation continues, "And books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books" (v. 12 NASB). Furthermore, "if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life,[17] he was thrown into the lake of fire" (v. 15). These statements emphasize the presence of both the lost and the saved on the great day of judgment.[18]

Now, finally, I quote a statement of Jesus which emphasizes that all persons will be present on that day: "I tell you, on the day of judgment men[19] will render account…" (Matt. 12:36). The day of judgment will include all man-kind.[20]

This leads me to speak for the first time of the resurrection of the unrighteous, the unbelieving dead. I have earlier discussed the resurrection of "the dead in Christ," which occurs at the return of Christ. Now I add that there will also be a resurrection of the unrighteous that they may also be present for the occasion of the Last Judgment. Further, since "the dead, great and small" stand before the throne, and as Revelation proceeds to say, "the sea gave up of the dead in it, Death and Hades[21] gave up the dead in them" (20:13), it is apparent that there will also be a resurrection of the unrighteous.

An Old Testament presage of this is found in the Book of Daniel: "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt [or 'abhorrence' NEB]" (12:2 NIV).[22] Hence, there will be both a resurrection to "life" and a resurrection to "shame" and "abhorrence." This points to the picture in Revelation of those whose names are in "the book of life," and thus have awakened, or been resurrected, to "everlasting life"; and others whose names not being found in the book of life are thrown into "the lake of fire" (20:15), hence have awakened to "everlasting abhorrence."

In this same connection we hear again the words of Jesus: "The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his [Christ's] voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation"[23] (John 5:28–29 KJV). The parallel with the Book of Daniel and John's writings is obvious: "the resurrection of life" (John), "everlasting life" (Daniel), "the book of life" (Revelation); and "the resurrection of damnation" (John), "everlasting abhorrence" (Daniel), "the lake of fire" (Revelation). The unrighteous will also be resurrected. But unlike the "resurrection of life" for the righteous, it is a

“resurrection of damnation,” or “condemnation.” The believer will by no means experience the latter, for Jesus also earlier said, “He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation;[24] but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24 KJV). The unbeliever will “come into condemnation,” for his resurrection on the day of judgment will be “the resurrection of damnation.”

To summarize this section: On the day of judgment the subjects will be both angels and human beings. The angels will be those evil or fallen; the humans will include all persons. Righteous persons will already have been raised from the dead (or translated) and transformed into spiritual bodies; in deed, they will also have come with Christ in His destruction of evil, and now stand before His throne. The unrighteous will likewise be raised from the dead and be present at the Great Assize. Such will be the vast multitude gathered before the throne of the Lord on the final day of judgment.

I append a brief word on the situation of the unrighteous dead before their resurrection. Those who have died before the return of Christ already are experiencing in some sense their coming condemnation. Two Scripture passages particularly bear on this matter: Luke 16:19–31 and 2 Peter 2:4–10.

In the Lukan passage Jesus speaks in a parable about a rich man who lived sumptuously, with no regard for the poor man Lazarus at his gate, and then died and was buried. The rich man’s situation after death is described as “in Hades, being in torment”[25] (16:23). So he cries out to Abraham (in whose “bosom” Lazarus now was): “Send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame” (v. 24). From this situation of torment and anguish, however, Abraham says there can be no relief and no crossing over the “great chasm” (v. 26) between. Thus the parable suggests that an unrighteous person, such as the rich man, after death experiences much pain and suffering: he is in a “place of torment” (v. 28).[26]

The passage in 2 Peter begins with words quoted earlier about how God did not spare the angels who sinned but cast them into hell to be kept there until the judgment. Then after an elaboration of God’s not sparing the world in Noah’s day while preserving a “herald of righteousness,” and of His destroying Sodom and Gomorrah while rescuing “righteous Lot,” Peter adds, “The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment[27] until [or ‘for’][28] the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority” (2:9–10). Continuing punishment, accordingly, is the situation of the unrighteous until the

day of judgment, though it seems from the use of the word “especially” that the amount or intensity varies with the evil committed before death.

This condition of suffering (Luke 16) or punishment (2 Peter) then applies to the situation of all the ungodly after death. It refers, of course, to their spirits, since their bodies, even as those of the righteous, decay in the grave. It will not be until the day of final judgment that they also will be raised and stand before the Lord.

III. PURPOSE

The purpose of the day of judgment will be, first, to exhibit the righteousness of God's judgment in the salvation of the righteous and the condemnation of the unrighteous. According to Paul, it will be the day "when God's righteous judgment will be revealed" (Rom. 2:5). It will be a declaration of the sovereign justice and mercy of God in relation to the whole universe.

Accordingly, it is not the purpose of that day to decide the destinies of angels and men, but to show forth God's righteousness and justice in what has already been determined. Hence, fallen angels do not come to the day of judgment for a determination whether their time in the nether darkness will be changed to a different destiny; nor do persons stand before the throne of Christ for a decision about their ultimate lot.

In regard to human beings, this may be observed in the scenes of Christ on the throne of judgment in both Matthew and Revelation. Christ "on his glorious throne" (Matt. 25:31) "separates the sheep from the goats" (v. 32), and the former go "into eternal life," the latter "into eternal punishment" (v. 46). The purpose is *not* to decide who are sheep and who are goats, but to separate them and after that to make clear to all why they already belong in these distinct categories. In the "great white throne" scene (Rev. 20) the purpose is not to decide whose names belong in "the book of life" ; that has long before been determined. Thus there will be no need on that day to discover whether or not one's name is inscribed in the book. A person's name is either in "the book of life" or in the other books: if not found in the former, he will be cast into "the lake of fire."[29]

The day of judgment will be a revelation of the righteousness of God's prior decision, and in each case this will be by an exhibition of the deeds done. Hence "sheep" are not sheep merely by an arbitrary decision of God, but are shown to be such by their acts of love and compassion (e.g., ministering to the thirsty and hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and those in prison). "Goats" demonstrate their contrary nature by doing none of these things. Similarly, what is written about the deeds of persons in both "the book of life" and the other books—"the dead were judged by what was written in the books" (Rev. 20:12) —declares the righteousness of God's decision. But, to repeat, the names of

persons are already in either “the book of life” or the other books; hence their ultimate destiny already has been set before the day of judgment.

Let me add a word about works (or deeds). Their importance should not be minimized in relation to one’s eternal destiny. Let us hear further from Paul, for just after the words quoted earlier about the day “when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed,” Paul adds, “For he will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience [or ‘perseverance’ NASB] in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious[30] and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury” (Rom. 2:6–8). Works will therefore be very important on the day of judgment, not because they will then bring about a positive or negative judgment concerning a person’s final destiny, but because God’s judgment in Christ will be “according to” and in consonance with their concrete demonstration. Even as now we are saved by a living faith that is shown forth in good works, so on the day of judgment good or evil deeds will be the tangible demonstration of this faith or lack of it, which issues in eternal life or “wrath and fury.”

The second purpose of the day of judgment is to reveal totally what is in every person. Paul writes, “Do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes[31] of the heart” (1 Cor. 4:5). Again, judgment is not to determine the future state of a person, but to make manifest what is there: things hidden in this present life, the inner motives of the heart. Accordingly, the purpose of judgment is *revelatory*, and the essence of judgment is *coming to light.* It is like the function of X-ray—to pierce through the outward to the inward and to expose all the deep and hidden recesses of a person’s being. Thus each one on the day of judgment will be revealed as he totally is.

There are, to be sure, areas of one’s life—sins and evils—already both known to oneself and evident to others. They point to the coming judgment, but other dark spots will be disclosed at that time. So writes Paul: “The sins of some men are conspicuous, pointing to[32] judgment, but the sins of others appear later”[33] (1 Tim. 5:24). In this life many persons know that they have sins which, if they are honest enough to admit, will cause them to face a future judgment. Often there is a deep sense of apprehension over what is coming,[34] no matter how much people may try to suppress it or put it aside. But the day will come—it cannot be avoided—when not only known sins and evils will come to light, but also those now hidden. For, to use our Lord’s own words, “Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed [i.e., ‘uncovered’], or hidden that will not be known” (Luke

12:2).[35] The day of judgment, in summary, will be a disclosure of both open and hidden sins: it will be the day of total manifestation.

This revelation will include even the words that one has spoken. So says Jesus, “I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless[36] word they utter; for out of[37] your words you will be justified, and out of your words you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:36–37). Like no other statement in the New Testament, this declaration of Jesus expresses the utter and total sensitivity to the minutest evil on the day of judgment. “Care less” words may scarcely seem evil, yet Jesus had earlier declared, “Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ [literally, ‘Yes, yes,’ or ‘No, no’]; anything more than this comes from evil” (Matt. 5:37). Careless words, idle words, thoughtless words, even excessive words, are actually evil. For each one of these “men will render account” and “out of’ them will be justification or condemnation, because God demands absolute integrity in human beings. Moreover, it is not the speech itself but what it represents, namely, the inner being or heart. “For,” said Jesus just prior to His words about the day of judgment, “out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34 NIV). Hence, every single word has vital significance, and for every “careless” utterance persons will be accountable on the final day. This again demonstrates the total manifestation not only of inward motives, secret thoughts, and conspicuous sins but also of the verbalizations that occur every day. The words uttered are the outward evidence of one’s real being.

Once more, this does not mean that on the day of judgment there will be a weighing of words (any more than deeds) to determine whether a person “makes it” to heaven or hell. For already by what one has spoken, i.e., the overflow of the heart whether evil or good,[38] the nature of the heart has been revealed. Thus whether it belongs to God or not—that is the determinant of one’s final destiny. But still, as the outward manifestation of the inward condition of the heart, every careless word will be accounted for on the last day.

Thus on the day of judgment nothing will any longer be hidden. Motives, thoughts, imagination, words, deeds: all will be utterly and finally exposed. In the probing words of Hebrews, “Before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (4:13). On the day of judgment what is perceived even now will be made wholly manifest.

Before going farther, we may ask, But will there be no difference between the believer and the unbeliever on the day of judgment? Will the sins of one who belongs to Christ be declared the same as those of an unbeliever? Perhaps the best answer is that, while all sins will be disclosed, in the case of the believer they will be disclosed as *forgiven.* Since the great Judge will be Christ Himself

who has borne the sins of the world, totally remitted the sins of His people, and perfected them in holiness, every sin, however small or great, as it is made manifest, will be wholly forgiven. Hence, there will be utterly no sense of guilt or condemnation: rather a fuller magnification than ever of the marvel of His grace. For only when the magnitude of what one has done is fully shown can there be complete rejoicing in His immeasurable love and mercy.[39]

And here these beautiful and reassuring words of Jesus come to mind: "Every one who acknowledges me be fore men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 10:32). On the day of judgment, all who have truly acknowledged Christ before the world will likewise be acknowledged by Him who is on the throne. Sins will be manifest but totally forgiven; persons will be standing before the judgment seat but with no condemnation,[40] all acknowledged by the Son to the Father. Indeed, it will be glory!

Now we move on to a third purpose of the day of judgment—the giving of rewards and punishment. In one of the last statements in Revelation the Lord says, "Yes, I am coming soon, and bringing my recompense[41] with me, to requite everyone according to his deeds" (22:12 NEB). The return of Christ will bring the requiting of "everyone," hence good and bad, righteous and unrighteous, believers and unbelievers, each according to his works.

I am not referring to eternal life or death which, as has been noted, is determined in this present life, but to the giving of rewards and punishment for the life yet to come. In this connection the emphasis in Scripture mainly relates to the rewards of the righteous, those who are God's people. This is apparent from an earlier scene in Revelation where the elders in heaven cry forth to God, "The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great"[42] (11:18 NIV). This statement is obviously an inclusive one for all believers—and covers "both small and great."

The mention of "small and great" leads us to reflect on the fact that even as on this earth there are levels of Christians[43] —for example, some "least in the kingdom of heaven" and some "great"[44] (Matt. 5:19; cf. 11:11)—so will there be degrees of reward. All believers will equally share eternal life or, to use the language of Revelation, equally dwell in the "new heaven" and the "new earth" (21:1), but the rewards will vary. Jesus said, "In My Father's house are many dwelling places" (John 14:2 NASB). These "mansions" (KJV) could very well correspond to the varying rewards God has for His people. In any event, it is clear that rewards will differ.

Let us recount a few other Scriptures. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), from which I just quoted the words about the "least" and the "great," Jesus several times speaks of reward.[45] In the first instance, He proclaims a blessing on those who are reviled, persecuted, and vilified on His account and then adds, "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven" (5:12). In the comparable Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17–49), Jesus declares in one place, "Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great" (6:35). Thus, summing up the two: there will be great reward for those who are persecuted for Christ's sake and those who love their enemies (even their persecutors) and do good, seeking nothing for themselves.

Also there are varieties of rewards. Jesus later declares, "He who receives a prophet because he is a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward, and he who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward" (Matt. 10:41). There is both "a prophet's reward" and "a righteous man's reward": they are clearly not the same. Moreover, the former probably also signifies a great reward.[46] "A great reward" is promised in Hebrews: "Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward" (10:35).[47] Finally, John writes in 2 John about "a full reward": "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward" (v. 8 KJV). There is "great reward" for maintaining confidence, and "full reward" in holding firm to what has been accomplished. Thus God has abundant reward for those who persevere in confidence to the very end.

One of the clearest statements about rewards is that set forth in the parable of the "pounds"[48] (Luke 19:11–27). Jesus tells about a nobleman who entrusted a pound each to ten of his servants, telling them, "Trade with [or 'do business with'] these till I come" (v. 13). When the nobleman received his kingdom, he returned and rewarded the servants according to their faithfulness and accomplishment. The servant who gained ten pounds more was told, "Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities" (v. 17). Another servant who gained an additional five pounds was placed over five cities. Still another servant, who hid away the pound and earned nothing, was strongly condemned. The nobleman took away the pound and gave it to the servant who had earned the additional ten pounds. Then the nobleman said, "I tell you, that to every one who has will more be given; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away" (v. 26). That this parable is about Jesus Himself and His return is unmistakable; also it is clear He is affirming that rewards will be given at that time. The basis will be

faithfulness in what has been entrusted to the individual by Christ; and the reward will vary with the commitment and accomplishment of each person.[49]

Finally, on the matter of rewards at the day of judgment one other Scripture reference calls for attention: 1 Corinthians 3:10–15. In this passage Paul says that the believer's work[50] will be tested on the day of judgment, and if it survives, there will be a reward. The foundation, says Paul, is Jesus Christ, and how a person builds on that, whether "with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.[51] If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward" (vv. 12–14 NASB). However, a person's work may be burned up, although he will himself still be saved: "If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire"[52] (v. 15 NASB).

What is striking about this passage is that it depicts fire in relation to the believer. We have already observed that fire will finally consume all evil (the "afflicters," the "man of sin," "the nations" attacking the "beloved city"). But here fire will consume a believer's work if it is "wood, hay, straw"—and the believer himself barely escaping "so as through fire." Thus, if a person's work remains, there is a reward; if not, he can expect no reward.

This is a sobering note for all Christians. How is one building on the foundation of Christ? Are one's works outwardly impressive, but actually without enduring quality? Are they works that give glory to God, or are they works that are self-serving, whatever their semblance? Are they truly "good works" that God has ordained,[53] so that they will endure on that day when the believer stands before Christ? In Revelation a voice cries forth, " 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord hence forth.' 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!' " (14:13). Will those deeds that "follow" be "burned up" or remain?

To be saved, thus to meet the Lord as He returns, will indeed be glorious. But to make it only "as through fire" is scarcely God's intention or the believer's highest joy. Certainly if the works are of little or no worth, far better that they be totally burned up than to have them "follow" one any longer. Let even the memory of them be forever erased!

To summarize concerning the rewards of believers: there will be great rewards, lesser rewards, and—for some—no reward. Hence there will be much diversity, even though all will share in the blessedness of the world to come. Such is the grace and justice of the good Lord.

Now let us move on to the matter of recompense for the unrighteous. Are there likewise degrees of punishment? The answer, based on several Scripture passages, is yes.

First, some punishment will be "more tolerable" than other punishment. Jesus, in sending out His disciples, said to them, "If anyone will not receive you or listen to your words…. I say to you, it shall be more tolerable[54] on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town" (Matt. 10:14–15). Similarly, Jesus, upbraiding the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum for their lack of repentance despite His many mighty works done among them, says to the former two: "Woe to you, Chorazin! woe to you, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you" (Matt. 11:21–22). And then He reproaches Capernaum: "I tell you that it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you" (v. 24). The heavier judgment in all these cases will be because of their total indifference, even callousness, to the offer of the gospel and to the mighty works of God calling for repentance. As worldly and proud as mercantile Tyre and Sidon were, as morally depraved as the already-destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah were: on the day of judgment their punishment will be more tolerable than those who had been given the opportunity to receive the gospel and callously turned it away.

Second, the punishment of some is described as "greater" than that of others. Jesus warns, "Beware of the scribes,[55] who like to go about in long robes, and love salutations in the market places and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation" (Luke 20:46–47; cf. Mark 12:38–40). The scribes and Pharisees will receive greater condemnation than others because these religious leaders, whatever they say about God, are actually hypocrites. Constantly showing false piety, seeking the adulation of others, and being brutal in relation to human need, these persons already marked out for hell[56] will receive a "greater condemnation." The greater condemnation —it is important to stress—is not to be re ceived by worldlings ("sinners" in the obvious sense of the immoral), but by the religious elite who underneath are veritable hypocrites. It does not take much imagination to hear the Lord today say, "Beware of the churchmen who… ." It is such who "will receive the greater condemnation."

Third, other Scripture lessons show that some will be punished far more

severely than others. Jesus speaks of a servant who has been placed in charge of his master's household. But, thinking his master will not return soon, he begins to beat the other servants, and he himself eats and gets drunk. When the master unexpectedly returns, he (the master) will, first, "cut him to pieces and assign him a place[57] with the unbelievers" (Luke 12:46 NIV). Thus his future destination will be the same as that of "unbelievers," hence hell. Further, this servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready, or do it, "will be beaten with many blows," whereas another who did not know but still did things "deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows" (vv. 47–48 NIV). Thus there will be degrees of severity of punishment in the life to come. Again, when one projects this to the contemporary scene, it is apparent that this particularly applies to a church pastor whose very office is to administer his Lord's "household." Like the first servant, the pastor may know full well his master's will and purpose, even his promise of returning soon, yet heedlessly abuses the flock and gives himself over to self-indulgence. He will not only be destroyed and assigned the unbelievers' miserable lot: he will also be punished very severely. Another pastor, less aware of his master's will and purpose, while also abusing the flock and indulging himself, will receive lesser punishment.

To summarize: There is unmistakable biblical testimony to degrees of punishment. Punishment will be pronounced upon those who callously spurn the offer of the gospel and do not repent, even when God's mighty works are done before their eyes. Again, punishment will be great for those who make a pretense of religious commitment but inwardly are self-seeking and unconcerned about others: the hypocrites of the world. Finally, punishment will be quite severe for those who have a position of responsibility over the Lord's household but, rather than being concerned, are both abusive and negligent.

So we behold that both rewards and punishment will be rendered at the coming day of judgment. The Lord will give to everyone according to what his life and work shows forth. Surely, it is a challenge to all of us to live every day as servants of the Lord, and to be as ready as possible when He returns.

IV. STANDARD

I must now add something about the standard of judgment. What will be the norm by which persons will be judged on that day? Perhaps the briefest answer is to say that judgment will be in accordance with the revealed will and purpose of God. Let us now observe three aspects of this revelation.

A. God's Will as Revealed Inwardly to Every Person

All persons who have ever lived have an internal criterion of right and wrong, namely, that which stems from the law "written on the heart." They may not have the Law (in the sense of the law given to Israel through Moses), but they have the *l*aw, and by that they will be judged. Let us hear Paul: "When Gentiles *[ethne]*, who do not have the law [i.e., the Law of Moses],[58] do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness,[59] and their thoughts now accusing, now even[60] defending them" (Rom. 2:14–15 NIV). "This will take place," Paul adds, "on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Christ Jesus" (v. 16 NIV). In other words, all people have the law of God—His central will and purpose—engraved on their hearts. To this their consciences will bear witness, and their thoughts will both accuse and defend them on the day of judgment when everything hidden will be brought to light. Thus mankind at large will be judged by the general, internal, revelation of God as their own consciences testify and their own thoughts act as prosecution and defense.[61]

All of this means, accordingly, that no one can escape the bar of judgment. To plead—as some might—that they were never given the Law of God as made known to Moses and Israel will be to no avail. They do have the law in their hearts, and they do have consciences, which are inward monitors; they are responsible for what they do.

Moreover, on that final day their own thoughts will sufficiently accuse them and defend them. They will stand before the judgment seat of God self-judged—even as the hiddenmost secrets are probed by the awesome presence of the Lord.

B. God's Will as Revealed Specifically to Israel

Again, let us hear Paul: "All who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law [the Law of Moses] will be judged by the law" (Rom. 2:12). Hence, the Jews who were "entrusted with the oracles of God" (3:2) will be responsible for the way in which each one measures up to that trust.

The Jews, or Israelites, therefore, have a far greater measure of responsibility than do the Gentiles, because they were uniquely chosen by God to be the recipients of His commandments. Moreover, the law of God written on the heart of man is not always clear. The conscience—the "fellow witness"—often becomes less and less sensitive, and people having no outward God-given law[62] may increasingly move farther and farther from the truth. In the midst of that human uncertainty God called a people, and through Moses He gave them His Word, His law, not only for themselves but also for the other nations. And since the Jews were so favored by God, they are also called to a far greater accountability.

On the day of judgment Israel will be judged by the very law God gave them. As Jesus Himself said to the Jews: "Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope" (John 5:45 NASB). So will Israel stand at the bar of judgment.[63]

C. God's Will as Revealed Through Jesus Christ

One of Jesus' most striking statements about the judgment of the last day is again found in the Gospel of John: "He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day" (12:48). This statement of Jesus, made just before His passion and directed to all people,[64] emphasizes that His "word," that is, the content of His message, will be the final judge. If a person rejects Christ and does not receive His "sayings," that is, His various words spoken, then the word that is going forth through every saying will be that person's judge on the Last Day.

Thus we now move beyond God's will as inscribed on the heart of every person and the Law given to Israel to the larger declaration that the words of Christ Himself will be the judge. In the Johannine passage this refers, as noted, to those who reject Christ; and this will surely include vast numbers who have spurned the gospel offer. But now, surely, we may add that the word of Christ will also be a judge for those who have accepted Him. Not only will that word judge those who do not receive Christ, but also those who have come to Him in true faith.

Truly Christ's words recorded in the New Testament will be a major criterion of judgment on the last day. The words of the Sermon on the Mount, which alone go far beyond the Old Testament commandments into inward thoughts and motives, will all the more probe the believer on the day of judgment. If the Jew will be judged by his adherence to the Law, which relates largely to external matters—murder, adultery, false vows, etc.—how much more will believers in Christ be judged by His word, which goes to the heart—anger, lust, no vows at all, etc. Even more, perhaps, Christ's words about love for enemies, praying for persecutors, rejoicing in suffering, and on and on, will sound forth on the judgment day. But, of course, the Sermon on the Mount is only a part of what Christ taught His disciples, and it will be His total word that will be heard on the final day. As Jesus said emphatically, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Matt. 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33 NIV).[65] Surely, then, Christ's words will all the more reverberate around His throne as men and nations stand for judgment in His presence.

Beyond Christ's spoken words, as set forth in Scripture, there are also His deeds. He was "a prophet mighty in deed and word" (Luke 24:19), and His mighty and compassionate deeds (or works) will stand supremely in judgment

on that day. What He embodied in His life—total outgoing love for every person from the least to the greatest, friend and foe alike, even to His vicarious death on the cross, bearing the sin and punishment of the world—all this will continue to radiate from His throne. His total deed will be the judgment of all mankind.[66]

Of course, since Christ is the Word of God, it is the unity of word and deed in His person that will make for fullness of judgment. Hence, the ultimate standard, or criterion, will be the very presence of Christ. The Christ of total love and—now I must add—of total holiness will be on the throne. In the Book of Revelation Christ's eyes are described as being "like a flame of fire" (1:14; 19:12). Before those eyes aflame with holiness and love, righteousness and compassion, justice and mercy, all creation will be utterly probed.[67] It will be the presence of Christ—His eyes, His face, His total being—that will ultimately be the judgment of the world. There can be nothing beyond that.

This seems an appropriate place to reflect briefly on the matter of the saints judging the world. I have earlier spoken of the Judge as God in Christ[68] —and that cannot be emphasized too much. However, from Scripture it is also apparent that those who belong to Christ will somehow share in that judging. So in 1 Corinthians 6:2–3 Paul writes, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? … Do you not know that we are to judge angels?" According to Paul, saints will judge the world—humans and angels. "The world" here refers to those who are unrighteous; and "angels," to those who are evil. Both groups (as we have earlier noted) are reserved for judgment on the Last Day.

This is a staggering picture indeed: saints to judge unrighteous men and women and evil angels! Perhaps it seems out of order in the first place, for have we not already observed that all people—righteous and unrighteous, believers and unbelievers—must stand before the judgment seat of God in Christ? Are not believers objects of judgment rather than judges? The answer, perhaps strangely, is that both are true. I must quickly add, however, in regard to the first (i.e., believers as objects of judgment) that, as we have observed, theirs will be a different kind of judgment. For their sins will not come under the judgment that is condemnation, but under that which belongs to forgiveness. Moreover, they will be openly acknowledged by Christ;[69] and, to use the language of Matthew 25:33, they will be placed at His "right hand." Therefore, the situation of the righteous and that of the unrighteous will be quite different on the day of judgment. Similar to their coming with Christ and His angels in the final destruction of the evil of the world, believers will be with him— placed at His "right hand"—on the day of final judgment. Thus, in some way that Scripture

does not fully relate, the saints will share in Christ's judgment of the world.

Let us pursue this a bit further. In the Book of Revelation are these words of Jesus: "He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne" (3:21). We have already considered the latter part of this verse,[70] observing how the Father and the Son share in judgment (there is only one throne, not two). But now we recognize that the first part speaks of the victorious believer who will sit on Christ's throne. This means that he will share in judgment with the Son, even as the Son with the Father! For the throne, as we see it climactically in Revelation 20:11–15, is the throne placed for judgment. And although no one is specifically mentioned aside from "him who sat upon it" (v. 11), we may surely believe that even as Christ sits with the Father—"with my Father"— so will we sit with Him on His throne in fulfillment of His promise. This pictorial language of one throne upon which sits the Father, the Son, and believers is impossible to bring into focus. But when this is understood as symbolic language for sharing in judgment, everything becomes quite clear. Christ Himself will uniquely be the Judge, but somehow we will be associated with Him.

As I said before, the Scriptures do not relate how this judging by the saints will take place. So far as we can tell (to review for a moment), believers will at the outset stand with all other persons before the judgment seat. After they have given account and their sins have been declared forgiven, they will then be associated with the Lord, who is the Judge, in the judging of all others who are gathered in His awesome presence. How they will do this is simply not described. Let us, however, try humbly and reverently to surmise a bit.

First, remember that the saints who stand before the throne will already have been made perfect in holiness.[71] Thus they will have unimpeded discernment of all that is evil, and be able to join fully in Christ's judging. Even in this life, according to Paul, "the spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one … [for] we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:15–16). How much more will this be a reality on judgment day when, with every trace of sin removed and therefore operating fully with "the mind of Christ," the believer "judges all things"!

Second, the righteous, the saints, who will share in Christ's judgment, were *all* once unrighteous, sinners away from God. They not only will have been tempted in every point as was their Lord but they will also have committed every sin known to mankind. On the same judgment day, as I have commented, the saints will have had to account for each and every sin. While gloriously proclaimed "forgiven," they will be quite aware of the sins and evils of the human race.

Hence, they will have an experiential knowledge of every sin judged, and therefore will be able to add this dimension to the overall judgment of Christ.

Third, the judgment by the saints on that Last Day will not only be a matter of their discernment of all human evil so as to pronounce judgment verbally, but it will also be a matter of their very presence. In this life it is already a fact that in the presence of saints the unrighteous often sense themselves judged. We may recall the demoniacs who cried out to Jesus, who had not spoken a word: "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?"[72] (Matt. 8:29). Jesus' holy and righteous presence *was* their judgment already. He did not come to torment or condemn, but to save; yet His presence already was their judgment. So on the day of judgment it will, of course, be supremely true of Christ—from whose presence "earth and heaven fled away"—that there will be awesome judgment before any word is spoken.[73] In such a way, but of course to a lesser degree, all the unrighteous and unforgiven will be judged by the holy, pure, and righteous presence of the saints.

Now a final word about the angels and their judgment. "We are to judge angels" (1 Cor. 6:3), Paul declares. On first thought this may seem strange, even quite disproportionate: *humans* to judge *angelsl* Are human beings not lower than angels by virtue of their creation? Would it not be more proper—if others than Christ are to be involved—for fellow angels to do the judging? For a vast host of blessed, unfallen angels indeed will have come with Christ to gather the elect and to wreak destruction on evil. Why would they not, then, along with the saints, be much involved on the day of judgment when both people and angels will be judged? Yet, despite such possible questions, angels simply are not depicted in the Bible as participating in the coming judgment.[74]

One further question may be asked: Since angels will not be involved in judging their fellow angels, why does not Christ judge angels alone without man? No scriptural answer is directly available; so here, even more than in the matter of how or why the saints will judge the world, we can only venture with much hesitation. I will suggest three answers. First, while it may seem inappropriate for saints to be judging angels, since human beings are on a lower level of creation, believers will be so changed on the day of resurrection as, in Jesus' words, to become "like angels in heaven" (Matt. 22:30). Hence, while lower *now*, believers will not be lower *then.*[75] They will be present in their spiritual bodies judging those who are spirits.[76] And since believers will be like Christ Himself, who will be present in His glorified body, they will stand with Him above the angels, bringing judgment to bear. Second, the saints will not be

judging angels simply as angels but as sinful and fallen angels. Thus whatever distance there might be between angels and people in their creation, there is no distance in relation to matters of sin and fall. The judging saints will be those who came from a fallen and sinful human race; thus they will have known experientially, not angelic nature, but angelic evil. And it is the latter, not the former, that will be the arena of judgment. Third, if the angels in their fall (as described in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6) are the background for, and possible instigation of, the fall of man through Satan,[77] then they all the more deserve to stand not only before the judgment seat of Christ but also before redeemed humanity whom they formerly had helped to despoil. Their judgment and eternal punishment will show forth all the more vividly under the impact of having to be present before the saints at the throne of Christ.

V. SIGNIFICANCE

Finally, let me add a word about the significance of the Last Judgment. Here three statements are in order.

First, the very fact that it is called the Last Judgment implies former judgment. Indeed, this may be noted primarily by the fact that Christ in His first coming has already rendered a decisive judgment upon the world. “Now,” declares Jesus, “is the judgment of this world” (John 12:31). Long before the Last Judgment, the world was being judged. Indeed, Jesus says, “For judgment I came into this world,” adding, “that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind” (John 9:39). While He was on the earth Jesus through His life and ministry brought about judgment. Many who had not seen before (i.e., were blinded by sin and evil) came to see; others who claimed to see, particularly the scribes and Pharisees, were blinded in their opposition. Thus a decisive judgment was rendered upon mankind in His first coming; the world was being judged by its reaction to Him. In regard to those who turned from Him, Jesus had earlier said, “This is the judgment,[78] that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (John 3:19–20). Evil persons were exposed already by their hatred of the light, namely Christ,[79] their judgment unto condemnation[80] being manifest in Jesus’ presence among them. On the other hand, adds Jesus, “He who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God” (John 3:21). By Jesus’ first advent people were judged: those of evil deeds turned away from Him; those who practiced truth came to Him.[81] So did the ways divide; so did Christ bring judgment into the world.

The climactic judgment of the world in Jesus’ first advent came about in His crucifixion and death. His words “Now is the judgment of this world” were spoken just before His apprehension in Gethsemane, His trial before the Jewish high court and Roman authorities, and His torturous death on the cross. Men presumed to judge Christ as a blasphemer, an anarchist, and an evil force that had to be destroyed. But actually in the whole process they themselves were being judged, exposed by Him in all their abysmal evil. The Jews, the Romans,

the Sanhedrin, Herod, and Pilate were on trial, not Christ, and proved that they, not Christ, deserved only condemnation and death. "*Now* is the judgment of this world."

And the world through its history, since Christ walked upon the earth, continues to be judged. It was not only to persons in Jesus' own time that He was speaking in John 3 and 9, but to people of every century since then. *The decisive judgment is rendered in this life* by the way people and nations respond to Christ, the Light of the world. The coming judgment on the last day, as emphasized before, will not be the determinant of people's destinies. That will already have been decided by their response to Christ in the present life. Thus the world is continually being judged,[82] even until the final day.

In a broad sense the entire world stands under the judgment of Jesus Christ. His whole manner of life—His total holiness and righteousness, His utter love and compassion, His constant truth and faithfulness, everything about Him including His words and His deeds—is a brilliant light that exposes the world in all its unholiness, lovelessness, and departure from truth. In a comprehensive way every moment, every occasion, every event in history stands before the bar of Christ: "Now"—every now—"is the judgment of this world."

Second, the Last Judgment will be the final separation of good from evil. Although judgment in this world has already occurred in the sense of ultimate decision having been made, it will only be at the Last Judgment that this will be fully manifest. During the present age, between Christ's first and second advent, good and evil remain intermingled; in Jesus' own imagery, the wheat with tares, the good fish with the bad. Indeed, there is no way we can know for certain which is which. Moreover, even if there were assured knowledge, and the righteous desired to remove the unrighteous, this would not be possible. In reference to the wheat and the tares and the question whether the latter should be gathered now, Jesus replied, "No; lest in gathering the weeds [tares] you root up the wheat along with them" (Matt. 13:29). Good and evil are so closely intermingled in every area of this world, including the church itself, that to extirpate all evil would also be to uproot the good! This does not mean there are no righteous ("the wheat"), for in Christ there surely are. But the righteous must live now in the matrix of an unrighteous world that cannot be removed or destroyed without detriment to their own existence. Hence, the problem exists of not fully knowing who are the righteous and who are the unrighteous[83] and, even if this were known, of being able to separate the one from the other. Therefore, in the words of Jesus, "Let both grow together until the harvest" (Matt. 13:30).

Thus at the Last Day the separation will finally occur. We live now in the time

of God's forbearance, of God's permitting the admixture to exist. But the day will come when total separation will be made: wheat from tares, good fish from bad fish, sheep from goats. Judgment will be discrimination and discernment manifested, but it will also be total and final separation.[84] The present state of uncertainty and inconclusiveness will be forever done away, and God will be wholly vindicated.[85]

On this latter point of God's vindication, we may sometimes wonder how and why God puts up so long with this continuing evil. How can He, in His holiness, bear it; why does He not end it all immediately? Has not evil been around long enough, ever seeking to corrupt the good? Why so much delay in the coming of the long-promised day of the Lord? Perhaps Peter speaks most directly to this line of questioning: "Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come…" (2 Peter 3:8–10). The marvelous forbearance of the Lord, His longsuffering patience, His yearning for the repentance and salvation of all people—yes, He permits things to continue for a few "days" (= perhaps thousands of years)—but it will surely end someday. Then will come the judgment, the final separation of good from evil—and God will be glorified.

Third, and finally, every person should see vital significance in the prospect of the coming day of judgment. We live today in such an atmosphere of this-worldliness that many are deluded into thinking either that death ends it all, hence there is no judgment to come, or that God in His kindness will take everyone into bliss and happiness, hence no serious judgment is to be expected.[86] But we have seen how different the biblical picture is; both Old and New Testaments strongly emphasize the day of the Lord as the coming day of judgment.[87] Thus this should motivate us to urgently warn unbelievers of what will surely come to pass, that although God is now forbearing, repentance is needed before it is too late. Paul sharply challenges the person who may think lightly of God's kindness and pay little heed to the call for repentance and to the warnings of the severity of coming judgment: "Do you presume upon[88] the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed" (Rom. 2:4–5). In the spirit of Paul this should be our message to any who trifle with the things of God and their own ultimate accountability to Him.

But the last word I reserve for believers. What should the coming day signify to them? Primarily, it is a day to look forward to for a number of reasons: (1) Everyone who truly belongs to Christ—who hungers and thirsts after righteousness[89] —yearns for the day when righteousness will be wholly present and evil totally separated from it. (2) The Judge sitting in judgment will be none other than the One who has died for every person, even submitted Himself to the fearsome wrath of God the Father, and has become the believer's Savior and Lord; hence, there can be no fear or anxiety but only comfort[90] in the expectation of beholding Him on His glorious throne. (3) It will be a day of rewards for those who have remained faithful; therefore even now we may look forward with keen anticipation to what He will give. (4) Since believers will assist Christ in judging both unrighteous angels and human beings, this extraordinary fact, and the way it will be accomplished, is surely a matter of high expectation. (5) It will be the great transitional event that leads to the "new heaven" and "new earth," to the fulfillment of Christ's kingdom, and to dwelling with God perfectly and forever. To be present and a part of this vast transition is truly beyond all comprehension, but we can rejoice in the assurance that through God's great love we will share in it.

Now I must also speak of the other side—not to create fear or foreboding, but to emphasize the seriousness of the high calling as believers that God has given us now. Since He has entrusted much to us, He does expect faithfulness and commitment until the very end. As we have seen, the believer's works are very important: if they are "hay," "wood," or "straw," they will be burned up. Thus, even now in light of that future possibility, we should ever seek to do those things that give honor and glory to God. At the worst extreme, if we are *knowingly* faithless to what God has given us (our responsibility in relation to the Lord's household, our stewardship of "talents" and possessions), there can only be the expectation of terrifying judgment: "a fearful prospect of judgment."[91] But of this, praise God, we need not fear if day by day we seek to remain His faithful disciples and fulfill His calling in our lives.

Someday the words will ring forth: "Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come" (Rev. 14:7). May we ever be ready for that announcement, and hail the occasion with joy and thanksgiving.

EXCURSUS: THE STATE OF THE LOST

Before leaving this discussion of the Last Judgment and beginning a consideration of the consummation in the new heaven and new earth, we should take a further look at the final state of the lost. Several times I have commented that the Last Judgment will not be for the purpose of determining that state; rather, it will be for the exhibition of the righteousness of God's prior decision in condemning the unrighteous, for the total revelation of what is in every person, and for the giving of rewards and punishment. The unrighteous are already lost before the day of judgment and will thereafter continue in that condition. Now let us reflect on their state.

Darkness and Fire

Two figures of speech are used to describe the state of the lost: *darkness* and *fire*. Let us consider each in turn.

A number of times Jesus speaks of "outer darkness." In the Gospel of Matthew He declares, "Many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into outer[92] darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth" (8:11–12). Here "sons of the kingdom" refers to unbelieving Jews, who, despite their traditional status as "sons," will be cast into the darkness outside the kingdom. Again, Jesus speaks of a certain man who came to a marriage feast without wearing a wedding garment. As a result, the king who gave the feast said to his servants, "Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth" (Matt. 22:13). The lack of a wedding garment signifies no appropriate repentance and change of life even though present at the feast of the Lord; such a person will be totally cast out. A third account is that of a man who buried the Lord's talent in the ground. About him the master will declare, "Cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness, there men will weep and gnash their teeth" (Matt. 25:30).

Before reflecting further on this "outer darkness," we should observe that the condition of natural man *already* is darkness. So Jesus declares, "I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness" (John 12:46). Not to believe in Christ, therefore, is to remain in darkness, both now and in the life to come. Paul says that God "has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col. 1:13), and Peter describes God's people as "called … out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). Clearly those not "delivered" and "called out" are in darkness and by implication will remain there both now and in the world to come.

In specific reference to the future life Peter, describing people involved in a variety of debasing sins, says, "For them the nether gloom of darkness[93] has been reserved" (2 Peter 2:17). Jude similarly speaks of those "for whom the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved for ever" (Jude 13). This "nether gloom of darkness" is doubtless equivalent to the "outer darkness," the darkness farthest out, to which Jesus refers.

Incidentally, the word "outside" is used in the Book of Revelation to locate all

people who are not finally found in the holy city:[94] "Outside are the dogs,[95] those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood" (22:15 NIV). The holy city is radiant with light and glory, while outside there is only darkness and gloom. Such is the final state of the lost.

What these Scriptures say is that the situation of the lost is one of continuing darkness, from this life into the next. Another word from Jesus: "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). *Not* to follow Christ, who is the true light, is not only to walk in darkness now but also in the life to come. It means to continue in a state of separation from God; however, in the final state the separation will be total. Not a flicker of light will be there to relieve the utter darkness.

This darkness is far more than a physical reality. It is existence totally removed from God, from Christ. On one occasion Jesus declares that on the final day He will say to some of His own professed followers: "I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers" (Matt. 7:23). Departure from Christ and estrangement from God is the state of the lost. It is to exist in "the nether gloom" of eternal darkness.

Jesus in His recorded teaching also speaks often of fire in connection with man's final condition. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus warns against "the hell of fire": "Whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell[96] of fire" (Matt. 5:22). Later in His parable of the wheat and the tares (or weeds), Jesus speaks of "the furnace of fire": "Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age … they [angels] will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and throw them into the furnace of fire ; there men will weep and gnash their teeth" (Matt. 13:40–42). Similarly in His parable of the dragnet, Jesus declares, "The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth" (vv. 49–50). Yet again Jesus speaks about cutting off one's hand or foot or plucking out one's eye if it causes one to sin rather than "with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire" or "with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire" (Matt. 18:8–9). In the parallel Markan passage the fire is described as unquenchable: "… to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire … where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (9:44, 48). Finally, in Matthew are these words of Jesus concerning the day of judgment: "Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels' " (25:41).

In the Book of Revelation is this vivid statement: "If any one worships the

beast and its image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand … he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever; and they have no rest, day or night" (14:9–11). Again: "If any one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (20:15). Finally: "The cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death" (21:8 NIV).

All of these scriptures about fire—"the hell of fire," "the furnace of fire," "fire and brimstone," "the lake of fire"—unmistakably depict the state of the lost as one of torment.[97] It is obvious that a garbage pit (hell),[98] a furnace, and a lake are different figures and therefore cannot be taken literally. This, however, does not detract from what such imagery points to—a condition of vast misery. For "fire" is the constant in all these expressions, and fire signifies burning and torment.

These two terms, "darkness" and "fire," that point to the final state of the lost might seem to be opposites, because darkness, even black darkness, suggests nothing like fire or the light of blazing fire. Thus again we must guard against identifying the particular terms with literal reality, such as a place of black darkness or of blazing fire. Rather, darkness and fire are metaphors that express the profound truth, on the one hand, of terrible estrangement and isolation from God, and on the other, the pain and misery of unrelieved punishment. It is significant that Jesus in His portrayals of darkness and fire often adds the statement "There men will weep and gnash their teeth."[99] This weeping and gnashing (or "wailing and grinding" NEB) of teeth vividly suggests both suffering and despair. So whether the metaphor is darkness or fire, the picture is indeed a grim one, even beyond the ability of any figure of speech to express.[100]

One further word: both darkness and fire refer to the basic situation of the lost after the Last Judgment. However, we have already observed that there will be degrees of punishment, hence in some sense the darkness and fire will not be wholly the same. Some punishment will be more tolerable than other punishment: some people will receive a greater condemnation, while some (to change the figure) will be "beaten with few blows."[101] Thus we should not understand the overall picture of the state of the lost to exclude differences in degree of punishment. Even as for the righteous in the world to come, there will be varying rewards, so for the unrighteous the punishment will not be the same.

Eternal and Final

The state of the lost is an eternal one, and the condition is final.

Frequently the Bible stresses the *eternal* state of the lost. We have already noted various statements that reveal this eternal character, such as the "nether gloom of darkness … reserved for ever" and being "thrown into the eternal fire." Thus the state of the lost is everlasting.

This is borne out particularly in the concluding words of Christ at the Last Judgment as recorded in Matthew 25: "They [the unrighteous] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (v. 46). The word "eternal"[102] is used for both the righteous and the unrighteous: even as the righteous are eternally blessed, so the unrighteous will undergo eternal punishment. One state is just as eternal as the other.

Next, let us observe that in speaking about "those who refuse to acknowledge God and … those who will not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus," Paul adds, "They will suffer the punishment of eternal ruin,[103] cut off from[104] the presence of the Lord and the splendour of his might" (2 Thess. 1:8–9 NEB). The ruin that is eternal goes along with being cut off from the presence of the Lord. Rather than continuing blessedness in the life to come, there will be nothing but an existence of ongoing ruination and misery.

We now need to look at one statement of Jesus that might suggest, not eternal continuance, but annihilation at death. Jesus declares, "Do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him[105] who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28 NASB). However, the word translated "destroy"[106] is set in contrast to "kill," and means to "give over to eternal misery"[107] or to "subject to the torments of hell."[108] To view "destroy" as to annihilate is contrary to both the intention of Jesus' words and the larger context.[109]

I add here a word about "annihilationism." This is the view that the unrighteous, rather than having to endure everlasting punishment, will be annihilated (i.e., reduced to nonexistence) in the age to come. Such expressions as "destruction" and "second death" are understood as the obliteration of the unrighteous; hence there is no continuing lost condition.[110] Such a view lacks biblical support and has never had credal or confessional status in the church.[111]

One further comment about the word "destruction." I have previously

discussed the purpose of the return of Christ for both "final redemption" and "total destruction."[112] "Total destruction," we have observed, refers to the slaying of all the "earth-dwellers," but it does not mean their annihilation.[113] Like all others who previously have died and live on after death, so will they be raised for the Last Judgment and continue to live ever after. In summary, there is no annihilation of either the godly or the ungodly.

It follows that the condition of the lost is *final.* It is a situation of eternal estrangement and misery that has no possibility of future alteration. Accordingly, there can be no ultimate entering into salvation.[114]

Here I must speak about the matter of "universalism." Universalism is the view that ultimately all people will attain salvation. In a popular vein universalism is the outright denial of hell because God is viewed as too good to send anyone there; hence, if there is a heaven, He will surely take everyone in. In pantheistic philosophy, since man is viewed as a part of God or one with God, there is no possibility of a final and ultimate separation from Him. In Hindu religion and the New Age affirmation of reincarnation, there is no once-for-all Last Judgment with eternal consequences to follow. In the Christian tradition "liberal" thinking often moves in the direction of universal salvation, and may seek to claim biblical justification.[115]

In regard to scriptural evidence for universalism, texts frequently quoted are John 12:32: "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself'; Acts 3:21, which refers to the future "restoration of all things" (NASB); Romans 5:18, which speaks of "acquittal and life for all men" ; 1 Corinthians 15:22: "as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive"; Ephesians 1:10 regarding "a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth"; Philippians 2:10–11: "that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord"; Colossians 1:20: "through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven"; and Titus 2:11: "the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men." What such verses actually declare is *not* universal salvation,[116] but the universal outreach of the gospel (it is not limited to some), the universal applicability of the gospel to all people's need (their death in sin), the universal reconciliation and unity of all things in Christ (in heaven and on earth), and the universal acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord (whether by those in heaven, on earth, or under the earth). The last statement might seem to point to universal salvation, because it also includes those "under the earth"—an expression that probably relates to the "nether"

regions. However, even if the phrase does refer to the underworld of darkness, the acknowledgment of Christ's lordship is best understood as referring not to an act of faith and worship by believers, but to the recognition by even those below that Christ is Lord of all.[117]

Universalism must be faulted for a one-sided biblical approach. The texts just quoted *might* incline one in a universalist direction if there were not many other texts and passages that clearly do not point that way. Scriptures relating to eternal punishment, eternal destruction (or ruination), and the like, do not need to be repeated here.

Universalism is a kind of annihilationism in reverse. Rather than annihilating all the ungodly, the ungodly will all be saved! In neither case is the lost condition a final and eternal one. Actually both views detract from the seriousness of evil in this life. If all people will eventually be annihilated or eventually saved, what one does now makes little ultimate difference. But if the gospel is the good news of salvation *from* eternal perdition as well as into the glories of eternal life, there is much indeed to proclaim!

God's Character and Human Decision

Finally, the continuing state of the lost is the result of both God's character and human decision.

The foundational fact of God's character is His *holiness.*[118] Because of that fact, sin is abhorrent in His eyes. As primary evidence of this, when the first man and woman sinned, not only were they shut out from God's presence but also were all their descendants to the present day. *We* are Adam's sinful and guilty race, and even as we compound that sin, we are on our way to eternal condemnation. The holy God finds intolerable the sinful condition of humanity and reacts forever against it. This is the fundamental reason for the existence of the "outer darkness" to which the human race is consigned and the "eternal fire" of divine punishment. Even *one* sin (as Adam and Eve's one sin vividly attests) is sufficient to bar a person from the eternal presence of God. What more needs to be said about humanity's almost unlimited quantity? Hell is our due, not because God arbitrarily consigns us there, but because His very holy nature eternally repels all that is unholy—unrighteous, impure, unclean.

God also is a God of *love.*[119] It is a love so vast that in Christ God went all the way to save the world from its own self-destruction. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The word translated "perish"[120] means "to be delivered up to eternal misery":[121] it was *that* world, *our* world, on the way to eternal darkness and misery that God loved so greatly as to send His Son to redeem it from perdition. In so doing, God in Christ paid the full price on the cross as He became totally identified with mankind's sin and misery, its lostness and continuing damnation. Christ suffered the ravages of God's holy judgment upon Himself—all the punishment that was our due—in order to set us free. Hence *there is nothing that mankind would ever have to endure that Christ has not already experienced Himself.* There is utterly no way that anyone can begin to contemplate the awful weight of the holy and righteous judgment that Christ took upon Himself. He has received it—in our place.

Thus God at unimaginable cost has done everything in Christ to make our final condition one of eternal joy and blessedness and not of eternal pain and misery. God is thereby *true*[122] to Himself in that both His holiness and His love have been fully and truly expressed through Christ who is "the way, and the

truth, and the life" (John 14:6), and salvation has been opened to all mankind. Accordingly, in the words of Paul, God is one who "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). Such great salvation has made hell necessary for no person.

None of this, however, forecloses its possibility. Eternal separation from God may still recur. But the good and glorious news is that "whoever believes in" Christ will never have to face that grim reality. He will instead enter into eternal life.

I have done this brief review of the gospel to emphasize that a fuller picture of God's character puts all things in perspective. Sometimes the question is seriously raised, How can there be a hell if God is a loving God? If God is loving and compassionate, how could He possibly allow one person to perish forever? The answer should be clear. Although God is loving and compassionate to the uttermost, even to vicariously suffering our sin and punishment, He is also a God of total holiness and righteousness who cannot endure sin and unrighteousness, and therefore must finally banish it from His presence. Only when God is recognized in His full character as holiness and love and truth can both the total emancipation from hell and its continuing reality be understood.

The other side of this continuing state of the lost rests in human *decision.* God Himself has done all things necessary to keep any person from perishing, that is, going to destruction. The one crucial thing on our part is to accept what God has done in Christ as our Substitute, who bore our sin and guilt and fulfilled God's holy and righteous judgment in our place. In a word, it is to "believe" in Christ as our Savior from condemnation and destruction. For, as John 3:18 continues, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe *stands condemned already* because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (NIV). Hence, one who does not believe in Christ remains under the final condemnation of God. A God of infinite love and holiness has truly wrought salvation for a lost human race. But a person must believe in Christ or else he still stands under condemnation. John 3 closes with these words: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects[123] the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (v. 36 NIV). This statement makes it clear that to hear of Christ and then to reject Him is to stay under God's holy wrath. "God's wrath remains"—thus a fearsome prospect of coming condemnation and destruction.

Here we may ask, But what about those who have never had opportunity to hear about Christ? Do all stand under God's eternal condemnation? It is one thing to say that God's wrath remains on those who spurn what He has done in Christ to save the perishing, but another to say that those who have never heard

will be condemned. Will hell be composed also of vast numbers of people who have never heard of Christ? The answer, I suggest, is twofold. First, the Scriptures are clear that there is no salvation outside of Christ. Jesus Himself declares, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). Peter proclaims, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Paul writes, “There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). So the task and challenge of witnessing to the sole sufficiency of Christ must never be diminished. Second, we should also leave open the possibility of God’s mercy in Christ being extended to some who do not outwardly know Him. I say, the *possibility*, based on such words as in John 1:9: “The true light that lightens every man was coming into the world,” and 3:21: “He who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.” These verses cannot mean that there is salvation outside of Christ. But they do suggest that the light of Christ in some sense lightens every person[124] whether Christ is outwardly known or not, and that there are those whose deeds have already “been wrought in God” prior to their coming to the light.[125] Thus God’s grace may extend to persons outside the perimeter of overt gospel proclamation.[126]

Again, on the matter of human decision it is important to recognize that vast numbers of people turn from the light of Christ because of their preference for darkness. John 3 also states, “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (v. 19 KJV). This preference for darkness is seen throughout Jesus’ ministry when many people turned against Him who is “the light of the world” (John 8:12). Figuratively speaking, they scurried away into the darkness so they could carry on their evil deeds.

Let us ponder this in terms of the final state of the lost. We have earlier noted that one description of this state is “outer darkness.” Also, in several instances the picture is that of being thrown, or cast, into this darkness.

However, the point now to reckon with is that for the lost this is not a new state; *it is rather a continuance in the state they are already in.*[127] To be sure, the condition will become still darker (recall “black darkness”), but it will not be a radical change or even necessarily a condition undesirable to the lost. If people have loved darkness rather than light in the present world, this will hardly change in the world to come. No matter how severe the biblical imagery of darkness, fire, and the weeping and gnashing of teeth, such a condition would be preferable to having to live in the presence of a holy God, holy angels, and holy

people.

Strangely enough, hell may be viewed not only as the result of God's holy judgment upon the unsaved, but also as the consequence of His love and mercy. At the beginning of human history God "drove out" (Gen. 3:24) Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden because of their sin. It was an act of God's holiness that punished them with permanent exclusion from His presence. But beyond that, God's mercy was manifest in their exclusion. If man and woman had stayed in Eden, life would have been intolerable—always fleeing from the presence of God, always living in fear and shame. So God let them go—and their "hell" on earth (with drudgery and pain) was more bearable than life in the paradise of God. It follows that hell with all its misery will be less torment for still sinful persons than to have to live eternally in the presence of a holy God and of those who are continually praising His Name.

This may speak further to the relationship between God's holiness and His love. Some object that although the eternal continuance of hell may indeed represent God's holy vengeance against the vastness of evil, it seems to contradict His eternal love and compassion. To reply: a loving and merciful God will never force people into a heaven for which they are totally unfit. He would rather let them go into their own proper habitation. The punishment of hell, whatever its measure, will be far less than the punishment of being in the courts of heaven; the fire of Gehenna far more tolerable than the brilliance of God's face; the outer darkness of the nether world infinitely more bearable than the splendor of heaven's glory. Yes, in the midst of God's holiness His mercy will ever shine forth.

A final word about the love of God. We must always remember that God loves so vastly that in Christ He has already suffered the eternal punishment that is mankind's due, with its terrible darkness, its fiery pain and agony. Christ on the cross stripped and beaten, darkness enshrouding the awesome scene, the agonizing cry of "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—all of this represents something of the terrifying reality of what God has endured. Verily, Christ "bore in his soul the tortures of condemned and ruined man."[128] Hell is no reality foreign to God: in Christ He has already experienced the worst that any person will ever have to endure. This truly is love beyond all comprehension.

[1]According to the Apostles' Creed, "He shall come to judge the quick and the dead." It is to this purpose that we now turn.

[2]"Great" points to power and majesty; "white," to holiness and purity-thus the rendering of judgment by the Almighty and All-Holy One.

[3]Earlier Jesus had said, “The Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done” (Matt. 16:27). Christ’s coming will be glorious and, likewise, it will be His throne of judgment.

[4]There are many Old Testament references to God as the Judge, beginning with Genesis 18:25: “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

[5]Hence, while it is true that in Revelation 14:7 “the hour of his judgment” simply mentions God, the “great white throne” scene depicted in Revelation 20:11, while not so stating it, suggests Christ. Note, e.g., the use of “white” in relation to Christ in earlier passages: Christ seated on “a white cloud” (14:14) and coming on “a white horse” (19:11). Some commentators hold, because of such a statement as “to him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb” (5:13; cf. 6:16; 7:10)-differentiating the occupant of the throne from Christ-as well as such a declaration (quoted above) as “Fear God and give him the glory, for the hour of his judgment has come,” that “him who sat upon” the “great white throne” must also be God (the Father). I am inclined, however, not only for the reason mentioned (i.e., the use of “white”) but also by virtue of both the overall analogy of Scripture (e.g., it is “the Son of man” on “his glorious throne” in Matthew) and the wider picture in the Book of Revelation to view this Judge as Christ. For example, on the latter point, early in Revelation the throne of the Father is said by Christ to be occupied also by Him: “I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne” (3:21). Since it is clearly Christ who will come to destroy all evil forces in Revelation 19, it follows that He will most likely occupy the throne of judgment, the event described immediately following.

[6]Although Jesus is not here referring to the final judgment, His words would surely, indeed supremely, apply to that event. Incidentally, these words of Jesus show that both He and the Father occupy the throne of judgment. This is set forth symbolically, I would suggest, in Revelation by the language of Christ’s also sitting on the Father’s throne.

[7]The Gospel of John emphasizes that Jesus “did not come to judge the world but to save the world” (12:47; cf. 3:17 [nasb]). However, Jesus does add, “He who rejects me, and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word I have spoken will be his judge on the last day” (12:48). (See later discussion about the place of “the word” in the judgment of “the last day.”)

[8]Literally, “son of man” or “a son of man.” A literal translation all the more

would stress His humanity. The translation “a son of man” is not unlike Paul’s language that “God … will judge the world in righteousness by a man …” (quoted supra).

[9]The role of believers in judging with Christ will be discussed later.

[10]The Greek phrase is thronou doxes autou, literally “the throne of his glory.”

[11]Recall that among the phenomena heralding “the day of the Lord,” hence Christ’s return, which the Book of Revelation earlier portrays, are these: “The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places” (6:14 nasb). The Grand Assize of Christ results in still further movement of earth and sky: not simply “split apart” and “moved out of their places,” but they will have totally “fled away” with “no place” at all for them!

[12]The Greek word here and in the next reference, 2 Peter 2:4, is zophon-“the Darkness of the nether regions” (BAGD).

[13]The Greek word for “cast into hell” is tartardsas. Tartarus was “thought of by the Greeks as a subterranean place lower than Hades where divine punishment was meted out, [and] was so regarded in Jewish apocalyptic as well” (BAGD). The “abode of the wicked dead … answers to the Gehenna of the Jews” (Thayer).

[14]It is most likely that their sin and fall corresponds to that of Satan. However, there is no firm biblical reference to such.

[15]Ethne may also be translated “people,” hence “all the people.” “All the people” (Matt. 25:32) accordingly equals “every man” (Matt. 16:27).

[16]The error is sometimes made of assuming a separate judgment of the nations over against mankind in general. However, the two above texts in Matthew as well as Scriptures elsewhere make no such distinction.

[17]In Revelation believers are several times described as those whose names have been written in “the book of life.” One “who conquers shall be clad thus in white garments, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life” (3:5); “the beast” is given authority over “every one whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain” (13:8); and “the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will marvel to behold the beast” (17:8).

[18]Accordingly, one cannot view this scene as the judgment of the unbelieving or unrighteous dead only. The statement that “the dead were

judged from the things which were written in the books" is sometimes held to signify only the unbelieving dead by claiming that "the books" are other than "the book of life," hence only the unbelieving or unrighteous are in the scene. However, there is no reason why "the books" do not include "the book of life;" hence both unrighteous and righteous are judged. Indeed, if nothing else, the final statement that "if anyone's name [literally, if anyone'] was not found written in the book of life …" makes unambiguously clear that both the lost and the saved are present. The "not found written" presupposes the other category of persons at the judgment.

[19]Literally, "the men," that is, "the good man" and "the evil man" of verse 35.

[20]It is invariably "the day of judgment," never "days." Hence, the idea sometimes entertained that believers will have a prior judgment is out of the question. There is only one final occasion of judgment-as described in Matthew 25 and Revelation 20-at which all are present.

[21]Hades is here "the abode of the unrighteous dead" (Mounce, The Book of Revelation, 366). Jeremias speaks of a "twofold use of "8175 in the NT." It may refer to "the place of all the souls of the dead until the resurrection (Ac. 2:27, 31), whereas in others it denotes the place only of the souls of the ungodly (Lk. 16:23) or non-Christians (Rev. 20:13f.)" (TDNT 1:149). In Revelation 20, reference is definitely to non-Christians.

[22]In Daniel it is not clear that all the dead will "awake," since the term used is "multitudes," or "many." Christ makes it quite clear: "all" (see next paragraph in the text).

[23]The Greek phrase is anastasin kriseos. This is translated "resurrection of judgment" in rsv and nasb. "Judgment" however may mislead, since it can suggest simply a resurrection for judgment, one way or the other, to be given. Krisis may indeed mean simply "judgment," but it can also carry the further meaning of "condemnation" (or "damnation" [kjv]). According to BAGD, "the word [krisis] often means judgment that goes against a person, condemnation, and the punishment that follows," (hence, again, "damnation"). Thus the best translation also for John 3:17-18 is not to use the neutral "judge" but "condemn" (or even "damn"!): "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn [krine] the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned [krinetai]; but he that belie veth not is condemned [kekritai] already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only

begotten Son of God" (kjv). (It is interesting that here rsv has "condemned" rather than "judged," whereas nasb stays with "judged.")

[24]The Greek word is krisin. Again, it could be translated "damnation." "Judgment" (rsv, nasb, neb) is misleading (niv fortunately has "condemned" - "will not be condemned").

[25]The Greek word is basanois-plural, hence "torments" (as kjv).

[26]It is sometimes said that since this is a parabolic story, it should not be pressed into the service of doctrine. Perhaps, it may be suggested, the grimness of the account is only to make Jesus' later point that even if someone, informed about the torment to come, should proclaim repentance before it is too late, it would do no good (vv. 27-31). However, even though Jesus does build up to that point, there is little room to suppose that He was not serious about the lot of a person at death. Indeed, Jesus speaks many times about the perils of walking in the path that leads to destruction.

[27]Literally, "being punished," the Greek word is kolazomenous. The niv translates the statement above in this way: "to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment."

[28]The Greek word is eis.

[29]Hence, as W. E. Cox puts it, "the judgment will not be for the purpose of determining men's destinies, but merely to manifest them" (Biblical Studies in Final Things, 148).

[30]The Greek word is eritheias. "Factious" or "contentious" (kjv) is possible; however, the further meaning of eritheias as "selfishness, selfish ambition" (BAGD) seems better to suit Paul's emphasis. The niv has "self-seeking"; nasb, "selfishly ambitious"; neb, "governed by selfish ambition."

[31]The Greek word is boulas; "motives" (nasb, niv); "inward motives" (neb); "counsels" (kjv).

[32]Or "going before." The Greek word is proagousai.

[33]Or "follow after." The Greek word is epakolouthousin.

[34]We may recall the fears of the Roman governor Felix as Paul spoke to him: "As he [Paul] was discussing righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened" (Acts 24:25 nasb). It was talk of the coming judgment and doubtless a realization of his own lack of genuine "righteousness" and "self-control" that alarmed Felix.

[35]These words were spoken by Jesus to His disciples in the context of a

warning concerning the “leaven of the Pharisees” (v. 1), and are not therefore directly words concerning the day of judgment. However, they point in that direction, as does much else in the same discourse (see especially vv. 5, 8).

[36]The Greek word is argon-usually translated “idle” (as in kjv). However, “careless” (rsv, nasb, niv)-even “thoughtless” (neb)-seems better to suit the context of not “speaking good” (v. 34). “Useless” (nasb mg.) is another possibility.

[37]Substituting “out of’ (as in neb) for “by” (rsv and others). “Out of’ (for ek) seems preferable in light of verses 34 and 35 where ek three times is translated in all versions as “out of.”

[38]“The good man out of his good treasure [i.e., the good heart] brings forth good [i.e., good words], and the evil man out of his evil treasure [i.e., the evil heart] brings forth evil [i.e., evil or careless words]” (Matt. 12:35). These words of Jesus immediately follow His statement that “out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.”

[39]The realization of the coming manifestation of all sin at the final judgment should also serve as an incentive to live purer lives now. For even though all sins will be manifest as forgiven, we should be challenged now not to add to their number. Anthony A. Hoekema puts it thus: “Believers have nothing to fear from the judgment-though the realization that they will have to give an account of everything they have done, said, and thought should be for them a constant incentive to diligent fighting against sin, conscientious Christian service, and consecrated living” (The Bible and the Future, 259).

[40]This is the profound meaning of the statement of our Lord when He said, “He who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life; he does not come into krisin [the judgment that condemns] but has passed from death to life.”

[41]The Greek word is misthos. “Recompense” or “reward” (kjv, niv, nasb) may refer to either blessing or punishment, though the former is more common in the New Testament. It is apparent in this verse that both are referred to. The background seems to be Isaiah 40:10: “Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him” (cf. 62:11; Jer. 17:10).

[42]The sentence concludes, “And for destroying those who destroy the earth.”

[43]It is noteworthy that in Revelation 11:18 “the prophets” are particularly

called God's "servants." Perhaps they are viewed in the text as especially being among the "great."

[44]Of course all true believers equally share in salvation: it is "a great salvation" (Heb. 2:3) for all!

[45]Matthew 5:12, 46; 6:1, 2, 4-6, 16, 18. Incidentally, Jesus makes it clear that the true disciple does not seek a reward or work for one, but it is God's blessing on those who live without display and in faithful obedience.

[46]Recall also Revelation 11:18, where, in speaking of giving rewards, the elders mentioned "the prophets" before "the saints" (the "righteous man" of Matthew 10?). If we view Revelation 11:18 from the perspective of Matthew 10:41, the prophets with their reward would seem to be in a unique, perhaps higher, category than "righteous" persons in general. (A higher category for the prophets was intimated in note 43 about "the prophets" and "the great.")

[47]That this reward refers to the time of the future advent of Christ is apparent from verse 37: "For yet a little while, and the coming one shall come and shall not tarry."

[48]Or "minas." A mina was worth approximately three months' wages of the ordinary laborer.

[49]In the similar parable of the "talents" of money (Matt. 25:14-30), the servants were given differing amounts (in the parable of the "pounds" each was given the same)-five, two, and one. The first two servants who doubled their amount-to ten and four talents respectively-were rewarded equally: each being "set over much." Hence the stress here lies on faithfulness to the amount entrusted, with the rewards the same. So, unlike the parable of the "pounds," the parable of "talents" is not about varying rewards. However- I would add-the parable does end quite similarly, in that the servant who had hidden his one talent had it taken away and given to the servant who now had ten talents. So in that sense there is reward. Also note the similar words of Jesus: "For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away" (v. 29).

Another parable of faithfulness, found in Matthew 24:45-51, is that of the servant who was set over his master's household. At the master's return he was found faithfully engaged in his responsibilities. Says Jesus, "Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions" (vv.

46-47). Thus the reward will be great.

[50]I 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 Paul refers to the believer who is engaged in the work of building (through teaching and other various forms of ministry) and warns against an inadequate building structure. Broadly speaking, Paul's words apply to all believers and the danger of false building or superficial works.

[51]A literal translation, namely, "of what sort each man's work is," may better convey the idea of whether the fire will find "gold, silver, precious stones" or "wood, hay, straw"- that is, "of what sort" it is.

[52]"As one escaping through the flames" (niv). This translation vividly suggests the picture of a person in a burning house losing all his possessions, escaping with nothing but himself and, even that, "through the flames."

[53]Recall Ephesians 2:10: "good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

[54]The Greek word is anektoteron, "bearable" (niv, neb).

[55]Or "scribes" and "Pharisees." Cf., e.g., Matthew 23:5-7, which is addressed to "the scribes and the Pharisees" (v. 2) and contains some of the same language.

[56]Jesus makes their destination clear in these words: "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?" (Matt. 23:33).

[57]Literally, "his lot." The Greek word is meros. Cf. Revelation 21:8: "as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot [meros] shall be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

[58]The context shows that Paul is clearly referring to the Old Testament Law, since Jew and Greek are being compared (see Rom. 2:9-10). The nasb here capitalizes "law" as "Law," which, though not in the Greek, is proper. The neb therefore takes the liberty of translating nomos, "law," as "the Law of Moses."

[59]Literally, "bearing witness with" (symmartyrouses). Conscience, accordingly, is "fellow witness."

[60]Or "also"; Greek: kai.

[61]The NEB has an interesting translation of the latter part of verse 15: "Their conscience is called as witness, and their own thoughts argue the case on either side, against them or even for them."

[62]There are, of course, innumerable societal laws, and doubtless many bear a significant relationship to the inward law of conscience; however, such societal laws (however described) are not "the oracles of God."

[63]Of course, I am not speaking here about salvation. No one will be saved by law- Gentile or Jew (or Christian, as I will discuss later). In Paul's words, "No human being will be justified in his [God's] sight by works of the law" (Rom. 3:20). Justification is one thing, judgment another; for although works (the law) cannot save, they are the measure of the judgment that will someday be given.

[64]In the preceding statement Jesus said, "I did not come to judge [or 'condemn'] the world, but to save the world" (v. 47). Thus He is speaking to the world at large.

[65]We may recall in the picture in Revelation, as Christ sits to judge at the Last Judgment, that from His presence "earth and heaven fled away" (20:11 nasb). After this the judgment of the dead occurs. Hence, although heaven and earth pass away, or flee away, Christ's words endure.

[66]For example, the words of Christ about the sheep and the goats and how they are judged by deeds of love (for the hungry, the sick, the imprisoned) will carry all the more weight because of His deeds. In Himself Christ was the perfect embodiment of all that He said, and it is this fact that will put the world all thp more under judgment.

[67]If it is true that even now "before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13), how much more will that be fulfilled on the final day of judgment.

[68]See earlier secion "The Judge," pages 445-47.

[69]Recall Matthew 10:32: "So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father."

[70]See note 5.

[71]At their death or translation. See supra.

[72]I.e., before the coming day of judgment and punishment (see nasb mg.).

[73]Many standing there will also have experienced the coming of Christ in "flaming fire" (recall 2 Thess. 1:7) in their destruction; now raised from the dead, they will be facing the same Holy One again.

[74]Daniel writes, "As I looked, thrones were placed and one that was ancient of days [or 'the Ancient of Days'] took his seat, his raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool [cf. Rev. 1:14]; his throne was fiery flames … a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand

times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened" (7:9-10). In this depiction of the day of judgment, angels-myriads of them-are shown to be present. But when it comes to judgment, this "was given to the saints" (v. 22 kjv). The angels serve and stand before "the Ancient of Days," but it is the court (i.e., the saints) that sits in judgment. Possibly "the thrones" that "were placed" likewise refers to the saints (see the earlier discussion of "throne" and "thrones").

[75]Hebrews 2:7 contains the words freely quoted from Psalm 8: "Thou didst make him [man] for a little while lower than the angels." If "a little while" *(brachu ti*)—as found in RSV, NASB, and NEB (also NIV mg.)—is the proper translation (both Thayer and BAGD concur that it is), then it is quite likely that the "little while" will end with the resurrection and glorification of the saints.

[76]In Hebrews 1:14 angels are called "spirits" (pneumata).

[77]Jesus speaks of "the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). The Devil is the head of the evil angels and therefore quite possibly led them in the rebellion in which they "did not keep their own domain" (Jude 6 nasb). It is that same spirit of pride and rebellion that entered into the human race at the beginning through Satan.

[78]Or "condemnation" (as in kjv). The Greek word again is krisis (see earlier footnote discussion). The "judgment" accordingly is a judgment to condemnation.

[79]Jesus declares in another place: "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12).

[80]See note 78.

[81]This does not mean that Christ's coming was only to make evil and good manifest. If that were the case, there would be no salvation: the dark would remain dark and the light light. Rather, those who through faith in Christ (John 3:16-18 precedes John 3:19-21!) come to the light are those who enter into eternal life; they thereby become "sons of light" (cf. John 12:36).

[82]Friedrich Schiller's words come to mind: "The history of the world is the judgment of the world." Not, I would submit, that history is the judge, but that throughout all history judgment is occurring.

[83]Of course, I speak from the human perspective. God fully knows those who are His own.

[84]Krind means primarily to "separate, distinguish" (BAGD). Krisis, usually translated "judgment" or "condemnation" (supra), may also convey the

note of separation. According to BAGD, krisis in John 3:19 “has in addition to the senses ‘judgment’ and ‘condemnation’ the clear connotation of ‘separation, division.’ “

[85]“Just as the resurrection puts an end to death, so judgment terminates the state of confusion and anxiety, of inconclusiveness … if there is no judgment, it means that God does not take his own will seriously” (Emil Brunner, Eternal Hope, 175).

[86]Popular thinking today seems to move between these two: either that there is nothing to fear after death because a person ceases to be, or that everything will be fine, even beauty and peace. In regard to the latter, one is reminded of many popular accounts today of presumed “after-death” experiences in which the spirit is said to hover for a time over the dead body, and after that-so some claim-goes through a dark tunnel but into light beyond that. Such illusions-for they are that-need to be done away in view of such scripture as we find in Hebrews 9:27: “It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment.”

[87]This was surely emphasized in the early church. As James Denney has well said, “It is impossible to overestimate the power of the final judgment, as a motive, in the primitive church” (Studies in Theology, 240-41).

[88]The Greek word is kataphroneis-“think lightly of’ (nasb, neb), “show contempt for” (niv), “despise” (kjv).

[89]Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matt. 5:6 kjv).

[90]In the Heidelberg Catechism one of the questions (Q. 52) is, “What comfort does the return of Christ 4to judge the living and the dead’ give you?” The answer: “That in all affliction and persecution I may wait with head held high the very Judge from heaven who has already submitted himself to the judgment of God for me and has removed all the curse from me; that he will cast all his enemies and mine into everlasting condemnation, but he shall take me, together with all his elect, to himself into heavenly joy and glory.” This statement of over four hundred years ago well sums up some of the things said above, even if somewhat quaintly phrased!

[91]The language of Hebrews 10:27 relating to the believer.

[92]The Greek word is exôteron. BAGD translates it as “farthest, extreme,” hence in relation to darkness, “the darkness farthest out.”

[93]Or “black darkness” (nasb), “blackest darkness” (niv, neb). According to BAGD, in connection with Greek thought, “the Darkness of the nether regions.”

[94]See the discussion of the holy city in the next chapter.

[95]The Greek word is kynes, literally “dogs”; however, according to Thayer, kyön metaphorically is “a man of impure mind.” Another possible meaning is “sodomites.”

[96]The Greek word is geenna, often translated “gehenna” (Gehenna). The word geenna occurs twelve times in the New Testament, all except one (in James 3:6) being on the lips of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. Gehenna originally was the rubbish pit outside Jerusalem that was always burning, hence “the gehenna of fire.” Thus it came to symbolize the final state of the unrighteous. Indeed, the word geenna may stand alone, without fire, as in some later statements of Jesus in Matthew 5:29-30 that speak of the “whole body” being “thrown into hell” or going “into hell.”

[97]Recall also picture of the callous rich man described by Jesus as “in Hades, being in torment.” “Hades” here signifies the intermediate condition of the unrighteous, whereas Gehenna invariably points to the final state. Nonetheless, whether after death or the final judgment, “torment” is the lot.

[98]See note 96.

[99]In regard to “outer darkness,” recall Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30. Regarding “fire,” recall Matthew 13:42, 50.

[100]Calvin writes, “Because no description can deal adequately with the gravity of God’s vengeance against the wicked, their torments and tortures are figuratively expressed to us by physical things, that is, by darkness, weeping, and gnashing of teeth … unquenchable fire, an undying worm gnawing at the heart. By such expressions the Holy Spirit certainly intended to confound all our senses with dread. … So we ought especially to fix our thoughts upon this: how wretched it is to be cut off from all fellowship with God” (Institutes of the Christian Religion, 3.25.12, Battles trans.).

[101]Luke 12:48 (niv). Recall our earlier discussion on pages 457-58.

[102]The Greek word is aionion. The kjv translates the first aionion as “everlasting” and the second as “eternal.” This may unfortunately give the impression that there is some kind of temporal difference between the two final states.

[103]The kjv, rsv, niv, and nasb have “destruction.” The Greek word is olethron. Thayer defines it as “ruin, destruction, death,” then adds in relation to 2 Thessalonians 1:9: “the loss of a life of blessedness after death, future misery.” Olethron therefore is better translated “ruin” or “ruination” rather than “destruction,” which too readily suggests annihilation. “Eternal annihilation” is obviously self-contradictory.

[104]The rsv reads “and exclusion from”; niv, “shut out from”; nasb, “away from”; kjv, “from.” The Greek text simply has the word apo, “from”; however, the text does not mean that eternal ruin comes from the Lord (as kjv may suggest) but away from (cut off from, etc.).

[105]“Him” refers to God. Accordingly, nasb capitalizes it.

[106]The Greek word is apolesai, from apollymi.

[107]Thayer, in relation to Matthew 10:28, so defines apollymi: “metaphorically, to devote or give over to eternal misery.”

[108]H. R. Ridderbos, Matthew, 206. Ridderbos points out that “the words ‘destroy in hell’ do not mean annihilate,” for “if they did, the word ‘kill’ in the first part of the verse would simply have been repeated” (p. 206).

[109]E.g., the verb apollymi is used in Matthew 9:17 where Jesus says, “Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; if it is, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed” (apollyntai). The wineskins surely are not annihilated. The niv and nasb translation of apollyntai in Matthew 9:17 as “ruined” makes this much clearer. According to W. E. Vine, after stating that apollymi “signifies to destroy utterly,” adds, “The idea is not extinction but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well-being” (Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, 1:302). Robert A. Morey writes, “In every instance where the word appollymi is found in the New Testament, something other than annihilation is being described” (Death and the Afterlife, 90). It might also be pointed out that in Luke 12:5, the parallel passage to Matthew 10:28, the word apollymi is not used at all; rather, the language is “to cast into [embalein] hell.”

[110]One form of annihilation is known as “conditional immortality.” This view is that immortality will be granted only to those who believe in Christ; all others pass out of existence at death. Annihilationism proper, on the other hand, affirms the natural immortality of human beings, but declares that God will obliterate the unrighteous following the day of judgment and possibly after some time of punishment. Practically speaking, the two views end in the same result: there will be no eternal state of the lost.

Annihilationism is affirmed particularly by Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists. A strong defense of annihilationism (designated as "conditionalism") may be found in E. W. Fudge, The Fire That Consumes. Some noted evangelicals have lately begun to favor some form of annihilationism. John Stott, for example, after exploring a number of relevant Scriptures, writes, "I … believe that the ultimate annihilation of the wicked should at least be accepted as a legitimate, biblically founded alternative to their eternal conscious torment" (David L. Edwards, Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal Evangelical Dialogue, with a Response from John Stott, 320). Philip E. Hughes speaks of "the abyss of obliteration" into which the wicked will plunge (The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ, 407). However, as much as one might like it to be so, neither annihilation nor obliteration is a biblical concept. For a careful study and refutation of annihilationism, see Morey, Death and the Afterlife, especially chapter 8, "Annihilationism." Some valuable brief comments contra annihilationism by J. I. Packer may be found in Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry, eds., Evangelical Affirmations, 123-26.

[111]For example, the Westminster Confession of Faith declares that, following the Last Judgment, "the wicked, who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (chap. 33, "Of the Last Judgment").

[112]Chapter 12.

[113]See earlier neb translation of 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9.

[114]This also excludes any idea of a "second chance" to hear the gospel and be saved. See J. M. Frame, "Second Chance," in the Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, 991-92.

[115]Universalism is particularly represented on the American church scene by the Unitarian Universalist Association (formed in 1961 by a merger of the Universalist Church of America and the American Unitarian Association). The first Universalist congregation was organized in 1779 in New England by a former Methodist preacher and grew in strength among liberal Congregational clergy. In 1803 Universalists adopted the Winchester Profession of Belief. Since then American universalism has become increasingly liberal in its view of Christ, its approach to other religions, and its close approximation to secular humanism.

[116]The words quoted in Acts 3:21 regarding the future "restoration"

[apokatastaseos] of all things have occasionally been regarded as including the universal salvation of mankind. Origen, an early church father, held that the apokatastasis included not only mankind but also Satan and his angels! Origen's view of restoration, later condemned by the church at large, has continued in various ways to be represented in universalism. (On apokatastasis, see EDT, 87.)

[117]J. J. Muller summarizes Philippians 2:10-11 thus: "Angels and demons, the living and the dead, the saved and the lost will acknowledge Him as Lord, will recognize His Lordship, and confess that he is Lord even as God Himself' (Epistles of Paul to the Philippians and to Philemon, NICNT, 897).

[118]For more detail see "God Is Holy," *Renewal Theology*, 1:59–63.

[119]See Renewal Theology, 1:63 -68.

[120]The Greek word is apoletai, again from apollymi (see earlier notes 106-7, 109).

[121]Thayer, in connection with John 3:16, so defines apollymi.

[122]See Renewal Theology, 1:68-70.

[123]The Greek word is apeithôn (participle), translated "does not obey" in rsv and nasb. However, the niv rendering above is more likely. Thayer, in connection with John 3:36, translates apeithôn as "to refuse or withhold belief." The word "rejects" expresses this well.

[124]F. F. Bruce writes that "whatever measure of truth men and women in all ages have apprehended has been derived from this source" (The Gospel of John, 35).

[125]On this latter point recall the Roman centurion Cornelius, described as "a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms liberally to the people, and prayed constantly to God" (Acts 10:2), to whom Peter said, "I perceive that… in every nation any one who fears him [God] and does what is right is acceptable to him" (vv. 34-35), and afterward proclaimed the message of salvation (vv. 36-43). The centurion's prior deeds had clearly been "wrought in God."

[126]I am aware of the possible hazards in such a statement, for it might seem to lessen the urgency of proclaiming Christ Himself as the only hope of salvation. However, on the other hand to state bluntly that the countless numbers of people who have never heard the gospel verbally are all consigned to hell seems to go beyond the New Testament message. I am, of course, not speaking here of anything like universal salvation, but

rather of the possibility of God's grace in Christ reaching beyond the actual gospel proclamation. That this may be the case should not lessen the urgency of proclaiming the gospel, for not only are many far from the light but some who are doing "what is true" are all the more eager to come to the light of Christ when they hear the gospel!

[127]C. S. Lewis writes that a "bad man's perdition" should not be viewed "as a sentence imposed on him but as the mere fact of being what he is" (*The Problem of Pain*, 123).

[128]Words of Calvin (Institutes, 2,16.10, Beveridge trans.).

15
The Consummation

We move, finally, into a consideration of the consummation of all things. The topics will be, in turn, the renovation of the world, the fulfillment of the kingdom, and eternal life.

I. THE RENOVATION OF THE WORLD

The primary observation about the consummation is that there will be a *new world.* This is portrayed most vividly at the opening of Revelation 21: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.” The vision that unfolds follows the judgment scene and the casting of all evil into “the lake of fire,” or “the second death” in Revelation 20. It will be a new heaven and earth, hence a new world, that will succeed the old. Similarly Peter speaks of “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13). Thus the world to come will be both a renewed and a purified reality.

Let us look back for a moment to the Old Testament. The opening verse in Genesis refers to the original world: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” And step by step this marvelous event of creation is described (Gen. 1:1–2:4). However, for all their substantiality, the heavens and earth, as originally made, will not last forever. In the words of the psalmist: “Of old thou didst found the earth; And the heavens are the work of Thy hands. Even they will perish, but Thou dost endure; And all of them will wear out like a garment; Like clothing Thou wilt change them, and they will be changed” (102:25–26 NASB).[1] Isaiah prophesies similarly, “Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment” (51:6). The latter example has an additional sense of this being related to salvation, for the passage continues, “And they who dwell in it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be for ever.” Still further in Isaiah are these striking words: “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind” (65:17). This extraordinary verse may well serve as the best link between Genesis 1 and Revelation 21—the passing from the old creation to the new heaven and earth.

A vivid picture of *how* this transition will occur is set forth in 2 Peter. Prior to the words about “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” are a number of statements describing the present world as undergoing dissolution. First, there is reference to the original creation “by the word”: “By the word of God heavens existed long ago, and an earth formed out of water and by means of water”; and later at the time of the Flood, “the world that then

existed was deluged with water and perished" (3:5–6). Similarly, Peter says, "By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (v. 7 NIV). What is to happen will occur at "the day of the Lord":[2] "The day of the Lord will come like a thief,[3] and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise,[4] and the elements[5] will be dissolved[6] with fire,[7] and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up" (v. 10).[8] Peter adds that "all these things [the heavens, the elements, the earth] are thus to be dissolved," and repeats that "the heavens will be kindled and dissolved and the elements will melt with fire [or 'intense heat'[9]]"[10] (vv. 11–12).

The basic motif in this description is not annihilation of the heavens and the earth but dissolution,[11] albeit total, so that in the consuming of everything by fire there will be the transformation[12] into the "new[13] heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (v. 13). Hence, a total renovation will occur both in terms of a new form for the present world and righteousness dwelling in it.

However, this does not mean that the new heaven and earth will be totally different from the present order. The form, to be sure, will be new,[14] and all evil that has permeated its existence will be radically done away with. But the essence, the substance, will be the same. There will still be heavens and earth, even if the old has "passed away"[15] —as Revelation 21 depicts. Thus it will not be the creation of heavens and earth as to their essential reality but as to their form, their mode of existence.[16]

Here we may ask whether there can be any connection between the fiery dissolution depicted in Peter's letter and the increasing technological possibility of worldwide conflagration. Is this holocaust to be viewed as a climactic result of the splitting of the atom and a nuclear chain reaction that would engulf the world in fire?[17] The "elements dissolved with fire" might seem to suggest that. However, the picture in 2 Peter goes far beyond any human capability in terms both of the power to execute and of the results attained. For it will be a *total* dissolution—the heavens themselves, the elements, the earth and the works upon it—which surely seems to go beyond man's utmost capacity. Indeed, according to Scripture, it will be accomplished by Almighty God Himself, by the word of His power. Since by the "word," says Peter, "the present heavens … are reserved for fire," it will be by that same word—the word of God, the word of Power—that the dissolution of the world will be brought about. But also—and this utterly transcends any human possibility—since the dissolution does not end with annihilation but with transformation, it must totally be of God. Man might

destroy much of the old; but no man, no nation, no power on earth can bring about “a new heaven and a new earth”!

Now let us consider the *timing* of this transition from the old to the new creation. It seems that it will occur just following the Last Judgment. John in his vision saw the Majestic One sitting upon His throne in preparation for judgment, and “from his presence earth and sky [or ‘heaven’][18] fled away, and no place was found for them” (Rev. 20:11). This may not only signify the vast awesomeness of the scene,[19] but also that the Last Judgment cannot be localized at any one place and that this is the next to last stage in the transition to the new.[20] On the latter point, the Book of Revelation early depicts a vast shaking and moving of heaven (or sky) and earth (6:14), and now a fleeing away with no place to be (20:11), hence, quite possibly, the next to last stage before total dissolution occurs. It seems likely that this dissolution will occur after the judgment, in view of the fact that the next scene is that of “a new heaven and a new earth” (21:1). Also the succeeding words are “for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.”[21] The “passing away” (final stage)—which is more than “fleeing away”—would correspond to the “passing away”[22] in 2 Peter 3:10, which, as noted, occurs “with a loud noise” and “by fire.” Thus between Revelation 20 and 21, it would follow, is the fiery transition described in 2 Peter.[23]

Now let us reflect upon another question: not how or when this transition will happen, but *why*—surely this is far more important. At least three answers may be given.

The first relates to the fact that the present world is *aging.* In some scriptural words already noted, the heavens and earth will “wear out like a garment”; hence there will be the need for a change of “clothing.” Like the human body that wears out no matter how healthy it is now, so also the heavens and the earth will wear out. To be sure, their life is vastly longer than man’s few years, but eventually they will wear out and need to be changed. This fact we may seldom reflect upon because of the great age of the world and its seeming unending continuance. Still there may come a time when even the world will grow old, and, like everything finite and creaturely, it will simply wear out. Hence, a change will be much in order.

A second answer relates to the fact that the world itself is in bondage to *corruption.* With the sin and fall of man, nature came under a curse: “Cursed is the ground because of you” (Gen. 3:17). In the language of Paul, “The creation[24] was subjected to futility,[25] not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to

corruption[26] into the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:20–21 NASB). Creation, for all its outward vitality and beauty, lies under the curse of man's evil. His sin has infected all,[27] so that creation is dominated by "thorns and thistles" (Gen. 3:18), by "nature red in tooth and claw." Even though man may cultivate and domesticate, creation still is basically intractable and constantly ready to revert to its "fallen" state of corruption. Thus creation has lost its original, pristine significance—it has been "subjected to futility" and frustration—and lies in bondage to corruption. But this will not be forever: there is hope (God-given) of a future glorious freedom, which will accompany the finally liberated children of God!

Let us continue with Paul as he states the background of his words about creation: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory[28] that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18). This glory, of course, refers to the glory that will be revealed at the return of Christ and in the age to come. Immediately following the statement just quoted are these extraordinary words: "For the anxious longing[29] of the creation waits eagerly[30] for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility…" (v. 19–20 NASB). Along with this anxious longing and eager waiting there is a deep inner agony. "We know," Paul later adds, "that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now" (v. 22). Thus creation yearns for that coming day of liberation from bondage, which will occur at the revealing of the sons of God, that is, when at the consummation those who belong to Christ are made manifest.

I referred earlier to Isaiah 65:17: "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind." Several verses later is this memorable statement: " 'The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,' says the LORD" (v. 25). In this idyllic picture of the new world, the corruption of the animal world is done away, and creation is at peace. In a related pas sage in Isaiah, following the language about the One who will "smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips … slay the wicked"[31] (11:4), there is an even fuller picture of nature at peace: not only wolf with lamb but also leopard with kid, lion with calf, bear with cow, asp with small child. The climax: "They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (v. 9). Here indeed is a glorious picture of the new world with all the fierceness and wildness of nature at last done away, and the knowledge of God filling all the earth![32]

One further picture in Isaiah may be mentioned. Isaiah 34 is largely a portrayal of the destruction of the evil world. All the people of the nations will be slain: "He will totally destroy them" (v. 2 NIV), and the heavens will collapse: "All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall…" (v. 4 NIV). This is the Lord's "day of vengeance" (v. 8). In chapter 35 a beautiful scene follows: "The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom … water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert" (vv. 1, 6 NIV). Hence, not only will the ferociousness of wild beasts be no more, but also the recalcitrance of the earth will be transformed into the glory of a new world.[33] This actually means, then, the redemption of creation, which—I may now add—corresponds to the redemption of our bodies. Following his statement about the whole creation's groaning and travailing together, Paul writes, "And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23 NASB). Since "the redemption of our body" refers to our bodies' being redeemed from corruption and decay, and since this will not occur until the Day of the Lord—the same day when the old heavens and earth are consumed to make way for the new—it is apparent that even as we receive new bodies, so will all creation become new. Thus creation, at last free from corruption and decay, will enter into "the freedom of the glory of the children of God."[34]

A third answer to the question of why there will be a new heaven and earth relates to the fact that this will be a proper dwelling for the *new humanity.* Since those who belong to Christ will have been transformed in their bodies, and so entered a new dimension of spiritual corporeality, they will be able to function better in a realm more suited to their new mode of existence. The new humanity will have transcended the old spatio-temporal order of existence (even as Christ did in His resurrection appearances) and hence will need a higher, and different, arena of activity. So it is that the new heaven and the new earth will provide the appropriate setting for the age to come.

It is important to recognize that the new world will no more be a purely spiritual realm than will humanity's existence be purely spiritual. To be sure, until the day of resurrection and translation, all believers who have died are present only as spirits in heaven. But because on the day of Christ's return all believers, both living and dead, will have been given spiritual bodies, their future appropriately lies in a spiritual/corporeal realm. And God will provide this in the new heaven and earth!

This will mean, further, that the new humanity will dwell neither in the

present creation—"the first heaven and the first earth" (Rev. 21:1)—nor in a realm that is totally other than heaven and earth, although it will be a "new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1). Spiritual corporeality would not fit the former (the present world) because the realm would be too material for its proper functioning; it would not fit the latter (a totally other realm) because the realm would be too spiritual. Hence, views of a future existence for spiritual bodies on the present earth, even if for a limited time,[35] or of an existence that is so ethereal (or heavenly) that the earthly has no place at all,[36] are both inadequate.

I need to say also that the new humanity will be more than a return to a "pre-fallen" human existence. It will surely be as sinless as was humanity in its originally created state, but it will also be a new form of humanity that has never existed before. To speak of Revelation 21 and 22 as simply picturing a "return to Eden" is not enough. Eden belongs to the "first heaven and the first earth" which, for all its pristine beauty, cannot approximate the new that is yet to come. For in the age to come, there will be redeemed, glorified saints in bodies suited for that age—all the more truly to glorify God and to worship and serve Him forever.

The pattern of history—as we earlier observed—moves from creation to consummation, and—as I now emphasize—the latter is far more than a return to the former. There is "renovation" to be sure, and this includes all that Eden originally was; but it is a renovation that is far beyond anything humanity, even in Adam, has ever before known. It is a re-novation that is also a re-creation—"I create new heavens and a new earth";[37] a re-creation that is also re-novation—"I saw a new heaven and a new earth." Truly, it is beyond all present imagination.

Here let us pause to note two further New Testament terms that express this future realm. The first is often translated "restoration"; the second, "regeneration."

In Peter's address to a gathered throng of Jews, he declared, "Repent … that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration[38] of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time"[39] (Acts 3:19–21 NASB). The "restoration" of which Peter spoke is unmistakably connected with the return of Christ; further, it will be the restoration of "all things."

This restoration patently involves far more than a people or nation. The apostles (including Peter himself) had shortly before asked the risen Jesus,

“Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Later, in his message to the Jews, Peter spoke not of a national but a universal restoration:[40] it will be “the restoration of all things.” Hence this restoration primarily refers to the situation of the present world, which has fallen away from its original harmony between God and man, and between man and the natural world. It is this primeval situation of the brokenness of the world, as depicted by “prophets from ancient time,” especially recorded in the Book of Genesis, that will be restored to its original unity.

We must carefully observe that this restoration will occur only against the background of the work of the gospel—repentance, forgiveness of sins, and renewal (“times of refreshing”). This is in itself spiritual restoration, but it is also preparation for the return of Christ (“that He may send Jesus”) and the final total restoration.

One further matter: the word translated “restoration” does, however, contain more than the idea of a return to the original situation of the world.[41] It also means to establish[42] or, perhaps better, fulfill what has never before been brought to its consummation. Thus, what the prophets of old saw at the end of the age concerning “all things” (for example, “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea”),[43] while in one sense a return to man’s pristine condition, will have a far greater, indeed richer, fulfillment in that which is yet to come.

The other word, “regeneration,” is to be found in Jesus’ words in Matthew 19:28: “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration[44] when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging [or ruling][45] the twelve tribes of Israel” (NASB). It is immediately noteworthy that here the idea of regeneration applies not to an individual,[46] but to something larger and in the future.

It follows that “the regeneration” refers to the rebirth of the world—thus “the new world” (RSV)—and belongs to the time when Christ will have returned and been seated on His throne of glory. That the apostles will sit on thrones in this “new world” forbids any viewing of this activity as occurring in the present world or age. It will happen only when the “new heavens and the new earth”—“the regeneration”— have come into being.

We may observe again, as in the case of “restoration,” that “regeneration” is not simply a return to the past, whatever its goodness and beauty, but signifies a new reality. There is continuity with the old world in its first generation, but

there is also discontinuity: the same world but in a new and higher form.[47]

II. THE FULFILLMENT OF THE KINGDOM

The consummation will bring the fulfillment of the kingdom of God. It is this kingdom of which Jesus speaks when He says, “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). The “blessed” are those who before the “glorious throne” of the returned Christ have been set at His “right hand” and will go “into eternal life” (vv. 31–33, 46). Those who have ministered to “the least”—the naked, the sick, the impris oned, and so to Christ Himself (vv. 35- 40)—w*ill* inherit the kingdom.[48]

Before proceeding further, it is important to recall that Christ in His first coming established the kingdom[49] and that all who belong to Him are already participants in that kingdom. The power of Satan over the world was broken in Christ’s victory so that—in the words of Paul—“He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Col. 1:13). Accordingly, even now we are “sons of the kingdom” (Matt. 13:38), Christ is reigning, and we know such kingdom blessings as “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17).[50] Although Christ won a decisive victory through His life, death, and resurrection, thereby establishing His kingdom and bringing many sons and daughters into it, the kingdom will not be complete until He destroys all enemy forces. “He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet,” writes Paul, adding, “The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:25–26). This destruction of all enemies will happen only at the return of Christ. Only then will the kingdom be consummated.

Let us contemplate the fuller picture. In the context of speaking about the future resurrection, Paul declares, “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming *[parousia*] those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power” (1 Cor. 15:22- 24).[51] The sequence, accordingly, is: the return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the translation of the living, the destruction of all evil, and the delivering of the kingdom to the Father. It is then that the saints will—in the language of Christ—“inherit the kingdom

prepared … from the foundation of the world."

We may here also recall the words of Christ about "the close of the age": "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:43 KJV). This will follow the return of Christ: "The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth" (Matt. 13:41–42). Then come the words quoted about the righteous in the kingdom.

Turning again to the Book of Revelation, it is apparent that the kingdom to come will belong to the order of "the new heaven and the new earth." Earlier in the book there is this joyous declaration: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever" (11:15). The background for this declaration is found in the thanksgiving that follows: "We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast, that thou has taken thy great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but thy wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear thy name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of earth" (11:17–18). Hence in an anticipatory vision, the final judgment—as portrayed later in Revelation 20—has just occurred: thus the joyous affirmation that "the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" has come. Accordingly, what immediately follows is a depiction of that kingdom, beginning with John's words in Revelation 21: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth."

A. God's Immediate Presence

In the kingdom to come God will be immediately present with His people. This is the primary fact declared in the Book of Revelation. "I heard a great voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them' " (21:3).[52] No longer—as in this present age—will God dwell in heaven, but will (marvelous to relate!) Himself dwell among His people. Even now, to be sure, the people of God know His indwelling by the Holy Spirit[53] —and this is a wondrous present fact and experience. But a future further action will occur in which, through the bridging of heaven and earth, God will be in immediate relationship with His redeemed people. And this, of course, means with *all* people, since no one else will be in the new heaven and the new earth except those who belong to God.

This points to the truth, first, that there will be a glorious fulfillment of the relationship between God and man as it was known in the beginning. In the original Eden God was personally present with man. Genesis 2 describes how He formed man from the earth itself, breathed the breath of life into him, placed him in the garden, brought the animals to him for naming, shaped out of his rib a woman and brought her to him that they might be one flesh. All such actions—including "walking in the garden in the cool of day" (Gen. 3:8)—bespoke the immediate and personal presence of God. But tragically, all this was lost through mankind's sin: Adam and Eve were driven out and no longer knew the wonder of divine immediacy. The whole of Scripture from Genesis 1 and 2 to Revelation 21 and 22 basically recounts the history of man's alienation from God and His action to restore the divine-human relationship. Centrally, there is the event of the divine Incarnation in which God came in human flesh. Hence God was again with man; but He was present in hidden fashion for the gracious purpose of overcoming man's alienation and restoring him to Himself. Through Christ God was *with* man; through the Holy Spirit He dwells *in* and *among* His people. But until all evil is eliminated and the new order of heaven and earth instituted, God will not establish His dwelling *within* the human sphere. Finally the end will come as a marvelous fulfillment of the beginning: God with man in a relationship that will go on forever!

But also, in the second place, the end will be far more than a reconstitution of the beginning. For one thing, in the kingdom to come—the new heaven and new

earth—man will be in his new spiritual body and thus have a direct relationship to God that transcends anything presently known. Again, in the kingdom to come, Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of mankind, will be bodily present. This will produce an intensity of joy and fellowship that could not have been experienced in the beginning, nor at any time by the redeemed people of God prior to the consummation. Further, in the kingdom to come there will never again be a temptation to evil—no Satan to get into Paradise, for he will have been consigned to "the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:10). All will be in perfect accord.

One of the truly beautiful touches in the Book of Revelation depicting God's immediate and personal presence is in the statement following the words "God himself will be with them," namely, "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away" (21:4). How tender is God's personal presence: wiping away every teardrop of the past (tears that possibly came through suffering persecution for the sake of Christ and tears shed in deep sorrow for sin), so that not a trace remains! How wonderful to realize that death is forever gone[54] —indeed, there will only be life! How joyful to know that never again will there be any sorrow or pain,[55] for the old, hurtful things will be totally done away!

It is also marvelous to realize that God's immediate presence will mean the bodily presence of Jesus Christ in the coming kingdom. Christ, who is now known on earth by faith and in heaven by sight, will be present with all the saints forever in the kingdom to come! Earlier in Revelation one of the elders before the throne made this memorable statement: "The Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water" (7:17). And then in words almost identical with those in Revelation 21, he added, "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (also v. 17). The Lamb/Shepherd will guide them to springs of water, and God the Father will wipe away all tears![56] Thus there will be the intimate presence of both Father and Son.

Although Jesus did not utilize the Apocalyse's imagery of Lamb as Shepherd in his earthly ministry, He did speak of the coming kingdom as the time when He would have close fellowship with His disciples. Following the memorable occasion of the Last Supper, Jesus declared, "I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:29). Hence, each celebration of the Lord's Supper is, for all its rich present meaning, also a looking forward to the coming kingdom where Christ will be immediately present to "drink it new" with all who belong to Him. Shortly after the Last Supper, Jesus also declared to the Twelve: "You are those

who have continued with me in my trials; as my Father appointed a kingdom for me, so do I appoint for you that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom”[57] (Luke 22:28–30). That such fellowship at the Lord’s table will by no means be limited to the apostles is clear from other words of Jesus: “And men will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God”[58] (Luke 13:29).

These portrayals of Christ’s presence with His people all refer to the kingdom to come in the new age. This will occur, therefore, not on the present earth or in some heaven beyond the earth, but in the world constituted by the new heaven and the new earth. In that world to come, which will transcend our present spatio-temporal sphere,[59] Christ will have close fellowship with all, and the “table” will be of such proportions that all the saints will be gathered in His personal presence and in intimate relationship with one another!

Now, returning to the Book of Revelation, we hear these powerful words from the throne: “Behold, I make all things new…. It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end” (21:5–6). This mighty proclamation follows all that has just been said about God Himself dwelling with His people (tears wiped away, death no more, pain forever gone). Although this is the future for us, it is already done in God’s sight! But then once again, despite the august voice of Almighty God from the throne, there is immediately the personal and intimate touch: “To the thirsty I will give water without price from the fountain of the water of life. He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son” (vv. 6–7).

In the kingdom to come God will be immediately and personally present with His people—forever.

B. A Radiant People

We have earlier noted the statement about the coming kingdom: “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 13:43 KJV). Thus there will be a radiance, like the sun itself, about God’s people dwelling in the new heaven and the new earth.

The Book of Revelation describes this radiance through the imagery of a *holy city* and a *bride adorned*. After seeing the vision of a new heaven and a new earth, John declares, “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (21:2). In this extraordinary double figure of the holy city and the adorned bride, John portrays the people of God in the age to come.

Let us look first at the imagery of an adorned bride. In doing so we may, at the outset, look back into the parable of Jesus about the kingdom that begins, “Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom” (Matt. 25:1 NASB). The parable relates that the bridegroom returned after a lengthy delay, and those who were ready with oil “trimmed[60] their lamps” (v. 7) and went into “the wedding feast” (v. 10) with him. Jesus Himself is unmistakably the bridegroom, the return is His final Parousia, and the virgins with trimmed lamps—thus radiant with light—are those prepared for His arrival. No bride is mentioned in the parable; however, we may understand that the prepared virgins represent the bride awaiting the bridegroom,[61] namely, Christ in His return.

We observe, next, that the apostle Paul speaks of the church as the bride of Christ: “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor” (Eph. 5:25–27). This is said against the background of the statement “Husbands, love your wives as… .” The ultimate intention of Christ is to have a bride “in splendor”[62] (“a radiant church” NIV), who is “without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (v. 27). This, as surely as Christ intended it, will be fulfilled in the coming kingdom.

Again we come to the Book of Revelation and now hear these memorable words in chapter 19: “ ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to be clothed

with fine linen, bright[63] and pure'—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints" (vv. 6–8). Here one beholds the heavenly bride in her adornment "bright and pure," once again radiant and holy. Then occur the words "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (v. 9). The marriage has not yet taken place, but the bride is now ready for the event.[64]

Thus the New Testament portrays a series of images of the radiant bride. The climactic one in Revelation 21 shows "a bride adorned for her husband." The word "adorned" conveys a sense of beauty and radiance while also recalling all the previous imagery about virgins with "lamps trimmed,"[65] a church "in splendor," a bride "bright and pure." Now—at long last—the consummation is to occur as the radiant bride comes down "out of heaven."

The significance of this is that in the kingdom to come the people of God—the church—will be a radiant and holy people. As such, they will be "wed" to Christ forever. Later in Revelation 21, the bride is designated as "the wife of the Lamb" (v. 9), and there is no suggestion of this marriage ever ending! The radiant bride has become the radiant wife—and with her glorious Lord will live forever.

Thus the imagery of the radiant bride and wife depicts the beauty and holiness of the people of God as finally fulfilled in the kingdom to come: the bride "comes down" out of heaven. But since this is imagery (however meaningful), the people of God may also be described (as we have observed) as "the righteous [who] shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Although there is no nuptial imagery in this description, the picture of the righteous "shining forth" is basically the same. In the kingdom to come, God's people will radiate the holiness and glory of God.

Second, let us consider the radiant people of God under the imagery of the holy city. It is a striking, perhaps surprising, thing to observe how easily the imagery shifts back and forth between the adorned bride and the holy city. Let us recall again John's words: "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). In such language there may be a seeming incongruity: a city and a bride compared! What have they in common? Later, in verses 3–8,[66] there is no direct reference to either. But then an angel gives an invitation to John: "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb" (v. 9). But when John looks to behold the bride, he is shown a city! Then John says, "And in the Spirit he [an angel] carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God"[67] (v. 10). Again, one may wonder at the comparison—until the next words: "having the glory of God, its radiance[68] like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal" (v. 11). Ah, now

it comes together: the radiant bride, the radiant city—each reflecting the glory of God!

The bridal imagery, for all its beauty, is now transformed into city imagery because the people of God may also be likened to a holy and radiant city. Further, no matter how beautifully a bride may be described in her adornment,[69] what John afterward sees in regard to the holy city goes far beyond what he has seen before. The splendor that is now unfolded dazzles even the heights of human imagination.

But first the holy city is identified as the people of God. There are twelve gates inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and twelve foundations with the names of the twelve apostles of Christ. This unmistakably designates the holy city as the people of God in continuity from the Old Testament to the New. Second, the vast size and shape of the city are next measured out: twelve thousand stadia (about 1,500 miles) in length, breadth, and height—an area far greater in length and breadth than any present earthly city, and in height utterly beyond the reach of any present city on earth—thus in shape a perfectly symmetrical cube. The vastness of size suggests the enormous number of saints, and the perfect symmetry suggests the Holy of Holies of the Old Testament temple,[70] hence a people in perfect holiness.

Once again the unspeakable radiance of the city, the people of God, is set forth: the wall "built of jasper," hence clear as crystal, the city itself "pure gold, clear as glass," the foundations of the wall (representing the twelve apostles) "adorned with every jewel" (twelve jewels are named), the gates (representing the twelve patriarchs) made of twelve pearls (each a single pearl), and the street of the city "pure gold, transparent as glass" (21:18–21). All this beggars the imagination: incomparable beauty, glistening brilliance, shimmering radiance—none of which any city of earth could ever approximate. Such is the holy city come down out of heaven from God.

It is of utmost importance to recognize that this holy city represents the holiness of the people of God in the age to come. As Jesus had said, "Then shall the righteous *shine forth* as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." The holy city in all its glorious luster is that shining forth of "the righteous." It is they who will be a "holy city."[71] It is *not* that the people of God *will dwell* in the holy city, but they *will be* the holy city. Even now believers are to "shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15)—a world that is full of darkness—but in the kingdom to come there will be a total radiance.

Here we pause to consider the fact that the redeemed people of God, the

church of Jesus Christ, even now reflects something of this radiance. In 2 Corinthians 3:7, Paul recalls how Moses came down from the mountaintop with his face so radiating the glory of God that the Israelites could not look upon it; however, that glory soon faded away. But now in the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, Paul adds, believers without any veil over their face not only reflect the glory of God, but will go on from glory to glory: "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect[72] the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit"[73] (3:18 NIV). Already in this present age those who belong to the Lord are a radiant people; they reflect His glory in their faces—indeed their whole life. But it is only the beginning! On and on we are to move "from glory to glory,"[74] more and more to be changed into His image, until—praise God!—in the kingdom to come we will totally show forth His glory.

Truly in the coming kingdom, the people of God, whether depicted as a bride or a city, will be a wholly radiant people. This means, further, that sin and evil will never again have a place. The people of God will be a *holy* bride—"without spot or wrinkle … holy and without blemish."[75] As a *holy* city, "nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it" (Rev. 21:27 NASB). Forever sin-free, the people of God will be a radiant people throughout eternity!

C. The Light and the Glory

The climactic reality in the kingdom to come is the light and the glory of God that illumines all.

First, not only is the city itself resplendent and radiant, but it is also suffused throughout with the light and glory of God. Already the city come down from heaven was shown as "having the glory of God" (Rev. 21:11). This city was later described as dazzlingly radiant—foundations of precious stones, gates made wholly of pearl, the city itself of pure and transparent gold. Truly the holy city in every way will reflect the glory of God. But now the climax is even more wondrous: "And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.[76] And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light[77] and its lamp is the Lamb" (vv. 22–23). The city—the radiant, holy city—is illumined from within by the glory of God!

Let us pause to reflect and rejoice. What all this magnificently declares is that the people of God, as the holy city, need never again to seek God in an earthly sanctuary or dwelling. For God Himself and the Lamb will be the temple in their midst. In this luminous presence all the lights of the heavens will be far surpassed; nor will there be need to look beyond to the heaven above the heavens for the light of God to come streaming down. The holy city—the new heaven and the new earth—will be suffused by the light and glory of God. The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb will be there,[78] and the people of God will be showing forth His eternal glory.

Second, John here moves beyond the city to the surrounding earth (the "new earth"), declaring, "By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it" (Rev. 21:24). The light of the city itself, which comes from the indwelling glory of God, is so vastly luminous that the nations of earth walk by it. In keeping with the glory radiating outward, the kings of the earth bring their glory within, as John shortly after adds: "They [the kings] shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations"[79] (v. 26).

From this it is apparent that the kingdom to come truly will have arrived on earth. The "nations" will no longer be the "earth-dwellers"[80] who walk contrary to the light of God; the "kings of the earth" will no longer be those who oppose God and the Lamb.[81] Indeed, *they will all be God's people*—nations[82] and kings alike—and at long last the ancient word from God Himself will have been

fulfilled: “Truly, as I live … all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord” (Num. 14:21).

It is important to recognize that both the holy city and the nations of earth represent the kingdom of God. The “holy city” is a depiction of the radiant holiness of God’s people; “the nations” walking in God’s light with the “kings of the earth” bringing glory and honor portray the universal centering of everything in God. It is *not* that some people will live in the city whereas others will be outside, for the city will not be the dwelling place of man but of God (“Behold, the dwelling of God is with men”). God’s presence there will give *all* persons immediate access to Him. For, as John further relates about the city: “Its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there” (Rev. 21:25).[83] Thus there will be both immediate and continuous access to the presence of the Lord God and the Lamb.

Let us try further to apprehend this magnificent portrayal of the kingdom to come. The people of God will be a holy and radiant people, as all the dazzling imagery of the holy city declares. The people of God will also be a people constantly giving God glory and honor, as the vivid imagery of nations and kings sets forth. Between these two pictures is one of Almighty God and the Lamb totally illuminating the city (“no need of sun or moon to shine upon it”) and the nations (“by its light shall the nations walk”). This is the kingdom to come: God henceforth will dwell in the midst of a holy and radiant people who forever render Him glory and honor!

III. ETERNAL LIFE

Finally, the consummation will bring eternal life. Already in this age the believer has entered into life eternal. In the words of Jesus, “He who hears my word and believes him who sent me, *has* eternal life; he … has passed from death to life” (John 5:24). This present eternal life is the result of the transition from spiritual death into spiritual life. Although physical death may yet have to be faced, spiritual life will never end. Indeed, it is only in the age to come that believers will know its completeness.

Eternal life in its consummation signifies far more than continuance. For there is also a continuance for those who do not know eternal life; however, they will experience a different kind of eternity. Jesus speaks of those who “will go away into eternal punishment” (Matt. 25:46), and Paul speaks of “the punishment of eternal destruction” (2 Thess. 1:9). Hence, eternity itself is not what the believer looks forward to, but an eternity that is life. The conclusion of Jesus’ statement, following His words concerning eternal punishment, is that “the righteous [will go] into eternal life.” Thus the key word is not “eternal” but “life”—eternal life both now and in the age to come.

Returning to the Book of Revelation, we observe the picture of eternal life in 22:1–5. The character of the life to come, depicted in these verses, is that of eternal blessedness, fullness of the worship of God, and reigning throughout eternity.

A. Eternal Blessedness

First, there will be *eternal blessedness.* This is vividly portrayed in "the water of life" and "the tree of life" with their blessings:

> Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Rev. 22:1–2)

The very expressions "the river of the water of life" and "the tree of life" recall the Garden of Eden: "a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden" and "the tree of life [was] also in the midst of the garden" (Gen. 2:9–10). The purpose of both the "water" and the "tree" was for "life," the former to enliven the garden of man's habitation, and the latter to enable him to "live forever."[84] Since man disobeyed God, ate of another tree—the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (2:9)— and was expelled from Eden, he could no longer benefit from the river nor partake of the tree of immortality. "Paradise lost," consequently, in the consummation will be "Paradise regained," or perhaps better, "Paradise fulfilled." Indeed, earlier in the Book of Revelation the future tree of life is spoken of as being in "the paradise of God": "To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God" (2:7).

Both "the river of the water of life" and "the tree of life" also call to mind the visionary temple, portrayed by Ezekiel, with water pouring forth and trees on both sides of the river (Ezek. 47). Ezekiel beholds "water … issuing from below the threshold of the temple" (v. 1) until it becomes a river bringing freshness to the land eastward so that "everything will live where the river goes" (v. 9). Also, the prophet declares, "on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food … they will bear fresh fruit every month…. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing" (v. 12). The parallel with Revelation is unmistakable, although the temple from which the water issues is here seen as "the throne of God and the Lamb" who are the temple in the age to come.[85] Rather than flowing through the land, the water flows "through the

middle of the street of the city"; rather than many trees, only one, "the tree of life," is depicted (though it is "on either side of the river"!). What these differences in Revelation declare is immensely important: God Himself, that is, God and the Lamb, is the continuing source of the river that provides not merely physical life but life eternal; and since the water flows through the middle of the street of the city, which is none other than the holy city, the glorified people of God, it is they, not merely a land, who will be blessed eternally by God's refreshing presence. Moreover, this very river makes possible the tree of life, whose manifold and continuing fruit is not merely for physical strengthening but for eternal life.

Before going further, we should observe that "the river" may well refer to the Holy Spirit. Jesus declares on one occasion, "He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water' "—to which the Gospel adds, "Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive" (John 7:38–39). Also, Isaiah equates water and Spirit in this prophecy: "I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring" (44:3). Moreover, to return to the New Testament and particularly to the Gospel of John, Jesus also declares that the Spirit "proceeds from the Father" (John 15:26). The Greek word translated "proceeds from"[86] is the same as that used in Revelation 22:1 regarding the water "flowing from"[87] "the throne of God and of the Lamb." In both cases (the Gospel and Revelation) the source is God, whether depicted as the "Father" or "the throne of God and the Lamb."[88]

Hence we may conclude that "the river" represents the Holy Spirit,[89] and "the water of life" is that eternal life which His flowing forth makes ever actual and enduring. At the consummation, the Holy Spirit, along with Father and Son, is involved in making available "the water of life." Let me add that although the Holy Spirit is not mentioned by name in this passage, He later with the Bride gives a moving invitation: "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.'… And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price" (Rev. 22:17). This invitation is all the more compelling against the background of the Holy Spirit as the river from which the water of life comes.

"The river of the water of life" not only points to eternal life but also suggests a special component of that life, namely, *joy and gladness*. The river "bright as crystal" sparkles as it flows forth, bringing pleasure and freshness in its flow. The Book of Psalms draws this vivid picture: "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High" (46:4). This clearly anticipates Revelation 22—the river flowing through the city, the holy

city—but also declares that the water "makes glad." One thinks also of Psalm 36:8: "Thou givest them drink from the river of thy delights." The river, it seems, is a joy, first of all to God, and then to man. Hence, in the age to come there will be joy and gladness, as from an ever-flowing, sparkling river. Surely, in the words of Jesus, this is that to which the faithful saint can look forward: "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. 25:21 and 23 KJV).

Although in this life we may experience joy, even fullness of joy,[90] it pales in comparison with the joy to be known in what lies beyond.[91] For it is the joy of the Lord—the joy that is first of all His—that we will find overflowing to us as we dwell in His personal presence. It is the joy, again, that can be known only when all of life's sorrows and anguish are forever a thing of the past. In the words of Revelation 21:4, "He [God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." Truly this will be joy beyond all that the present life can contain: it will be joy in the personal, intimate presence of the eternal God.[92]

Looking again at "the tree of life," we observe a number of extraordinary features. First, it is "on either side of the river" (Rev. 22:2). What seems practically impossible-one tree on both sides of a river—is spiritually a beautiful symbol of the eternal life that is present wherever the river of God flows. Also, this one tree has "twelve kinds of fruit"[93] (v. 2), signifying the variety and diversity of the eternal supply of fruit,[94] and that in the age to come one will feast on the richness of God's bountiful supply. Again, the tree, far beyond any earthly tree's ability, will yield its fruit "each month" (v. 2), thus portraying in vivid manner the constancy of God's blessing.

We may pause to reflect on the blessedness exhibited in "the tree of life" and its fruit. Regarding the tree itself: before sin entered the world, man could have partaken of the tree of life, that is, lived in accordance with God's command, walked in communion with his Maker, and thereby lived forever. But since the Fall, "the tree of life" has been closed off to him. Even now in this present life, although there is the possibility of entrance into eternal life, death still looms for all people. Thus, "the tree of life" lies yet beyond. What a joy to know that there will be no "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" in the age to come, for all evil will be utterly done away! The *only* tree—in all its marvelous multiplicity—will be the tree of eternal life.

What is depicted regarding the twelve kinds and monthly yield of the fruit of the tree surely is the blessedness of God's ever-varied and ever-continuing bounty. This highlights the *abundance* of God's supply in the new heaven and

the new earth. We can scarcely imagine what all this signifies, for "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). So it is with this marvelous fruit of the tree of life. We may sense the blessedness of what it signifies; but until the new age dawns, we can by no means begin to comprehend it all.

Also there is the blessing of *rest* in the world to come. In the Book of Revelation, a voice is heard proclaiming, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth. 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors'" (14:13). Rest is also mentioned in the Book of Hebrews: "So then, there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God; for whoever enters God's rest also ceases from his labors as God did from his" (Heb. 4:9–10). After all the labors of this earth and even the "sabbath's rest" intermittently enjoyed, there still awaits[95] an eternal rest for those who belong to Christ.

Let me further clarify this. For the present life God established a pattern of rest from human labors in the provision of the Sabbath: one day in seven to desist from work. Further, the provision of rest for the generation of those who left Egypt, while not fulfilled for them because of their sin, has been fulfilled with those who believe the gospel—"we who have believed enter that rest" (Heb. 4:3). In this connection we may recall these words of Jesus: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest … for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:28–29). Accordingly, there is provision for both physical and spiritual rest in this life—and for both we are profoundly grateful. Yet, despite such rest, work is frequently tedious and toilsome,[96] labor often results in pain and weariness. From all such burdens there will be total deliverance in the new heaven and new earth.

It is possible that the picture of the tree of life, with its multiple and continuing yield of fruit—"twelve kinds … each month"—points in the direction of this rest. Since man's labor on earth is for earning his daily bread, and this in the sweat[97] of his face, the depiction of the world to come is all the more meaningful. There will be total rest from this kind of labor, as God Himself provides bountiful fruit for all to enjoy. Truly there will be blissful rest from toil in the coming Paradise of God.[98]

One final feature of the tree of life is that "the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (Rev. 22:2). This vivid picture should be set alongside that of God's wiping away tears from the eyes of His people. For not only will tears of mourning and pain be done away, but also the wounds due to longheld division and strife between various peoples will be forever healed. Hence, all

personal sorrow will pass away, and all causes of strife will be totally gone.[99]

Surely here also is the suggestion of universal *peace.* The same Old Testament passage that speaks of the sun being no more and the Lord instead being an "everlasting light" (Isa. 60:19) also affirms that "violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders" (v. 18). Hence, peace will be on every hand in the future age. Isaiah 65:17, which speaks of the coming creation of a new heaven and a new earth, also declares about wild animals: "They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain" (v. 25).[100]

It is of course true that at the heart of the gospel is the message of peace and its realization through Christ. There is deep personal peace as well as opportunity for growth in that peace; both are true regardless of the world situation. Indeed, it is a peace the world cannot give or take away. Also, Christ has made peace possible between Jew and Gentile by being the one way for both to the Father. "He [Christ] is our peace, who has made us both one" (Eph. 2:14). Yet, by no means has universal peace come in this world, nor will it come until evil has been utterly destroyed and the new age has dawned.

Truly in the new world—to use the words of Isaiah—"nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (2:4).[101] For all nations will be the holy people of God, and perfect peace will prevail. There may be memories of past bitterness and disappointment, of wars and bloodshed; but those memories, however poignant, will be healed. For the tree of life from which all people will be nourished will also be a tree of healing—"The leaves of the tree were [perhaps better 'will be'!] for the healing of the nations."

To summarize thus far: Eternal life in the world to come means the perfection of blessedness. The water of life and the tree of life—both its fruit and its leaves—point to the final fulfillment of joy and gladness, of rest and peace. All of this will come from the throne of God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit); for it is in His presence that they will become complete.

B. Fullness of the Worship of God

A second aspect of the character of the life to come, as pictured in Revelation 22:1–5, is that there will be the *fullness* of the worship of God. In verses 3–4 we read, “There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve[102] him; they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads.”

The curse that has been upon the world since man’s fall into sin will be forever gone.[103] For God’s throne will be in the holy city to sanctify it totally. In that beautiful and holy situation, several things will take place.

There will be, first of all, the *unending service* of God: “His servants shall serve Him.” Earlier in Revelation is the heavenly scene of the saints who have come out of “the great tribulation” and whose robes were washed “white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14). These words follow: “Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night within his temple; and he who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presence” (7:15). In the new world, as we have observed, there will be no temple, for God Himself and the Lamb will replace it. Also there will be no night and day. Nonetheless, what is said about the tribulation saints doubtless will apply even more vividly to the redeemed in the world to come, namely, they will continually be in the service of God. They will serve Him throughout eternity!

One marvelous aspect of the eternal service of God will be the freedom and capacity to do this totally. The believer in this world is likewise dedicated to serve God faithfully, though such service is, in part, always inadequate. Both the frailty of human life and the residue of sin stand in the way of that perfect service. We are called upon now to present ourselves as “a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Rom. 12:1). But this we can never fully do because of our imperfect holiness. We may yearn for total devotion to the Lord, but we never completely attain it. Thus, one of the most striking aspects of eternal life will be that of free and total unending service.

Climactically, at the heart of all service in the coming age will be the worship of God. At every moment, in whatever aspect of service, there will be the continuing praise and worship of God. It will be joyful, obedient service—whatever the Lord commands—and always with the heart fixed on God. Service and worship actually become one,[104] for *all* things will be done for the glorifying of God.

Again, there will be the *direct vision* of God: “they shall see his face.” In these simple but profound words is declared the ultimate blessedness: beholding the face of God! Remember that Moses once said to God, “I pray thee, show me thy glory,” and God replied, “You cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live” (Exod. 33:18, 20). Even Moses, who had intimate communication with God and doubtless yearned to behold God in totality, was not permitted the ultimate vision. Indeed, it would have caused his destruction, for mortal flesh cannot bear the full weight of the divine glory. Likewise the apostle Paul, although testifying of many “visions and revelations of the Lord,” even to being “caught up into Paradise” (2 Cor. 12:1, 3), was constrained to speak of God as one who “dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see” (1 Tim. 6:16). The sheer brilliance of God’s presence makes such sight presently impossible.

But—it may be rejoined—was not the Incarnation the very revelation of God Himself? For John wrote, “No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known” (1:18). Does not this imply that God, invisible before, became visible through Christ, so that those who beheld the face of Christ beheld the face of God? Is this not further confirmed by Jesus’ own words, “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9)? To reply: Christ, the Incarnate One, was truly the mediator of God’s presence, so that God the Father was seen in Him. However, for all its glory and grace, His presence was still a mediation in the flesh. The direct vision of God remains beyond—and in the age to come we shall so behold Him!

Actually, there is nothing, absolutely nothing, that people so yearn to behold as the face of God. The psalmist speaks the heart cry of mankind: “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?” (42:2).

For “the face of God” means the shining forth of God’s own being, the splendor of His glorious person. It has been truly said, “Life has but one failure: not to see God.” For to see God in all His glory is the highest possible good;[105] to miss that is ultimately to miss everything. While seeing God is not possible in this mortal and sinful flesh, the wonder, the marvel is that the day is coming when in our transformed bodies we shall see His face! Then the weight of God’s glory will not simply overwhelm and crush our human existence; rather, it will shine forth upon a humanity prepared to receive it.

The glorious vision of God! The angels in heaven always see the face of God;[106] the four living creatures that stand around the throne of God continually behold Him;[107] the twenty-four elders on surrounding thrones constantly fall

down and worship the Lord, casting their crowns before Him.[108] Likewise, the living creatures and elders prostrate themselves before the Lamb who stands near the throne of God, giving Him similar worship. Their worship joins that of the "myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands" of angels and every creature in heaven, and earth, and under the earth.[109] All this that is transpiring even now anticipates the glory to come in the new heaven and the new earth. No longer will God be on the throne and the Lamb near at hand; rather it will be "the throne of God *and* of the Lamb"[110] (Rev. 22:3). And it is He (not they) who will be seen: "They shall see *his* face." Although God the Father and the Son will forever remain distinct persons, the vision will merge, the faces becoming gloriously one, and in that one face will be united all the glory of God the Creator and God the Redeemer. His face they will see, His being they will worship—throughout eternity!

What this vision of God in the age to come will be far transcends our human imagination. For in the one vision—the one "face"—will be seen all the glory and the grace of both God the Father and God the Son. It will be the face of the One who brought us forth out of nothing but also saved us from final destruction. It will be the face of complete holiness and purity, but also the face of total mercy and compassion. Such glory, such grace—also such beauty, such truth—"*they* shall see." But let us change the pronoun to we—"we shall see his face"[111] —and, so seeing, will worship and praise Him throughout eternity.

Once again, there will be an *intimate relationship* between God and man: "His name shall be on their foreheads" (Rev. 22:4). This vivid picture recalls the Old Testament passage where Moses tells Aaron and his sons to bless Israel: "The LORD bless you and keep you: The LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace" (Num. 6:24–26). Then follows this promise of God: "So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them" (v. 27). "My name upon the people of Israel" signifies that Israel belonged to God in a special way and that all the blessings mentioned, including God's face shining upon them, were intended for His people. In a far more abundant way God's name will be upon His redeemed people in the age to come, for we are totally His[112] forever.

A similar picture is described earlier in the Book of Revelation of the 144,000 with the Lamb on Mt. Zion who have "his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads" (14: l).[113] They, likewise, are the redeemed—"these have been redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb" (v. 4). The two names (Christ's and the Father's) of Revelation 14[114] merge into the one name of Revelation 21, because the redemption of all has now occurred so that

even as they see God's face in eternity, His one name is upon them. Surely God's name upon His people in the new heaven and new earth bespeaks an intimate relationship flowing out of the fullness of worship in which His very face is seen. For those who see the face of God will have His name on their foreheads, not only as a sign of their being possessed by Him and having His blessings on them, but also doubtless as a reflection of His glory.[115]

Paul says that even now we "with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory," and in this way "are being transformed into his likeness with everincreasing glory" (2 Cor. 3:18 NIV).[116] If indeed in this life we reflect God's glory and are being gradually changed into His likeness from glory to glory, how much more will this be when we will not just reflect God's glory but also behold His face! The transformation will be complete, the believers will be glorified, and their whole being will radiate a divine glory that will *never* fade away.[117]

"His name shall be on their foreheads." How incomprehensible is the picture of this intimate relationship with the Lord God! We will be marked not with our own name but with God's name, the name of Him whose face is beheld in glory, and will bear that name throughout eternity! Blessed by Him beyond measure, possessed by Him in totality, changed wholly into His likeness—so shall it be in the age that is yet to come.

But let us end this section as we began, emphasizing that everything focuses on the fullness of the worship of God. Whether we speak of unending service, the direct vision of God, or the intimate relationship between God and the redeemed, the background is "the throne of God and the Lamb." The only possible attitude before this glorious throne is worship and adoration. So whether serving Him, beholding His face, or reflecting His likeness, it will all be in the context of overflowing praise. It will be praise—eternally!

C. Reigning Forever

Third, and finally, there will be an *eternal reign*. We may now hear this climactic prophecy: “And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 22:5). With these words the vision of the consummation comes to an end.

To appreciate better the eternal reign of the saints, let us consider a number of truths.

1. From the beginning man was made by God to rule. The first recorded words of God to newly created man were these: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen. 1:28 NASB). The psalmist echoes these words, saying, “Thou dost make him to rule over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet” (8:6 NASB). The writer of Hebrews, after quoting from Psalm 8, declares, “Now in putting everything in subjection to him [man], he left nothing outside his control” (2:8).

2. Man does not fully exercise this rule. The words in Hebrews 2:8 continue: “As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.” The point, then, is that this dominion, or rule, by man is not complete—indeed, it is far from complete because of the inroads of sin, death, and the power of Satan.

3. The focus shifts to Jesus: “But we see Jesus,” who was victorious over all that prevents man’s rule, “crowned with glory and honor” (v. 9). So Jesus, by His victory on the cross and His elevation to heaven, now rules over all principalities and powers.

4. Those who belong to Christ also rule, or reign, now because of Him. Paul writes, “If, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:17). We “reign in life” even now. As Paul later adds, “We are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37)—and this includes life, death, principalities, things present, things to come: there is no limit.[118] In the Book of Revelation, John writes, “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever” (1:5–6). We have been made a kingdom and therefore rule even now, just as we are also now priests to God.

5. Although Christ now reigns, He has not yet destroyed all the forces of evil;

their power is broken, but their end has not yet come. Paul, looking ahead to the Parousia of Christ, writes, “Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power” (1 Cor. 15:24). Paul adds that Christ “must reign[119] until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (v. 25). For this final destruction and subjection, Christ will return to inflict “eternal destruction” (2 Thess. 1:9) upon His enemies and to “destroy” (2 Thess. 2:8) utterly the “man of sin.”[120] According to the Book of Revelation, this will be the time when a loud voice in heaven cries forth: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever” (11:15).[121] Thus, after all foes are destroyed, Christ will reign eternally.

6. Although we reign now, the reign is not complete, since there is still sin and evil, death and Satan. But once they have all been destroyed, and the new age entered into, there will no longer be any hindrance. Recall Daniel’s prophecy in which the “horn[122] made war with the saints, and prevailed over them, until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints received the kingdom” (7:21–22). It is further said that “his [the ‘horn’s’] dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed[123] to the end. And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their[124] kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them” (vv. 26–27).[125] Looking forward from Daniel, we hear again the climactic note of the Book of Revelation: “They shall reign for ever and ever.”

It is clear that the saints will reign with Christ throughout eternity, for both “he” and “they” “shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 11:15; 22:5). But if we ask, “Over what shall the saints reign?” the answer is not clear. According to Daniel, as was quoted, “All dominions shall serve and obey them.”[126] Perhaps this refers to angelic dominions or sovereignties—the various beneficent principalities, authorities, and powers.[127] Since Christ reigns over them, we may share in that reign. Since the saints are to judge angels at the judgment day,[128] it seems quite possible that we may somehow also reign over them.

But the reign of believers could also be over other spheres. We may again refer to Jesus’ parables of the talents (Matt. 25:14–30) and pounds (Luke 19:11–27).[129] Each of these parables depicts the return of the Lord after a long period of time and His settling accounts with His servants who had been entrusted with various amounts of money. In the former parable, the two servants who doubled

their amount are told, “You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things” (NIV). In the latter parable, the two servants who increased their amount are given a greater sphere of authority: “You shall have authority over ten cities…. You are to be over five cities.” We have earlier observed how these parables relate to different rewards in the age to come; here we note that the rewards consist of spheres of rule and authority. On the basis of these parables we may conclude that in the coming age the reign of believers will be wide-ranging (“in charge of many things”) and varied (some “over ten cities,” some “over five cities”). What these “many things” are is not described, nor is it clear how there can be “cities” in the age to come. Since *the* “holy city” alone is portrayed in the Book of Revelation, where may other “cities” be found? Of course, since these are parables and the main point in each case concerns faithfulness rather than a later reward, we should be hesitant to draw too many detailed conclusions. However, it seems possible to say this much: the saints will have spheres of authority in the world to come—whether or not these are “cities” in a literal sense. The saved will be over “many things.”

In line with this, it may well be that we will reign fully in those areas over which the Lord has already given us authority and responsibility in this life. This could signify the fullest possible expansion of our abilities and experience, the uniqueness of each person preserved and multiplied beyond measure. “Reigning” does not need to be understood only as over authorities and powers but over every aspect of what God has made us to do and to accomplish. It hardly seems possible that all we have been given by God at birth and in the experience of our lives will simply be a thing of the past with no relation to the future world. If this were true, why does God both preserve us in our entirety (body, soul, and spirit) and glorify what He has made in the age to come? His purpose surely must be that we carry forward to an ultimate degree what has begun on this present earth. We may not—indeed do not—reign completely now; moreover, death cuts us short. *But* in the new heaven and the new earth, by God’s grace, we shall reign forever.

Whatever the full nature or scope of our future reign, we may greatly rejoice that it will be a shared reign with our Lord Jesus Christ. And as surely as Christ and the Father are one God, and there is only one throne of God and the Lamb, our reign will be with the Lord of the whole universe. Moreover, it will not be at a distance, for God Himself will be dwelling with us, His Son guiding us, and His Spirit refreshing us. Our reign will be in the glorious presence of Him whose face we shall at every moment behold.

Praise God! So shall we reign—for ever and ever!

[1]Cf. Hebrews 1:10-12. Luther expressed it in inimitable fashion: “The heavens have their work-day clothes on; hereafter they will have on their Sunday garments” (quoted in C. H. Hodge, Systematic Theology, 3:853. Hodge does not give the exact source; nor do I know).

[2]Which is also “the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (as we have seen).

[3]This is another way of describing the day of Christ’s return. See the earlier discussion on hēmera in chapter 9. Also recall the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:2: “The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night,” the coming “as a thief’ referring to the surprise element (see 5:4).

[4]The Greek word is hroizedon, “roar” (nasb, niv), “great rushing sound” (neb), “great noise” (kjv).

[5]The Greek word is stoicheia, “elemental substances, the basic elements from which everything in the natural world is made, and of which it is composed” (BAGD). According to TDNT, this relates to “the Stoic idea of a cosmic conflagration in which the other elements will dissolve into the primal element of fire” (7:686).

[6]The Greek word is lythesetai, “disintegrate” (neb), “be destroyed” (nasb, niv). The basic idea is that of being broken up and disintegrating. “To dissolve something coherent into parts” (Thayer).

[7]The Greek word is kausoumena, “with [by] intense heat” (nasb). According to EGT, it means “a violent consuming heat” (5:145).

[8]Or “laid bare” (niv, neb). In the Second Epistle of Clement (ca. a.d. 120-40) we find these interesting words: “But ye know that the day of judgment cometh even now as a burning oven, and the powers of heaven shall melt, and all the earth as lead melting on the fire, and then shall appear the secret and open works of men” (J. B. Lightfoot, The Apostolic Fathers, 50). The appearing of “the secret and open works of men” is parallel to the idea of being “laid bare” or “discovered.” Since this destruction by fire is related to “the day of judgment,” it could include the laying bare of “secret and open works” (as we have seen earlier). However, I believe the reference here is not primarily to the laying bare, hence judging of men’s works, but to the physical destruction of all things upon the earth. If so, this will not be an occasion of judgment, but of transition to the new world.

[9]The Greek word is kausoumena (as in v. 10). See note 7.

[10]Peter writes these words in the context of his call to live “lives of holiness

and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled. …"

[11]See note 6 on lythesetai.

[12]According to Calvin, "the elements of the world are to be consumed, only that they may be renovated, their substance still remaining the same" (Commentary on The Second Epistle of Peter, in loco). Similarly C. H. Hodge says, "Combustion is not a destruction of substance … it is merely a change of state or condition … destruction of the world by water and by fire are analogous events; the former was not annihilation, therefore the second is not" (Systematic Theology, 3:852).

[13]The word "new" in both 2 Peter and Revelation 21 is kainos. Kainos means what is "new in kind" (TDNT, 3:448); it "denotes the new primarily in reference to quality" (Thayer). Thus while remaining the same in substance, the heavens and earth will undergo a total qualitative change.

[14]Paul declares that "the form [schéma] of this world is passing away" (1 Cor. 7:31). Schéma means "figure, shape, fashion" (Thayer-under the discussion of morphé in which he is comparing morphé, "that which is intrinsic and essential," with schéma, "that which is outward and accidental").

[15]The "passing away" therefore refers only to its form, not its essence or substance.

[16]"There will not be a new, second creation, but a re-creation of what exists, a renaissance. Substantially, nothing will be lost" (C. G. Berkouwer, The Return of Christ, 221, in a paraphrase of a statement by Bavinck).

[17]Recall the earlier reflection on this point under "Total Destruction," pages 413-21. In this nuclear age we are surely closer than ever before to an all-consuming fiery end.

[18]Ouranos may be translated either "heaven" (kjv, nasb, neb) or 44sky" (rsv, niv). Ouranos is the word translated "heaven" (all versions) in "new heaven" (Rev. 21:1) and in "new heavens" (2 Peter 3:13). "Sky" in Rev. 20:11 scarcely seems strong enough, though it does convey the proper note that the Scripture is not here describing "heaven" in the ultimate sense as the spiritual, presently invisible, realm beyond earth. (We will observe this meaning of "heaven" in discussing Revelation 21:2.) It is rather the expanse beyond earth with all things visible in it.

[19]Recall the earlier discussion of this.

[20]Some commentators understand the words of Revelation 20:11 as referring to the transition from the old order to the new creation (e.g., G. E. Ladd in his Commentary on the Revelation of John, 272; W. Hendriksen in More Than Conquerors, 235; R. H. Mounce in The Book of Revelation, NICNT, 364-65). However, I have difficulty finding this meaning in the language of Revelation; moreover, it seems incongruous to view the transition as having occurred before "Death and Hades" have been done away (at the end of the event of judgment in Rev. 20:14). For in the new order death will be no more.

[21]The Greek word is apelthon, "vanished" (neb).

[22]The word there is pareleusontai. Both words (from aperchomai and parerchomai) have basically the same meaning. Pareleusontai is likewise found in Jesus' statement "Heaven and earth will pass away" (Matt. 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33).

[23]Incidentally, if my understanding is correct that this transition will occur at the conclusion of the Last Judgment, it is all the more apparent that people can have nothing to do with the act of dissolution. All ungodly persons will have been slain already and raised from the dead for judgment; all righteous ones will have been raised or translated, shared with Christ in His total victory over the evil of the world, and afterward also been present for the judgment. Indeed, since the very heavens and earth will have "fled away," the final act in relation to them will-and must-be totally of God.

[24]The Greek word is ktisis. It can also be translated "creature" (as kjv); however, "creation" (all modern translations) is doubtless better in this context. It is also apparent that ktisis here refers to creation below man, thus the world of animate and inanimate nature.

[25]The Greek word is mataioteti, "vanity" (kjv), "frustration" (niv, neb), "futility" (rsv, nasb).

[26]The Greek word is phthoras, "ruin, destruction, dissolution, deterioration, corruption" (BAGD). "Decay" (rsv, niv) does not as adequately capture the result of the curse on nature.

[27]"You cannot divide the created order into distinct and independent sections. What happens in one section will have repercussions in all. If there is any unity in the universe, a disaster in one realm will have repercussions on all" (IB, in loco).

[28]Literally, "the coming glory"-mellousan doxan.

[29]The Greek word is apokaradokia, “to watch with head erect or outstretched” (Thayer). What a vivid picture this is of creation personified, straining ahead, watching for the future!

[30]The Greek word is apekdechetai, “assiduously and patiently to wait for” (Thayer). The very form of creation is that of expectant, eager waiting.

[31]Recall the previous discussion of this as occurring at the return of Christ.

[32]Some biblical interpreters (e.g., Scofield; see the Scofield Reference Bible) hold that this Isaianic picture refers to a messianic reign of Christ on the present earth. However, F. Delitzsch, I believe, puts it well in saying that “the full realization [of this prophecy] is conditioned no doubt by a revolution in creation, and therefore belongs to the new earth under the new heaven” (Biblical Commentary on the Prophecy of Isaiah, 248).

[33]It would be a mistake to view Isaiah 35 as referring to the presently constituted earth. The background (in chap. 34) of total destruction of the nations and the dissolution of the heavens is preparatory (as we have before observed) to the coming of a new creation. The prophet is speaking about a renovated earth.

[34]The creation itself shall in a glorious sense be delivered into the freedom from debility and decay in which the children of God, when raised up in glory, shall expatiate” (W. E. Biederwolf, The Second Coming Bible Commentary, 416).

[35]As, for example, in a millennialism that posits resurrected saints dwelling on the present earth for a thousand years.

[36]As in much popular Christianity that envisions only a future heaven far beyond this earth. Hoekema writes, “Are we to spend eternity somewhere off in space, wearing white robes, plucking harps, singing songs, and flitting from cloud to cloud while doing so? On the contrary, the Bible assures us that God will create a new earth on which we shall live to God’s praise in glorified, resurrected bodies” (The Bible and the Future, 274). Hoekema’s final chapter (20), “The New Earth” (274-87), may go too far on the earthly side, but he undoubtedly speaks an important word (see also G. C. Berkouwer’s The Return of Christ, chap. 7, with the same title, “The New Earth”).

[37]We actually need both terms, “renovation” and “recreation,” since the former without the latter may suggest too little, the latter without the former too much. (I chose the former word, “renovation,” for this section heading, realizing that it is not altogether satisfactory.)

[38]The Greek word is apokatastaseós, “restitution” (kjv), “establishing” (rsv), “restoration” (neb), “restore” (niv). “Restoration” is the translation given in BAGD and Thayer. This is the only use of the noun apokatastasis in the New Testament. Cf. other passages where the verb form apokathistèmi is used: Mark 3:5 (cf. Matt. 12:13; Luke 6:10); 8:25; 9:12 (cf. Matt. 17:11); Acts 1:6; Hebrews 13:19.

[39]The Greek phrase is ap’ aiónos, “from eternity.”

[40]Jesus’ earlier reply to the apostles also implies a universal restoration: “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:7-8). Jesus’ words not only are a reproof about trying to fix “times” and “seasons” but they also imply a much wider, even different, fulfillment, namely, that by the proclamation of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit the kingdom of God, not the restoration of Israel as a kingdom, will be brought near. It is about this kingdom that Jesus had been speaking with the apostles: “during forty days … speaking of the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). It is significant that after the apostles had this last conversation with Jesus before His ascension, when Peter again used the words about “restoration,” it was no longer concerning Israel but “all things.” Henceforward in Acts there is no reference anywhere to a national restoration of Israel; moreover, the kingdom as proclaimed throughout the book invariably relates only to the spiritual kingdom into which one enters through faith in Christ (see Acts 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). It is this, and this alone, that prepares the way for the restoration of all things at the return of Christ.

[41]In the Stoic philosophy of endless recurrence the word apokatastasis is used to express a cyclical return to the original state-“everything is restored exactly as it was before” (TDNT, 1:390).

[42]As noted before, rsv translates apokatastaseós as “establishing.” F. F. Bruce writes, ‘‘αποκαταστάσις may here be rendered ‘establishment,’ ‘fulfilment,’ referring to the fulfilment of all OT prophecy, culminating in the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth” (The Acts of the Apostles, 112). Bruce does not rule out “restoration”: “The sense of ‘restoration’ should perhaps not be entirely excluded.” TDNT brings together the idea of both “restoration” and “establishment”: “These (’all things’) are restored, i.e. brought back to the integrity of creation, while the promise

itself is established or fulfilled" (1:391).

[43]Isaiah 11:9 (cf. Hab. 2:14).

[44]The Greek word is palingenesia, "the new world" (rsv), "the renewal of all things" (niv), "the world that is to be" (neb). Both nasb and kjv translate it "regeneration." The only other New Testament usage of palingenesia is in Titus 3:5: "the washing of regeneration" (kjv, rsv), "rebirth" (niv, neb). Palingenesia means, literally, "again- birth," thus "re-generation."

[45]The Greek word is krinontes. According to TDNT, "The sense 'to rule' rather than 'to judge' occurs at Mt. 19:28; Lk. 22:30" (3:923).

[46]As, e.g., in John 3:3-8. The language about being "born again" (or "anew," "from above") does not use the word palingenesia. Rather, in various forms, it is a combination of gennaó and anóthen.

[47]According to TDNT, palingenesia "means 'new genesis' either in the sense of a. 'return to existence,' 'coming back from death to life,' or of b. 'renewal to a higher existence'…" (1:646). It is this latter meaning that is particularly contained in the picture of a coming "new world."

[48]In the similar judgment scene found in Revelation 20:11-15, the "blessed" ones are undoubtedly the same as those whose names are found in "the book of life" (v. 12). They- like all others-"were judged by what they had done" (v. 13).

[49]See the earlier discussion in chapter 8.

[50]Paul's definition of the kingdom of God. His complete statement is this: "For the kingdom of God does not mean food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

[51]This delivery signifies that the Son has completed His work of abolishing every alien power, and at last presents the perfected kingdom to God the Father. This by no means signifies that Christ ceases to reign, but that He, so to speak, offers up the victory to the Father. The kingdom will forever be "the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph. 5:5).

[52]This declaration actually follows a vivid statement concerning the "holy city … coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (v. 2). However, since the theme of the holy city and bride is not elaborated until verses 9ff., whereas verses 3-4 depict God's dwelling with people, the primacy of the latter is apparent. The "great voice from the throne," declaring God's dwelling with people, lends further weight to its great significance.

[53]Recall, e.g., Paul's words about how Jew and Gentile believers are members of "the household of God … a holy temple … a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:1922).

[54]Recall Revelation 20:14: "Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire."

[55]Here truly is the ultimate fulfillment of these beautiful words in Isaiah: "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (35:10).

[56]God the Father will not only wipe away tears but also, according to Revelation 21:6, give His people water to drink-from the very springs the Lamb/Shepherd has led them to: "To the thirsty I will give water without price from the fountain [or 'spring'] of the water of life." Thus closely associated again are Father and Son.

[57]The verse concludes, "… and sit on thrones judging [or 'ruling'-krinontes; see n. 45] the twelve tribes of Israel." Recall the prior discussion of this in relation to the "regeneration" to come. According to N. Geldenhuys, "krinein here does not mean 'to judge' but 'to rule' " and "the expression 'the twelve tribes of Israel' is not intended literally, but is a conventional expression for the members of the kingdom" (The Gospel of Luke, NICNT, 565). Thus the apostles will continue to have a leadership role in the fulfilled kingdom.

[58]In the preceding verse Jesus speaks of "Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God" (v. 28). Hence, the "table" will include Old Testament worthies before Christ as well as those who have come to personal faith in Him since His Incarnation.

[59]See the prior discussion of this.

[60]The word translated "trimmed" is ekosmesan, a form of kosmed, often meaning "adorn." In the picture of "the bride adorned" (Rev. 21:2), the word for "adorned" is a form of kosmed (kekosmemenen).

[61]Recall that Jesus was described by John the Baptist as a bridegroom (John 3:29) and that Jesus referred to Himself in similar fashion (Matt. 9:15; Mark 2:19-20; Luke 5:34-35).

[62]The Greek word is endoxon (from doxa), "glorious," "splendid," "radiant."

[63]The Greek word is lampron. "Bright (lampros) is the color of radiant whiteness that depicts glorification" (Alan F. Johnson, Revelation, EBC,

12:571).

[64]It would be a mistake to assume that the marriage feast occurs in heaven. Revelation 19 is a picture of the preparation of the bride for the feast yet to come. Her brightness and purity beautifully represent the saints in heaven who have gone to be with the Lord (whether by death or rapture). This is final preparation for the consummation of the marriage in the kingdom to come (Rev. 21).

[65]See note 61.

[66]The verses we earlier considered in relation to God's dwelling with people.

[67]Cf. Ezekiel 40:1-2. Ezekiel declares, "The hand of the Lord was upon me, and brought me in the visions of God into the land of Israel, and set me down upon a very high mountain, on which was a structure like a city opposite me." Following this, in chapters 40-48, much of what is described by Ezekiel is evidently a foregleam of what John beholds of the holy city in Revelation 21 and 22.

[68]The Greek word is phóstèr, "splendor, radiance" (BAGD). The word phòstér conveys the idea of a glittering radiancy, nasb and niv translate phóstèr as "brilliance."

[69]As briefly in Revelation 19:8: "It was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure."

[70]The Holy of Holies, or "inner sanctuary" was likewise a perfect cube: "twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and twenty cubits high" (1 Kings 6:20).

[71]Even as they will be a "bride adorned" in purity.

[72]The Greek word is katoptrizomenoi, "reflecting." The kjv, nasb, and rsv translate it as "beholding" (kjv, "beholding as in a glass"; nasb, "beholding as in a mirror"); rsv has "reflecting" in the margin. Either "reflecting" or "beholding" is exegetically and linguistically possible; however, the broader context, including Moses, points, I believe, to the translation of "reflects" or "reflecting as a mirror." So one commentator puts it, "As Moses reflected temporarily the glory of Yahweh which he had seen, our faces reflect continually the brilliance of Christ" (P. E. Hughes, Second Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, 118, n.19, quoting E. B. Alio).

[73]That is, by the Holy Spirit ("the Spirit of the Lord" kjv).

[74]Second Corinthians 3:18, kjv and nasb translation.

[75]Ephesians 5:27. Recall that the bride will be "clothed with fine linen, bright and pure" (Rev. 19:8).

[76]Earlier I mentioned Ezekiel 40-48 as a foregleam of Revelation 21-22. Here the revelation to John goes far beyond that given to Ezekiel, for in Ezekiel, although the city is spoken of, the main vision concerns the temple: its measurements, its priestly service, etc. But for John the temple-for all its earthly beauty-has been wholly transcended and replaced by God Himself! "For John there is no temple because symbol [i.e., in Ezekiel] has given way to reality" (Mounce, The Book of Revelation, NICNT, 383). The city is no longer Jerusalem but the glorified people of God, and the temple is no longer a structure built by man but the presence of God Almighty and the Lamb.

[77]Cf. Isaiah 60:19: "The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night, but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory." What a glorious fulfillment of this prophecy is found in Revelation 21:22-23! Isaiah, to be sure, depicts this in terms of the earthly Jerusalem of "Zion" (v. 14), and a people who "shall possess the land for ever" (v. 21), but in the revelation to John all of this is transcended in the glory of the New Jerusalem "out of heaven from God," a "land" that is "the new heaven and the new earth," and a possession that is eternal life (see following).

[78]The magnificent climax of Ezekiel 40-48, after the description of temple and city, is found in these words: "And the name of the city from that time on will be: the Lord is there" (48:35 niv). What words could better declare the reality of the coming holy city, the radiant people of God: "the Lord is there"!

[79]Cf. Isaiah 60:3: "And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising."

[80]Recall the earlier references in Revelation to the "earth-dwellers."

[81]Recall Revelation 19:19 and elsewhere.

[82]The kjv, in translating Revelation 21:24, has "the nations of them which are saved," emphasizing that the nations are the people of God. Although the basis for such a textual addition is weak, the kjv, I believe, is correct in its understanding.

[83]Cf. Zechariah 14:7: "And there shall be continuous day (it is known to the LORD), not day and not night, for at evening time there shall be light."

[84]Genesis 3:22. God spoke these words after Adam and Eve had sinned so

that man had to be banished “lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.” Although Genesis 2 does not state that the “tree of life” made eternal life possible, this is so specified in Genesis 3.

[85]Recall Revelation 21:22.

[86]The word is ekporeutai.

[87]The word is ekporeuomenon. The kjv translates it “proceeding out of.”

[88]The Lamb is shown in Revelation sitting on the throne of the Father: “I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne” (3:21). Thus there is only one throne and one God.

[89]Swete calls it “the river of the life-giving Spirit” (Commentary on Revelation, 298).

[90]We may recall that Jesus said, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11). Peter speaks of a present “unutterable and exalted joy” (1 Peter 1:8).

[91]C. S. Lewis writes, “All your life an unattainable ecstasy has hovered just beyond the grasp of your consciousness” (The Problem of Pain, 136). It is this “unattainable ecstasy,” then attained, that will highlight the age to come.

[92]A final note on the theme of the coming joy: The prophet Isaiah, speaking for the Lord, declares, “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.” (Observe the unmistakable parallel with Revelation 21:1.) Then follows “But be glad and rejoice for ever … for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy” (Isa. 65:17-18). The immediate reason for this coming joy: “No more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress” (v. 19). (Note the parallel with Revelation 21:4.) “No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days … for the child shall die a hundred years old” (v. 20). How much greater the joy to come in the “new Jerusalem” where life is not only extended but will never come to an end!

[93]Literally, “twelve fruits” (karpous dodeka). The nasb also adds “kinds”; kjv, “manner”; niv and neb, “crops.” “Kinds” or “manner,” suggesting diversity, seems to be the more likely translation of the Greek text.

[94]Hence “the tree of life” is the composite and ultimate fulfillment of the words in Genesis 2:9: “And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of

life also in the midst of the garden."

[95]The neb translates Hebrews 4:9: "Therefore, a sabbath rest still awaits the people of God"

[96]Originally man in Eden knew nothing of toil. He was, indeed, responsible for cultivating the garden-"to till it and keep it" (Gen. 2:15). Thus there was work to be done. After the Fall, toil becomes man's lot: "Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it … and in the sweat of your face" (Gen. 3:17, 19). It is from the work that has become toil (not from work itself) that rest will be complete in the age to come.

[97]See note 96.

[98]Worth quoting here are some beautiful words from noncanonical 2 Esdras 8:52-54: "It is for you that paradise is opened, the tree of life is planted, the age to come is prepared, plenty is provided, a city is built, rest is appointed, goodness is established and wisdom perfected beforehand. The root of evil is sealed up from you, illness is banished from you, and death is hidden; hell has fled and corruption has been forgotten; sorrows have passed away, and in the end the treasure of immortality is made manifest."

[99]"The nations" are to be understood as in Revelation 21:24, 26. See the previous section. They are none other than God's people whose tears will be wiped away (Rev. 21:4), but now viewed not in terms of individual hurts and pains but of collective wounding and strife.

[100]Recall the prior reference to this verse on pages 483-84.

[101]The same words are found in Micah 4:3.

[102]Instead of "worship" as found in both rsv and neb. The Greek verb is latreusousin from latreud, which primarily means the total service one offers to God. Thus, it may also mean "worship," as the highest possible service to God. However, I believe it best to keep the broader meaning, "serve," in the translation (as do kjv, nasb, and niv). Incidentally, the one other use of latreuo in Revelation 7:15 is translated as "serve" in the rsv ("minister" in neb), also in kjv, nasb, and niv. See the comment on Revelation 7:15 infra.

[103]The words "There shall be no more anything accursed"-more literally, "There shall no longer be any curse" (nasb)-go back to Zechariah 14:11: "There shall be no more curse." The prophecy of Zechariah, continuing with the words "Jerusalem shall dwell in security," refers in Revelation to the new Jerusalem of the world to come.

[104]As noted before, the Greek word latreuö contains the note of both service and worship.

[105]The summum bonum of which philosophers often have spoken.

[106]Jesus in reference to “these little ones” said, “Do not despise [them]; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 18:10).

[107]The four living creatures are described in Revelation 4:8 as “full of eyes all round and within” (hence, total vision); moreover, “day and night they never cease to sing, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!’ “

[108]Revelation 4:9-11; conipare 11:16; 19:4. Although one cannot be certain, the twenty- four elders probably represent the glorified church.

[109]Revelation 5:11-14. The climax: “The elders fell down and worshiped” (v. 14).

[110]Even as the temple will be “the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (Rev. 21:22).

[111]“There comes to mind this gospel chorus:

O that will be glory for me,
Glory for me, glory for me;
When by His grace
1 shall look on His face
That will be glory, be glory for me.
Charles H. Gabriel

[112]“The redeemed shall be perfectly possessed by God” (Ladd, *A Commentary of the Revelation of John*, 288).

[113]“Incidentally, this strikingly contrasts with Revelation 13, where the “earth-dwellers” have the mark of the beast on their foreheads (v. 16). Also, compare 14:9, where reference is again made to the beast’s mark on the forehead. In between these two “beastly” passages is the beautiful picture of Revelation 14:1.

[114]Still earlier, in Revelation 3:12, there are three names. In the message to the church of Philadelphia Jesus declares, “He who conquers I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the New Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.”

[115]Mounce puts it well: “The faces of those who have experienced the

beatific vision will reflect the unmistakable likeness of their heavenly Father" (*The Book of Revelation*, NICNT, 388).

[116]Recall the earlier discussion of this verse on pages 496–97.

[117]I should not fail to mention Moses, who with "unveiled face" had such an exposure to God's glory (for forty days and nights, praying and fasting atop a mountain, communing with God, and receiving the Ten Commandments) that when he came down, "the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God" (Exod. 34:29). That glory faded in time, but not so for the inner glory of the believer, who is being continuously changed in this life and will be completely transformed in the age to come. The glory is there-forever.

[118]Paul adds that none of these things can "separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (v. 39). The very fact that they cannot separate us demonstrates that we are "more than conquerors."

[119]This refers to Christ's present reign. For the view of those who understand this to mean a future millenial reign, see the Excursus in chapter 13, "The Millennium," pages 434-44.

[120]Recall the earlier discussion.

[121]Later the twenty-four elders say that the time came for "destroying the destroyers of the earth" (v. 18). It is against this background that the victorious reign "for ever and ever" is pronounced.

[122]The "horn" represents the same anti-God, anti-Christian evil force as "the beast" (Rev. 13:7).

[123]Note the parallel with the theme of destruction in the preceding paragraph.

[124]The nasb (cf. niv) has "His." The pronoun is singular, so it could point to the Messiah (see 7:14); however, the present context suggests that the "his" refers to the saints. Accordingly, rsv and neb translate it as "their." The kjv has "whose kingdom," thus, like rsv and neb, referring back to the "saints of the Most High."

[125]This agrees with Daniel 7:18: "The saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom … for ever, for ever and ever."

[126]Assuming as above that this text refers to the rule of the saints.

[127]As mentioned in Ephesians 1:21; Colossians 1:16; 1 Peter 3:22.

[128]Recall the previous discussion.

[129]See the earlier discussion, pages 455-56.

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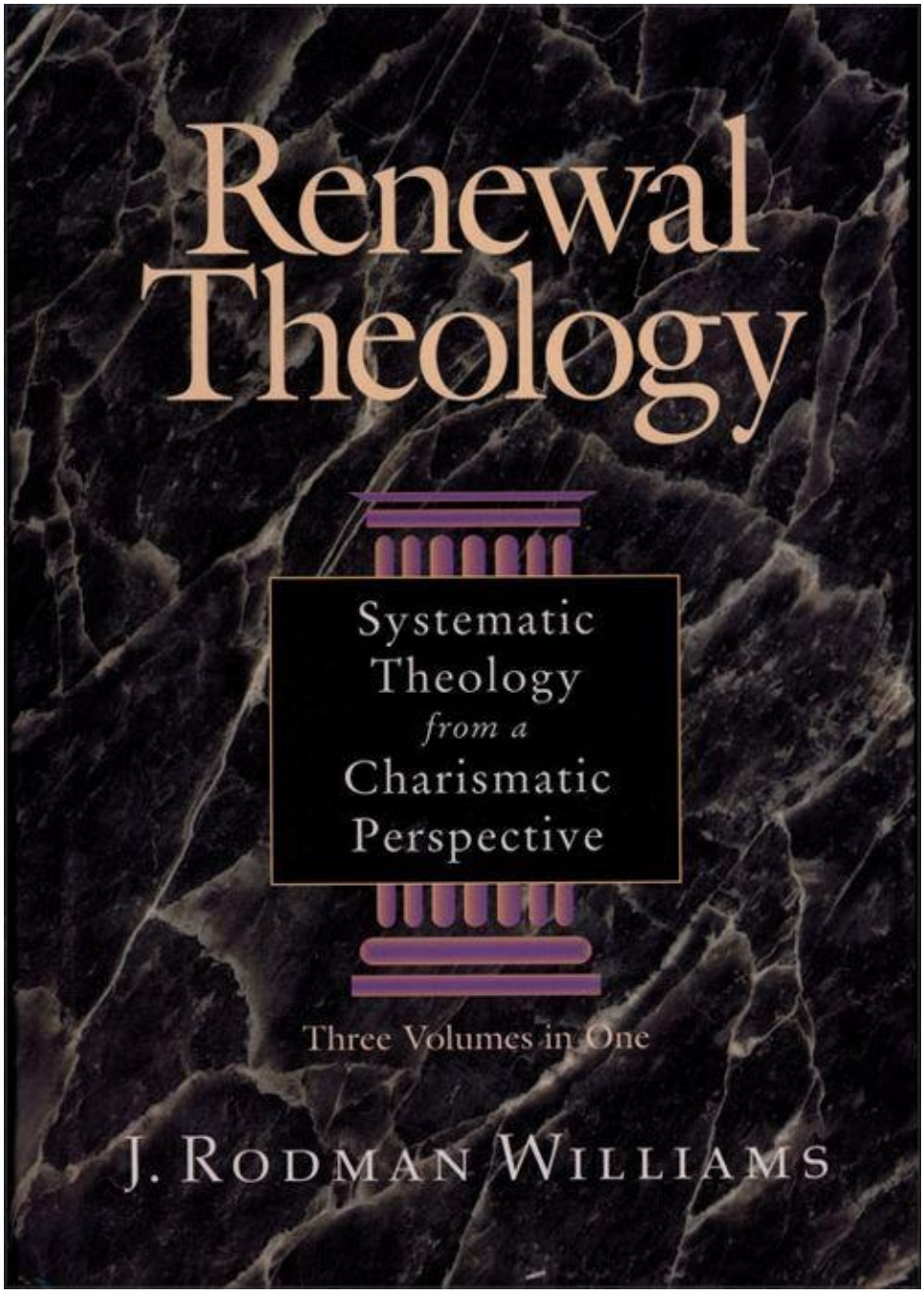

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