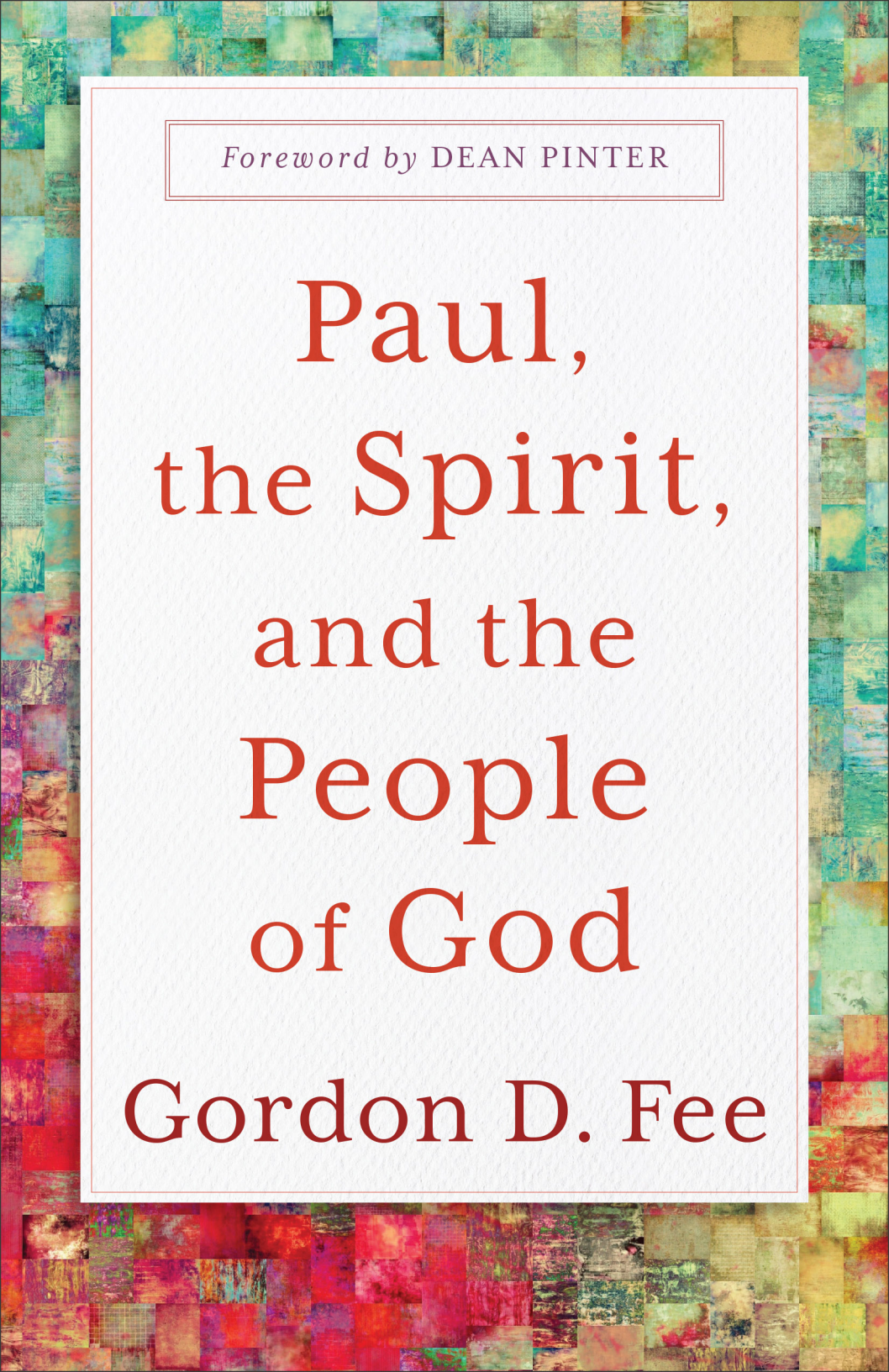


The background of the entire image is a complex, abstract mosaic of small, irregular squares in various shades of teal, green, blue, and yellow. A large, white rectangular panel is centered on this background, containing the text. The text is in a serif font, with the title in a larger, reddish-brown color and the author's name in a smaller, dark red color. The foreword credit is in a small, italicized, dark red font at the top of the white panel.

Foreword by DEAN PINTER

Paul,
the Spirit,
and the
People
of God

Gordon D. Fee

Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God

Gordon D. Fee

Foreword by DEAN PINTER



Baker Academic

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group © 2022
Used by permission.

Contents

Foreword *by Dean Pinter* vii

Preface xi

Overture—An Invitation to Read Paul Anew xvii

1. A “Theology” of the Spirit? The Spirit in Pauline Theology 1
2. God Revisits His People—The Spirit as the Renewed Presence of God 9
3. The Holy Who? The Spirit as Person 24
4. God in Three Persons—The Spirit and the Trinity 35
5. The Beginning of the End—The Spirit as Evidence of the “Presence of the Future” 46
6. A People for His Name—The Spirit and the People of God 60
7. Conversion: Getting In (Part 1)—The Spirit and the Hearing of the Gospel 70
8. Conversion: Getting In (Part 2)—The Spirit at the Entry Point 79

9. Conversion: Staying In (Part 1)—The Spirit and Pauline Ethics	91
10. Conversion: Staying In (Part 2)—The Fruit of the Spirit	104
11. The Ongoing Warfare—The Spirit against the Flesh	117
12. Power in Weakness—The Spirit, Present Weakness, and Prayer	130
13. To the Praise of His Glory—The Spirit and Worship	141
14. Those Controversial Gifts? The Spirit and the <i>Charismata</i>	152
15. Where to from Here? The Spirit for Today and Tomorrow	167
Appendix: Spirit Baptism and Water Baptism in Paul	181
Notes	191
Scripture Index	201

Overture—An Invitation to Read Paul Anew

One reads Paul poorly who does not recognize that for him the presence of the Spirit, as an experienced and living reality, was the crucial matter for Christian life, from beginning to end.

Contemporary Christians have a right to be concerned. In an increasingly secular, individualistic, and relativistic world—dubbed “post-Christian” in the 1960s and now called “postmodern”—the church is regularly viewed as irrelevant at best and Neanderthal at worst. Frankly, much of the fault lies with the church, especially those of us in the church who pride ourselves in being orthodox with regard to the historic faith. For all too often our orthodoxy has been either diluted by an unholy alliance with a given political agenda or diminished by legalistic or relativistic ethics quite unrelated to the character of God or rendered ineffective by a pervasive rationalism in an increasingly nonrationalistic world.

But there is reason for hope as well since contemporary postmodernism looks much like the culture of the Greco-Roman world into which the gospel first appeared some two thousand years ago. The secret to the success of the early believers in their culture lay first with their “good news” centered in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Immanuel had come, bringing both revelation of the character

of God (“Have you been with me for so long and don’t know who I am? The one who has seen me has seen the Father” [John 14:9]) and redemption from our tragic fallenness (“You shall call his name Yeshua, for he will save his people from their sins” [Matt. 1:21]). But their success also lay with their experienced life of the Spirit who made the work of Christ an effective reality in their lives, thus making them a radical alternative within their culture.

It often seems otherwise with us. If we have (rightly) kept our central focus on Christ Jesus, we are less sure about the Holy Spirit. Despite the affirmations in our creeds and hymns and the lip service paid to the Spirit in our occasional conversations, the Spirit has been largely marginalized both in the halls of learning and in the life of the church as a community of faith.

I do not mean that the Holy Spirit is not present; he is indeed, or we are not of Christ at all. But the primary emphasis regarding the Spirit’s activity has been on his quiescence, based largely on imagery drawn from Elijah’s encounter with God on Sinai, where the LORD was not in the wind, earthquake, and fire, but came to Elijah in “a still small voice” (1 Kings 19:11–13 KJV). Support for this view is then found in the New Testament by emphasizing Paul’s “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22–23), while suggesting that the “gifts of the Spirit” in 1 Corinthians 12–14 were for the apostolic period only. Quiescence, however, has sometimes fostered anemia, not only in the church corporately but also at the individual level, evidenced in part by the myriad of ways individual believers have longed for a greater sense of God’s presence in their lives.

This common “missing out” on the Spirit as an experienced, empowering reality has frequently been “corrected” historically through a variety of Spirit movements—most recently in the twentieth century in the form of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements. Emphasis here has been on the “wind, earthquake, and fire,” and the primary texts referenced are from Acts and 1 Corinthians 12–14. These Spirit movements have also tended to emphasize individualistic spirituality, so that the reality of the Spirit is sometimes merely experienced in the experience. Such piety has frequently lacked sound exegetical basis or betrayed inadequate theological reflection.

The net result has tended toward a truncated view of the Spirit on both sides, accompanied by an inadequate view of the role of the Spirit in Paul's understanding of things Christian. For him, life in the Spirit meant embracing both fruit and gifts simultaneously and vigorously—what I have come to call life in the radical middle. The Spirit as an experienced and empowering reality was for Paul and his churches the key player in all Christian life, from beginning to end. The Spirit covered the whole waterfront: power for life, growth, fruit, gifts, prayer, witness, and everything else.

But if the empowering, experienced dimension of life in the Spirit is often missed on the one side, too often missing on both sides are two further matters that, for Paul, lie at the very heart of faith. First, the Spirit as person, the promised return of God's own personal presence with his people; second, the Spirit as eschatological fulfillment (see chap. 5 below), who both reconstitutes God's people anew and empowers us to live the life of the future in our between-the-times existence—between the time of Christ's first and second coming.

If the church is going to be effective in our postmodern world, we need to stop paying mere lip service to the Spirit and instead recapture Paul's perspective: the Spirit as the *experienced, empowering* return of God's own *personal presence* in and among us, who enables us to live as a radically *eschatological* people in the present world while we await the consummation. All the rest, including fruit and gifts (that is, ethical life and charismatic utterances in worship), serve to that end.

Hence I offer this "invitation" to read Paul afresh, to recognize the crucial role of the Spirit in his life and thought, and in that of his churches. Such a reading, I insist, must be thoroughly exegetical—hence the frequent references to the exegesis presented in *GEP*—and fully theological, to see how the Spirit fits into the bigger picture of things Pauline. This fresh reading of Paul will make clear that for him the presence of the Spirit, as an experienced and living reality, was the crucial matter for Christian life, from beginning to end. Since that is a theological assertion, some preliminary theological issues must first be addressed in chapter 1. I encourage readers not to get bogged down here. The chapter is necessary in order to establish a reference point for the rest of the book.

1

A “Theology” of the Spirit? The Spirit in Pauline Theology

Our theology and experience of the Spirit must be more interwoven if our experienced life of the Spirit is to be more effective.

I well remember my graduate theology professor declaring emphatically, “*Everyone* has a theology [that is, some rudimentary view of God and the world on the basis of which they live]; the question is not *whether* you have a theology—you do—but whether you have a *good* one.”

Without apology, therefore, this is primarily a book on Paul’s *theology*—that is, how Paul understood God and his ways, and the role of the Spirit in that theology. For some, of course, a “theology” book on the Spirit is the kiss of death; and in many ways I am in that camp. But we lack a better word; and in the final analysis, the health of the contemporary church necessitates that its *theology* of the Spirit and its *experience* of the Spirit correspond much more closely than they have in much of the past.

Ordinarily theology has to do with a studied, reflective understanding of things divine, dealing with how the various matters we believe about God and God's ways can be put into a coherent whole. But we do not find Paul reflecting on the Holy Spirit any more than we find him reflecting on the significance of the Lord's Table or on the relationships within the Godhead, which he presupposes and which tantalizingly pop out here and there. As often happens with such foundational matters, we rarely look at them reflectively. They are simply part of the stuff of ongoing life; and what we say about them is often offhanded, matter-of-fact, and without argument or explanation.

Yet theology is what Paul is doing all the time. Rather than the reflective theology of the scholar or classroom, his is a "task theology," the theologizing that takes place in the marketplace, where belief and the experience of God run head-on into the thought systems, religions, and everyday life of people in the Greco-Roman world at the beginning of the second half of the first century. Paul's task theology is the more complex because it takes place in a racially and socially diverse environment. In part, therefore, the issues raised for Paul have to do with what the God of the Jews (the one and only God) was doing in history through Christ and the Spirit, which for Paul transpired within a primarily gentile context.

Into this kind of setting Paul came preaching, experiencing, rethinking, and restating old and new truths, as he wrestled with what it meant for Jew and gentile together to be the one people of God. In the process he was constantly "doing" theology, grappling with how the gospel works—and works out—in this new context that was so radically different from the more insular Jewish world in which the gospel first appeared in history.

Our present concern in this reading of Paul is with what he *says* about the Spirit, since his words are our primary window into his understanding. But we need to do more than just gather all the passages and test them against some set of doctrinal assumptions, for in the case of the Spirit we are dealing with the essential matter of early Christian *experience*. The only worthwhile theology, after all, is one that is translated into life; and Paul's understanding of the Spirit is ultimately a matter of lived-out faith. The experience of the Spirit

was how the early believers came to receive the salvation that Christ had brought, and how they came to understand themselves as living at the beginning of the end times. For them, the Spirit was both the evidence that God’s great future for his people had already made its way into the present and the guarantee that God would conclude what he had begun in Christ (= Paul’s eschatological framework). Thus the Spirit is foundational to their entire *experience* and *understanding* of their present life in Christ.

My concern is that we come to terms both with the experienced realities and with Paul’s understanding of them, as much as we can do that with fairness and integrity.

Continuity and Discontinuity with the Past

One of the primary issues in Pauline theology is that of continuity and discontinuity between the old covenant and the new—that is, between God’s word to Israel, communicated by prophet and poet, and God’s new word to his people through Christ Jesus, communicated by apostles and teachers. We read the letters of Paul as part of the New Testament, the record of God’s new covenant with his people, effected through Christ and the Spirit. But, in fact, Paul did not know he was contributing to such a “new testament.” For him the “new covenant” was not a written record at all but a historical reality, experienced anew at the Table of the Lord and realized on an everyday basis through the presence of the Spirit. The question then is, How is the new related to the old? Does it *supersede*, as a truly *new* covenant? Or does it *fulfill*, and in so doing carry with it much of what was there before? In order to understand Paul properly we must grasp how his perspective both continues and modifies the religious tradition in which he was reared, especially his understanding of his Old Testament roots.

One of the primary issues in Pauline theology is that of continuity and discontinuity between the old covenant and the new.

First, we must recognize his own sense of continuity with his heritage. Paul sees himself and his churches as being in a direct line with the people of God in the Old Testament; and despite his deep convictions about the radical implications of the coming of Christ and the Spirit, he regularly reaffirms that continuity. He includes a primarily gentile church in the events of the exodus: “all *our* forefathers were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Cor. 10:1–2). To gentiles who were in danger of submitting to circumcision he not only appeals to Abraham and the promises of the old covenant but also asks frankly, “Tell me, you who wish to be under the law, do you not hear the law?” and then expounds the “true meaning” of Sarah and Hagar, Isaac and Ishmael, in light of Christ and the Spirit (Gal. 4:21–31). Paul never speaks of a “new Israel” or “new people of God”; his language is “God’s Israel” (Gal. 6:16), an *Israel* in continuation with the past but now composed of Jew and gentile alike as the one people of God.

But just as clearly, there is significant discontinuity. The people of God have now been newly formed. Christ is the “goal of the law” (Rom. 10:4), and the Spirit is “the promised Holy Spirit” (Gal. 3:14; Eph. 1:13). Christ’s death and resurrection have brought an end to Torah observance (living on the basis of the Old Testament law [Rom. 7:4–6; 8:2–3]); being led by the Spirit has replaced observance as God’s way of fulfilling Torah (Gal. 5:18); indeed, the righteous requirement of Torah is now fulfilled in those who walk in/by the Spirit (Rom. 8:4).

The Holy Spirit was an essential part of Israel’s promised future. For Paul the gift of “the Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph. 1:13) is the certain evidence that the future has already been set in motion. To see how the promise has been fulfilled by the Spirit, and how that affected the early church’s self-understanding, is part of the invitation to this fresh reading of Paul.

Since the Spirit plays this integral role in fulfilling the promised new covenant, it would be fitting to include a chapter in this book on the Pauline antecedents;¹ that is, on the role of the Spirit in the Old Testament and intertestamental Judaism. Rather than do that, I have chosen to show throughout the book what their expectations looked like and how Paul understands the Spirit as fulfilling them.

Finding the Elusive Center

A final introductory word concerns the long debate in scholarship as to what constitutes the “heart” of Paul’s theology.² The traditional view, fostered by the Reformers and perpetuated by generations of Protestants, is that “justification by faith” is the key to that theology. This view emphasizes Christ’s historical saving act on our behalf and our realization of it through faith. The inadequacy of this view is that it focuses on one metaphor of salvation, justification, to the exclusion of others.³ Such a focus fails to throw the net broadly enough to capture all of Paul’s theological concerns.

In response to this, others found as the center Paul’s “mystical experience of being *in Christ*.”⁴ This view shifted the focus from Christ’s historical work and its appropriation by the believer to the believer’s (especially Paul’s) ongoing experience of Christ. While in some ways this view served as a corrective to the traditional one, most contemporary Pauline scholars have recognized that both these approaches are somewhat limiting. The frequent result, however, has been to emphasize the diversity and “contingency”⁵ of Paul’s letters to such an extent that many scholars, reflecting contemporary postmodernism, despair of ever finding a genuine center to Pauline theology—or even of finding coherence in his theology at all.

I bring two convictions to these matters regarding Pauline theology. First, I am convinced that there is a stable core to Paul’s understanding of Christ and the Spirit, much of which he presupposes, based on his sense of continuity with the old, and all of which can be found in what he simply calls “the gospel.” For him there was a fundamental core content to the gospel—a content held in common with all other early Christians (see, e.g., 1 Cor. 15:1–3, 11). The seeming variations in Paul’s theology, as I understand them, have to do with his working through the implications of that common content for the gentile mission, to which he devoted the last two decades of his life.

Second, and in keeping with some of the present mood, I am convinced that the center is so elusive because the basic core of Paul’s theology covers too much ground for one to simplify it into a single phrase. It would seem far better for us to isolate the essential elements of his theology that lie at the heart of matters for Paul and around

which all other concerns cluster. In my view, at least four elements are essential:

- The *church* as an eschatological community (that is, a community living in the “beginning of the end times”) made up of the new covenant people of God.
- The *eschatological framework* of this new people’s existence and thinking.
- The formation of God’s new people by the eschatological *salvation* accomplished through the *death and resurrection of Christ*.
- The focus of this people on *Jesus* as Messiah, Lord, and Son of God.

To put this another way:

- The *foundation*: a gracious and merciful God, who is full of love toward all.
- The *framework*: the fulfillment of God’s promises as already begun but not yet completed.
- The *focus*: Jesus, the Son of God, who as God’s suffering servant Messiah accomplished eschatological salvation for humanity through his death and resurrection, and who is now the exalted Lord and coming King.
- The *fruit*: the church as an eschatological community, who, formed as a people by Christ’s death and the gift of the Spirit, and thus restored into God’s likeness, becomes God’s new covenant people.

If this is a correct assessment of Paul’s perspective (and indeed that of the rest of the New Testament), then we might further distill all of this. On the one hand, as will be pointed out in chapter 5, it seems impossible to understand Paul without recognizing *eschatology* as the essential framework of all his theological thinking; on the other hand, *salvation in Christ* is the essential concern within that framework. Salvation is “eschatological” in the sense that final salvation, which still awaits the believer, is already a present reality through Christ

and the Spirit. It is “in Christ” in the sense that what originated in God was effected historically by the death and resurrection of Christ, and is received and experienced by God’s people through the work of the Holy Spirit—who is also the key to Christian life “between the times,” until the final consummation at Christ’s *parousia* (“coming”).

It does not take much reflection to recognize that apart from the actual focus on Jesus Christ as Messiah, Lord, and Savior, the Spirit is a crucial ingredient to each of these aspects of the Pauline center. Thus my conviction that the Spirit stands near the center of things for Paul, as part of the fundamental core of his understanding of the gospel. The experience of the Spirit is the key to his already/not yet eschatological framework; the Spirit is the essential player in believers’ experiencing and living out the salvation that God has brought about in Christ; the Spirit both forms the church into God’s new (eschatological) people and conforms them into Christ’s image through his fruit in their lives; and the Spirit gifts them in worship to edify and encourage one another in their ongoing life in the world. It is fair to say that “Paul’s entire theology without the supporting pinion of the Spirit would crumble into ruins.”⁶

*It is fair to say
that “Paul’s entire
theology without
the supporting
pinion of the Spirit
would crumble
into ruins.”*

Finally, I must note that the aim of all this is not simply informational. I would be less than honest if I did not admit to trying to persuade. But persuasion in this case is not a matter of being right or wrong. My ultimate concern, for myself and for the contemporary church, is that we return to our biblical roots on this matter if the church is going to count for anything in the new millennium that lies just around the corner.

Reflection Questions

1. Fee contends, “The only worthwhile theology . . . is one that is translated into life; and Paul’s understanding of the Spirit is

ultimately a matter of lived-out faith” (p. 2). What are some ways in which your understanding of the Spirit is lived out in your life and the life of your local church community?

2. Fee suggests that four elements lie at the center of Paul’s theology, “around which all other concerns cluster”: (1) “the *church* as an eschatological community . . . made up of the new covenant people of God,” (2) “the *eschatological framework* of this new people’s existence and thinking,” (3) “the formation of God’s new people by the eschatological *salvation* accomplished through the *death and resurrection of Christ*,” and (4) “the focus of this people on *Jesus* as Messiah, Lord, and Son of God.” “Salvation in Christ” is the essential concern within Paul’s eschatological framework and the Spirit is the “crucial ingredient” to each component of the Pauline center (see pp. 6–7). With this perspective in mind, where do you see these four elements and their respective components in your reading of Paul’s letters?

2

God Revisits His People— The Spirit as the Renewed Presence of God

The outpouring of the Spirit meant for Paul that God had fulfilled his promise to dwell once again in and among his people.

Presence is a delicious word—because it points to one of our truly great gifts. Nothing else can take the place of presence, not gifts, not telephone calls, not pictures, not mementos, nothing. Ask the person who has lost a lifelong mate what they miss the most; the answer is invariably “presence.” When we are ill, we don’t need soothing words nearly as much as we need loved ones to be present. What makes shared life—games, walks, concerts, outings, and a myriad of other things—so pleasurable? Presence.

God has made us this way, in his own image, because he himself is a personal, relational being. The great problem with the fall is that we lost not only our vision of God (that is, his true character has been distorted) but also our relationship with God, and thus no

longer knew his abiding presence. For Paul the coming of Christ and the Spirit changed all of this forever.

At the heart of things Pauline is his understanding of the out-poured Spirit as the coming of “the promised Holy Spirit” (Eph. 1:13; Gal. 3:14). While this promise especially included the renewal of the prophetic word,¹ for Paul it also meant the arrival of the new covenant, anticipated by the promised “circumcision of the heart” in Deuteronomy 30:6 and prophesied explicitly in Jeremiah 31:31–34: “I will make a new covenant . . . and I will write it on their hearts” (NRSV). This prophecy was shortly thereafter picked up by Ezekiel, who expressly linked it to the Spirit, whom God was going to “put in you” (36:26–27; 37:14). Above everything else, as fulfillment of the new covenant² the Spirit marked the return of the lost presence of God.

Here, then, is one of the more significant areas where the Spirit represents both continuity and discontinuity between the old and new covenants. The continuity is to be found in the promised renewal of God’s presence with his people; the discontinuity lies in the radically new way God has revisited them—indwelling them individually as well as corporately by his Spirit.

The Presence of God in the Old Testament

The theme of the presence of God is crucial to both the Old and New Testaments, serving in fact as bookends to the Christian Bible.³ It begins in Genesis 2–3 with the creator of heaven and earth being present in the garden with those he has created in his own image; it concludes with the marvelous pictures of the renewed heaven and earth and the renewal of Eden in Revelation 21:1–22:5, in which John says expressly, “I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (21:22 NRSV). Whatever else, the people of Israel understood themselves to be the people of the Presence, the people among whom the eternal God had chosen to dwell on earth.

The Tabernacle and Temple

The most prominent way God’s presence is experienced in the Old Testament is in the tabernacle and the temple. Such a presence

motif, culminating in God's glory descending on the tabernacle, is the structural key to the book of Exodus. In the incident of the burning bush (Exod. 3), the living God first shows himself present to Moses at Sinai. Then he instructs Moses to bring the people there to worship him. When Israel arrives at the holy mount in chapter 19, they come to the place of God's "dwelling," the place they are forbidden even to touch on penalty of death. Only Moses is allowed into God's presence.

But God plans to move from the mount and dwell among his people by means of a tabernacle. So after the giving of the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 20–24), Moses receives the instructions for the tabernacle's construction (chaps. 25–31). But between the instructions and the construction (chaps. 35–39), the disastrous episode in the desert occurs (chap. 32), followed by God's announcing to Moses: "My presence will not go with you"; an angel will go instead (chap. 33). Moses recognizes the inadequacy of this solution and intercedes: "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" (33:15–16 NIV).

This is followed by the further revelation of God's character ("compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness," Exod. 34:4–7) and the construction of the tabernacle, all of which concludes with the descent of God's glory, which "filled the tabernacle" (40:35). With that, they are ready to journey to the place that "the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name" (Deut. 12:11 and *passim*), led by the presence of God symbolized by the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire.

The Deuteronomy promise was finally fulfilled in the construction of Solomon's temple, where the same glory as in Exodus 40 descended and "filled his temple" (1 Kings 8:11). Thus Jerusalem and the temple are regularly described as "the place Yahweh chose for his name to dwell"; and the temple became the focal point of Israel's existence in the promised land.

Even more than the law, therefore, or other identity markers such as circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath observance, God's presence with Israel distinguished them as his people. They well understood

that the God who created the heavens and the earth could not be contained by an earthly structure (e.g., Isa. 66:1–2); nonetheless, because God chose to have his presence concentrate there, the tabernacle and the temple became the primary symbols of God’s presence among his people.

Thus, even though the temple also served as a place for sacrifices, the Old Testament people of God saw it primarily as a place of prayer and a reminder that God’s presence was with them. This comes out over and over again in Israel’s hymn book, the Psalter. Take, for example, the great enthronement hymn in Psalm 68, which pictures God’s presence on Zion as the hope of his people and the envy of their neighbors:

The mountains of Bashan are majestic mountains;
 rugged are the mountains of Bashan.
 Why gaze in envy, O rugged mountains,
 at the mountain where God chooses to reign,
 where the LORD himself will dwell forever? (Ps. 68:15–16)

Of the “enthronement,” the psalmist sings:

The chariots of God are tens of thousands
 and thousands of thousands;
 the Lord has come from Sinai into his sanctuary.
 When you ascended on high,
 you took many captives;
 you received gifts from people,
 even from the rebellious—
 that you, LORD God, might dwell there. (vv. 17–18 NIV)

This same theme is repeatedly picked up by individual Israelites throughout the Psalter, as they reflect on the glory of being in God’s presence:

How lovely is your dwelling place,
 O LORD Almighty,
 My soul yearns, even faints,
 for the courts of the LORD;
 my heart and my flesh cry out
 for the living God. (Ps. 84:1–2)

I have seen you in the sanctuary
And beheld your power and your glory. (Ps. 63:2)

But Israel's failure caused them to forfeit God's presence. This is what makes the fall of Jerusalem and the exile so full of pathos for them. The temple in Jerusalem, where God had chosen to dwell, was destroyed; and not only were the people carried away captive, but the captives and those who remained were no longer a people distinguished by the presence of the living God in their midst. The poignancy of it all finds its ultimate, symbolic expression in Ezekiel 10, where, just as with the ark of the covenant in 1 Samuel 4, the "glory of the LORD" departs from the temple in Jerusalem.

The Promise of the Renewed Presence

But all was not lost. Central to the prophetic hope was the promised return of God's presence. Through Ezekiel, for example, God promises, "My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God and they will be my people" (Ezek. 37:27); and Malachi prophesies, "Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple" (Mal. 3:1). This hope continues into inter-testamental Judaism among the apocalyptic writers, as, for example, in Testament of Dan 5:13: "And Jerusalem will no longer undergo desolation, . . . because the Lord will be in her midst."

In keeping with Israel's earlier history, the motif of the renewed presence is tied directly to the hope of a restored temple. The motif finds its most powerful metaphorical expression in Ezekiel's grand vision (chaps. 40–48) but its most memorable moment in the oracle of Isaiah 2:2–3 (repeated in Mic. 4:1–2), where the inclusion of the gentiles is also a primary motif⁴ (cf. Zech. 14:16–19):

In the last days
the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established
as chief among the mountains;

*Central to the
prophetic hope
was the promised
return of God's
presence.*

it will be raised above the hills,
 and all nations will stream to it.
 Many peoples will come and say,
 “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
 to the house of the God of Jacob.
 He will teach us his ways,
 so that we may walk in his paths.”

The second temple, however, does not live up to all these expectations. Thus it evinces mixed feelings among the people. In light of Solomon’s temple and the promised future temple of Ezekiel, Haggai complains, “Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?” (Hag. 2:3). In many circles, therefore, the hope of a rebuilt, grand temple still awaited the people of God.⁵

The Presence Equated with the Spirit

For Paul the most crucial matter regarding this motif lies with the fact that in Isaiah 63:9–14 the divine presence in the Exodus narrative was specifically equated with “the Holy Spirit of the Lord.” In recalling Israel’s past, the prophet says:

He became their savior in all their distress.
 It was no messenger or angel
 but his Presence that saved them.
 In his love and mercy he redeemed them;
 he lifted them up and carried them
 all the days of old.
 Yet they rebelled
 and grieved his Holy Spirit.
 Therefore he became their enemy;
 he himself fought against them.
 Then they recalled the days of old,
 of Moses and his people.
 Where is he who brought them through the sea,
 with the shepherds of his flock?
 Where is he *who set*
 his Holy Spirit among them,

who sent his glorious arm of power
to be at Moses' right hand,
who divided the waters before them,
to make for himself an everlasting name,
who led them through the depths?
Like a horse in the desert,
they did not stumble;
like cattle that go down to the plain,
the Spirit of Yahweh gave them rest.
This is how you guided your people
to make for yourself a glorious name.⁶

This connection is one with which Paul is thoroughly familiar, as is confirmed by his deliberate echo of the language of verse 10 in Ephesians 4:30: “And do not *grieve the Holy Spirit of God*, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

The Spirit as the Renewed Presence in Paul

When we turn to Paul from these (especially) Old Testament antecedents, it is clear that he understands the Spirit's coming as fulfilling three related expectations: (1) the association of the Spirit with the new covenant; (2) the language of “indwelling”; and (3) the association of the Spirit with the imagery of the temple. By fulfilling both the new covenant and the renewed temple motifs, the Spirit becomes the way God himself is now present on planet earth.⁷

The temple imagery is especially significant in this regard, since the temple was always understood as the *place* of God's dwelling, the place of his glory. For Paul the Spirit is how God presently dwells in his holy temple. Significantly, such dwelling takes place both in the gathered community, as one might well expect given the Old Testament background to this usage, and especially in the heart of the individual believer.

*For Paul the
Spirit is how
God presently
dwells in his
holy temple.*

The Spirit's Role in the New Covenant

In keeping with the rest of the early church, Paul recognizes the death of Christ as instituting God's new covenant with his people (see 1 Cor. 11:25). He also sees the Spirit as the way that covenant is realized in and among them. As the result of his own—and others'—experience of the Spirit, Paul understands this role especially in terms of Ezekiel 36:26–27 and 37:14. Paul combines motifs from these two passages in such a way that in the coming of the Spirit into the life of the believer and the believing community God fulfilled three dimensions of the promise:

1. God would give his people a “new heart”—Jeremiah's “heart of flesh” to replace that of stone (Jer. 31:31–33)—made possible because he would also give them “a new spirit” (Ezek. 36:26). In Paul this theme finds expression in 2 Corinthians 3:1–6, where the Corinthians are understood to be the recipients of the new covenant in that they were “inscribed” by “the Spirit of the living God” on “tablets of human hearts” (v. 3). Paul himself is the minister of this new covenant, which no longer has to do with “letter” but with the Spirit who gives life (vv. 5–6). This same understanding lies behind the similar language in Romans 7:5–6, as well as the “circumcision of the heart by the Spirit” in Romans 2:29, which echoes Deuteronomy 30:6 in terms of fulfillment.

2. This “new spirit” is none other than God's Spirit, who will enable God's people to follow his decrees (Ezek. 36:27). As is evident in Romans 8:3–4 and Galatians 5:16–25,⁸ the Spirit's fulfillment of this theme is Paul's answer to the question of what happens to righteousness if one does away with observance of the Torah (the Old Testament law).

3. God's Spirit means the presence of God himself, in that by putting “my Spirit in you . . . you will live” (Ezek. 37:14). Again, Paul picks up this theme in 2 Corinthians 3:5–6. As the Spirit of the living God, the Spirit provides for God's people the one essential reality about God. “The Spirit,” Paul says in the context of the new covenant, “gives life.”

Similarly, the language of 1 Thessalonians 4:8 is expressly that of Ezekiel 36–37. Any rejection of holiness on the part of the Thessalonians is a rejection of the God who “gives his Holy Spirit into

you.”⁹ It is the presence of the holy God himself, by his Holy Spirit, whom they reject if they reject Paul’s call to holy living. We may conclude that for Paul, Christ has made the new covenant effective for the people of God through his death and resurrection; but the Spirit is the key to the new covenant as a fulfilled reality in the lives of God’s people.

The Indwelling Spirit

Intimately related to the divine presence theme and the new covenant passages in the Old Testament are the many texts in Paul that speak of the Spirit as dwelling in or among the people of God. This theme is found first of all in the texts that locate the Spirit within the believer. The Spirit is spoken of as being “in you/us” (1 Thess. 4:8; 1 Cor. 6:19, 14:24–25; Eph. 5:18 [in the imagery of “filling”]). The location of “in you/us” is the “heart” (2 Cor. 1:22, 3:3; Gal. 4:6; Rom. 2:29, 5:5). This in turn becomes the language of “dwelling in” (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Rom. 8:9–11; Eph. 2:22).

Two of these passages (1 Cor. 14:24–25 and 2 Cor. 6:16) are especially instructive in that Paul cites Old Testament texts that speak of God’s dwelling in the midst of his people, which Paul now attributes to the presence of the Spirit. When pagans turn to the living God because their hearts have been exposed through the prophetic Spirit, Paul speaks of this in the language of Isaiah 45:14: “Surely God is among you.”

Similarly, in the temple imagery of 2 Corinthians 6:16, which presupposes the presence of the Spirit in the life of the community from 1 Corinthians 3:16, Paul understands God to be present among his people. In making that point, he draws on the language of the new covenant promise of Ezekiel 37:27: “I will dwell among them and they shall be my people.” This latter passage points toward the ultimate expression of the language of indwelling—in the imagery of the temple.

The Church as God’s Temple

It is especially with temple imagery that Paul designates the Spirit as the renewed presence of God among his people. This imagery

occurs four times in Paul, three times in keeping with its Old Testament precedents (1 Cor. 3:16–17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:22), where God dwells in the midst of the people by means of tabernacle and temple, and once in keeping with the promised new covenant (1 Cor. 6:19–20),

where the “temple” is now the body of the believer, “who is in you, whom you have received from God.”

It is especially with temple imagery that Paul designates the Spirit as the renewed presence of God among his people.

First, then, Paul specifically ties the Spirit to temple imagery in the context of the Spirit’s presence in the midst of the people of God. Here is how the living God is now present with his people, expressed most clearly in Ephesians 2:22: the church is being raised up to become a holy temple in the Lord, built up to-

gether as “a dwelling for God by his Spirit.”

Here lies the significance of 1 Corinthians 3:16–17.¹⁰ Paul’s introductory, “do you not know that . . .” followed by “you are the temple of God [in Corinth],” plus the argument in context, make clear that the Spirit as fulfilling the temple/presence of God motif is the rich history that Paul has in mind. In context he is arguing with those who are in the process of destroying the church in Corinth by their contention over leaders in the name of (merely human) wisdom. In response Paul moves from words about the folly of their making “lords” of merely human servants in verses 5–9 to words of warning in verses 10–15, toward those currently leading the church in this disastrous direction, and finally to words that address the church itself in terms of who they are as the people of God in Corinth—namely, God’s temple in Corinth.

Paul’s use of the temple imagery begins in verse 9 (“you [the church in Corinth] are God’s building”). Their foundation (Christ crucified) had been laid by the apostle, but at the time of Paul’s letter the superstructure was being erected with materials incompatible with that foundation (wood and straw, referring to their current fascination with wisdom and rhetoric). They must build with enduring materials (gold, silver, costly stones = the gospel of the Crucified One), imagery taken from the building of Solomon’s temple (1 Chron. 29:2; 2 Chron.

3:6). Then in verse 16 Paul asks rhetorically, “Do you not know what kind of building you are? God’s temple in Corinth!” As a gathered community, they formed the one temple of the living God, God’s alternative to Corinth’s countless pagan temples; and what made them his alternative was the presence of the Spirit in their midst.

But the Corinthians were in the process of dismantling God’s temple, because their strife and fascination with wisdom meant the banishing of the revealing and unifying Spirit from their midst.¹¹ Hence this strongest of warnings: the people responsible for the destruction would themselves be destroyed by God. He will do this precisely because his temple, the place of his presence, is holy; and “you the church in Corinth are that temple.” The gathered church is the place of God’s own personal presence, by the Spirit. This is what marks off God’s new people from “all the other people on the face of the earth” (Exod. 33:16).

There is not a more important word in all the New Testament as to the nature of the local church than this one! The local church is God’s temple in the community where it is placed; and it is so by the presence of the Spirit alone, by whom God has now revisited his people. It is no wonder, therefore, that Paul sees the expulsion of the incestuous man from their corporate fellowship (they are not even to eat with him) as ultimately leading to his salvation (1 Cor. 5:1–13). Being put outside the place of God’s presence will apparently lead to his repentance, so that he may be saved, by being once more among the people of the Presence.

This emphasis on the church as God’s temple, and therefore God’s alternative to the pagan temples of Corinth, also lies behind the identical imagery in 2 Corinthians 6:16–7:1. Those in the church must come out from the idolatry of Corinth (repeating the prohibition of 1 Cor. 8–10) and purify themselves from every defilement, because they are God’s temple, the place of the eternal God’s dwelling in Corinth.

In urging his readers in Ephesians 4:30 “not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God,” Paul uses the language of Isaiah 63:10, the one certain place in the Old Testament where the concept of the divine presence with Israel in tabernacle and temple is specifically equated with “the Holy Spirit of Yahweh.” This equation is the basis of Paul’s warning. The divine presence in the form of God’s own Spirit, not an angel or envoy,

journeyed with God's people in the desert. By the Holy Spirit, God's presence has now returned to his people, to indwell them corporately and individually so that they might walk in his ways. Paul therefore urges the Ephesians not to repeat Israel's failure. They are not, through various sins of discord that destroy the "unity of the Spirit" (4:3), to grieve the God who is present among them by his Holy Spirit.

The Individual Believer as God's Temple

In 1 Corinthians 6:19–20, Paul makes the remarkable transfer of this imagery from the church to the individual believer. Thus God not only dwells in the midst of his people by the Spirit, but has likewise taken up residence in the lives of his people individually by the same life-giving Spirit.

The significance of this transfer of images should not be missed. The context has to do with sexual immorality. Paul's concern is with the "sanctification" of the believer. Reflecting an understanding of the time that sharply distinguished between physical, material reality and the immaterial, invisible realm (Hellenistic dualism), some Corinthians were suggesting that the human spirit was not affected by what happens to one's body, including having sex with prostitutes. But Paul will have none of that. The God who created us in his image created the body as well as the spirit, and thus pronounced the material order to be good.

In this final moment of argument with them, Paul appeals to the presence of the Spirit in their lives in the context of the saving work of Christ. In "purchasing" them for God's glory, Christ also purchased their bodies, as evidenced by the Holy Spirit, whose temple they are because God now dwells not in temples made by human hands but in temples constructed by his own hands. Thus they are not their own, to do with their bodies as they please. They belong to the God who purchased them through Christ's sacrifice and now indwells them by his Spirit.¹²

In this text, as well as in 2 Corinthians 2:14–4:6, lies the secret to Paul's personal piety and to his understanding of the Spirit in his own life. In both cases the texts finally point outward; that is, the goal of this dimension of Spirit life is not simply contemplation but the

ethical life that the Spirit produces. Nonetheless, the personal dimension cannot be set aside. Indeed, the first location of God's presence in the new covenant is within his people individually, sanctifying their present existence and stamping it with his eternity.

But as is often true of imagery in Paul, by its flexibility it can take a different turn in another context. Part of our way into a proper understanding of 2 Corinthians 2:14–4:6 is again through the combined imagery of tabernacle/temple and presence.¹³ It begins in 2:17 with Paul's arguing regarding the validity of his ministry—in contrast to the peddlers of another gospel—that he makes his claim as one who “lives in the presence of God.”

This theme is then picked up in 3:7 and carried through to the end by the contrast of his ministry with that of Moses. This treatment evolves eventually into a kind of midrash (that is, a traditional Jewish explanation of a Bible passage) on Moses's being veiled when he came *from* the presence of God, whereas he was unveiled when he entered the tent of the Presence. Believers are those who now turn to the Lord, who is here equated with the Spirit of the Lord, the key to God's presence in the present age. As with Moses, but now by the Spirit, we are unveiled as we enter the sanctuary to behold the glory of the Lord.

It is the play on veil and Spirit that makes the argument so telling; the Spirit of the Presence has now removed the veil—most likely also alluding to the veil keeping people away from God's presence within the temple. The result is that by the Spirit's coming the veil is removed, both from our faces and from the Presence, so that we can behold the glory of the Lord himself in the face of God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Here Paul enters the holy place. By the Spirit's presence one is now behind the veil in the very presence of God, not only beholding God's glory in Christ but also being transformed into God's likeness from one degree of glory to another. Here the *Abba*-cry evolves into praise and adoration. Here too God's children are transformed from the likeness of their former “father,” the god of this world who still blinds the hearts of those who do not believe (4:4), into the likeness of God himself (3:18). We now bear his image in our present “already-but-not-yet” existence.¹⁴ This is not the only thing Paul believes the

Spirit to be doing in our present world, but it is very significant, and we miss Paul by a wide margin if we do not pay close attention to it.

* * *

In sum: For Paul, the Spirit is not merely an impersonal force or influence or power. The Spirit is none other than the fulfillment of the

*For Paul, the Spirit
is not merely an
impersonal force or
influence or power.*

*The Spirit is none other
than the fulfillment
of the promise that
God himself would
once again be present
with his people.*

promise that God himself would once again be present with his people. The implications of this are considerable, not only in terms of Paul's understanding of God and the Spirit (the concern of the next two chapters) but also in terms of what it means for us individually and corporately to be the people of God (the concern of chaps. 6–14). The Spirit is God's own personal presence in our lives and in our midst; he leads us into paths of righteousness for his name's sake, he "is working all things in all people," he is grieved when his people do not reflect his character and thus reveal his glory,

and he is present in our worship, as we sing "praise and honor and glory and power" to God and the Lamb.

It is for God's people of a later time, like ours, to once more grasp these realities *by experiencing them*, if we are truly to capture Paul's understanding. Perhaps a beginning point for us would be to downplay the impersonal images (wind, fire, etc.), as rich as they are in terms of aspects of the Spirit's ministry, and to retool our thinking in Paul's own terms, where we understand and experience the Spirit as the personal presence of the eternal God. That is where the next two chapters fit in.

Reflection Questions

1. More than anything else—more than the law or any identity marker—it is God's revealed presence among them that

distinguishes Israel as God's people (see Exod. 33:12–34:9). Fee writes, “The most prominent way God's presence is experienced in the Old Testament is in the *tabernacle* and the *temple*” (p. 10 emphasis added). Despite this, God withdraws his presence from Israel. Why does God do this and what impact does this have on Israel?

2. To describe what becomes of people corporately and individually when the Holy Spirit dwells within them, Paul uses the image of the temple. According to Fee, “There is not a more important word in all the New Testament as to the nature of the local church than this one!” (p. 19). How would you affirm the use of this temple imagery for yourself or your congregation?