

UNION WITH CHRIST AND THE OLD TESTAMENT BELIEVER:
A TEST CASE FOR THEOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

by
Kevin Hobi

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To those local church families in Christ,
who have faithfully cared for the spiritual needs of my own family;

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For theologians who begin their knowledge of God with the pre-supposition that He can be known only through His unified and reliable revelation, the quest for an integrated understanding of this revelation follows a precedent laid down by the authors of the New Testament. The apostles and their associates were men who shared this foundational starting point—faith in the unity of Scripture. The Old Testament canon, revered as the inspired Word of God by these authors (2 Pet. 1:20-21, 2 Tim. 3:16), taught clearly that coherence with antecedent truth is one of the tests of a true prophet.¹ We are not surprised therefore, as we read portions of the New Testament, when an author exhibits a careful concern for agreement with his Old Testament Bible. It was not enough, for example, for the Apostle Paul to teach in Romans that the gospel he preached required faith rather than the works of the law (Rom. 3:27-28). In so teaching, the apostle also understood the importance of reconciling that gospel with what had come before, and so he asks: “Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law” (Rom. 3:31).²

¹ J. Barton Payne emphasizes this test as “the most important” delimiter between a true and false prophet, citing Deuteronomy 13:1-3 (see also v. 4) and Isaiah 8:20. *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 57.

² Unless otherwise indicated, Bible quotations are taken from the *New American Standard Bible* (Anaheim, CA: Foundation Publication, 1996). Note that whether Paul’s

This concern for coherence is the same today for interpreters who share the faith of the apostles, faith in a unified and reliable revelation. Often an interpretation of a New Testament doctrine or text makes perfect sense until the question of coherence with the Old Testament is raised. For example, interpreters of the New Testament must wrestle with issues related to the relevance of the law of Moses for believers today.³ Yet because Scripture teaches that God's revelation is a unified and coherent whole, no interpreter of Scripture understands a doctrine well enough if he has not yet accounted for the Old Testament believer in his understanding of New Testament revelation, whether that accounting ultimately involves some form of similarity or distinction. In recognition of this, orthodoxy has produced interpretive theological systems designed to describe the nature of coherence between the testaments.

Need

The doctrine of union with Christ confronts these systems with an important challenge by raising the question, "Did the Old Testament

use of the term *law* in this verse is a reference to the first five books of the Old Testament or a technical soteriological term referring to the role of the Mosaic covenant in salvation, his obvious concern for coherence with the Old Testament in this passage and the book as a whole remains an inescapable characteristic of his methodology (see Rom. 1:2, 1:17b., 2:13, 3:2, 3:19, 3:21, 4:1-25).

³ The notes of Douglas J. Moo on Romans 7:1-6 illustrate this phenomenon of Biblical interpretation: "It is only when we ask the question about the status of OT saints—a question that was probably not in Paul's mind at the time—that a problem arises." *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 422. Moo is referring here to his view that the New Testament believer is relieved from bondage to the law in a way the Old Testament believer was not. He concludes referring to the Old Testament believer: "Their status is somewhat anomalous, as they participate in the same salvation that we experience—through faith in conjunction with the promise—yet experience also that 'oldness' and sense of bondage which was inescapable for even the OT saints" (422).

believer experience union with Christ?” Although it may be acceptable for an interpretive framework to leave undefined the relationship of a particular text to the status of the Old Testament believer, this question requires an answer. Standing at the center of New Testament soteriology and ecclesiology,⁴ the doctrine of union with Christ encompasses themes that must reconcile with the status of the Old Testament believer or the nature of the coherence of Scripture becomes difficult to define.

The comprehensive nature of the doctrine of union with Christ has two related but distinguishable aspects. On the one hand, union with Christ impacts our understanding of soteriology from passages such as Ephesians 1, where Paul makes clear that “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” requires his union with Christ formula as a modifier: “in Christ Jesus,” “in Christ,” “in Him,” or “in the Beloved.”⁵ After a simple reading of the first fourteen verses of this passage, it is on the surface difficult, if not impossible, to exclude the Old Testament believer from

⁴ Bruce Demarest counts 216 Pauline and 26 Johannine usages of the union with Christ formula *in Christ* and its synonymous phrases. *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 313. While Demarest has pointed out that not every usage relates to the doctrine of union with Christ (p. 326), most are at least remotely connected. Augustus Strong can therefore assert: “In fact, this phrase ‘in Christ,’ always meaning ‘in union with Christ,’ is the very key to Paul’s epistles, and to the whole New Testament.” *Systematic Theology* (1907; reprint Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, n.d.), 797.

⁵ See Ephesians 1:3. The specific spiritual blessings so defined are “faithfulness” (1:1, πιστοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ), “chosen” (1:4, ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ), “grace” (1:6, τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἧς ἐχαρίστωσεν ἡμᾶς ἐν τῷ ἡγαπημένῳ), “redemption” (1:7, ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν), “consummation” (1:10, ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ), “inheritance” (1:11, ἐν ᾧ καὶ ἐκληρώθημεν), and “sealed” (1:13, ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς . . . ἐσφραγίσθητε).

many of these experiences without proffering, either intentionally or by default, two separate gospels between the testaments.⁶

On the other hand, union with Christ also impacts our understanding of the ecclesiology of many passages. Central to some of these is the ecclesiological reality of Spirit-baptism (1 Cor. 12:13), a reality most if not all interpreters agree belongs to a new age of the Holy Spirit prophesied by the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-29), promised by Jesus Christ (John 7:37-39, 14:16-17, 25-26, 16:5-15), and fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16).⁷ Without a doubt understanding the doctrine of union with Christ correctly requires correctly understanding the change introduced at Pentecost. The simple uncontested fact that Pentecost instituted a monumental change in salvation-history indicates that, at least from an ecclesiological perspective, union with Christ may very well exclude the Old Testament believer.

Tension between the soteriological and ecclesiological aspects of union with Christ calls for further investigation into the applicability of this doctrine to the Old Testament believer. Accounting for this

⁶ A two-gospel solution is not completely foreign to the classical dispensational approach, and the reasons for this in relation to the doctrine of union with Christ will be more thoroughly treated in a later chapter. It is generally claimed by dispensationalists today, however, that the two-gospel solution no longer enjoys support within this category of interpreters. See Robert L. Saucy's discussion of "Resolved Issues" in *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 14-19.

⁷ For example, the thorough treatment of union with Christ by covenant theologian Louis Berkhof's systematic theology includes a section entitled, "It is a union mediated by the Holy Spirit." Under this heading, Berkhof defines the ecclesiology of union with Christ in terms any dispensationalist would be proud to have written: "The Holy Spirit was in a special capacity a part of the Mediator's reward, and as such was poured out on the day of Pentecost for the formation of the spiritual body of Jesus Christ. Through the Holy Spirit Christ now dwells in believers, unites them to Himself, and knits them together in a holy unity." *Systematic Theology* (1941; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 450.

applicability is necessary not only to a coherent understanding of salvation and the church, but also to an assessment of the value of interpretive systems that purport to describe this scriptural coherence.

Definition of Terms

Four terms utilized by the title of this dissertation require preliminary elaboration. *Union with Christ*, of course, is a phrase that stands at the center of this study. Because it is far more than a term, the meaning of this comprehensive doctrine must occupy the focus of later chapters.⁸ Even the recent history of the doctrine discloses a variety of definitions for union with Christ that have influenced theological systems in different ways. This reciprocal relationship between the definition of union with Christ and a resulting impact on theological systems will also be part of a later investigation.⁹ In addition, all who define union with Christ agree that their understanding of this doctrine is closely connected to their understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. A later chapter will explore this issue as well.¹⁰

This study avoids definitions of union with Christ that reflect an overemphasis on the extremities of the doctrine. The first of these issues concerns the doctrine's focus on both the individual and the assembly (a feature analogous to the tension between soteriology and ecclesiology

⁸ See especially chapters 2 and 3, "Treatment of the Old Testament Believer in Definitions of Union with Christ" (in two parts); chapter 4, "The Old Testament Believer and Antitheses of Union with Christ"; and chapter 5, "The Old Testament Believer in Key New Testament Union with Christ Passages."

⁹ See chapter 7, "Theological Systems and Union with Christ."

¹⁰ See chapter 6, "The Baptism of the Holy Spirit and Union with Christ."

mentioned above). Overemphasis on the individual has yielded the absorption definitions of union with Christ reflected by the errors of medieval mysticism. While these definitions take on a variety of forms, all have in common three basic characteristics related to an overemphasis on the individual: (1) transient vs. permanent experience, (2) particular vs. universal participation, and (3) personal vs. propositional knowledge of God.¹¹ Each of these failings shows that the view lies outside the boundaries of a scriptural definition of union with Christ. Furthermore, an overemphasis on the importance of the assembly to union with Christ also creates problems. This view underpins the position of Roman Catholicism, which sees identification with the Roman Church as synonymous with union with Christ. This view assigns priority to the Roman Church's connection to Christ rather than the believer's.¹² As the "saving incarnation," the Roman Church becomes also "the theophanic manifestation of the Lord,"¹³ and union with Christ is union with the

¹¹ The best-known representative of this error was Meister Eckhart (d. 1328). For a brief discussion of distinctions between medieval mysticism and union with Christ, see Dennis D. Martin, "Unio Mystica," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001), 1231; and W. Stanford Reid, "Union with God," *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Everett F. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), 537.

¹² Note the warnings of D. Martin Lloyd-Jones in this regard: "But the right order is to put the person and individual first and the corporate second. So that I am not born of the Church—the Church is not my spiritual mother—I am born of the Spirit. And the moment I am, I am in the Church, the unseen, the mystical Church. So let us emphasise [sic] the personal aspect, and let us make certain that we will never allow any specious teaching to rob us of that individual element. We do not have to go to Him through the Church; we can go to Him one by one, and we are united to him singly as well as in a corporate manner." *God the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997), 111.

¹³ These are phrases used by Marie-Joseph le Guillon, Karl Rahner, and Emilio Sauras, "Church," *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 1:319. August Franzen discusses the importance

Roman Church in every practical sense. A Christian can therefore experience this union only through the Roman Church's sacraments of baptism and Eucharist.¹⁴ Characteristics that apply to this overemphasis on the assembly include (1) sacramental vs. spiritual reality and (2) intermediate vs. direct operation.¹⁵ Again, these characteristics fall outside the realm of a scriptural definition.

of an encyclical by Pius XII to the Roman Catholic idea of mystical union: "Pius XII summed up this concept [*Christi mysticum*] in the encyclical *Mystici Corporis* of 29 June 1943: the Church really is the body of Christ, not just in a spiritual, moral or metaphorical sense but as a visible, social, all-embracing hierarchically-ordered corporation" ("Church History," *Sacramentum Mundi*, 1:372).

¹⁴ William Grossouw articulates the importance of baptism to union with Christ from the Roman Catholic perspective: "For it is only through a personal and firm faith, that the adult, who is outside the Church, is led to baptism, which incorporates him into Christ." *In Christ: A Sketch of the Theology of St. Paul* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1952), 66; Guillon, Rahner, and Sauras emphasize the Eucharist: "Thus when St. Paul applies the expression of Body of Christ to the Church, he means the one body which gathers together within it, in the Spirit, the whole assembly of believers by means of the sacraments, and principally the Eucharist" (1:320).

¹⁵ For a discussion of Calvin's use of the union with Christ doctrine to respond to both medieval mysticism and Roman Catholic ecclesiology, see Jae Sung Kim, "*Unio Cum Christo*: The Work of the Holy Spirit in Calvin's Theology" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1998), 283-291. Overemphasis on the extremes of the union with Christ doctrine has appeared to a lesser degree within the ranks of Reformed orthodoxy in terms of the legal (objective) vs. experiential (subjective) features of the doctrine. The federal theology of Charles Hodge brought a revision to Calvin's union with Christ doctrine that involved on the one hand a mitigation of the importance of the humanity of Christ (especially as perpetuated by John W. Nevin's Mercersburg Theology), and on the other a distinction between the legal and experiential features of the doctrine along the lines of the distinction between justification and sanctification. Hodge's concern was especially a defense of the doctrine of imputation against the Roman Catholic view of an infusion of righteousness. See his discussion of Romans 5:12f. in *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (1864; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 144-191. The issues raised by this division will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5, where an attempt will be made to account for the subjective aspect of the doctrine at the moment of salvation without forfeiting imputation. See also Appendix B, "Impartation versus Imputation and Union with Christ." For a critical assessment of the modifications popularized by Hodge, see William Borden Evans, "Imputation and Impartation: The Problem of Union with Christ in Nineteenth-Century American Reformed Theology" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1996), 326-397.

The term *Old Testament believer* requires a preliminary clarification. Often the debate between theological systems centers on whether or not there exists a valid distinction or identification between Israel and the church, and on the nature of that distinction or identification.¹⁶ This study has purposefully avoided the use of the term *Israel* in favor of the term *Old Testament believer*. Table 1 illustrates.

Table 1 – Definition of *Old Testament Believer*

System	Believers in the OT	Believers in the NT
Covenant Theology	Israel–the true church	church–the true Israel
Dispensationalism	Israel–not the church	church–not Israel
Scriptural Data	believing Gentiles prior to Abraham; believing Israel; Ninevites in the days of Jonah; other believing Gentiles	believing Jews and Gentiles prior to Pentecost; the church – Pentecost to the rapture; tribulation saints ¹⁷

A second issue related to the definition of an Old Testament believer involves identifying the point in history in which believers transitioned from old to new. As mentioned above, the monumental change executed at Pentecost is generally accepted as a critical transition point of the divine plan of redemption; for this reason, this study shall

¹⁶ Compare for instance the first third of Charles C. Ryrie’s “*sine qua non* of dispensationalism”: “A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the church distinct.” *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 39. This work is a revised and expanded version of the author’s earlier work *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965). Interestingly, Ryrie’s revision recognizes something of the limitation of the Israel/church comparison with a new paragraph that concedes: “Though God’s purpose for Israel and God’s purpose for the church receive the most attention in Scripture, God has purposes for other groups as well” (*Dispensationalism*, 39).

¹⁷ This study assumes a pre-tribulation rapture, but see “Delimitations.”

understand Pentecost as the demarcation between old and new. An Old Testament believer is one who died prior to Pentecost, and a New Testament believer is one who died subsequent to Pentecost.

Test case is a term that describes the function of this study. From a pedagogical perspective, a test case allows the student of a particular discipline to apply the principles he has learned in class to a simulated set of conditions. From a theological perspective, a test case involves the use of particulars of data to measure the validity of a hypothesis.¹⁸ This study uses scriptural data related to the doctrine of union with Christ to measure the validity of theological systems that have developed hypotheses related to the coherence of Scripture.¹⁹

Finally, the term *theological system* appears in the title and has been utilized repeatedly throughout this introduction. For the purposes of this study, *theological system* refers to a theological framework that provides a basis for the interpretation of Scripture under the assumption of a unified and coherent revelation. More specifically, three broadly

¹⁸ Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest identify “induction,” “deduction,” and “verification” as “Three Methods of Justifying Beliefs.” They distinguish among the three as follows: “After a problem has been delimited, the verificational method does not begin with an allegedly blank mind (as in inductive methods), or with a confessional statement presupposed to be true (as in deductive methods), but with several historical and contemporary answers as hypotheses to be tested. These proposals are evaluated and confirmed or disconfirmed by the primary biblical evidence.” *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 1:11-12. Note that although both the “deduction” and “verification” methods described above are technically deductive reasoning processes, they differ in that the “deduction” method assumes as valid an initial presupposition, which defines the parameters of the final conclusion. In the “verification” method, the validity of the initial presupposition is viewed not as a given parameter, but rather as a hypothesis requiring testing.

¹⁹ The approach was inspired in part by Walter C. Kaiser’s article “The Davidic Promise and the Inclusion of the Gentiles [Amos 9:9-15 and Acts 15:13-18]: A Test Passage for Theological Systems,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20 (1977): 97-111.

defined categories of theological systems of coherence will be the focus: covenant theology, dispensational theology, and progressive dispensationalism.²⁰ For the sake of brevity, the debate among these categories is referred to as *the coherence debate*.

Statement of Purpose

Something of the function of this dissertation has already been laid out under its definition of the term *test case* discussed above. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the ongoing discussion that progressive dispensationalism has brought to the coherence debate. Craig Blaising's work on the topic issues a call for further research: "Much more work remains, however, for bringing interpretations of progressive dispensationalism into broader discussions of theology and practice of ministry."²¹ In addition, Walter Kaiser has noted "The Need to Integrate Old Testament Theology into New Testament Systems" under his description of "Challenges to Dispensationalism Tomorrow."²² Ultimately the goal is not the reinforcement of a particular theological system, but rather a better understanding and defense of the unity and coherence of scriptural revelation.

In response to these issues, the purpose of this dissertation is to conduct a "broader discussion of theology" investigating whether the

²⁰ See chapter 7 for a discussion of the distinctions among these categories.

²¹ Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 285.

²² Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "An Epangelical Response," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 375.

scriptural data related to union with Christ as it concerns the Old Testament believer addresses in part the “need to integrate Old Testament theology into New Testament systems.”²³ How do theological systems of coherence treat the doctrine? Do the new approaches account better for union with Christ than the old? Do the confessional approaches have anything to offer the understanding of the dispensationalist today? Has an interpretive framework been developed that adequately accounts for the breadth of the union with Christ doctrine? If not, can one be developed? The purpose of this study is to give an answer to these and some related questions.

Delimitations

The nexus of this study is the intersection between the doctrine of union with Christ and the coherence debate. At issue in this regard is the status of the Old Testament believer in relation to the work of the Holy Spirit in view of Pentecost. Clearly, the literature related to the doctrine of union with Christ, the coherence debate, and the work of the Holy Spirit in view of Pentecost is extensive. Therefore, this study will need to follow certain boundaries.

In the first place, the focus here assumes that the coherence of the canon of scriptural revelation is a reality worth understanding. It is assumed that because Scripture is the product of the Holy Spirit’s work of inspiration, its complex diversity exhibits a truly miraculous

²³ Note that the history of dispensationalism is a history of progress, refinement, and developing interpretive insight. For a thorough discussion of this phenomenon of the discipline, see Blasing’s chapter “The Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism” (*Progressive Dispensationalism*, 9-56). For a discussion of “Some Dangers of Progressive Dispensationalism,” see Appendix A.

continuity if understood correctly. As already noted, this starting point was an important component of the faith of Christ and the apostles. Consequently, no attempt is made here to interact at a level that claims to be an antecedent to this starting point. This study is exegetical, not polemical.

Second, the focus of this study is backward rather than forward, and for this reason it does not share the typical eschatological focus of the coherence debate. This work is written by a dispensational premillennialist who believes in a pre-tribulational rapture. While these issues may contribute to an understanding of not only the coherence debate, but also the doctrine of union with Christ, many of the details of New Testament eschatology do not relate to the past status of the Old Testament believer and therefore reside outside the limits of this study. This study is soteriological and ecclesiological, not eschatological.²⁴

Third, as has already been mentioned, the extremities of the historical definitional domain of the doctrine of union with Christ will not be treated. Instead, the study will remain within the boundaries of Protestant orthodoxy in its examination of this doctrine and its treatment by theological systems. Along these lines, the sacramental import of Christian ordinances will not be a major category of investigation, although the importance of the ordinance of baptism will surface as a critical

²⁴ Note, however, that eschatology is an important component of both Biblical soteriology and ecclesiology. Assessing the soteriology and ecclesiology of theological systems in light of their treatment of union with Christ will require a focus on the prophecy of the Old Testament, an eschatological topic. Issues related to the new covenant especially are tied closely to the events of Pentecost in the coherence debate literature. Treatment of the new covenant appears in chapter 8, "Union with Christ and the Fulfillment of the New Covenant."

component of the way some within Protestant orthodoxy have defined the union with Christ reality. This study is pneumatological, not sacramental.

Finally, there are important aspects of the doctrine of union with Christ that must be neglected. For instance, no discussion of the doctrine's position in an *ordo salutis* will appear. In addition, focus on contemporary understandings of union with Christ rather than a thorough treatment of historical definitions will keep this study pointed at the doctrine's relationship to the coherence debate, which is a relatively recent theological phenomenon. Furthermore, discussion of many of the scriptural metaphorical figures related to union with Christ becomes applicable only when those metaphors have an Old Testament correspondence that needs to be better understood. Finally, the valuable practical implications for sanctification related to the doctrine of union with Christ will be left unexplored. This study's treatment of union with Christ is focused on the coherence debate, not broadly comprehensive.

Previous Works

Attention to the status of the Old Testament believer is rare in studies of union with Christ. Where the doctrine is treated as central to ecclesiology as well as soteriology, distinguishable pre- and post-Pentecost features of the doctrine begin to emerge. For example, the Ph.D. dissertation by Jae Sung Kim on Calvin's view of the doctrine distinguishes between on the one hand an external, corporate, collective, ecclesiastical, and organic dimension to the doctrine, and on the other a

spiritual and individual dimension.²⁵ The first is post-Pentecost only, while the second is also pre-. He points out that Calvin believed that the church as the dwelling place of God began at Pentecost, but an ambivalence found in Calvin regarding the nature of this beginning relative to the experience of the Old Testament believer persists in Kim's work. Pentecost is described as a gift of the Spirit "more copiously given" and as "a symbol of the hidden grace" found in all the elect.²⁶ The study exhibits a tension between its support for continuity between the testaments and its view of the monumental importance of Pentecost.²⁷ Furthermore, the work's focus on the views of Calvin precludes any direct interaction with today's coherence debate.

Bruce Demarest addresses the question of the Old Testament believer directly in a chapter on union with Christ in his important work on soteriology, *The Cross and Salvation*. Demarest gives three reasons for concluding that only the New Testament believer experiences union with Christ: (1) union with Christ involves union with the humanity of Christ, which could happen only subsequent to the incarnation; (2) because the basis of union with Christ is His atoning death and

²⁵ "Unio Cum Christo: The Work of the Holy Spirit in Calvin's Theology" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1998), 279-282.

²⁶ Ibid., 296, 299, 307.

²⁷ Kim's treatment of the OT believer is most explicit in the following paragraph: "Just as the creation and the incarnation were one-time events, Pentecost was also never to be repeated. Beyond Pentecost, of course, the Holy Spirit continues to be active just as He had been in the Old Testament. After Pentecost, the believer's union with Christ was initiated by the life-giving Spirit. Although the Holy Spirit was active in the Old Testament, a remarkable and essential difference exists between His operation in the Old Testament era and after Pentecost in the New Testament. The Holy Spirit chose the church as His dwelling place and temple on the day of Pentecost, never again to be separated from it" (303).

resurrection, prior to these there was no basis for the experience; and (3) the indwelling Christ and the indwelling Spirit go together, and believers did not experience the indwelling of the Spirit until after Pentecost.²⁸ Though valuable for its direct treatment of the question at hand, Demarest's comments must conform to the constraints of his format. The treatment suffers from brevity, and it consequently leaves the reader with some unanswered questions.²⁹ Demarest also argues against a bifurcation of union with Christ into corporate and individual aspects.³⁰

A third direct treatment of the question regarding union with Christ and the Old Testament believer appears in J. Barton Payne's *The Imminent Appearing of Christ*. This covenant theologian comes to the opposite conclusion, supported by the dispensationalist Demarest. He asserts that the Old Testament believer experienced union with Christ, from three evidences: (1) that Old Testament saints were regenerated and indwelt in the same sense as the New Testament saints; (2) that the Bride metaphor is used of the Old Testament saint; and (3) that union with Christ is the only way of salvation available to men of any age. Payne's position states that the Old Testament saint experienced the efficacy of the person of Christ if not a complete understanding of Him.³¹

²⁸ Demarest, 338-339.

²⁹ The questions spring from the truth understood by Demarest that union with Christ is the "central verity" of the salvation of the New Testament believer (p. 313). Demarest leaves untreated exactly how the Old Testament believer can be saved at all while being excluded from the "central verity" of New Testament soteriology.

³⁰ Ibid., 320.

³¹ (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 128-129. See also *The Theology of the Older Testament*, 73-73, 113, 241, 256, 276.

Beyond these more direct treatments of the question of union with Christ and the Old Testament believer, other general works on the doctrine will be valuable to this study and more thoroughly discussed in later chapters. Works by Ernest Best, Norman F. Douty, John Flavel, A. J. Gordon, Charles A. Heurtley, E. L. Mascall, A. T. Pierson, J. K. S. Reid, Lewis B. Smedes, James S. Stewart, Fritz Neugebauer, and L. S. Thornton³² all give various definitions to union with Christ that limit to varying degrees the potential for inclusion of Old Testament believers.

Various unpublished works have focused on union with Christ. In addition to the previously mentioned works of Kim and Evans, a dissertation by Jonathan Won examines the relationship between Calvin's view and the views of four seventeenth-century English Puritans. Seventh-Day Adventist Roberto Pereya's study argues against a mystical union interpretation of the phrase "in Christ" in 1 Thessalonians. Kevin Kang has written on Jonathan Edward's view of union with Christ. Bruce Forsee's work emphasizing sanctification concentrates on the New Testament theology of the doctrine, noting the Old Testament as one of the study's delimitations. None of these works engages the status of the Old Testament believer or the coherence debate.³³

³² See Bibliography for publication information.

³³ Jonathan Jong-Chun Won, "Communion with Christ: An Exposition and Comparison of the Doctrine of Union and Communion with Christ in Calvin and the English Puritans" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1989); Roberto Pereya, "Paul's Earliest Statement Concerning the Christian Church: A Review and Evaluation of Research into Paul's Association of the Term ἐκκλησία to ἐν Χριστῷ in 1 Thessalonians" (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 1995); Kevin Woongsan Kang, "Justified by Faith in Christ: Jonathan Edward's Doctrine of Justification in Light of Union with Christ" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2003); Bruce Forsee, "The Role of Union with Christ in Sanctification" (Ph.D. diss., Bob Jones University, 1985).

Some standard systematic theologies treat the doctrine thoroughly. Louis Berkhof's treatment is primarily concerned with establishing the priority of union with Christ to faith against the Lutheran view. He accomplishes the task by distinguishing between the objective and subjective aspects of the doctrine. The question of the Old Testament believer becomes a source of confusion in Berkhof's treatment, however, because his *ordo salutis* approach is never reconciled with his position that union with Christ is effected by the Holy Spirit's indwelling ministry subsequent to Pentecost.³⁴ Like Berkhof's, Robert L. Reymond's theology is primarily concerned with an *ordo salutis* discussion, although unlike Berkhof, Reymond is willing to see faith as prior to union with Christ because he distinguishes between an eternal and a historical aspect of the doctrine. The question of the Old Testament believer is left for a different chapter focused directly on the coherence debate.³⁵

Augustus H. Strong's treatment of union with Christ emphasizes regeneration and the impartation of new life, but he also sees justification as inextricably linked to the doctrine. Interestingly, he compares the comprehensive nature of the revelation of the doctrine in Scripture to that of the Trinity, an analogy that may help explain the quantitative differences between the testaments in regard to treatment of union with Christ. Strong references the Old Testament spousal imagery in his discussion of the husband-and-wife metaphor that pictures union with Christ. He also uniquely speaks of the image of God in man as a

³⁴ *Systematic Theology*, 447-450.

³⁵ *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 736-737.

“natural union with Christ” that prepares the way for spiritual union. He uses the categories of “objective” and “subjective” (like Berkhof) to distinguish between the universal and particular aspects of soteriology (unlike Berkhof). Strong makes no connection between union with Christ and Pentecost.³⁶ In addition to these standard theologies, the extensive discussions of Lewis Sperry Chafer are significant for their classical dispensational approach,³⁷ and the hypothesis of Millard J. Erickson, that the Old Testament believer was baptized into Christ at the moment of Pentecost rather than conversion, provides a unique concept that deserves further attention.³⁸ Both of these works will be treated in more detail in later chapters.

In addition to these treatments, the New Testament theologies of Donald Guthrie and Alan Richardson³⁹ are especially valuable to an understanding of union with Christ. Guthrie emphasizes especially the assembly over the individual in his interpretation of Romans 6. He sees *in Christ* as meaning “in a new situation” in which the cross has defeated the enemies of Christ. He also emphasizes the importance of the historical Christ to the doctrine. Richardson includes some valuable material on the Old Testament background of the idea of corporative

³⁶ Strong, 795-809.

³⁷ *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 4:10-16, 29, 32-33, 42, 45-46, 48, 70-71, 79, 97-98, 129, 154-155.

³⁸ *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983-85), 1048-1049.

³⁹ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1981), 641-660; A. Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 136-140, 242-290.

representation, but his support of Barthian universalism limits the value of the conclusions he draws from the data.

In addition to the literature on the union with Christ doctrine, works related to the coherence debate are an important resource for this study. The classical dispensational position was developed especially by the works of Lewis Sperry Chafer and Cyrus I. Scofield.⁴⁰ Revised dispensational thought is best represented by the works of Charles Caldwell Ryrie, Alva McClain, Ronald Showers, and John F. Walvoord.⁴¹ Also important from this perspective is Merrill Unger's work on the Holy Spirit⁴² and Bruce Compton's dissertation on the new covenant.⁴³ The position of covenant theology is best represented by the works of Oswald T. Allis, Edmund Clowney, Curtis I. Crenshaw and Grover Gunn, William David Davies, Daniel Fuller, Anthony Hoekema, Rienk Bouke Kuiper, George Ladd, Vern S. Poythress, O. Palmer Robertson, and Bruce Waltke.⁴⁴ Robert Reymond's theology contains the best standard systematic theology treatment of the issues from this perspective.⁴⁵ The progressive dispensationalist viewpoint has received treatment from the authors of *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for*

⁴⁰ Lewis S. Chafer, *Dispensationalism* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1936); C. I. Scofield, ed., *The Scofield Reference Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1909).

⁴¹ See Bibliography for publication information.

⁴² *The Baptism and Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974).

⁴³ "An Examination of the New Covenant in the Old and New Testaments" (Th.D. diss., Grace Theological Seminary, 1986).

⁴⁴ See Bibliography for publication information.

⁴⁵ *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 503-544.

*Definition.*⁴⁶ The earlier works by John S. Feinberg are also valuable resources for the position.⁴⁷

Method of Procedure

This study begins in the first two chapters with an examination and assessment of differences related to definitions of the doctrine of union with Christ. These differences are explored first because any correlation between the different approaches to defining union with Christ and the interpreter's position in the coherence debate will help clarify whether or not theological systems adequately account for the doctrine, and it will identify the gaps that develop in the treatment of union with Christ due to a lack of conformity with such a system. This procedure will help assess the relative value of theological systems. Chapter 2 focuses on definitions that lack a pneumatological emphasis, and the chapter 3 focuses on pneumatological definitions.

The next two chapters build on the understandings of the first two to construct a scriptural definition of union with Christ. Chapter 4 approaches the question with an inductive study of the antitheses of

⁴⁶ Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992). The authors referred to here in addition to Blaising and Bock are Bruce A. Ware, Carl B. Hoch, Jr., Robert L. Saucy, W. Edward Glenny, J. Lanier Burns, David K. Lowery, John A. Martin, David L. Turner, and Kenneth L. Barker. In the opinion of this author, the strongest defenses of the progressive dispensational position in this work come from Barker and Saucy. See also Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993); and Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1993).

⁴⁷ John S. Feinberg, ed., *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988); and John S. Feinberg, "Salvation in the Old Testament" in *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981).

union with Christ in the New Testament. The question for this exercise in particular is whether or not the data gathered indicate that the Old Testament believer is a part of this category. If examples of both inclusion and exclusion are found, accounting for the different senses in which this can be true becomes a priority. An exegesis of key union with Christ passages is the concern of chapter 5. Both the soteriological and ecclesiological emphases of Romans 5, Ephesians 2-3, and Romans 11 need to be examined.

Chapters 4 and 5 raise important issues related to the work of the Holy Spirit, and chapter 6 focuses on addressing these questions. The central pneumatological question for both soteriology and ecclesiology concerns the nature of the change that occurred at Pentecost. Along with a survey of the extensive literature and an identification of the key issues involved, the chapter proceeds to examine briefly the use of the Old Testament in the New in passages that involve a pneumatological context. Next, key passages are examined: John 7:37-39, John 14:17, and 1 Corinthians 12:13.

Chapter 7 moves from defining union with Christ to the coherence debate material, but it maintains the same focus on the doctrine of union with Christ. Because soteriological and ecclesiological issues are critical to the debate, and because the doctrine of union with Christ is at the center of both soteriology and ecclesiology, one would expect to find a thorough treatment of the doctrine in the coherence debate literature. The study will seek to determine how the parties in the debate comprehend union with Christ and to assess whether that comprehension helps to validate or question theological systems.

Finally, chapter 8 draws the study to its conclusion with a focus on the contribution union with Christ makes to an interpretation of the fulfillment of the New Covenant. After reviewing the validity of hypotheses of existing theological systems, this study constructs an interpretive framework that suggests an approach to the question of union with Christ and the Old Testament believer. This framework is then used to interpret key test passages related to the fulfillment of the New Covenant that have proven to be especially debatable in the coherence debate: the Hebrews author's use of Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Heb. 8:7-12), Peter's use of Joel 2:28-32 (Acts 2:16-21), and James's use of Amos 9:11-12 (Acts 15:15-18). Finally, the study will close with a summary of the usefulness of its answer to the question, "Was the Old Testament believer in union with Christ?"

CHAPTER 2

TREATMENT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT BELIEVER IN DEFINITIONS OF UNION WITH CHRIST – PART 1

Although definitions of the doctrine of union with Christ exhibit a variety that contrasts with their unanimous advocacy of the doctrine's central importance,¹ common understandings repeatedly surface within orthodox Protestantism. Some of these understandings preclude consideration of the Old Testament believer for various reasons. Choosing from among these important traits of historic definitions of union with Christ affects whether or not the interpreter can logically include the Old Testament believer in his understanding of union with Christ. This choice must follow a scriptural assessment of these definitions.

A summarized understanding of the commonalities within Protestant orthodoxy in regard to definitions of union with Christ is helpful to a detailed investigation of the specific variation between definitions. This synthesis can identify any baseline components of the concept in an introductory way, unearthing the essential features of the doctrine. These essential features can act as guides for the study of the different emphases of full-scale treatments, as well as highlight areas of overlap between these definitions. The differing emphases of classical full-length definitions of union with Christ fall under three broad categories:

¹ The observation of Millard J. Erickson is typical in this regard: "In one sense, union with Christ is an inclusive term for the whole of salvation; the various other doctrines are simply subparts." *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983-85), 948.

(1) definitions that emphasize the rite of baptism, (2) definitions with an emphasis on the incarnation, and (3) definitions with a pneumatological emphasis. Each category contains specific implications for inclusion of the Old Testament believer.

Organizational Conventions of Summary Definitions

The use of organizational schema is one of the commonalities orthodox interpreters share. Summary definitions of the doctrine generally utilize one of two methodological conventions for organizational purposes, and many use both. The first of these conventions approaches the doctrine through categorical contrasts, and the second describes the doctrine with a list of characteristic features.

Categorical contrasts typically help define the doctrine in one of two ways. First, authors who seek to incorporate union with Christ into a comprehensive understanding of soteriology often use categorical contrasts to distinguish a correct view of union with Christ from other incorrect soteriological understandings.² Secondly, within the framework of a single advocated definition, categorical contrasts sometimes appear where the author addresses the relationship between union with Christ and an *ordo salutis*. Some question the feasibility of such an exercise given the comprehensive nature of the doctrine.³ This comprehensive

² For example, Bruce Demarest distinguishes between ontological, sacramental, covenantal, moral/filial, and experimental. He favors experimental as the view of “many evangelicals” (pp. 313-319). R. David Rightmire contrasts “mystical, existential, sacramental, local, eschatological, and ecclesiastical.” “Union with Christ,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 789.

³ John Murray is one example: “There is, however, a good reason why the subject of union with Christ should not be co-ordinated with the other phases of the application of redemption with which we have dealt. That reason is that union with Christ is in itself a very broad and embracing subject. It is not simply a step in the application of

nature is one of the keys to a unified understanding of union with Christ. Although the categories involved in *ordo salutis* presentations of the doctrine are often related at a nominal level, the contrasts between them create the essential points of definitional clarity. For this reason, a key shortcoming of this process is its tendency to lead to three separate definitions of union with Christ, rather than to a single unified concept.⁴

A list of characteristic features more adequately contributes to a single unified definition of union with Christ. Some characteristic components share a focus on the results of union with Christ, while others contemplate the intrinsic nature of the relationship involved. Table 2

redemption; when viewed, according to the teaching of Scripture, in its broader aspects it underlies every step of the application of redemption.” *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 161.

⁴ Louis Berkhof’s presentation illustrates this problem. He distinguishes between the “ideally established,” “objectively realized,” and “subjectively realized” categories of “union of life with Christ.” The first involves union with Christ in eternity past in the counsels of redemption; the second involves union with Christ in his death, resurrection, and ascension; and the third involves union with Christ at the moment of regeneration. *Systematic Theology* (1941; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 448. Two problems with Berkhof’s approach must be noted. First, his use of categorical contrast in this section of his treatment has failed to define union with Christ as a unified concept. Instead, the approach has created the division of union with Christ into three separate definitions that have as little connection between them as do the definitions of “election,” “atonement,” and “regeneration.” Election is not atonement, nor is atonement regeneration, yet there is a sense in which union with Christ is one thing in terms of Biblical theology, though it may involve these separable spiritual blessings. Paul indicates that “every spiritual blessing” is “in Christ” in a unified sense (Eph. 1:3). That sense is unaccounted for in Berkhof’s organizational approach. A second problem with Berkhof’s use of categorical contrast is his advocacy of “life objectively realized” in salvation prior to regeneration (p. 448), an idea that is difficult to reconcile with the scriptural truth that conversion is the moment of the objective realization of life (regeneration) and legal justification (John 3:36; 1 John 5:10-12). Berkhof recognizes the problem with seeing objective justification prior to faith (p. 519), but he fails to apply the same insight to “life objectively realized.” Instead, he must separate objective justification from the objective realization of spiritual life, a procedure that seems out of step with Paul’s doctrine of “justification of life” (Rom. 5:18). Objective life apart from objective justification is scripturally untenable.

organizes some of the more thorough of these treatments and identifies the commonalities involved.

Table 2 – Summary Definitions of Union with Christ

Commonalities		Barrett	Berkhof	Dabney	Demarest	Strong
Results	Legal	“representative”		“legal”		
	Vital	“vital”	“vital”	“spiritual”/ “mystical”	“vital”	“vital”
	Organic		“organic”			“organic”
Nature	Eternal	“eternal”			“eternal”/ “indissoluble”	“indissoluble”
	Spiritual	“spiritual”	“Holy Spirit mediated”	“spiritual”/ “mystical”	“spiritual”/ “supernatural”	“spiritual”
	Inscrutable	“mystical”		“mysterious”		“inscrutable”
	Personal		“personal”		“individual”	
	Other	“intimate”	“reciprocal”	“communal”	“local” “corporate”	

The table illustrates some features that are important to our study of the definitions of union with Christ and their treatment of the Old Testament believer.⁵ First, while characteristics that describe the results

⁵ Michael P. V. Barrett, *Complete In Him: A Guide to Understanding and Enjoying the Gospel* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador-Emerald, 2000), 93-118; Berkhof, 450-451; Robert L. Dabney, *Systematic and Polemic Theology* (1871; reprint, Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 612-617; Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*

of union with Christ are multiple, this group includes a clear emphasis on the characteristic “vital”—spiritual life stands at the center of union with Christ. The other result-characteristics identified in the table are closely connected with the idea of spiritual life in Scripture. For example, when Barrett emphasizes the legal results of union with Christ under the term “representative” union, he does so with references to passages that also emphasize spiritual life.⁶ In addition, when Berkhof and Strong speak of “organic” union, they are speaking of the formation of the body of Christ—a reality that includes shared spiritual life.⁷

Second, the description “spiritual” is an important emphasis in regard to characteristics that define the nature of union with Christ. Dabney combines the vital result of union with Christ with its spiritual nature in his presentation, labeling the feature both “mystical” and “spiritual”: “A Spiritual, or mystical union by which we participate in spiritual influences and qualities of our Head Jesus Christ; and have

(Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997), 330-333; Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (1907; reprint, Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, n.d.), 800-802. See also Charles Buck, “Union with Christ,” *A Theological Dictionary* (Philadelphia: E. C. Markley & Son, 1869), 443-444; and Erickson, 952. The characteristics in the table appear in quotation marks to indicate that the label listed is the specific word chosen by the author involved. Where these labels are repeated under the same author, the chart indicates that the author has identified two characteristics with a single label.

⁶ The key passages Barrett cites in this regard are Psalm 8, Romans 5, and 1 Corinthians 15, where he compares the headship of Adam with the headship of Christ: “Whereas by nature, all men in Adam are under the sentence of death, by grace, all believers in Christ are alive” (p. 96). Note the emphasis on life. Whereas legal justification is clearly an important part of union with Christ in these and other passages (Rom. 8:1), the connection to life is also a key emphasis in these contexts, and so we read: “the gift of righteousness shall reign in life” (Rom. 5:17); “justification of life” (Rom. 5:18); and “so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22).

⁷ Berkhof, 450; Note the emphasis on “life” from Strong: “So each member of Christ’s body lives for him who is the head; and Christ the head equally lives for his members” (p. 800). Shared spiritual life is that which distinguishes an organism from a mere organization.

wrought in us, by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, which was given to Him without measure, spiritual life, with all its resultant qualities and actings.”⁸ As Dabney teaches, the central point regarding the spiritual nature of the union is the necessary involvement of the Holy Spirit. None of these orthodox interpreters listed excludes the work of the Holy Spirit from his understanding of union with Christ.⁹

Therefore, spiritual life and the work of the Holy Spirit constitute two baseline understandings of the traditional Protestant view of union with Christ according to these summary definitions. Although the Old Testament believer may have experienced spiritual life and the work of the Holy Spirit without union with Christ, the baseline concepts show that he was not united to Christ unless he was also (1) in possession of spiritual life and (2) the object of the work of the Holy Spirit. More detailed definitions of union with Christ adhere to these baseline features in varying degrees. The first two categories of these definitions, which involve an emphasis on baptism and an emphasis on the incarnation, generally mitigate some aspects of either the *vital* or *spiritual* characteristics of the doctrine. In addition, they generally preclude applying union with Christ to the Old Testament believer. Although most of the representatives of these positions still attribute some form of spiritual life and the work of the Holy Spirit to the soteriology of the Old Testament, they nevertheless reserve union with Christ for the New Testament believer. The pneumatological category of definitions better supports an

⁸ Dabney, 614.

⁹ Charles Buck notes that the “spiritual” emphasis protects against false views of union with Christ, which involve “mental,” “physical,” or “essential” union (p. 443).

emphasis on spiritual life and the work of the Holy Spirit found in summary definitions, but differing interpretations of Pentecost's relationship to Spirit baptism divides this group. Consequently, some pneumatological interpretations of union with Christ exclude the Old Testament believer while others do not.

Baptismal Definitions

Most authors who maintain that the key to understanding union with Christ rests upon an emphasis on the objective aspects of the doctrine pinpoint the inception of union with Christ with the rite of baptism. Ecclesiology rather than soteriology dominates their interpretation of the theme, yet the soteriological import of union with Christ confronts this category with a challenge. A survey of the views sharing this approach discloses two subcategories of interpreters who emphasize the rite of baptism in regard to union with Christ.

The first group discounts the importance of meeting the soteriological challenges presented by an ecclesiastical emphasis on the doctrine. These interpreters simply take a position that either effectively disallows the involvement of spiritual life and the work of the Holy Spirit or that advocates baptismal regeneration in an *ex opere operato* sense. Although those who advocate this overemphasis on the objective elements of union with Christ generally fall outside the boundaries of Protestant orthodoxy, a brief understanding of these views provides an important context for assessing orthodox positions that share their baptismal emphasis. The orthodox representatives of this category, on the other hand, endeavor to meet the challenge their baptismal emphasis poses for their adherence to traditional Protestant soteriology.

The most radical representative of those who define union with Christ with an ecclesiological emphasis is the existentialist Rudolf Bultmann. Bultmann disallows spiritual life and the work of the Holy Spirit from the doctrine of union with Christ by dispensing with the traditional understanding altogether. He interprets the *in Christ* formula merely as ecclesiological articulation: “‘In Christ,’ far from being a formula for mystic union, is primarily an ecclesiological formula. It means the state of having been articulated into the body of Christ by means of baptism.”¹⁰ Here we have a completely objectified interpretation of the doctrine. To be “in Christ” is simply Pauline verbiage meaning “church member,” “baptized person,” or “Christian.” While the breadth of the semantic field of “in Christ” certainly includes Bultmann’s definition, that same breadth makes his summary too simplistic to account adequately for the scriptural usage.¹¹ His denial of the subjective aspects of “mystic union” relies on a presupposition unsupported by his brief treatment of the doctrine.

Albert Schweitzer also emphasizes the objective elements of union with Christ to the point of neglecting its relationship to subjective soteriological understandings. Typical of the baptismal emphasis category as

¹⁰ *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951), 1:311.

¹¹ Demarest locates six meanings of the phrase in addition to the technical soteriological idea normally associated with union with Christ: “Paul used ‘*en Christo*,’ ‘*en Kyrio*,’ etc. (1) as a synonym for one who is a Christian (Rom 16:7; 2 Cor 12:2; cf. Phil 16); (2) as a dative of instrument or agency, in the sense of ‘by’ or ‘through Christ’ (Rom 3:24; 5:10b; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 3:14; 5:19 (cf. v. 18); Gal 2:17; 3:8, 14); (3) as a dative denoting locale (Rom 8:39; Phil 2:5); (4) to connote authoritative basis, i.e., ‘on the authority of Christ’ (1 Thess 4:1); (5) in the sense of ‘on behalf of Christ’ (Phil 1:13); (6) as a dative signifying sphere of reference (Rom 16:8-12; 1 Cor 7:39; 15:31, 58; Eph 1:9; 3:11; Phil 3:3; 1 Thess 4:1)” (p. 327).

a whole, Schweitzer relies on the rite of baptism to support a related ecclesiological emphasis:

That this mystical doctrine is actually derived from the eschatological concept of the Community of God in which the Elect are closely bound up with one another and with the Messiah is quite clearly evident from the fact that inclusion in this favoured corporeity is not effected in the moment of believing, and not by faith as such. It is first by Baptism, that is, by the ceremonial act by which the believer enters the 'Community of God' and comes into fellowship, not only with Christ but also with the rest of the Elect, that this inclusion takes place.¹²

According to this view, mystical union is an eschatological component of ecclesiology initiated by water baptism. This definition clearly precludes consideration of the Old Testament believer. Schweitzer believes that Paul's reference to baptism for the dead supports his approach (1 Cor. 15:29).¹³ In addition, he disallows symbolism from passages such as Rom. 6:3-4, because symbolism undermines an objective emphasis by indicating that the inception of union is something other than the external sign.¹⁴ And so Schweitzer concludes:

Without baptism there is no being-in-Christ! The peculiarity of the Pauline mysticism is precisely that being-in-Christ is not a subjective experience brought about by a special effort to faith on the part of the believer, but something which happens, in him as in others, at baptism.¹⁵

¹² *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, trans. William Montgomery (New York: Henry Holt, 1931), 116.

¹³ Schweitzer writes in this regard: "The effect of Baptism is thought of so objectively that some in Corinth caused themselves to be baptized for the dead, in order that through this Baptism by proxy they might share in the benefits of the sacrament. Far from combating such a view as superstitious, Paul uses it as an argument against those who cast doubt upon the resurrection (1 Cor. xv. 29)" (p. 19).

¹⁴ Schweitzer: "He makes no use of the symbolism of the ceremony to explain what happens. He does not make it an object of reflection. In Rom. vi. 3-6 he nowhere suggests that he thinks of Baptism as a being buried and rising again with Christ just because the baptized plunges beneath the water and rises out of it again" (p. 19).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

Yet Schweitzer, like Bultmann, has trouble accounting for the breadth of Paul's doctrine with an interpretation limited to its objective ecclesiological results.¹⁶ When 1 Cor. 1:14-17 fails to support his view, a passage in which Paul distinguishes between the relative value of the preaching the gospel on the one hand, and of the administration of the rite of baptism on the other, Schweitzer simply explains: "This sober matter-of-fact sacramentalism is absolutely un-Hellenistic."¹⁷ But this explanation falls short of correctly representing the theology of the apostle in the larger context of this passage. Far from advocating a sacramentalism of any kind, Paul clearly subordinates the rite of baptism to the word of the cross as he describes how "by [God's] doing you are in Christ Jesus" (v. 30). Paul unequivocally exposes the ritual's lack of efficacy when he affirms: "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel" (v. 17). It was the calling of Paul to be involved in the doings of God, which result in men and women who are "in Christ Jesus," and this involvement did not require the administration of ritual baptism. Still more incriminating for Schweitzer's approach is his treatment of the book of Ephesians, which he dismisses as non-Pauline simply on the grounds that it fails to support his interpretation of Pauline mysticism.¹⁸

¹⁶ William Davies agrees that Schweitzer has failed to exhaust the meaning of Paul. He calls Schweitzer's view "mechanical" and "even magical." *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), xii-xiv.

¹⁷ Schweitzer, 20.

¹⁸ Schweitzer's rationale for the dismissal is entirely unsupported by external evidence and relies solely on his subjective view that all Pauline data must agree with his interpretation of Paul's union with Christ doctrine or be dismissed as non-Pauline: "Since the doctrine of the mystical body of Christ contains within it Paul's view of the

Fritz Neugebauer is a third author who has emphasized objective elements of union with Christ to the neglect of any subjective understandings.¹⁹ Though more orthodox than either Bultmann or Schweitzer, Neugebauer criticizes traditional approaches to the doctrine because they have failed to offer a clearly standardized definition.²⁰ He cites five propositions in traditional definitions as presumptive rather than proven: (1) that ἐν Χριστῷ is a technical and theologically significant formula; (2) that the ἐν Χριστῷ formula should be taken locally or spatially; (3) that there is no difference between the phrases ἐν Χριστῷ and ἐν πνεύματι; (4) that “Christ” refers to a spiritual personality; and (5) that “Christ” means “the body of Christ” in an organic way.²¹ Rejecting the local/spatial sense of ἐν, Neugebauer prefers to understand ἐν Χριστῷ as “to be determined by Christ.”²² He correctly asserts that “Christ” refers not to a spiritualized person, but rather to a historically crucified and

pre-existent Church and its realisation in time, he does not otherwise enter upon the conception of the Church. The occurrence in the Epistle to the Ephesians of speculation about the Christian community as a whole (the Church) is an argument against the Pauline authorship” (p. 120).

¹⁹ Although the rite of baptism is not a major emphasis of Neugebauer’s, his views are in league with this category because of his complete objectification of the union with Christ doctrine.

²⁰ Neugebauer identifies a local sense of the phrase ἐν Χριστῷ and an emphasis on personal relationship as contradictory reasons for the ambiguity: “Sehr häufig begegnen zur Veranschaulichung und Umschreibung jener Wendung räumliche Begriffe wie ‘Bereich’, ‘Sphäre’ oder auch ‘pneumatischer Christusleib’, die—und das ist vielleicht ein Widerspruch—eine personale oder mystische Beziehung bzw. Gemeinschaft mit dem pneumatischen Christus verständlich machen sollen.” “Das Paulinische ‘In Christo’,” *New Testament Studies* 4 (1957-8): 124-125.

²¹ Ibid., 125.

²² Ibid., 129.

risen person;²³ and he ultimately concludes that ἐν must be interpreted temporally, rather than locally, with an emphasis on the work of Christ in history.²⁴

Although Neugebauer's emphasis on the work of Christ in history offers an important corrective against Deissmann's evaporated Christ,²⁵ his approach commits the error of the opposite extreme by excluding proper consideration of the person of Christ. Ἐν Χριστῷ refers to both the person and work of Christ, yet these concepts are still distinguishably related to the subjective and objective aspects of the doctrine.²⁶ To be "in Christ" means not only to be objectively determined by the historical work of the crucified and risen Christ; it also means to be subjectively empowered with a life principle involving a relationship with the person of Christ that can be explained only in subjective and personal terms:

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Neugebauer calls his view of ἐν "the historical ἐν": "Auch der Sinn des ἐν ist also am Geschehen orientiert, so dass man beinahe sagen möchte: dieses ἐν ist eher zeitlich als räumlich zu verstehen. . . . Es liegt bei Paulus vielmehr eine eigenartige Einheit von Raum und Zeit vor, die uns sprachlich vielleicht noch in dem Wort Geschichte greifbar wird, eine Einheit von Räumlichkeit und Zeitlichkeit, von Leiblichkeit und Geschehen. Von dieser Einheit her aber muss das ἐν verstanden werden . . . ein geschichtliches ἐν zu nennen, d.h. ein auf Geschehen bezogenes" (p. 138).

²⁵ The view of Adolf Deissmann is best known for his comparison of the spiritualized Christ to air: "Christ is Spirit; therefore He can live in Paul and Paul in Him. Just as the air of life which we breathe is 'in' us and fills us, and yet we at the same time live and breathe 'in' this air, so it is with St. Paul's fellowship of Christ: Christ in him, he in Christ." *St. Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan (New York: Hodder and Stroughton, 1912), 128.

²⁶ Murray J. Harris's warning against the "Denial of a Double Entendre" correctly counsels that we need to guard against limiting Paul's "in Christ" phraseology too restrictively, as Neugebauer's historical ἐν does: "But in addition it seems illegitimate, simply on *a priori* hermeneutical principles, to exclude the possibility that *on occasion* an author may use a single preposition in a dual sense." "Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament," *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975-78), 3:1177.

“Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). In addition, Neugebauer’s criticism of traditional views as failing to distinguish between Christ and the Spirit is more effective against Deissmann than against traditional definitions of union with Christ. Traditional views have maintained the connection between the Christ of history and the ascended Christ by recognizing the role of the Holy Spirit in union with Christ. The agent of union with Christ is not an evaporated Christ, but rather the Paraclete sent by Christ. Although traditional views recognize the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit of Christ” in a sense similar to His identity as “the Spirit of God” (Rom. 8:9), they nevertheless distinguish between the Holy Spirit and the risen Christ in a way that Deissmann does not. Neugebauer fails to distinguish adequately between the view of Deissmann and the traditional view. Consequently, his solution is an overreaction to the error of Deissmann, a response which reduces the work of the Holy Spirit in union with Christ captured by the phrase “in the Spirit” (Rom. 8:9-10) to a label for a mature Christian.²⁷ Neugebauer’s neglect of the work of the Holy Spirit in regard to union with Christ precludes a correct understanding of the subjective elements of the doctrine so vital to the believer’s daily experience.

The most formidable studies of the doctrine of union with Christ that emphasize the rite of baptism are those of Herman Ridderbos²⁸ and

²⁷ Neugebauer agrees with Bultmann in this regard: “es stimmt damit völlig überein, wenn Bultmann πνευματικοί als eine ‘Bezeichnung der gereiften Christen’ versteht” (p. 136). Note that “in the Spirit” in Rom. 8:9 is not a description of a mature believer per se, but a description of all believers: “if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.” Note also that verse 10 indicates that “Christ in you” is parallel to “in the Spirit,” “Spirit dwells in you,” and “have the Spirit of Christ.”

²⁸ *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard DeWitt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

Louis Smedes.²⁹ Within the baptism category of interpreters, these authors are uniquely concerned for consistency with historic Protestant soteriology in spite of their emphasis on ritual baptism. They attempt to solve the dilemma between Protestant soteriology and a baptismal view of union with Christ by objectifying the latter, thereby giving it a decisively ecclesiological emphasis distinguishable from the subjective soteriological aspects of traditional definitions (“vital” and “spiritual”).

Ridderbos’s definition for union with Christ rests on two foundational pillars. First, Ridderbos distinguishes between on the one hand the “fundamental structures” of Paul’s theology captured in the phrases “in Christ” and “with Christ,” and on the other hand the “metaphorical” expression, “the body of Christ.”³⁰ This dichotomy allows the author to emphasize soteriological themes related to union with Christ in the first section, and then to emphasize ecclesiological themes connected to the rite of baptism in the second section. In both sections, however, Ridderbos argues for an objectified view of the doctrine. Once this objectified understanding of union with Christ is firmly established, Ridderbos cites the baptismal ceremony as the union’s inception.

As Ridderbos treats “in Christ” and “with Christ,” he recognizes the pneumatic and vital components of the historic interpretations of this phraseology: “For a long time scholars have proceeded from the idea that

²⁹ L. B. Smedes, *All Things Made New: A Theology of Man’s Union with Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970). Smedes republished this work under the title *Union with Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) in a less technical format. This study has utilized the earlier work because of its greater thoroughness.

³⁰ The separation is immediately apparent in the organization of Ridderbos’s book. “In Christ” and “with Christ” occupy attention in chapter 2, “Fundamental Structures” (pp. 57-64), whereas the “body of Christ” concept appears in chapter 9, “The Church as the Body of Christ” (pp. 362-395).

'being in Christ' denotes communion with the pneumatic Christ, out of which then the speaking of dying, rising, etc., 'with Christ' is said to have developed as a description of the closest personal experiences."³¹ Ridderbos does not embrace this subjective idea of personal experience.

Instead, he responds to the traditional view by defining the "in Christ" phrase in forensic terms, supporting his conclusion with its parallel, "in Adam," from 1 Cor. 15:22:

What really matters, however, is that here 'in Christ' is paralleled with 'in Adam.' Herewith the character of this 'in' becomes plain. As *the decision has fallen* in Adam with respect to the 'all' who pertain to him, that they should die, so in Christ that they shall live. Adam and Christ here stand over against each other as the two great figures at the entrance of two worlds, two aeons, two 'creations,' the old and the new; and in their actions and fate lies the decision for all who belong to them, because these are comprehended in them and thus *are reckoned* either to death or to life. This is now expressed by 'in Adam' and 'in Christ.' And it is therefore in this sense that Adam can be called the type of him who was to come [emphasis mine].³²

The objective nature of Ridderbos's interpretation of these soteriological aspects of union with Christ is obvious from his use of the phrases "the decision has fallen" and "are reckoned." Although he understands that the decision determines "that they should die" and "that they should live," and although he describes the reckoning as "either to death or to life," the fact that spiritual life and death are subjective spiritual realities requiring treatment in a scriptural definition of "in Christ" and "with Christ" never quite surfaces in Ridderbos's approach due to the weight of his emphasis on objective imputation. This objective emphasis leads him to view Adam and Christ as gatekeepers at the entrance of two worlds,

³¹ Ibid., 59.

³² Ibid., 60-61.

whereas Paul seems to be emphasizing subjective truths—that Adam is the source of spiritual death for the sinner, and that Christ is the source of spiritual life for the believer. Paul’s emphasis in 1 Cor. 15:22 is clearly on life and death, rather than on entrance into ages or worlds.

Strict objectification of the soteriological aspects of union with Christ remains Ridderbos’s schema for his interpretation of the Pauline old man/new man doctrine. The trouble which confronts his attempt to eliminate completely the subjective elements of this theme portends the difficulty he later faces in regard to baptism:

‘Old’ and ‘new’ then designate the time before and after conversion or personal regeneration, and the corresponding manner of life. But we shall have to understand ‘old’ and ‘new man,’ not in the first place in the sense of the *ordo salutis*, but in that of the history of redemption; that is to say, it is a matter here not of a change that comes about in the way of faith and conversion in the life of the individual Christian, but of that which once took place in Christ and in which his people had part in him in the corporate sense described above.³³

Ridderbos illustrates in this paragraph the difficulty involved with completely objectifying a doctrine that includes subjective aspects, for he manages to teach in the space of two sentences two contradictory assertions regarding Paul’s old/new man: (1) that it “designate[s] the time before and after conversion or personal regeneration,” and (2) that “it is a matter here not of a change that comes about in the way of faith and conversion in the life of the individual Christian.” How can Paul’s old/new man designate the time before and after personal conversion and still not be a matter of conversion in the life of the individual Christian? Clearly, the scriptural weight of the subjective elements of Paul’s

³³ Ibid., 63.

old/new man doctrine places a strain on Ridderbos's attempt to objectify completely the concept with his history-of-redemption approach.

A similar strain accompanies Ridderbos's use of the rite of baptism to objectify completely Paul's "body of Christ" doctrine. Here again, Ridderbos begins with a recognition of the subjective elements of traditional definitions of the body of Christ:

So far as the former is concerned [the Protestant view], it is characteristic of the traditional conception that body of Christ is here exclusively understood of the pneumatic mode of existence of the church on the ground of its communion with the exalted Christ. It is the Spirit who constitutes this communion. . . . In this context the body of Christ is accordingly often spoken of as the invisible church and the mystical union between Christ and the church.³⁴

Ridderbos presents a useful distinction between the Headship of Christ metaphor and the body of Christ metaphor.³⁵ He does so, however, because he wants to emphasize that the body metaphor focuses on the objective connection between believers and other believers, rather than on a subjectively pneumatic connection between believers and Christ. Connection exists, of course, between Christ and the believers within

³⁴ Ibid., 363.

³⁵ Ridderbos offers some sound reasons for separating the metaphors: "First of all, the representation of a body nourished from the head and growing up toward the head, as one would then have to take Ephesians 4:15, 16 and Colossians 2:19, is physiologically difficult to imagine, and was certainly not current in antiquity. . . . More importantly, however, from Paul's own terminology clearly another idea emerges than that of such a composite metaphor. For the church is continually represented as the whole body (in Eph. 4:16 as well), and not merely as the remaining parts of the body belonging to the head, which the idea of a trunk would then imply. In 1 Corinthians 12:16 the functions of the head are likewise compared with those of the church (and not with those of Christ). And what entirely settles the matter is this: Christ cannot be thought of as a (subordinate) part of his own body, which is involved in the process of growth toward adulthood and which as part of the body must itself consequently be 'in Christ.' Even from these 'organic' texts themselves it is evident that one arrives at all kinds of absurdities when one chooses to take 'body' and 'head' as one, composite metaphor" (p. 380).

Ridderbos's view of the body of Christ metaphor, but it does so in terms of objective representation and ownership, not in terms of the subjective indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit:

Both the characteristic expression 'the many' and the definitive 'in Christ' are borrowed from the familiar terminology that denotes the many as having been included in the one, the church as being *represented by* Christ. The distinguishing feature of the idea of 'body,' therefore, is that these many in virtue of this common *belonging to* Christ form in him a new unity with each other. They are not each one individually, but as a corporate unity, all together in him [emphasis mine].³⁶

Ridderbos understands the importance of the work of the Holy Spirit to the practical "realization" of unity in the body of Christ, but he refuses to see the work of the Holy Spirit as the agent of its organic nature:

With this, then, the view has been refuted that the idea of the body of Christ rests on the pneumatic indwelling of Christ in his church. . . . It is unmistakably apparent from the above terminology that the one body is not conceived in the first instance as a pneumatic but (we may perhaps say) as a redemptive-historical, 'objective' unity.³⁷

With a truly objectified understanding of the body in Christ firmly established, Ridderbos argues for the view that the act of union with the body of Christ is ritual baptism. His interpretation of 1 Cor. 12:13 is central to his position in this regard. He makes much of the observation that being baptized into the body of Christ requires the prior existence of the body, and then he summarizes:

Hence the Spirit, too, is not thought of here as the factor constituting the body (so that one would have to translate: 'by one Spirit'), but as the gift in which believers share in virtue of their incorporation into the body. For to be in Christ, to belong to his body, means to be in the Spirit (Rom. 8:9), to have been brought under the rule of the Spirit. In this train of thought it is not the Spirit who incorporates into the body by means of baptism, but, just the

³⁶ Ibid., 371.

³⁷ Ibid., 372.

reverse, incorporation by baptism means being baptized with the Spirit of Christ.³⁸

According to Ridderbos's rendering of 1 Cor. 12:13, water baptism, which incorporates an individual into the body of Christ (i.e., the community of believers), precedes and effects being baptized with the Spirit of Christ. This approach works initially for Ridderbos without a complete capitulation to baptismal regeneration, because he manages to objectify not only the body of Christ, but also what it means to be in (or baptized by) the Spirit. This he defines as having been "brought under the rule of the Spirit," a concept that broadly defines life regulated by the Spirit in the church. Regeneration as a subjective life principle within the individual is no longer in view. Yet the verse cited by Ridderbos (Rom. 8:9) not only teaches that believers are "in the Spirit," but also predicates this blessing on the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, not on water baptism: "if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him." Ridderbos advocates from 1 Cor. 12:13 the construction "baptism into the body of Christ/belonging to Christ" → "in the Spirit,"³⁹ whereas the structure of Rom. 8:9 requires "indwelling of the Spirit" → "in the Spirit/belonging to Christ." For Ridderbos's interpretation of 1 Cor. 12:13, belonging to Christ precedes life in the Spirit. For Paul in Rom. 8:9, the indwelling of the Spirit precedes belonging to Christ. Traditional definitions of union with Christ have reconciled the truth of 1 Cor. 12:13 and Rom. 8:9 by spiritualizing the baptismal idea in 1 Cor. 12:13, taking ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι instrumentally as

³⁸ Ibid., 372-373.

³⁹ Ibid., 372.

a reference to either regeneration or Pentecost. Ridderbos reconciles them by ignoring the whole import of indwelling in Rom. 8:9.

Ridderbos finds it difficult to hold his objectified definition of “in the Spirit” (and with it his objectified view of union with Christ) completely consistently, because it is difficult to ignore completely the subjective elements of the doctrine:

All this does not alter the fact that the qualification body of Christ (in the nature of the case) also has a pneumatic significance, insofar as it refers to the communion between the church and the exalted Christ.⁴⁰

In addition, baptismal regeneration *ex opere operato* also becomes a nearly unavoidable conclusion once water baptism is identified as the inception of existence “in the Spirit.” This is true because the subjective aspects of the doctrine are persistently inescapable. Distancing himself from a mechanistic view of baptismal regeneration begins with discounting the symbolism of the ritual, because Ridderbos wants to conceive of water baptism as an act of God, not men:

Entirely distinct from this is the symbolical interpretation given in many commentaries of this connection between baptism on the one hand and the dying, being buried, and rising on the other. This symbolism is said to lie in the going down of the one baptized into, and the emerging again out of, the water of baptism, which pictures dying on the one hand and resurrection on the other. But this whole symbolism . . . appears to us to be a fiction. In Paul’s statements themselves it has no support whatever. So far as the water of baptism is concerned, its symbolical significance, as appears from the whole of the New Testament, is that it purifies, not that one can sink down into it and drown, to say nothing of being buried in the water. . . . To see this moment of immersion especially as a symbol of burial, however, seems to us entirely absurd. For not only is one not buried in water, but it is also difficult to symbolize burial by immersing oneself for an instant under water.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ibid., 394-395.

⁴¹ Ibid., 402.

The argument Ridderbos makes against the death-burial-resurrection symbolism of water baptism relies in part on the objection that this symbol is symbolic, not literal. His reason for calling immersion an absurd way of symbolizing burial is that people are not literally buried in water. Clearly, a symbol by definition cannot be incriminated for its lack of literalness.

Ridderbos's point also relies on his preference for the washing concept when it comes to the symbolism of the ceremony, but this idea causes him to lose some of the distance he has tried to establish between an objectified view of union with Christ effected by water baptism, and the soteriologically loaded concept of regeneration:

The connection between baptism and the Spirit thus does not consist specifically in an incidental outpouring of unusual gifts of the Spirit, but in the transition of the baptized to the new life that has been brought to light by Christ, in which not only are the guilt and uncleanness of sin washed away, but in which, positively, the new government of the Holy Spirit also prevails.⁴²

Here the objectified spiritual result of water baptism persists—"the new life that has been brought to light" and "the new government of the Holy Spirit"—but there is slippage, for this is also a life that washes away guilt and uncleanness. Crediting baptism with the washing away of guilt and uncleanness creates a dilemma for any view that also rejects a mechanical view of baptismal regeneration. Ridderbos seeks to address the soteriological dilemma caused by his interpretation of union with Christ by claiming that it is impossible to separate water baptism from faith. He also appeals to the free sovereignty of God in order to avoid the charge that he advocates an entirely mechanistic view of the ritual. He

⁴² Ibid., 398-399.

summarizes his twofold argument: “Baptism and faith are both means to the appropriation of the content of the gospel. However, while faith according to its nature is an act of man, baptism according to its nature is an activity of God and on the part of God.”⁴³ Although Ridderbos makes an excellent observation in this regard, his assertion confuses whether he still has in mind the water ceremony men are commanded to enact (Matt. 28:19). In what sense is baptism “according to its nature . . . an activity of God” but still a commandment given to men? Here Ridderbos reveals why he avoids a strictly symbolic understanding of the ceremony. Because water baptism is an act of God, it must be much more than a mere symbol. However, separation between baptism as the water ceremony and baptism as an act of God creeps into his view; for Ridderbos admits the possibility that a recipient of the ritual might obtain no true benefit on account of his lack of faith.⁴⁴ It is therefore possible to get wet in the ceremony without being baptized by God.

Not only is Ridderbos’s definition of union with Christ as effected by the ordinance of baptism difficult to reconcile with orthodox soteriology, but also it precludes any consideration of the Old Testament believer. The Old Testament believer was not water baptized in the New

⁴³ Ibid., 412.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 411. Ridderbos uses this idea to account for the displeasure of God with the Israelites in 1 Cor. 10. While Ridderbos may be credited with developing an explanation for the recipient of baptism who does not believe, he has not addressed the believer who is never baptized (the category the Old Testament believer belongs to). Charles A. Heurtley, who agrees with Ridderbos’s emphasis on baptism as the inception of union with Christ, distinguishes between “the life of the womb” and “the life which is given at birth” to account for believers who have not been baptized. In this case, believers experience “an incipient state” of union with Christ that is not “formally effected.” *The Union Between Christ and His People* (London: Chas. J. Thynne, n.d.), 51.

Testament sense. Ridderbos makes some significant observations from 1 Corinthians 10 in this regard:

For there he compares the New Testament church with ancient Israel—as he does so often—and says of the latter that ‘our fathers were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.’ . . . For just as God has baptized and incorporated the church in Christ, so Israel’s salvation lay in the fact that it had received Moses as leader and head and was contained in Moses.⁴⁵

Ridderbos uses this passage as an analogy that helps to define water baptism as the point of entrance into a corporate personality. As he interprets the passage, “baptism into Moses” means “they all participated in the discriminating and saving operation of the cloud and the sea that God accomplished for them by the ministry of Moses.”⁴⁶ Ridderbos has little more to say about the union of the Old Testament believer with Christ, but his use of 1 Corinthians 10 as an analogy for Christian baptism provides an important insight for understanding the relation of union with Christ to the Old Testament saint. Ridderbos would recognize the typical nature of the Old Testament events described in 1 Corinthians 10—only two of those so “saved” or “baptized into Moses” actually made it into the promised land, Joshua and Caleb. This baptism into Moses through the cloud and the sea did not effect the salvation of the souls of these Israelites *ex opere operato*. In fact, the exodus event likely involved many unbelievers. Stephen clearly teaches that most of those following Moses in the exodus were not truly believers (Act 7:37-43, 52). Paul even notes in the context of 1 Corinthians 10 that with most of

⁴⁵ Ibid., 405.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

them God was not well pleased (v. 5).⁴⁷ The analogy Paul makes here, therefore, is not the comparison of an Old Testament spiritual reality (the exodus - “baptism into Moses”) to a New Testament spiritual reality (the ordinance - “baptism into Christ”), but rather he makes a comparison between Old Testament typical symbol and New Testament typical symbol by comparing the exodus to the ordinance of baptism. Paul could say that the OT Jew was “baptized into Moses” not because the OT Jew was saved in a soteriological sense by passing through the Red Sea and following the cloud, but rather because that nation’s deliverance from Egypt typified the salvation of the soul just as baptism does. Baptism into Christ does not save in a soteriological sense by passing through water any more than passing through the Red Sea saved the souls of the Israelites. Instead, both are types of the salvation of the soul.

Louis Smedes’s work on union with Christ is the second formidable advocacy of the baptismal view. Smedes shares Ridderbos’s concern for a consistent understanding of Protestant soteriology. In league with the views of Ridderbos,⁴⁸ Smedes approaches the doctrine with an objective focus. His approach prioritizes avoiding the traditional subjective elements of the doctrine, “vital” and “spiritual.”⁴⁹ He labels his

⁴⁷ Ridderbos also acknowledges as much (p. 411).

⁴⁸ Smedes’s fourteen references to the views of Ridderbos in support of his own indicate the influence of *Paul: An Outline of His Theology on All Things Made New* (see Smedes’s “Index of Authors,” 268). Only Calvin is referenced more often, although not always favorably.

⁴⁹ Smedes relegates the “vital” characteristic to positions that stand outside the boundaries of Protestant orthodoxy when he speaks of the commonality between the errors of Deissmann and Roman Catholicism in regard to union with Christ: “What

interpretation of union with Christ the “Within the New Situation” view, and he defines it as follows: “Like the sacramentalist approach, it holds that something radically, even ontologically, new has come into existence with Christ; but instead of seeing the new thing as a stream of divine life that boosts created existence to a new level, it sees the new thing as a new order in history, a new environment, a new situation.”⁵⁰

Eliminating the “vital” characteristic of the traditional definitions of union with Christ determines Smedes’s interpretation of a number of Scripture passages. He reads in 2 Cor. 5:17, for example, not that the man in Christ is a new creation, or that he has experienced a new creation on a personal level, but rather that he is a part of a new creation, which is the church:

Where is the new creation? May we look for it in the changed moral life of individual Christians? There, too, of course, but not primarily. The new exists wherever Christ is known, confessed and served as the Lord of life. The new exists wherever men are in fact reconciled to God. May we insist, as Neugebauer and most interpreters do, that the new creation is the Church? I think we may. If I understand this thesis, it suggests that anyone who is genuinely part of the community where the reconciliation of Christ is preached and lived is part of that new movement in history called the new creation.⁵¹

they have in common is the conviction that Paul’s doctrine of union with Christ as a ‘being in Christ’ involves an actual sharing of His life in some form” (p. 83).

⁵⁰ Ibid., 90.

⁵¹ Ibid., 106. Note that Paul’s grammar (ἔι τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καὶνὴ κτίσις) certainly is an unusual way to say “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature.” Normally, one would expect ἔστιν in the apodosis (cf. 1 Cor. 16:22). However, the more likely translation, “if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation” (RSV), still may be a reference to regeneration rather than the church. Two other passages help define Paul’s new creation theme: Rom. 4:17 and Gal. 6:15. They have in common a contrast between the significance of the new creation and the significance of the circumcision issue (Rom. 4:9-12). The Romans passage does not use the term “new creation,” but it gives the most explicit definition of the concept: “God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which did not exist.” Here we see that new creation is bound up in the gift of life, a theme that leads Paul to the importance of the resurrection in Rom. 4. Therefore,

Smedes's objectified approach to Paul's new creation doctrine argues for a progressive agenda for the church, expanding its mission from making individual disciples of Christ to executing a new movement in history.⁵² However, as the quotation above indicates with the phrase, "There, too, of course, but not primarily," Smedes has trouble keeping Paul's "in Christ" concept entirely external to the believer.⁵³ Ultimately, Smedes's interpretation of this verse requires that the plain assertions of the apostle be nearly reversed:

For while being 'in Christ' involves the relocation of a person within a whole new order of existence in history, he can find little in actual history that indicates the radical righteousness and love characteristic of the new creation. *The 'old things' have not all*

when Paul contrasts "new creation" with the circumcision debate in Rom. 4 and Gal. 6:15, what settles the issue in both passages is not that the formation of the Church now renders the circumcision question moot, but rather that the gift of life changing the individual through faith in the work of Christ on the cross has done so. What distinguishes the Israel of God from the Israel according to the flesh is not church membership, but rather regeneration. This is the new creation. Charles Hodge notes that the church without life would not be a new creation worth having: "In the Old Testament, Is. 43, 18, 19. 65, 17, the effects to be produced by the coming of the Messiah are described as a making all things new. . . . The inward spiritual change in every believer is set forth in the same words, because it is the type and necessary condition of this great cosmical change. What would avail any conceivable change in things external, if the heart remained a cage of unclean birds?" *A Commentary on 1&2 Corinthians* (1857-59; reprint, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 517.

⁵² Smedes's vision for the church resembles postmillennialism in this regard: "The design of Christ's new creation is far too grand, too inclusive to be restricted to what happens inside my soul. No nook or cranny of history is too small for its purpose, no cultural potential too large for its embrace. Being in Christ, we are part of a new movement by His grace, a movement rolling on toward the new heaven and new earth where all things are made right and where He is all and in all" (pp. 127-128). He criticizes what he calls "the truncated apocalyptic of extreme fundamentalism" (p. 108).

⁵³ Smedes experiences the same difficulty in an earlier section, where he notes: "But while Paul talks here about a man's being in Jesus Christ and about the radical alteration in such a man, the context makes it clear that his main theme is neither of these. His subject is the act of God in Jesus Christ at the cross of Calvary" (p. 104). The difficulty these admissions pose for Smedes's complete objectification of union with Christ is that his position requires not only that objective aspects of union with Christ be a "main theme," they need to be the "only theme," or Smedes's definition of union with Christ falls short of a complete definition.

*passed away. The 'new' has come only ambiguously at best. And the saints on earth cry even more agonizingly than their brothers under the altar: 'How long, O Lord?' (Rev. 6:9f.) [emphasis mine].*⁵⁴

While it may be true that the old things have not yet passed away for the “new creation” Smedes is referring to, this cannot be the same “new creation” Paul is referring to, for Paul says unequivocally regarding his “new creation” that “old things have passed away, new things have come.” Because of his complete objectification of the doctrine, the new creation Smedes sees in 2 Cor. 5:17 becomes very difficult to distinguish not only from the church, but also from the world. In addition, the ministry of reconciliation undergoes an adjustment. The key to reconciliation is no longer the vicarious sacrifice of Christ that the individual might know righteousness rather than sin (2 Cor. 5:20-21); it has now become cultural “embrace” and concern for every “nook and cranny” of history (social, political, etc.).⁵⁵ Consequently, the reader of Smedes must ask whether the desire for cultural embrace is determining his definition of union with Christ, or is his definition truly creating the desire.

A second passage that undergoes the objectification process of Smedes’s interpretive approach is Romans 6. Here the author proposes and defends his view that the rite of baptism transacts the transition from life outside of Christ to life in Him. Smedes begins with Rom. 6:10. From this verse Smedes argues that “for Paul sin is a force or power outside of us, a power that can make a prisoner of man.”⁵⁶ With this

⁵⁴ Ibid., 107.

⁵⁵ See note 52.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 134. Note the parallelism between “died to sin” and “alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

starting point established, Smedes can argue that to be dead to sin means to be “liberated from the control of the powers of the old age.”⁵⁷ From here, proposing a completely objectified understanding of life in Christ requires only a small step:

Coming alive to God (Rom. 6:10) means that we gain a new point of orientation, a new goal and thus a new direction. More it means that we live by a new power (Phil. 3:10) within a new life order. . . . We are dead to the destructive powers and threats of the old order and are free to live in a new setting, under new conditions and with a new style of action.⁵⁸

The importance of baptism is still a step away, but the stage has been set with an objectified view of life in Christ. Although Smedes mentions living “by a new power,” the key to this power is no longer the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit as confessed by traditional definitions of union with Christ. Now living by this power involves things external: “a new point of orientation,” “a new goal,” “a new direction,” “a new life order,” “a new setting,” “new conditions,” and “a new style.”

This approach involves two related problems, however. First, the view fails to recognize that the jurisdiction of the reign of sin is strictly internal according to the larger context of Romans 6. Consider verse 12: “Therefore, do not let sin reign *in your mortal bodies* so that you obey its lusts.” “Sin” is not the old setting that surrounds the sinner from the outside; “sin” is the old nature that corrupts the sinner from within. The second problem causes the first. When Smedes recognizes the

⁵⁷ Ibid., 135.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 137. Smedes tries unsuccessfully to find support for his view in Calvin. He admits that the Reformer spoke of the life of Christ as an internal spiritual reality, but he tries to explain Calvin’s emphasis as something of an aberration: “When we read things like this in Calvin, however, we must remember that he was willing to use any language at all, as long as it functioned to get the point across” (p. 173).

personification of sin in Rom. 6:10, he commits a *non sequitur* with his conclusion that personification demands an objectified/externalized understanding of sin. Reality need not be objective reality in order to be personified. In this chapter Paul personifies sin to show its enslaving power. That he does so does not require us to understand him as literally describing a “power outside of us.” To conclude that personification can be used to explicate only external spiritual truth is to miss the metaphorical nature of the literary device. Smedes commits this error.

It is with his treatment of Romans 6 that Smedes supports the view that union with Christ takes place through the ritual of baptism:

Union with Christ in His redemptive action occurs for us at the moment of our baptism. It is this association between our union with Christ and our experience of the sacrament that plants our feet firmly in the present time and practically rules out the trans-historical notion of contemporaneity with Christ in the past. We did not die with Him about A.D. 30 at Calvary outside Jerusalem, but rather in our own time at the baptismal font in our local church. There is no getting around Paul’s plain language and, evangelical shyness about sacramental efficacy notwithstanding, there is no avoiding the fact that it is in baptism that we are both buried and raised with Christ.⁵⁹

Smedes charges Baptists with too narrow a view with their emphasis on the ritual as a symbol of an internal reality. He even claims that this emphasis puts them closer to the sacramentalist than to Scripture, because their view admits the subjective elements of union with Christ, which he assiduously avoids.⁶⁰ He agrees with Ridderbos that 1 Corinthians 10 requires an objective and efficacious view of baptism, and his view is consequently subject to the same criticisms expressed above in regard to Ridderbos’s interpretation of that passage.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 138-139.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 141.

There is obviously very little room for the Old Testament believer in Smedes's definition of union with Christ as the "New Situation." The Old Testament believer was part of the old situation; he was never baptized. Yet Smedes must recognize that dividing the old situation from the new situation is not a simple matter of pinpointing the correct date on the calendar: "The new order is obviously not divided from the old order by the calendar: the old order is still here, along with the new; they exist side by side."⁶¹ In fact, the more Smedes discusses the Old Testament believer, the less he speaks of the "new situation" as something new.⁶² The importance of baptism simply does not surface in these sections, and his desire to include Abraham in the new community threatens to incriminate much of the definition for union with Christ he has proposed:

The cross, it must be noted, brought in a new community to replace the old disunity; it did not destroy the old covenant. The 'ordinances that were written against us' in the law were abolished, but the covenant community that began with Abraham was not abolished. . . . No, the cross did not divide the new community from the covenant partnership God entered with Abraham. It created the new community from the chaos created by Adam. The cross draws a line between community and loss of community, and rescues humanity as communion.⁶³

Here Smedes offers something closer to a recitation of the nature of the problem than a solution for it. The view rests on his direction on the one hand to distinguish between the new community and the covenant partnership God created with Abraham, and on the other to identify the new

⁶¹ Ibid., 71.

⁶² The key discussion appears under the heading "The Origin of the Community" (pp. 222-224).

⁶³ Ibid., 223.

community with the covenant community that began with Abraham, which was not abolished. We are not told exactly how the covenant community of Abraham can continue if the new community is truly new. Smedes's objective "community" rubric is failing him at this point. The continuity he seeks between Abraham and the believer today must be defined in terms of soteriology, not ecclesiology, yet Smedes's definition of union with Christ has essentially disallowed a soteriological solution.

In summary, definitions of union with Christ that cite the ordinance of baptism as the act of union wrongly emphasize ecclesiology to the exclusion of the soteriological importance of the doctrine. They fail to account for the subjective aspects of the doctrine of union with Christ, "vital" and "spiritual," emphasized by traditional definitions. For this reason, they are pressed to an objectification of the doctrine that leads either to a complete denial of union in favor of "articulation" (Bultmann), to an *ex opere operato* mechanistic view of baptismal regeneration (Schweitzer), or to an equivocal and strained interpretation of NT passages which teach the "vital" and "spiritual" characteristics of the doctrine (Neugebauer, Ridderbos, and Smedes). None of these approaches have presented an adequate rationale for either the inclusion or exclusion of the Old Testament believer.

Incarnational Definitions

An emphasis on the incarnation identifies a second major category of definitions of union with Christ. These definitions are distinguishable from emphases on the rite of baptism and emphases on the work of the Holy Spirit because they view union with Christ as union with His human nature. The incarnational category does not form a mutually

exclusive set with its baptismal and pneumatological counterparts. Some who emphasize the incarnation also emphasize baptism, while others also emphasize either regeneration or Pentecost. Nevertheless, the distinctive characteristics of this category present a unique set of obstacles when it comes to consideration of the Old Testament believer. As Demarest understands, “there could be no such incorporation until Christ’s assumption of human flesh at the Incarnation”⁶⁴ if incarnational definitions are correct.

Whereas definitions emphasizing the rite of baptism require the objectification of subjective aspects of the doctrine, incarnational definitions lead to the subjectification of the humanity of Christ. Unlike baptismal definitions, incarnational definitions maintain a strong emphasis on the “vital” characteristic of the doctrine; but similar to the baptismal view, the importance of the work of the Holy Spirit to union with Christ subsides in favor of other considerations. This emphasis on the humanity of Christ in regard to mystical union arose out of the Eucharistic controversies of the Protestant Reformation. Consequently, the ordinance of the Lord’s Table often displaces the Holy Spirit as the primary mechanism of ongoing vitality for incarnational views of union with Christ, though the agency of the Spirit is never denied. Incarnational definitions of union with Christ claim support from the teachings of John Calvin. These understandings, and those of some of his more moderate theological progeny, are foundational to incarnational definitions of union with Christ. The extremities of the category, as found in John W. Nevin and E. L. Mascall, distance themselves in varying degrees from this

⁶⁴ Demarest, 338-339.

foundation. Both the foundational understandings and the extremities hold important implications for the consideration of the Old Testament believer.

Though distinguishable from a purely sacramental approach to the doctrine, incarnational views of union with Christ are closely connected to the sacramental tradition both historically and theologically. Most incarnational definitions of union with Christ claim to build upon a foundation laid by Calvin. His understanding of the doctrine developed in the crucible of theological controversy over the Lord's Table. Calvin's *Institutes* identifies three primary antagonists that occupied his concern in this regard: transubstantiation, consubstantiation, and the views of Osiander. Some interpreters of Calvin believe that his emphasis on the human nature of Christ in regard to mystical union surfaced as a response to the mystical views of Osiander, which Calvin understood as advocating an infusion of the divine nature.⁶⁵ They also see in Calvin's interpretation of the Lord's Table a substantial transfer of the human life of Christ and a rejection of the symbolical approach of Zwingli, in spite of the fact that Calvin also opposed transubstantiation and consubstantiation. Evans refers to Calvin's summary in this regard,⁶⁶ and then concludes:

⁶⁵ William Borden Evans illustrates this view: "Calvin's emphasis on the humanity of Christ in the doctrine of union with Christ stemmed from his opposition to the view of Osiander that resembled the assumption theories of the medieval mystics. He held that there could be no direct union with the substance of Christ's divine nature, only with the substance of His human nature." "Imputation and Impartation: The Problem of Union with Christ in Nineteenth-Century American Reformed Theology" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1996), 41.

⁶⁶ The passage from Calvin is the following: "The sum is, that the flesh and blood of Christ feed our souls just as bread and wine maintain and support our corporal life. For there would be no aptitude in the sign, did not our souls find their

In summary then, Calvin's doctrine of union with Christ, as expounded in Books III and IV of the *Institutio* and clarified in the context of eucharistic debates, affirms nothing less than the reception by the believer of the substance, the very being, of the incarnate Christ. This union is nothing less than the impartation of the life of the risen Christ to the believer, albeit in a manner which does not diminish the personal individuality of both Christ and the individual believer.⁶⁷

Later incarnational definitions of union with Christ build upon this interpretation of Calvin's emphasis on the humanity of Christ in one of two connected ways. First, some interpreters see the incarnation as redemption's recreation of the frame of mankind. Union with Christ is union with His humanity because it involves participation with perfect manhood recreated in Him. The 17th-century English Puritan nonconformist Walter Marshall advocates this understanding of union with Christ:

By his incarnation, there was a man created in a new holy frame, after the holiness of the first Adam's frame had been marred and abolished by the first transgression: and this new frame was far more excellent than ever the first Adam's was: because man was really joined to God by a close inseparable union of the divine and human nature in one person, Christ.⁶⁸

The crux of this position is the availability of a new perfect humanity through the incarnation. Therefore, union with Christ involves union with His human spirit and even His flesh: "It is by our being in Christ,

nourishment in Christ. This could not be, did not Christ truly form one with us, and refresh us by the eating of his flesh, and the drinking of his blood. But though it seems an incredible thing that the flesh of Christ, while at such a distance from us in respect of place, should be food to us, let us remember how far the secret virtue of the Holy Spirit surpasses all our conceptions, and how foolish it is to wish to measure its immensity by our feeble capacity." *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), IV.xvii.10.

⁶⁷ Evans, 47.

⁶⁸ *The Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification* (1692; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), 34.

and having Christ himself in us; and that not merely by his universal preference as he is God, but by such a close union, as that we are one spirit and one flesh with him; which is a privilege peculiar to those that are truly sanctified.”⁶⁹ This view of union with Christ is strongly connected to Marshall’s view of the Lord’s Table. The Table becomes the mechanism of the ongoing vitality of mystical union:

And, if we can imagine that Christ’s body and blood are not truly eaten and drunk by believers, either spiritually or corporally, we shall make the bread and wine joined with the words of institution, not only naked signs, but such signs as are much more apt to breed false notions in us, than to establish us in the truth. And there is nothing in this union so impossible, or repugnant to reason, as may force us to depart from the plain and familiar sense of those scriptures that express and illustrate it. Though Christ be in heaven, and we on earth; yet he can join our souls and bodies to his at such a distance without any substantial change of either, by the same infinite Spirit dwelling in him and us; and so our flesh will become his, when it is quickened by his Spirit; and his flesh ours, as truly as if we did eat his flesh and drink his blood; and he will be in us himself by his Spirit, who is one with him, and who can unite more closely to Christ than any material substance can do, or who can make a more close and intimate union between Christ and us.⁷⁰

In this paragraph Marshall refers to “the same infinite Spirit dwelling in him and us” as the key agency of the transfer of the human spirit and flesh of Christ to the believer, but notice that the Spirit is made the agent of the institution. For Marshall, the bread and cup of the Lord’s Table become the true mechanism of vitality for union with Christ.

This concept of mutual indwelling is the crux of the second approach to building on Calvin’s emphasis on the humanity of Christ. These interpreters do not emphasize the Lord’s Table to the degree found in the first approach; therefore, the mutual indwelling by the Spirit of the

⁶⁹ Ibid., 28-29.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 29-30.

humanity of Christ and the believer becomes the true agency of ongoing vitality. Norman Douty illustrates this position:

Hence, I say, is the union of believers with Christ by the Spirit and not with the Spirit Himself; for this Holy Spirit dwelling in the human nature of Christ, manifesting and acting Himself in all fullness therein . . . being sent by Him to dwell in like manner and act in a limited measure in all believers, there is a mystical union thence arising between them, whereof the Spirit is the bond and vital principle.⁷¹

Douty's view of union with Christ as mutual indwelling of the Spirit between the humanity of Christ and the believer leads him to see Pentecost as the inception of the church:

But when did the Church Universal begin? I speak of it here, not in its inchoate state (for it has existed thus from Eden), but in its definite form as a specific organism. Since the incarnate, sacrificed and glorified Son of God is the Head of this body, the Foundation of this temple, and the Propagator of this race, it is plain that His redemptive course must precede it. Then we must date the formation of the Church Universal at the same time as the formation of the first local assembly—at Pentecost.⁷²

Douty's incarnational definition of union with Christ begins to equivocate, however, as he contemplates the Old Testament believer. On the one hand, he insists on the priority of the redemptive work of the incarnate Son of God to the "definite form" of the church "as a specific organism." This he distinguishes from the church universal "in its inchoate state." But the difference Douty asserts between new and old remains stuck at the nominal level. He never explains specifically the nature of the differences between the "inchoate" state of the universal church and the "specific organism" state of the universal church. Douty confronts other issues involving the Old Testament believer's access to union with

⁷¹ *Union With Christ* (Swengel, PA: Reiner Publications, 1973), 144.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 243.

Christ, but an examination of his approach will follow a brief examination of some extreme representatives of this category: John W. Nevin and E. L. Mascall.

John W. Nevin was the 19th-century German Reformed theologian who battled the imputation views of Princeton's Charles Hodge with a position that came to be known as the Mercerberg Theology. In Nevin's incarnational definition of union with Christ, the believer's connection to the humanity of Christ undergoes a broadening, for Nevin uses the theanthropic person of Christ as a template for understanding the believer's union with God, not merely Christ's human nature as indwelt by the Holy Spirit:

The round of the Christian faith then, that to which it owes its origin and character, is the unity of Christ with God; but along with this it includes with equal necessity the assurance, that the fact thus constituted is not single, solitary and transient in its nature, but must with the spirit and life of Christ extend itself to those also who believe in him, and so by degrees to humanity as a whole. Christ is alone, as the unity in him was original and complete; but he is not single, since that which was in him, is to become, according to the measure of receptivity, the possession of the whole race.⁷³

According to this view, the person of Christ is alone in terms of theanthropic union, but He is not single. The theanthropic person of Christ is alone only in terms of originality and completion. Others can eventually join in, because the union of God and individual man in Christ is seen as a component of union of God and manhood in Christ. As such, the unity of God and man known by the theanthropic person of Christ can "extend itself to those also who believe in him."

⁷³ John W. Nevin, *The Mystical Presence* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1963), 33-34.

Yet Nevin affirms that the idea of repeated hypostatic unions is clearly a “monstrosity.”⁷⁴ He distinguishes his own understanding from such a view by asserting that the believer’s union with Christ involves a union with Christ’s human nature as well as his divine nature. Union with the human nature of Christ protects Nevin’s view from the deification of believers. In traditional definitions this safeguard is accomplished by the characteristic “spiritual,” which invokes the distinct personhood of the Holy Spirit as the agent of union. The incarnation was the Son of God acquiring human nature; union with Christ is the believer being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Although Nevin’s understanding of union with Christ involves a recognition of the role of the Holy Spirit, his view also requires a significant mitigation of that role because it tends to disagree with the idea of an infusion of the human life of Christ:

Of course, once more, the communion in question is not simply with Christ in his divine nature separately taken, or with the Holy Ghost as the representative of his presence in the world. It does not hold in the influences of the Spirit merely, enlightening the soul and moving it to holy affections and purposes. It is by the Spirit indeed we are united to Christ. Our new life is comprehended in the Spirit as its element and medium. *But it is always bound in this element to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. . . . As such it is a real communion with the Word made flesh; not simply with the divinity of Christ, but with his humanity also; since both are inseparably joined together in his person* [emphasis mine].⁷⁵

Nevin’s view mitigates the role of the Holy Spirit because he wants to emphasize that the essence of union with Christ is union with His

⁷⁴ Ibid., 169.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 57-58. Nevin understood his distance from Calvin in this regard. Nevin criticized Calvin on three counts: (1) Calvin failed to realize that a real communication between the body of Christ and the body of the saints was possible through the principle of the organic law of the body; (2) Calvin violated the theanthropic unity of Christ by distinguishing the specific redemptive role of His humanity; (3) Calvin failed to idealize properly the concept of manhood in the humanity of Christ (pp. 157-161).

human nature.⁷⁶ He wants to say that union with Christ “does not hold in the influences of the Spirit merely,” although he must confess that the Spirit is “its element and medium.” This failure to maintain a distinction between the Holy Spirit and the theanthropic person of Christ in regard to the agency of union with Christ eventually creates difficulties for Nevin’s understanding of the humanity of Christ. In his view the human nature of Christ undergoes a divination that enables it to do the work pneumatological definitions assign to the agency of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁷

The extremities of the incarnational approach to union with Christ appear also in the work of the Anglican E. L. Mascall. Mascall begins his definition of union with Christ with a cogent statement of the issue at the heart of the incarnational approach to the doctrine: “Briefly, the question is whether the re-creation of human nature, which is the *leitmotiv* of the Gospel, is to be located in the union of the human nature with the Person of the Word in the womb of Mary the Virgin or in the death of the Lord Jesus upon the Cross.”⁷⁸ By citing the incarnation as the “location”

⁷⁶ In terms of the agency of union with Christ, the person of the Holy Spirit and the theanthropic person of Christ are inseparable for Nevin: “Forth from the person of Christ, thus ‘quickened in the Spirit,’ the flood of life pours itself onward continually in the Church, only of course by the presence and power of the Holy Ghost; for it holds in no other form. Not however by the presence and power of the Holy Ghost, as abstracted from the presence of Christ himself; as though he were the fountain only, and not the very life-stream too, of the new creation, or could he supposed to be in it and with it by the intervention only of a presence, not involving at the same time and to the same extent his own” (p. 175).

⁷⁷ Nevin’s view was criticized by Hodge as Eutychianism for comments like the following: “This of course, in the power of his divine nature. But his divine nature is at the same time human, in the fullest sense; and wherever his presence is revealed in the Church in a real way, it includes his person necessarily under the one aspect as well as under the other” (p. 174). See Charles Hodge, “Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord’s Supper,” *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 20 (1848): 265.

⁷⁸ E. L. Mascall, *Christ, the Christian and the Church: A Study of the Incarnation and Its Consequences* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1946), 69.

of the re-creation of human nature, Mascall does not completely dismiss the work of Christ on the cross, but rather he sees the cross as part of a larger whole—the identification of the Son of God with the pain and punishment of creation through the incarnation.⁷⁹ Although Mascall's Anglican background includes a sacramental view of baptism, which gives him much in common with some in the baptismal view of union with Christ,⁸⁰ he does not share that category's objectified approach to the doctrine. Instead, the transfer of the human nature of Christ into the believer is the essence of union with Christ for this author:

Now the basis of this ontological change by which a man becomes a Christian is the permanence of the human nature of Christ. . . . Becoming a Christian means being re-created by being incorporated into the glorified manhood of the ascended Christ.⁸¹

Mascall weighs in on the debate between imputation and impartation strongly in favor of impartation. Logically, all this leads him to a conception that sees the gift of eternal life in salvation coming by way of the theanthropic hypostatical union of the person of Christ:

⁷⁹ Mascall writes in this regard: “The ultimate purpose of the Incarnation is not just the re-creation of human nature in Jesus, but the re-creation of the whole human race into him; and this involves that, as its representative, he shall in his human nature himself undergo the pains that both the physical and the moral constitution of the universe involve for the fallen human race as a consequence of its defection from the condition in which, and for which, it was first created” (p. 69).

⁸⁰ Mascall sees the rite of baptism as the inception of union with Christ: “Now the normal and divinely appointed means by which this re-creation is initiated is clearly the Sacrament of Baptism, the sacrament of new birth, of regeneration” (p. 78). But unlike the objective views of the baptismal category, Mascall sees baptism as the mechanism for the infusion of the humanity of Christ into the Christian: “that in baptism we are brought into a real relation with the glorified manhood of the Redeemer, that in baptism there is a real supernaturalization of our human nature in its essence, which can result, if we co-operate with the grace of God, in a progressive supernaturalization of its operations and in the manifestation of supernatural virtues” (p. 83).

⁸¹ Ibid.

For, as we have seen, by our adoptive union with the human nature of Christ, which is in turn hypostatically united with his divine Person, we are given, in the mode proper to us as creatures, a real participation in the eternity which is one aspect of the life of God.⁸²

With this statement Mascall draws a parallel between our possession of eternal life and our possession of the human nature of Christ. The former comes to us via the latter because Christ's human nature was hypostatically united with His divine nature.

Although Mascall's presentation brings the incarnational definition of union with Christ to its logical conclusion, it does so by disregarding Scripture's emphasis on the Holy Spirit. Mascall's definition of union with Christ redefines regeneration as a work of the human nature of Christ, whereas Scripture defines it as a new birth of the Spirit: "that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit" (John 3:5-6). Although he correctly identifies the key issue as whether the benefits of Christ's incarnation or the benefits of Christ's cross work are at the center of re-creation in Christ, Mascall chooses the wrong answer. Rather than subordinating the work of the cross to the incarnation, as Mascall does by making the cross a component of identifying with the pain and punishment of creation, Scripture subordinates the incarnation to the purposes of the cross (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). Jesus was born to obey and to die (Phil. 2:7-8). Equally important, believers do not obtain eternal life because they vicariously participate in the hypostatic union of Christ through the incarnation. This must be the case in light of the fact that Christ took on the human nature of all humanity, not merely the human nature of believers. If we allow

⁸² Ibid., 106.

participation in the human nature of Christ through the incarnation to become the key to eternal life, an unscriptural universalism results.

Incarnational definitions of union with Christ approach the Old Testament believer in two different ways. The most consistent approach is also the most obvious. Nevin argues that the Old Testament believer did not experience union with the human nature of Christ because the Son of God was not yet incarnate—He did not yet have a human nature to be united to:

Christ, as the angel of the covenant, was with his people under the old dispensation; and we know, that there were communications of the Spirit then also, under a certain form. But it is everywhere assumed in the New Testament, that the presence of the one, and the communications of the other, have become since the incarnation of a wholly different character.⁸³

Nevin explains this “wholly different character” in terms of the exclusion of the Old Testament believer from union with Christ:

In the religion of the Old Testament, God descends towards man, and holds out to his view in this way the promise of a real union of the divine nature with the human, as the end of the gracious economy thus introduced. To such a real union it is true, the dispensation itself never came. By a series of condescensions, that grew always more significant and full of encouragement as the dispensation advanced towards its proper end, God drew continually more and more near to men in an outward way. The wall of partition that separated the divine from the human, was never fully broken down. The tabernacle of the Most High was among men; but he dwelt notwithstanding beyond them, and out of them, between the cherubim and behind the veil.⁸⁴

It is clear that for Nevin, what Paul referred to as a wall of partition between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14) has become a wall between God and the Old Testament believer. In Paul’s treatment the Old Testament Jewish believer is on God’s side of the wall (v. 12, 19); in Nevin’s

⁸³ Nevin, 195.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 203.

treatment all Old Testament believers are on the wrong side of the wall. Furthermore, in Paul's treatment the blood of Christ has broken down the wall (Eph. 2:13), whereas in Nevin's treatment the incarnation has broken down the wall. Nevin takes a very low view of the spiritual character of the Old Testament believer so as to reconcile better their existence with his incarnational definition of union with Christ: "Their spiritual life, their union with God, their covenant privileges, all had an unreal, unsubstantial character, as compared with the parallel grace of the gospel, and constituted at best but an approximation to this grace, rather than the actual presence of it in any sense itself."⁸⁵

Less consistent and obvious are the views of some who adopt an incarnational definition of union with Christ while nevertheless seeking to apply the doctrine to the Old Testament believer. Douty, Marshall, and Mascall all provide examples of this effort, and their brief treatments of the question exhibit two primary answers. First, Douty postulates the availability of the human nature of Christ during the Old Testament dispensation. Mascall, on the other hand, proposes that union with the humanity of Christ became a reality for Old Testament believers only long after their deaths at the incarnation. Marshall incorporates both understandings in his explanation.

Douty shows that the question raised here is not a new one by quoting the classical work of Edward Polhill:⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Ibid., 208.

⁸⁶ Edward Polhill, *Christus in Corde: or, The Mystical Union between Christ and Believers, Considered in its Resemblances, Bonds, Seals, Privileges, and Marks* (1680; reprint, London: W. Justins, 1788). Note that Polhill was a contemporary of Marshall.

Though the Son of God had not yet become incarnate in their time, their faith had attached itself to Him as the promised Seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15; cf. I Cor. 10:3, 4). About three centuries ago, Edward Polhill said in this connection: "Christ's human nature, though not in actual being in those times, was yet present in such sort, that the ancients were capable of being united to Him; it was present with their faith; though it had not an absolute existence, as a thing put forth out of its causes, yet it had a relative existence in the promise, so as to be an object of their faith."⁸⁷

This citation from Polhill makes the human nature of Christ available to the Old Testament believer for the purposes of union with Christ by distinguishing between "actual being" and "present with their faith," between "absolute existence" and "relative existence in the promise." Calling the promise of something the relative existence of that thing, however, seems to be little more than a linguistic mechanism for assigning existence to that which does not exist yet. Although faith is the substance of things hoped for (Heb. 11:1), faith is not things hoped for. Faith does not make the reality hoped for "present." As already noted, Douty's incarnational definition of union with Christ relies on the concept of mutual indwelling. According to Douty the believer is united to the human nature of Christ because both are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Thus, in order for the Old Testament believer to be united to the human nature of Christ under Douty's definition, the promise would not only have to give Christ's human nature a "relative existence," it would also somehow have to bring about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in that existence. Yet what is actually described here is a promise, not an existence. If union with Christ was experienced by the Old Testament believer prior to the incarnation, it was not a union with any true existence of Christ's human nature.

⁸⁷ Douty, 254.

Marshall's presentation also seeks to make the human nature of Christ available during the Old Testament dispensation. In so doing, he comes very close to asserting the eternality of the human nature of Christ:

Whereas it may be doubted, whether the saints, that lived before the coming of Christ in the flesh, could possibly be one flesh with him, and receive a new nature by union and fellowship with him, as prepared for them, in his fullness: we are to know, that the same Christ that took our flesh, was before Abraham (John viii. 58); and was foreordained before the foundation of the world, to be sacrificed as a lamb without blemish, that he might redeem us from all iniquity by his precious blood. (1 Pet. i. 18, 19, 20)⁸⁸

Here Marshall seems to suggest that if Christ was slain before the foundation of the world, there must be some sense in which His flesh is eternal. Yet Marshall never explicitly avers the eternality of the human nature of Christ. Instead, his comments turn to the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament:

Now, this Spirit was able and effectual to unite those saints to that flesh which Christ was to take to himself in the fullness of time, because he was the same in both, and to give out to them that grace with which Christ would afterwards fill his flesh, for their salvation, as well as ours.⁸⁹

Marshall avoids claiming eternality for the humanity of Christ by advocating a position that sees the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as the essence of union with Christ. Wittingly or not, Marshall has prioritized the work of the Spirit over the incarnation in his definition of union with Christ. His desire to account for the Old Testament believer forces a retooling of his incarnational definition. It is clearly less difficult to see

⁸⁸ Marshall, 38.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

the work of the Holy Spirit active in the Old Testament than it is to see the availability of the human nature of Christ.

Mascall takes a slightly different approach. He views the incarnational event strictly within the limits of history by postulating that Old Testament believers were united with the human nature of Christ when the Son of God became a man. After defining the church as “one . . . from the beginning of the world to the end,” Mascall explains the impact of the incarnation on the Church as follows: “At the Incarnation of the Son of God the Church acquired universality in time and space, and became partaker of the divine nature by her mystical union with him as his Bride, and as Queen at his right hand, and was admitted to an inheritance and partnership in that kingdom which will never be destroyed.”⁹⁰ But this approach to union with Christ and the Old Testament believer is difficult to reconcile with Mascall’s emphasis on the “ontological change” executed by union with Christ through the incarnation.⁹¹ The infusion of the human life of Christ into the believer is an important emphasis in incarnational definitions of union with Christ. How could the Old Testament believer have avoided spiritual death without access as yet to spiritual life sourced from the human nature of Christ? What was his existence like prior to receiving spiritual life and ontological change at the incarnation? In addition, while a case can be made cogently for a radical change in the spiritual lives of believers after

⁹⁰ Mascall, 129. Marshall also indicates the same understanding: “And when Christ was manifested in the flesh, in the fullness of time, all things in heaven and on earth, all the saints departed, whose spirits were then made perfect in heaven, as well as the saints that then were, or should afterwards be on earth, were ‘gathered together in one,’ and comprehended in Christ as their head (Eph. i. 10)” (p. 38).

⁹¹ Mascall, 83, n. 80.

Pentecost from Acts 2, there is no scriptural record of that kind of radical change in the lives of believers living on earth on the first Christmas day.

Three final considerations parallel the question of the Old Testament believer as challenges to the tenability of incarnational definitions of union with Christ. First, these definitions misinterpret the views of Calvin regarding the importance of the humanity of Christ to union with Christ. Historically, interpreters of Calvin with a sacramentalist view of the Eucharist have overemphasized the Reformer's differences with the memorial approach of Zwingli.⁹² They then interpret Calvin's union with Christ doctrine in terms of these Eucharistic differences. To the contrary, the nemesis confronted most often by the Reformer in regard to the doctrine of union with Christ was Osiander, and he opposed this mystic for his advocacy of two concepts that are also held by incarnational definitions of union with Christ. First, Calvin found in Osiander the error of subordinating the death of Christ to the incarnation of Christ:

In like manner, in another passage (which I greatly wonder that Osiander does not blush repeatedly to quote), he places the fountain of righteousness entirely in the incarnation of Christ, "He has made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21). Osiander in turgid sentences lays hold of the expression, righteousness of God, and shouts victory! as if he had proved it to be his own phantom of essential righteousness, though the words have a very different meaning, viz., that we are justified through the expiation made by Christ.⁹³

Calvin clearly criticized Osiander for failing to see that the significance of the human nature of Christ lies primarily in His atoning cross work. The

⁹² Evans, for example, sees the memorial view on equal footing with transubstantiation and consubstantiation as controverting the view of Calvin (p. 34). The *Institutes*, however, never singles out the views of Zwingli for treatment the way it does transubstantiation and consubstantiation.

⁹³ *Institutes*, III.xi.9.

second point of contention also appears in this paragraph in the words *essential righteousness*. Evans criticizes Princeton's 19th-century emphasis on imputation, crediting the Mercerberg Theology with greater fidelity to the legacy of Calvin.⁹⁴ Yet the idea of infused righteousness was one of the key issues Calvin opposed in Osiander:

Osiander derides us for teaching, that to be justified is a forensic term, because it behooves us to be in reality just: there is nothing also to which he is more opposed than the idea of our being justified by a free imputation. Say, then, if God does not justify us by acquitting and pardoning, what does Paul mean when he says "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them"? "He made him to be sin for us who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:19, 21). Here I learn, first, that those who are reconciled to God are regarded as righteous: then the method is stated, God justifies by pardoning; and hence, in another place, justification is opposed to accusation (Rom. 8:33); this antithesis clearly demonstrating that the mode of expression is derived from forensic use.⁹⁵

Calvin's emphasis on the human nature of Christ certainly never precluded a well-developed advocacy of forensic imputation. In addition, unlike the incarnational definitions claiming to build upon a Calvinistic foundation, Calvin maintained a strict emphasis on the agency of the Holy Spirit in union with Christ.⁹⁶ Whereas incarnational definitions use

⁹⁴ Evans, 323-383.

⁹⁵ *Institutes*, III.xi.11.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, III.i.1. Note also Calvin's comments against Osiander's mitigation of the role of the Spirit: "But Osiander, spurning this spiritual union, insists on a gross mixture of Christ with believers; and, accordingly, to excite prejudice, gives the name of Zwinglians to all who subscribe not to his fanatical heresy of essential righteousness, because they do not hold that, in the supper, Christ is eaten substantially. For my part, I count it the highest honor to be thus assailed by a haughty man, devoted to his own impostures; though he assails not me only, but writers of known reputation throughout the world, and whom it became him modestly to venerate" (III.xi.10). Calvin's more metaphorical sections describing the significance of the Lord's Supper (see note 66) must be read in the context of the positions he argued against Osiander, transubstantiation, and consubstantiation.

the humanity of Christ to account for an infused righteousness in the believer, Calvin's emphasis on our union with the humanity of Christ arises from contexts in which he describes our connection to the work of Christ. Prior to expressing his opposition to Osiander's emphasis on the incarnation in mystical union,⁹⁷ Calvin explains the significance of union with the Christ who became man as follows: "For although Christ could neither purify our souls by his own blood, nor appease the Father by his sacrifice, nor acquit us from the charge of guilt, nor, in short, perform the office of priest, unless he had been very God, because no human ability was equal to such a burden, it is however certain, that he performed all these things in his human nature."⁹⁸ It was not the divine nature that suffered and died; the theanthropic person accomplished redemption's work. "Imputation" rather than "impartation" more adequately describes the nature of our connection to this work. Therefore, for the Reformer union with the human nature of Christ creates an imputation of the benefits of the cross work to the believer through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

Two final considerations make incarnational definitions less tenable. First, these definitions often miss the metaphorical nature of terms such as *body*, *blood*, and *flesh* as descriptions of the nature of union with Christ. Demarest, for instance, claims from John 6 that the Old Testament believer did not know the benefits of union with Christ

⁹⁷ See note 93.

⁹⁸ *Institutes*, III.xi.9.

because this union involves “participation in our Lord’s humanity.”⁹⁹

The passage in John 6 describes eating the flesh of Christ and drinking the blood of Christ as the keys to obtaining eternal life (vv. 53-56). But where the passage dwells in the realm of eating and drinking, it dwells in the realm of metaphor. The metaphor begins with the idea of the bread of life, and it ends with the idea of the flesh and blood of Christ. Christ clearly wanted His audience to identify Him with the manna bread of the wilderness (John 6:48-51). But neither bread nor the flesh and blood of Christ must be eaten literally to obtain eternal life. Instead, Christ speaks literally when He speaks of the need to believe rather than eat (John 6:47, 64), and when He speaks of the need to believe He speaks of His own words and the work of the Spirit rather than His flesh and blood: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life” (John 6:63). This is not to say that the flesh and blood of Christ have nothing to do with eternal life in a literal sense; they certainly do in a way literal bread never could. It is only to say that in this context “bread,” “flesh,” and “blood” all share a metaphorical import. The fact that the overtones of the “flesh” and “blood” metaphor clearly refer to the literal sacrifice of Christ does not

⁹⁹ Demarest, 338. Demarest quotes Calvin in support (*Institutes*, IV.xvii.8). The meaning of this section of the *Institutes* is a difficult one to ascertain, but the first sentence of the passage explicitly contradicts Demarest’s conclusion: “First of all, we are taught by the Scriptures that Christ was from the beginning the living Word of the Father, the fountain and origin of life, from which all things should always receive life.” The Word is clearly the source of life in the Old Testament here. What Calvin describes as new with the incarnation is that the “communication” of this life was lost prior to it and found subsequent to it. With the incarnation came the spanning of “a distance from us” that “exhibits himself openly for participation.” From all of this, it would appear that this section of the *Institutes* teaches the revelatory change introduced by the Word through the incarnation rather than a soteriological change offering the post-incarnational believer a life source that was unavailable to the pre-incarnational believer.

change their metaphorical nature in this passage. The metaphor of eating bread and eating and drinking the flesh and blood of Christ teaches His audience that they need to believe His words. Peter eats and drinks the flesh and blood of Christ when he says: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God” (John 6:68-69). Thus Christ is not describing the nature of union with Christ in terms of the incarnation in John 6. Instead, He is describing the importance of believing what He says.¹⁰⁰

Finally, incarnational definitions of union with Christ have great difficulty accounting for Peter’s assertion that believers are partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). The phrase is admittedly difficult,¹⁰¹ but its preclusion of a foundational tenet of incarnational definitions of union with Christ could not be more clear. Believers “have received a faith . . . in the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:1),

¹⁰⁰ Robert Letham further illustrates the problem associated with the metaphorical nature of Christ’s statements in John 6: “If the bread of life discourse in John 6 is sacramental (while this is disputed, I personally believe it is), then Jesus teaches that in the sacrament we chew his flesh and drink his blood, thus receiving eternal life (Jn. 6:25-29, especially verses 48-58).” *The Work of Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 84. Along the same lines as those discussed above from John 6, C. F. D. Moule cautions against anything more than a metaphorical understanding of the term *body* in Paul’s “body of Christ” theme: “Perhaps it will be useful to state, in advance, the conclusion of this review. It is that it seems to be true that Paul’s use of *sōma* is not, as has sometimes been claimed, either entirely original or other than metaphorical. It appears that we are not confronted by an unprecedented usage, nor by one that has to be taken as in some strange way literal.” *The Origin of Christology* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 70.

¹⁰¹ Donald Guthrie concludes regarding the passage: “This seems, therefore, to be a way of saying that the believer no longer shares the world’s corruption, but shares a new nature derived from God.” *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1981), 660. However, the verse clearly says more than that the believer’s nature is new and that the believer’s new nature is obtained from God. Issues related to the difficulty involved in the interpretation of this verse are more thoroughly examined in Appendix B, “Impartation versus Imputation and Union with Christ.”

and this salvation makes them in some sense “partakers of the divine nature.” Definitions of union with Christ that restrict the relationship to the human nature of Christ inadequately account for the meaning of 2 Pet. 1:4.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined two important approaches to formulating a definition of union with Christ: the baptismal and the incarnational. Baptismal definitions objectify what it means to be “in Christ” to the point of distancing the doctrine from its historically affirmed “vital” and “spiritual” character. Incarnational definitions maintain an emphasis on “vital,” but these treatments tend to mitigate the importance of “spiritual.” Where consistently advocated, both approaches exclude the Old Testament believer from union with Christ. No Old Testament believer was baptized into the visible church, and nearly all Old Testament believers died prior to the incarnation. Although some representatives of the incarnational view postulate some form of existence for the human nature of Christ prior to the incarnation, these efforts in truth no longer consistently define union with Christ as dependent on the historical reality of the birth of Jesus. Instead, an emphasis on “faith” or the work of the Holy Spirit effectively redefines the essence of union with Christ with these understandings.

Baptismal and incarnational definitions of union with Christ not only fail to account adequately for the Old Testament believer, but also neglect important emphases related to union with Christ leading to conclusions not supported by scriptural data. The objectification the doctrine undergoes with the strictly ecclesiological emphasis of the

baptismal approach neglects important subjective soteriological truths related to union with Christ. “In Christ” describes not only a relationship to the work of Christ, but also a relationship to the person of Christ. The import of “life in Christ” in Scripture will not conform to strict objectification as advocated by these approaches (Gal. 2:20). This fact makes avoiding baptismal regeneration very difficult for the baptismal definitions of union with Christ.

Incarnational definitions of union with Christ subordinate the atonement to the incarnation, rather than the incarnation to the atonement, in regard to redemption’s plan. They have failed to interpret correctly Calvin’s emphasis on imputation and the role of the human nature of Christ in redemption. Although claiming the heritage of the Reformer, many incarnational definitions more closely correspond to the position of his nemesis, Osiander. The view identifies the Holy Spirit as the agent of the Lord’s Table, but it gives Him credit for little more in regard to the agency of union with Christ. It also confuses metaphor with substance as it interprets the terms *body*, *flesh*, and *blood*, thereby subjectifying (if not completely deifying) the human nature of Christ. Finally, when taken to their logical conclusion, incarnational definitions of union with Christ lead to an unscriptural universalism.

For these reasons, baptismal and incarnational definitions of union with Christ provide little direction for concluding whether or not the Old Testament believer was “in Christ.” Chapter 3 turns next to the pneumatological definitions of union with Christ.

CHAPTER 3

TREATMENT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT BELIEVER IN DEFINITIONS OF UNION WITH CHRIST – PART 2

A third category of orthodox definitions of union with Christ emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit as the agent of what it means to be in Christ. This category correlates well with the inescapable vital and spiritual characteristics of the doctrine, which the baptismal and incarnational definitions ignore to varying degrees. Complete unanimity eludes pneumatological definitions of union with Christ, however, and treatment of the Old Testament believer stands at the center of this diversity of opinion. As in the case of the baptismal and the incarnational definitions, pneumatological definitions of union with Christ struggle for consistency when dealing with the tension between the soteriological and the ecclesiological import of the doctrine.

Some pneumatological definitions, which emphasize the soteriological importance of mystical union, identify the regeneration of the believer as the work of the Holy Spirit central to the doctrine. These interpreters emphasize soteriological continuity between the Testaments and therefore include Old Testament believers in their understanding of union with Christ. Understanding the importance of the Spirit's indwelling to mystical union, these interpreters also see regeneration as the inception of indwelling, and they view both regeneration and indwelling as benefits of Old Testament soteriology. Other pneumatological definitions emphasize the ecclesiological importance of mystical

union and define the significance of the work of the Holy Spirit relative to Pentecost. They emphasize ecclesiological discontinuity between the Testaments and therefore exclude the Old Testament believer from union with Christ. They see Pentecost as the inception of the Spirit's indwelling ministry and often as the beginning of His work of regeneration as well.

A third category of pneumatological definitions applies Pentecost to the Old Testament believer. These interpreters recognize the importance of both the soteriological and the ecclesiological elements of the doctrine. According to this view, the Old Testament believer experiences union with Christ posthumously in an ultimate sense, and this experience happened on the Day of Pentecost. Chapter 3 examines each of these three categories of treatment of the Old Testament believer: inclusion through regeneration, exclusion through Pentecost, and ultimate inclusion through Pentecost. Prior to this examination however, orthodox pneumatological definitions of union with Christ need to be distinguished properly from the views of Adolf Deissmann, whose unorthodox understandings share with this category a common emphasis on the Spirit of Christ.¹

Distinguishing Between Deissmann and Pneumatological Definitions

Adolf Deissmann lived from 1866 to 1937. He taught as a professor of theology at the University of Berlin. He is remembered especially

¹ J. K. S. Reid notes the importance of Deissmann's 1892 monograph, *Die Neutestamentliche Formel 'in Christo Jesu'* (Marburg): "Since this date, it has hardly been possible to write about St Paul's theology without reference to the phrase or reckoning with this monograph." *Our Life in Christ* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 12. Fritz Neugebauer begins his refutation of the pneumatological category of definitions of union with Christ by referencing the influence of Deissmann: "Seit A. Deissmann ist dieser Ausdruck ['in Christo'] immer wieder Gegenstand wissenschaftlicher Betrachtung gewesen." "Das paulinische 'en Christo'," *New Testament Studies* 4 (1957-8):124.

for his work with Egyptian papyri, which showed conclusively that the Greek of the New Testament was the common language of the people, not a spiritualized heavenly language. Deissmann was also part of a generation of liberal theologians in Germany who, especially prior to World War I and the rise of Karl Barth, had adopted positivistic presuppositions as the basis for their theological conclusions.² Applying these presuppositions to the realm of Christology, Adolf Harnack had developed the template of New Testament interpretation that Deissmann found most appealing:

The whole development of early Christianity—to which Adolf Harnack has lately applied the term ‘double gospel,’ i.e., the gospel of Jesus and the gospel of Jesus the Christ—appears to me as an advance from the gospel of Jesus to the cult of Jesus Christ, that cult deriving its sustenance and its lines of direction from the gospel of Jesus and the mystic contemplation of Christ. This view, which regards the apostles as devotees of a cult (not, of course, to be confused with an established religion), seems to me to do greater justice to the essential nature of Primitive Christianity than any other that has been formulated.³

² “Positivism” refers to the belief that knowledge obtained from sensory empirical investigation and logical scientific inquiry is the most reliable and powerful form of certitude.

³ *St. Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan (New York: Hodder and Stroughton, 1912), xii. Deissmann cites psychological Easter experiences as accounting for the rise of the Christ cult, although in so doing he must admit the limits of science in regard to offering a thorough explanation for this history: “Though the torches of exact scholarship are powerless to penetrate the sacred twilight of those mysteries, and to analyse all that is ancient and mysterious into crystal-clear phenomena self-evident to the modern mind, we have displayed to us in the beginnings of the cult of Jesus an example, probably unique in ancient religious history, of the rise of a new cult” (116-117). He has the same trouble offering a scientific explanation for the conversion of Paul: “Here too, as with the appearances of Christ to St. Peter and the others who saw Him at the first Easter, we shall never succeed in unraveling the experience psychologically and analyzing it without any residue, not even if we call to our aid the numerous analogies to the incident of conversion which the history of religions affords” (119-120). Deissmann stops short of embracing the supernatural explanation that the New Testament gives in the bodily resurrection of Christ, but the difficulty he has relying completely on a natural explanation for the rise of Christianity is due to the fact that the Jewish monotheistic background of the early disciples largely precludes a merely psychological explanation.

This “double gospel” refers to the difference Harnack postulated between the Jesus of history and the Christ of Paul. This dichotomy frames Deissmann’s interpretation of Paul’s doctrine of union with Christ. Within this framework, mystic contemplation and Hellenistic influences transform the historical Jesus into a spiritualized Christ.⁴ For Deissmann, the key to understanding the difference between who Paul believed Christ to be and who Jesus actually was lies with understanding Paul’s identification of Jesus Christ with the Spirit:

Still more characteristic of St. Paul is the second, more Hellenistic and mystical phase of his experience of Christ: the living Christ is the Spirit. As Spirit (*pneuma*) the Living One is not far away beyond the clouds and stars, but present on this poor earth, where He lives and rules among His own. . . . St. Paul himself is responsible for some significant formulations:—‘The Lord is the Spirit,’ ‘The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit,’ ‘He that is joined unto the Lord is one Spirit,’ and so on. Still more important perhaps than lines of such symbolical character as these is the fact that in numerous passages St. Paul makes statements about Christ and about the Spirit in precisely equivalent terms. This is specially observable in the parallelism of the mystical formulae ‘in Christ’ and ‘in the (Holy) Spirit.’ The formula ‘in the Spirit,’ which occurs only nineteen times in St. Paul, is connected in nearly all these passages with the same specifically Pauline fundamental notions as the formula ‘in Christ.’⁵

Deissmann finds it impossible to distinguish “Christ” from “Spirit” in Paul, and this impossibility explains why it is that New Testament believers viewed themselves as “in Christ” and Christ as “in me.” According to his view, mystical contemplation in the early church evaporated the historical Christ into something which Christians can inhabit and be inhabited by, someone indistinguishable from the Spirit.

⁴ Albert Schweitzer corrected Deissmann by showing that Pauline mysticism is not Hellenistic. *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, trans. William Montgomery (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1931), 15-16.

⁵ Deissmann, 125-126.

The relationship between the work of the Holy Spirit and the phrase *in Christ* lies at the center of all pneumatological definitions of union with Christ.⁶ However, the views of Deissmann go beyond this paradigm. Rather than elucidating the work of the Holy Spirit in regard to union with Christ, Deissmann confuses the person of the Holy Spirit with the person of Christ. He claims that this confusion is Pauline, but Deissmann neglects two components of Pauline theology while making this claim.

First, Pauline eschatology predicts the bodily return of the ascended and transcendent Christ of history. For Paul, to “fall asleep in Jesus” means the same thing as to be “dead in Christ” (1 Thess. 4:14, 16). This “Jesus Christ” is the historical figure who died and rose again (v. 14), who must descend from heaven with a shout (v. 15), and who will catch us up to heaven to be with Him forever (v. 17). When Paul spoke of being “in Jesus” and “in Christ,” he thought of a relationship with a historical figure who had become transcendent by virtue of His bodily resurrection and ascension, one who must descend from heaven through a second Parousia and relocate His people (catch them up) in order for them to be with Him forever. Accounting for Pauline eschatology shows

⁶ Deissmann also shares this category’s symbolical understandings of the sacraments: “The assertion that in St. Paul baptism is the means of access to Christ, I take to be incorrect. There are passages which, if isolated, might be held to prove it, but I think it is nevertheless more correct to say that baptism does not bring about but only sets the seal to the fellowship of Christ. In St. Paul’s own case at any rate it was not baptism that was decisive, but the appearance of Christ to him before Damascus; nor did he consider himself commissioned to baptize, but to evangelise. The Lord’s Supper, again, was to him not the real cause of fellowship with Christ, but an expression of this fellowship; it was an especially intimate contact with the Lord. The Lord’s Supper does not bring about the fellowship, it only brings it into prominence. Neither baptism nor the Lord’s Supper is regarded as of magical effect. In every case it is God’s grace that is decisive” (pp. 130-131).

that Paul's phrase *in Christ* did not denote a personal relationship with a vaporized Jesus.

Secondly, Deissmann's view ignores Paul's emphasis on identification with the death and resurrection of Christ in regard to union with Christ. His view commits the opposite error of baptismal definitions, which neglect the subjective elements of union with Christ, by denying the objective elements of the Pauline doctrine. For Paul, "in Christ" meant "to be changed by historical events" (Rom. 6:3-8) as well as "to have a personal relationship" (Gal. 2:20). Both understandings must be maintained to account for all of the Pauline data. Orthodox pneumatological definitions of union with Christ accomplish this balance by interpreting the Spirit not as Christ, but as the agent of Christ.⁷ Christ and the Spirit are therefore identified functionally, but not personally. This functional identification allows for the fact that some functions of the Holy Spirit are distinct from the functions of Christ, a fact of Pauline theology.⁸ It also allows for the fact that the personhood of the Holy

⁷ John Murray provides an example of this emphasis: "Christ dwells in us if his Spirit dwells in us, and he dwells in us by the Spirit. Union with Christ is a great mystery. That the Holy Spirit is the bond of this union does not diminish the mystery but this truth does throw a flood of light upon the mystery and it also guards the mystery against sensuous notions, on the one hand, and pure sentimentality, on the other." *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 166.

⁸ Bruce Allan Forsee makes some insightful observations in this regard: "Because Christ is the center of the believer's redemption, even though Paul makes a functional identification between Christ and the Holy Spirit, he is very careful when he speaks of the nature of their work. He says several things about Christ, for instance, that he could not say about the Holy Spirit. . . . His assertions that the believer is 'crucified with Christ' (Gal. 2:20) and that he is identified with the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:3-5) would not make sense if the Holy Spirit replaced Christ in these instances. Nor could his statements regarding Christ's headship of the Church (Eph. 5:23) be said of the Spirit. . . . The statements 'for me to live is Christ' (Phil. 1:21) and 'your life is hid with Christ in God' (Col. 3:4) could not be said of the Holy Spirit. Paul also speaks more directly of the doctrine of progressive sanctification when he calls attention to the fact that Christians are being conformed to the image of Christ (Rom.

Spirit and the personhood of Christ are clearly distinguishable in the writings of Paul (2 Cor. 13:14, Eph. 4:4-6).

Inclusion Through Regeneration

The first category of orthodox pneumatological definitions of union with Christ includes the Old Testament believer because of its emphasis on regeneration.⁹ Because the new birth is central to both the salvation of a soul, and the relationship of mystical union, the Old Testament believer must have been united with Christ if he were to be saved at all. Characteristics of this emphasis on regeneration include (1) an emphasis on spiritual life in a subjective sense, (2) the inseparability of regeneration, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and union with Christ, and (3) “Spirit baptism” defined as the new birth.

None of the interpreters of this category claim that “spiritual life” is a concept easily defined,¹⁰ but all agree that it stands at the center of union with Christ. They share the understanding of Calvin, that to lack

8:29) and that Christ is being formed in them (Gal. 4:19, cf. Eph. 4:13). Believers are never conformed to the image of the Holy Spirit.” “The Role of Union with Christ in Sanctification” (Ph.D. diss., Bob Jones University, 1985), 291.

⁹ J. Barton Payne illustrates this position: “When dispensationalists question how the New Testament can legitimately speak of ancient Israel as a part of the *ekkle-sia*, organically related to Christ (Heb. 2:21), one must remember that the Old Testament saints, as truly as the New, were individually born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Ezek. 36:25-28, cf. John 3:10).” *The Imminent Appearing of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 128.

¹⁰ Augustus Strong notes this difficulty: “It should not surprise us if we find it far more difficult to give a scientific definition of this union, than to determine the fact of its existence. It is a fact of life with which we have to deal; and the secret of life, even in its lowest forms, no philosopher has ever yet discovered.” *Systematic Theology* (1907; reprint, Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, n.d.), 798. Strong later calls it the “dominate affection” and “ruling disposition” of the soul (p. 804). For a discussion of the important distinction between “life” and “nature” in the impartation/imputation debate, see Appendix B, “Impartation vs. Imputation and Union With Christ.”

the indwelling presence of Christ is to be separated from Him and to lack His saving benefits:

And the first thing to be attended to is, that so long as we are without Christ and separated from him, nothing which he suffered and did for the salvation of the human race is of the least benefit to us. To communicate to us the blessings which he received from the Father, he must become ours and dwell in us.¹¹

Standing at the center of these saving benefits is spiritual life, the correction of a condition described by Eph. 2:1 as being “dead in your trespasses and sins.”¹² This emphasis does not deny the forensic and representative nature of these benefits, but it does affirm that forensic and representative aspects of salvation are consequential to vital union.¹³ In fact, eternal life itself is nothing less than the life of Jesus Christ communicated to the believer through the indwelling presence of the Holy Ghost.¹⁴ Those who include the Old Testament believer in union with Christ do so with this strong soteriological emphasis on new life.

¹¹ Calvin, III.1.1.

¹² The comments of Anthony Hoekema sum up this understanding: “By regeneration, also called the new birth, is meant that act of the Holy Spirit whereby he initially brings a person into living union with Christ, so that he or she who was spiritually dead now becomes spiritually alive” (p. 59). Hoekema goes on to support his view from Ephesians 2:4-5: “The point Paul is making is that this ‘making alive’ takes place in union with Christ. Though in ourselves, by nature, we were spiritually dead in sin, at a certain point in time God caused us to share the life of Christ, and thus to become spiritually alive. In other words, regeneration occurs when we are for the first time savingly united with Christ.” *Saved By Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 59.

¹³ John Flavel emphasizes this: “The [vital] union I here speak of is not a federal union, or a union by covenant only; such a union indeed there is between Christ and believers, but that is consequential to and wholly dependent upon this.” *Method of Grace: How the Spirit Works* (1680; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 39.

¹⁴ Note the comments of H. C. G. Moule in this regard: “The Spirit, as our Communion Creed confesses, is the Life-Giver, the Maker-alive. But what is the Life which He gives, with which He works? I listen, and I hear another Voice, which is yet as if also His; and it says, ‘I am the Life.’ ‘The Life Eternal is in the Son’; ‘He that hath the Son hath the Life.’” *Veni Creator: Thoughts on the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit of*

Because the spiritual life standing at the center of union with Christ is an eternal possession of the believer, interpreters in this category understand regeneration, indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and union with Christ as inseparable benefits of salvation. According to this view, if a man is united to Christ, it is because he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit; and if he is indwelt, it is because he was first regenerated. Regeneration yields eternal life through the Holy Spirit's indwelling, and this constitutes union with Christ. Here again, Calvin provides a foundational understanding:

Already, indeed, it has been clearly shown, that until our minds are intent on the Spirit, Christ is in a manner unemployed, because we view him coldly without us, and so at a distance from us. . . . To this is to be referred that sacred marriage, by which we become bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, and so one with him (Eph. 5:30), for it is by the Spirit alone that he unites himself to us. By the same grace and energy of the Spirit we become his members, so that he keeps us under him, and we in our turn possess him.¹⁵

Therefore, in terms of union with Christ, the Spirit works not only to regenerate the believer, but also “to secure and preserve that life in us.”¹⁶ According to this view, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is not a benefit that distinguishes the New Testament believer from the Old Testament believer, but rather one that separates all believers from unbelievers.¹⁷

Promise (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1900), 39. Moule says further in this regard: “What does the Holy Life-Giver impart, infuse, develop? What is my Life Eternal in the last analysis? Not Himself, the blessed Worker and Conveyer, but my incarnate, sacrificed, and glorified Redeemer and Head. The Spirit pours into me Him, to be my Eternal Life for deliverance, for victory, for peace, for service, as truly as He the same Saviour is my pardon and righteousness in His once-wrought propitiation” (pp. 40-41).

¹⁵ *Institutes*, III.1.3.

¹⁶ Flavel, 40.

¹⁷ Note that John Flavel speaks of the Spirit's activity among unbelievers as a “coming upon” them in distinction from “indwelling,” which is experienced only by

Charles Hodge teaches plainly: “the indwelling of the Spirit is the source of all spiritual life.”¹⁸ After agreeing with Calvin that “all the benefits of Christ’s redemptive work come to us through this union,”¹⁹ Lloyd-Jones inseparably links this union to the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit:

Now this is where the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is so vitally important. We are joined to Christ and we are in union with Him by means of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us. It is the function, the special work of the Holy Spirit to join us thus to Christ, and we are joined to Christ by the Holy Spirit’s presence in us.²⁰

Finally, this emphasis on spiritual life and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit leads to interpreting some of the key baptism passages of the New Testament as references to Spirit baptism rather than the water ritual. Although the definition of union with Christ that Ernest Best advocates is “corporate personality,” his definition corresponds to a pneumatological approach because of the importance he assigns to Spirit baptism: “In passing, we may, however, note that the baptism of 1 Cor. 12.13, by which we are added to the one Body, is not water baptism but baptism in the Spirit; water baptism is the sign and seal of this latter

believers: “In this sense we are to understand the Spirit in this place; and by giving the Spirit to us, we are to understand more than the coming of the Spirit upon us. The Spirit of God is said to come upon men in a transient way for assistance in some particular service, though they are unsanctified persons. Thus the Spirit of God came upon Balaam, Num. 24:2, enabling him to prophesy of things to come. Though the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit have now ceased, yet the Spirit ceases not to give his ordinary assistances unto men, both regenerate and unregenerate. 1 Cor. 12:8-10, 31. But, whatever he gives to others, he is said to be given, to dwell, and to abide only in believers” (394).

¹⁸ *Systematic Theology* (1873; reprint, Montville, NJ: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 3:108.

¹⁹ D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *God the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997), 101.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 108. The author goes on to support his contention from 1 Cor. 6:17, “But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him,” and 1 Cor. 12:13, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.”

baptism—just as in Rom. 6. 1-14 water baptism does not effect our death and resurrection with Christ, which took place upon the cross, but is the sign and seal of it to us.”²¹ Because Spirit baptism obtains a heavy soteriological emphasis in regard to union with Christ, the spiritual life issuing from it becomes available to Old Testament believers as well as the New. Best understands this life as the resurrection life of Christ:

It may be argued here that the ‘old Israel’—the Jews by birth—died and rose with Christ into the ‘new Israel’—the Church. This is true, but old and new are now being used in a different sense. The ‘old Israel’ possessed the ‘new life’ which came with the cross and resurrection of Christ. This is just the same as saying that it is ultimately by the redemption of Christ that the saints of the Old Testament are saved; what life the old Israel possessed was new life and not old life. Old and new are really used historically in this connection of old and new Israel. In the case of the life of the believer they are used of quality; it is a new type of life which he receives from Christ.²²

In this paragraph, Best distinguishes between a qualitative “old”/“new” contrast and a historical “old”/“new” contrast. The historically “old” Israel could in some sense possess the qualitatively “new” resurrection life of Christ, and so the Old Testament believer must be considered a part of the “Church” or “New Israel.” So when Best speaks of the church coming into being through identification with the death and resurrection of Christ (Spirit baptism), he is not speaking of a date in history:

On the other hand we must be sure, that when we say the Church came into being with the resurrection of Christ, we do not mean that the Church started its life on the first Easter Day; we mean that all the saints, both of the Old and New Testaments, rose with Christ on that day. They were not all alive then—some were not physically born, others were already physically dead—but all were present in Christ’s inclusive personality. The Church has its life because of what happened on the first Easter Day. In view of all

²¹ *One Body in Christ: A Study in the Relationship of the Church to Christ in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul* (London: SPCK, 1955), 73.

²² *Ibid.*, 63-64.

this it would be perhaps wiser to avoid the phrase. The Church is the place where there is resurrection life; it does not itself rise.²³

For Best the inclusive personality of Christ accounts for the crucifixion and resurrection of all believers with Him, in spite of the fact that some of these believers were not yet born and that some had long since died. It is possible for believers of different ages to join “in Christ” and then by virtue of that union to die and rise with Christ on the first Easter weekend, whether prospectively or retrospectively. In light of this, Best counsels that it is better not to speak of the church “coming into being” with the death and resurrection of Christ. Rather, the death and resurrection of Christ is the ground upon which the church may claim to be “the place where there is resurrection life.” To be baptized by the Spirit in this body is simply to share this life. The Old Testament believer was Spirit-baptized because he was identified with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

Best’s definition of *church* at this point has a completely soteriological content, but the ecclesiological-historical sense of “old” and “new” found in the New Testament definition of the church does not go completely unnoticed in the author’s treatment of the Old Testament believer. Instead, Best must at times understand “new” in a historical sense in relation to the church in Christ:

The community which is related to Christ is a new community. For Paul prior to his conversion there were only two communities—the Jewish and Gentile; now there is a third—the Christian. As a new community it consists of new men who are to be distinguished from their old Jewish and Gentile selves. The new men and the new community are a new work of creation by God. Within this new community, not only are the old distinctions of

²³ Ibid., 64.

class, race, and sex wiped out, but new distinctions appear through the bestowal of *Charismata*.²⁴

In this paragraph Best begins with the qualitative sense of “new” as he speaks of Paul’s experience before and after his conversion, but the definition of “old” vs. “new” takes on a historical importance, for this context distinguishes the Christian community from the Jewish community. Unlike the Jewish community, the Christian community is “a new work of creation by God”; the new creation has wiped out historically “old distinctions”; historically “new distinctions” have been introduced through a historical event that bestowed the *charismata*. Once completely compiled, Best’s treatment of the Old Testament believer advocates both the qualitative and historical sense of “new” life in the church. By means of the first, he includes the Old Testament believer, and by means of the second, he distinguishes the Christian community from the Jewish community. However, Best never reconciles the two.

This same conclusion appears in John Flavel’s treatment of the Old Testament believer. He too begins with the importance of spiritual life to all believers, using vital union to distinguish between the experience of believers and the experience of angels.²⁵ As a covenant theologian, Flavel sees union with Christ as critical to the believer’s participation in the covenant of grace and his liberation from the covenant of works:

That which is a mark of our freedom from the covenant of works, and our title to the privileges of grace, must also show our union with Christ and interest in him. But the indwelling of the

²⁴ Ibid., 189-190.

²⁵ Flavel, 172.

Spirit in us is a certain mark of this, and consequently proves our union with the Lord Jesus.²⁶

Flavel identifies the covenant of works with the Mosaic covenant, and the covenant of grace with the new covenant:

The spirit of the first covenant was a spirit of fear and bondage, and they that were under it were not sons, but servants; but the spirit of the new covenant is a free spirit acting in the strength of God, and those that do so are the children of God; and as such they inherit the privileges and immunities of that great charter, the covenant of grace: they are 'heirs of God,' and the evidence of their inheritance, and of freedom from the bondage of the first covenant, is the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, crying Abba, Father. 'If ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.' Gal. 5:18.²⁷

Flavel's presentation relies on a strictly soteriological understanding of what it means to be on the one hand "under the law," and on the other free "from the bondage of the first covenant." He does not exclude the Old Testament believer when he speaks of union with Christ.²⁸ Therefore, the Old Testament believer in union with Christ could not have been "under the law" because he was free from the covenant of works. Furthermore, the Old Testament believer participated in the "new covenant," for this is the covenant of grace and the only way any sinner can graduate from slave to son.

As in the case of Best, Flavel's treatment of the Old Testament believer leads him to the conclusion that "new" is in some important sense not historically "new." For Best new resurrection life is shared by the Old Testament believer. For Flavel the new covenant is shared by the

²⁶ Ibid., 395.

²⁷ Ibid., 396.

²⁸ Flavel's inclusion of the Old Testament believer is expressed more implicitly than explicitly in his work in comments like the following: "nor can the mystical union of our souls and bodies with Christ be dissolved . . . by death. God calls himself the God of Abraham long after his body was turned into dust" (p. 41).

Old Testament believer. What is missing from Flavel's presentation, however, is the scriptural sense in which the new covenant is something historically new. Jeremiah clearly promises the new covenant as a future blessing that did not exist in his own day: "Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah'" (Jer. 31:31). By equating the new covenant and the covenant of grace, Flavel fails to account for all of the scriptural import of the promise of Jeremiah.

In summary, the weakness of definitions of union with Christ that include the Old Testament believer through regeneration is their failure to account for the sense in which the new covenant and the church are historically new. By locating regeneration and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the experience of believers prior to Pentecost, these definitions have not appropriately accounted for the historical and eschatological characteristics of Jeremiah's promise. In addition, their soteriological focus neglects the ecclesiological sense in which the Jewish community of the Old and New Testaments is distinguishable from the Christian community in Christ. Where this difference appears among these authors, definitional inconsistency results.

Conversely, the strength of definitions of union with Christ that include the Old Testament believer through regeneration lies in their consistent advocacy of the comprehensive soteriological import of the doctrine. Scripture does teach a strong connection between regeneration, indwelling, and union with Christ (1 John 5:10-11). In addition, this category more easily explains Old Testament passages that speak of the continuity between the spiritual blessings of the Old Testament

believer's life and his eternal afterlife. The goodness and mercy characteristic of all the days of his life continues as he dwells in the house of the Lord forever (Ps. 23:6).

Exclusion Through Pentecost

The second category of pneumatological definitions of union with Christ excludes the Old Testament believer from consideration by citing Pentecost as the inception of Spirit baptism and Spirit baptism as the inception of union with Christ. In contrast to the previous category, these definitions seek to maintain a historical/eschatological interpretation of the newness of life in Christ and an ecclesiological context for the interpretation of the doctrine. Two passages of Scripture are foundational to the understandings of this category: John 14:20 and 1 Cor. 12:13. The first passage provides the basis for seeing Pentecost as the inception of Spirit baptism, and the second establishes Spirit baptism as the inception of union with Christ.

This approach to the doctrine of union with Christ is, in large part, the legacy of Lewis Sperry Chafer. Chafer distinguished baptism of the Holy Spirit from regeneration by teaching that the first places the believer in Christ and the second places Christ in the believer. Both happen at the moment of conversion in the life of every believer,²⁹ yet union with Christ is notwithstanding something historically new in fulfillment of the Lord's promise in John 14:20:

The unsaved are not in Christ, nor is Christ in them; but when one of these believes on Christ as Savior, he instantly comes to be in

²⁹ Chafer teaches: "To this organism, His body, every believer is perfectly and eternally joined by the baptism of the Spirit at the instant he believes. He is then 'in Christ'." *Salvation* (Philadelphia: Sunday School Times, 1922), 70.

Christ by the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit and Christ comes to be in that one by the regenerating ministry of the Holy Spirit. This great twofold operation of the Holy Spirit fulfills the prediction of Christ given in His farewell to the disciples in the upper room, namely: “At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.” (John 14:20)³⁰

Chafer’s consistent dual emphasis on both the comprehensive soteriological nature of union with Christ and the historical newness of union with Christ poses a difficulty for his understanding of the soteriology of the Old Testament.³¹ Nevertheless, his treatment of the historical newness of the doctrine, in light of the Lord’s teaching in John 14:20, deserves a response it generally does not receive from those who oppose his interpretation. Others not connected to the legacy of Chafer agree that the “new creation” aspect of union with Christ must have an eschatological/historical import.³² As discussed earlier, the baptismal definitions of Herman Ridderbos and Lewis Smedes take this view.³³ In addition to these, James S. Stewart recognizes the importance of the dawning of the age of the Spirit to the doctrine of union with Christ. He

³⁰ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 4:155. Chafer is followed by John Walvoord, who emphasizes that “in Christ” is a “new relationship,” which was “first announced by the Lord to his disciples in the upper room in the statement, ‘You [pl.] are in me [en moi], and I am in you’ (John 14:20).” “Identification with Christ,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001), 588. Charles C. Ryrie also followed Chafer’s understanding of John 14:20. See *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 49.

³¹ See chapter 7, “Theological Systems and Union with Christ,” for more on this.

³² F. F. Bruce provides an example of this understanding: “For him [Paul], the Spirit has come: his indwelling presence is experienced by the people of Christ both corporately and individually: the church and the individual believer may equally be spoken of as a temple of the Holy Spirit.” *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 141.

³³ See pp. 46-49.

writes from the perspective of a pneumatological definition of union about the eschatological and historical importance of Pentecost:

Yet even so, the Spirit of God remained somewhat aloof and remote from the ordinary life of men in the world. A new orientation was given to the idea by its conjunction with Israel's Messianic hope. The Spirit of the Lord would rest upon the coming Redeemer in a unique and glorious way. His appearing would signalize [sic] the dawning of the era of the Spirit. The gift which had been the privilege and prerogative of the few would then be poured out 'upon all flesh.' This was the great hope which the Church saw fulfilled at Pentecost.³⁴

This transition, from "somewhat aloof and remote" in the Old Testament to "the dawning of the era of the Spirit" in the New Testament, constitutes a critical emphasis of this category. Union with Christ depends on "a new orientation" that was "fulfilled at Pentecost." This emphasis leads easily to an ecclesiological context for the doctrine that readily accounts for historical differences between the Jewish and Christian communities in God's plan of redemption.³⁵

The second key passage related to this category is 1 Cor. 12:13. Here the phrase "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body"

³⁴ *A Man in Christ: The Vital Elements of St. Paul's Religion* (1935; reprint, Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2002), 308. Stewart shows great appreciation for the views of Deissmann in his understanding of union with Christ, but he corrects Deissmann on two key points: 1) he does not see "the full mystical meaning present in every occurrence of the phrase ["in Christ"] in Paul's epistles," a charge he directs at Deissmann's view (157); and 2) "the exalted Saviour who takes believers into fellowship with Himself is no vague 'Heavenly Being,' but One who wears the very features of the Jesus who lived and died" (186).

³⁵ C. I. Scofield connects Pentecost history with union with Christ in his definition of the invisible church in his notes on Hebrews 12:23: "The Church, composed of the whole number of regenerate persons from Pentecost to the first resurrection (1 Cor. 15:52), united together and to Christ by the baptism with the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12-13), is the body of Christ of which He is the Head (Eph. 1:22-23). As such the Church is a holy temple for the habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph. 2:21-22); is 'one flesh' with Christ (Eph. 5:30-31); is espoused to Him as a chaste virgin to one husband (2 Cor. 11:2-4)." *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 1324.

connects not only to the conversion experience of the believer, but also to the events of Pentecost. Unlike the baptismal definitions, these pneumatological definitions insist that this passage speaks of Spirit baptism rather than a water ritual.³⁶ Although Chafer distinguished Spirit baptism from regeneration in a technical sense, he understood these blessings as two aspects of the same conversion experience.³⁷ Most in this category simply identify regeneration with Spirit baptism as the inception of union with Christ and the Christian life.³⁸ But there is also an important connection between union with Christ and Pentecost by virtue of this connection between union with Christ and Spirit baptism. Semantically, while one might expect a working understanding of “new birth” prior to Pentecost (John 3:10), the concept of “Spirit baptism” is more readily applicable to a post-Pentecost era in light of John’s predictions regarding baptism with the Spirit (Matt. 3:11). Therefore, Demarest concludes:

Not in OT times but only following Pentecost would the Counselor ‘live with you and be in you’ (John 14:17). . . . The OT does not speak this language of the Spirit’s baptizing, indwelling, and sealing ministries, as does the NT with such richness and variety.³⁹

³⁶ The importance of Spirit baptism to a definition of union with Christ and the interpretation of 1 Cor. 12:13 is examined in Chapter 6, “The Baptism of the Holy Spirit and Union with Christ.”

³⁷ See note 30.

³⁸ Bruce Demarest offers an example: “Paul explicitly taught that at the commencement of the Christian life (i.e., simultaneous with regeneration and union with Christ) the believer is baptized by the Spirit into Christ’s mystical body. He wrote, ‘For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body . . . and we were all given the one Spirit to drink’ (1 Cor 12:13). Paul’s repetition of the word ‘all’ indicates that at the new birth every Christian—including the carnal Corinthians—received Spirit baptism as an immediate and once-for-all event.” *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997), 414.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 339.

Because the riches of the Holy Spirit's ministry began with Pentecost, the Old Testament believer cannot be thought of as united to Christ.

As mentioned earlier, these understandings and emphases lead to the exclusion of the Old Testament believer in regard to union with Christ. Because the Old Testament believer could not have been Spirit baptized, he could not have been united with Christ as 1 Cor. 12:13 describes. The weakness of this category, however, surfaces at this point as interpreters struggle to make sense of Old Testament soteriology apart from union with Christ. Bruce Demarest, for instance, advocates both the exclusion of the Old Testament believer from union with Christ, and the view that union with Christ is "a discrete stage in the *ordo salutis*."⁴⁰ The difficulty, however, with excluding Old Testament believers from any stage of a scriptural *ordo salutis* is obvious. In what sense can Old Testament believers be saved at all if excluded from the same *ordo salutis* that saves the New Testament believer in light of passages such as Rom. 8:28-30? Stripping union with Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit connected to it from Old Testament soteriology leaves Demarest with a seriously impoverished Old Testament believer:

We conclude, strictly speaking, that OT believers did not receive the new nature via Holy Spirit regeneration and they were not united to Jesus Christ in an indissoluble relation by the ministry of the same Spirit. As we have seen, there is ample evidence to suggest that believers under the old covenant received a measure of atonement. They were justified by faith, they experienced removal of the defilement of sins (albeit via repeated sacrifices), they enjoyed fellowship with God, and they possessed the hope of eternal life. But the fullness and perfecting of salvation as

⁴⁰ Ibid., 323. Demarest sees this approach to the doctrine as that which distinguishes his "Experiential" view from the "Covenantal" view.

incorporation into Christ had to await the once-for-all sacrifice of the Messiah.⁴¹

Chafer's position is essentially the same as that of Demarest, although more explicitly expressed. Quoting Eph. 1:4-12 in support, Chafer asserts:

Generally speaking, all that enters in to the reality which constitutes salvation—already analyzed as representing at least thirty-three positions and possessions—contributes directly or indirectly to the fact of the New Creation. However, as the Scriptures, cited above, demonstrate, the New Creation is specifically the result of the believer's position in Christ. . . . Over against the emphasis which is given to this truth in the teachings of grace, is the corresponding fact that there is no hint of a possible position in Christ in any teaching of the law or of the kingdom. The believer's present position in Christ was not seen even in type or prophecy. In the ages past it was a secret hid in the mind and heart of God.⁴²

Chafer never reconciles how he can say on the one hand that "all that enters in to the reality which constitutes salvation . . . is specifically the result of the believer's position in Christ," and on the other hand that "there is no hint of a possible position in Christ in any teaching of the law or kingdom." If there is no hint of "all that enters in to the reality which constitutes salvation" in the Old Testament, how could any Old Testament believer ever have come to believe (Rom. 10:17)?

⁴¹ Ibid., 339.

⁴² Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:97-98. Earlier Chafer confirms that the Old Testament believer suffered from not only a lack of revelation, but also a lack of soteriological blessing: "This vast body of truth, which is but slightly indicated here, is not found in the Old Testament, nor are the Old Testament saints ever said to be thus related to the resurrected Christ. It is impossible for these great disclosures to be fitted into a theological system which does not distinguish the heavenly character of the Church in contrast to the earthly character of Israel. This failure on the part of these systems of theology to discern the character of the true Church, related wholly, as it is, to the resurrected Christ, accounts for the unusual omission from these theological writings of any extended treatment of the doctrine of Christ's resurrection and all related doctrines" (4:32-33).

The exclusion of the Old Testament believer from the blessings of union with Christ is not an easy position to maintain consistently for these Scripture-based theologians. Chafer, in a later volume, exempts Abraham from this beleaguered soteriological status of the Old Testament believer:

The Old Testament knows nothing of the Body of Christ, nor of the New Creation Headship in the resurrected Christ. Men were just and righteous as related to the Mosaic Law, but none had the righteousness of God imputed to them on the ground of simple faith except Abraham, he who was so evidently marked out and raised up of God to anticipate and illustrate (cf. Romans and Galatians) the New Testament doctrine of imputed righteousness; so of Abraham alone Christ said, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad." (John 8:56)⁴³

But if Abraham must be exempted in this way, what must be done with David (Rom. 4:1-9)? Clearly, exemptions of this kind do more to expose the weaknesses of this definition than they do to support it.

In summary, pneumatological definitions of union with Christ that exclude the Old Testament believer in light of Pentecost exhibit strength in regard to the important historical sense in which the work of the Holy Spirit in this age is something new. They also have no trouble accounting for the obvious ecclesiological distinctions between the Jewish community and the Christian community within the context of mystical union. Serious weakness appears, however, in their treatment of Old Testament salvation. Their soteriology has accounted inadequately for the sense in which the Old Testament believer may be justified at all without having been united to Christ. The final category of pneumatological definitions remedies this shortcoming by including the Old Testament believer in the soteriological blessing of union with Christ,

⁴³ Ibid., 6:74.

while it maintains the pneumatological uniqueness of the age introduced by Pentecost.

Inclusion Through Pentecost

Chapter 1 of this study pointed out that the baptismal, incarnational, and pneumatological definitions of union with Christ do not form three mutually exclusive sets. Overlap is especially noticeable in the views of Norman Douty. Earlier we saw that Douty's definition of union with Christ emphasized the mutual indwelling by the Holy Spirit of Christ's human nature and the believer.⁴⁴ In this regard Douty agrees with incarnational definitions of union with Christ, which see the necessary involvement of the human nature of Christ. On the other hand, the Spirit's indwelling also stands at the center of Douty's definition, and this characteristic causes his definition to take on a pneumatological emphasis as well:

It is the indwelling of the Spirit that makes a man a Christian. As matter, with the principle of life added, makes vegetation, and matter with life and motion makes a living creature, and a living creature with personality makes a man, so a man with the Holy Spirit inhabiting makes a Christian. So true is this that the Apostle Paul declares: 'If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His' (Rom. 8:9). Accordingly, throughout the Epistles, the indwelling of the Spirit is repeatedly mentioned as the distinguishing mark of Christians.⁴⁵

This passage follows a discussion of John 4:13-14 in which Douty makes clear that the Holy Spirit's indwelling comes about only after His advent at Pentecost:.

⁴⁴ See pp. 57-58.

⁴⁵ Norman F. Douty, *Union With Christ* (Swengel, PA: Reiner Publications, 1973), 141.

When He has come, He will make Christ an indwelling presence in His own, will recall His words, will testify of Him, and will both convict the world and instruct the Church with reference to Him.⁴⁶

Initially, it appears as though Douty's dual emphasis on both the incarnation and Pentecost precludes the participation of the Old Testament believer in union with Christ, but this is not Douty's conclusion. Instead, as noted earlier, Douty clears the incarnational hurdle when he follows Polhill by postulating the availability of the humanity of Christ to the Old Testament believer through faith.⁴⁷ This leaves only the issue of Pentecost as an obstacle to Old Testament participation, and Douty's solution in this regard claims a retroactive applicability for the Spirit's work on that day:

Secondly, those saints who died before Pentecost were, we submit, incorporated into the Church Universal at its formation. It is not unusual for builders to introduce into their structures materials prepared long before the foundations were laid. As a simple matter of fact, this procedure was followed in the erection of Solomon's temple (I Kings 5:17, 18), and that temple is viewed in the New testament [*sic*] as a type of the Church Universal. At Pentecost the saved company became a saved body.

Thirdly, the Old testament [*sic*] saints who were made members of Christ's body, stones of His temple, and children of His race, at Pentecost, had already been such incipiently, and were now made such completely, so that this act only consummated what had previously been wrought.⁴⁸

Douty understands Pentecost as the point of formation of the universal church.⁴⁹ He asserts in the quotation above that union with Christ happens "completely" for the Old Testament believer at this point. "Incipiently," however, the Old Testament believer had always been a part of the

⁴⁶ Ibid., 138-139.

⁴⁷ See p. 65, n. 87.

⁴⁸ Douty, 253.

⁴⁹ See p. 58, n. 72.

body of Christ in much the same way cedar trees were ultimately a part of Solomon's temple. So when confronted with the question, "Was the Old Testament believer in union with Christ?" Douty would reply, "Yes, incipiently prior to Pentecost and completely after Pentecost." The difficulty with Douty's answer, however, is that it leaves undefined the specific differences that distinguish the "incipient" form from the "complete" form of the body of Christ, his analogy to cedar trees and the temple complex notwithstanding.

Other interpreters also attempt to include the Old Testament believer in the blessings of union with Christ through a retroactive view of Pentecost. Millard Erickson understands the essence of union with Christ from a pneumatological perspective that emphasizes the Spirit's indwelling.⁵⁰ He also recognizes the comprehensive soteriological import of the doctrine, and so he concludes that the Old Testament believer must have somehow become a part of the body of Christ at Pentecost:

If the Old Testament believers, those who made up true Israel, were saved, like us, upon the basis of Christ's redemptive life and death, then they may well have been swept by the event of Pentecost into the same body as the New Testament believers.⁵¹

Erickson appears to time the incorporation of Old Testament believers into Christ at Pentecost in a way similar to his timing of their salvation with the events of Calvary.

The definition of L. S. Thornton makes the event of Pentecost retroactively effective in a slightly different manner. His view relies on an eschatological understanding of regeneration. Through His death and

⁵⁰ Erickson states: "It is apparent that all that the believer has spiritually is based upon Christ's being within" (949).

⁵¹ Ibid., 1048.

resurrection, Christ and His disciples with Him passed through a new birth into a resurrection life that gives a foretaste of the new heaven and new earth to come.⁵² Pentecost also played an important role in this renewal. At first this eschatological emphasis on union with Christ through regeneration seems to provide no room for the Old Testament believer:

By baptism we are united to the crucified and risen Messiah. We are therefore new creatures in a sense never true of converts to Judaism. Being united with Christ's death and justified through his resurrection we have passed into a new life which already belongs to the future regeneration of the world.⁵³

But here again the author finds it difficult to exclude the Old Testament believer completely. Instead, Pentecost is viewed as a consecration of an already existing *ecclesia*:

The *ecclesia* which he so consecrated was the true Israel which had always existed since the promises were first given, notwithstanding the apostasy of 'Israel after the flesh'. In the light of what was said about re-birth in the last chapter, and particularly with regard to the teaching of John 1 and 3, we may think of the act of cleansing and consecration as beginning at our Lord's own baptism and coming to its climax in the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost.⁵⁴

Thornton's eschatological view of regeneration as the passing from death into a new life loses both its end-time focus and its regeneration force as he considers the Old Testament believer. He must see the atonement (and with it the events of Pentecost) as "the central point of a crisis which extends backwards and forwards."⁵⁵ The fact that the Old Testament

⁵² *The Common Life in the Body of Christ*, 3rd ed. (London: Dacre Press, 1946), 189.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 228.

believer had new life in Christ requires “eschatological” to become “backward and forward” and “new birth” to become “consecration and cleansing.” As in the other attempts at retrofitting Pentecost to the Old Testament believer, the definition of the essence of union with Christ undergoes a subtle but significant retooling, which actually results in a completely different definition.

The strength of pneumatological definitions of union with Christ that seek to include the Old Testament believer by virtue of a retroactive or posthumous benefit from Pentecost lies in their recognition of the comprehensive soteriological import of the doctrine. By including the Old Testament believer in union with Christ in an ultimate sense, they seek to avoid the implications of a deprecated Old Testament soteriology. In addition, this approach to the question can easily advocate a historical newness to the age of the Spirit’s indwelling that accounts for important differences between the Jewish and Christian communities.

However, this approach to union with Christ and the Old Testament believer creates some unique difficulties. First, posthumous incorporation into the body of Christ through Pentecost misses the “earnest” truth related to the purpose of the Spirit’s indwelling ministry. This approach waits until Pentecost to apply union with Christ to the Old Testament believer, because the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit is critical to the experience of union with Christ. But the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is also a pledge of an inheritance to come or glorification (Eph. 1:14, 2 Cor. 1:20-22). Applying the indwelling of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost to believers who are already absent from the body and present with the Lord (Gen. 5:24; Eccles. 3:17-21;

Ps. 17:13-15; Ps. 49:15; Ps. 73:24; Phil. 1:23-24; 2 Cor. 5:6-8) fails to recognize this purpose. Believers already with the Lord walk now by sight, not by faith. They do not have the same need for a down payment of the glory to come.⁵⁶

Second, these views fail to recognize the heaven-to-earth direction of the Pentecostal context. The purpose of the Holy Spirit's advent was to ensure that the people of Christ on earth are not left here as orphans (John 14:16-18). In addition, as explained by both the Old and New Testaments, the focus of Pentecost is on "all flesh" (Joel 2:28) and "the world" (John 16:8). The Scripture never speaks of the Holy Spirit's activity in heaven on that day. Instead, it tells of His having been sent from heaven to an important work on earth (John 16:7). Finally, the theory is more speculative than scriptural, and it still fails to account adequately for the important role of the Holy Spirit in Old Testament soteriology.

Conclusion

This study has focused up to this point on treatment of the Old Testament believer in definitions of union with Christ. The survey has shown that it is possible to understand the doctrine in various ways and that this possibility affects whether or not one can apply mystical union to the Old Testament believer. In general, definitions that emphasize the rite of water baptism do not allow for this applicability. Furthermore, definitions that emphasize the incarnation preclude the participation of

⁵⁶ For a good summary of the Old Testament theology of life after death, see Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 457-461. The authors present scriptural evidence for the view that Old Testament believers were present with the Lord when absent from the body in much the same way as the New Testament believer is.

the Old Testament believer when consistently applied. Both the baptismal and incarnational definitions of union with Christ fall short, however, of accounting for all the scriptural aspects of the doctrine, and therefore they are not conclusive for the question at hand.

Pneumatological definitions of union with Christ address more directly the question of applicability to the Old Testament believer. Three approaches emerge under this category: inclusion through regeneration, exclusion through Pentecost, and inclusion through Pentecost. Each category faces interpretive challenges in spite of the varying strengths it possesses. The challenges faced by definitions of union with Christ correspond to the key issues prevalent in today's coherence debate, and therefore addressing these challenges can shed light on those issues. An examination of the antitheses of *in Christ* in the New Testament helps address some of the definitional challenges posed by the doctrine of mystical union.

CHAPTER 4

THE OLD TESTAMENT BELIEVER AND ANTITHESES OF UNION WITH CHRIST

An antithesis helps to elucidate a thesis. To understand the opposite of a concept is to understand that concept more fully. Scripture often employs this pedagogical principle. For instance, the apostle John more specifically delineates the love of the Father by outlining the specifics of a love of the world (1 John 2:15-17). This principle, when applied to the New Testament doctrine of union with Christ, helps the interpreter to understand the applicability of this doctrine to the Old Testament believer.¹ More specifically, New Testament usages of the concepts *you in Christ* and *Christ in you* often occur in contexts in which the

¹ Other authors have seen the value of outlining life “outside of Christ” for understanding life “in Christ,” although they generally do not have the Old Testament believer in view. Schweitzer believed that the “in Christ” formula originated in part because of its utility for expressing a contrast with its opposites: “‘Being-in-Christ’ is therefore the commonest, but not the most appropriate, expression for union with Christ. It becomes the most usual, not only because of its shortness but [also] because of the facility which it offers for forming antitheses with the analogous expressions ‘in the body,’ ‘in the flesh,’ ‘in sin,’ and ‘in the spirit,’ and thus providing the mystical theory with a series of neat equations.” *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, trans. William Montgomery (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1931), 123. Smedes’s work on union includes a section entitled, “Life Outside of Christ,” where he identifies “Life in the Flesh,” “Life Under the Law,” and “Life in Sin” as antitheses of union with Christ. *All Things Made New: A Theology of Man’s Union with Christ* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1970), 92-104. J. C. Ryle treats “Without Christ” in the 16th chapter of his work *Holiness* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1952). After every chapter of A. T. Piereson’s work on mystical union, *In Christ Jesus: The Sphere of the Believer’s Life* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), the differences between “in Christ” and “out of Christ” are outlined. See also the Roman Catholic author William Grossouw for “Existence Without Christ” organized as “Sin,” “The Flesh,” “The Law,” and “Death.” *In Christ: A Sketch of the Theology of St. Paul*, trans. and ed. Martin W. Schoenberg (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1952), 15-34.

author communicates the opposites of these phrases. With an understanding of the nature of these antitheses to union with Christ, the interpreter can ask whether or not they include the Old Testament believer. If a category antithetical to union with Christ includes the Old Testament believer, then its passages preclude the Old Testament believer's participation in this blessing. On the other hand, if an antithetical category cannot include the Old Testament believer, then its passages support viewing the Old Testament believer as a participant in the blessings of union with Christ.

These two possibilities organize the chapter. After a discussion of some preliminary methodological understandings, an inductive study investigates passages that support the inclusion of the Old Testament believer in the blessings of union with Christ. Next, some passages that indicate the exclusion of the Old Testament believer receive treatment. In regard to the first category, the antitheses of union with Christ cannot describe the Old Testament believer; in regard to the second, they can. Finally, the chapter concludes with a verdict on the implications of the antitheses of union with Christ for the inclusion of the Old Testament believer.

Methodology

Two preliminary understandings are important to the inductive method of this chapter. First, unearthing the antitheses of union with Christ from contexts in which *you in Christ* and *Christ in you* occur requires distinguishing between an antithetical concept and a complementary concept. Although both *antithesis* and *complement* are terms that may describe opposites, they differ because an antithesis is an

opposite that repels, and a complement is an opposite that attracts.² Whereas a complement completes its opposite as a counterpart, an antithesis forms a mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive alternative to its opposite. Consequently, this study must avoid confusing the antitheses of union with Christ with understandings that are complementary to the doctrine.³

For example, the phrases *in the Spirit* and *in God* are complements of, not antithetical to, the phrase *in Christ*. In addition, the difference between antithesis and complement serves to distinguish two nuances in the New Testament's usage of the *world* concept as a contrast to union with Christ. There is a sense in which being in Christ and being in the world are complementary rather than truly antithetical, because the New Testament indicates that believers inhabit both realms. John 16:33 illustrates: "These things I have spoken to you, so that *in Me* you may have peace. *In the world* you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." There is an obvious contrast between "in Me [Christ]" and "in the world" in this verse: "in Me [Christ]" is friendly to believers, and "in the world" is hostile to believers. But notice that the believer exists both "in Me [Christ]" and "in the world." Consequently, *in the world* does not form a completely mutually exclusive contrast to *in Christ* in this context. Therefore, it cannot be considered an antithesis to

² This distinction is discernable in the secondary definitions Webster's dictionary gives *antithetical*, "being in direct and unequivocal opposition," and *complementary*, "serving to fill out or complete." *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (1986), s.v. "antithetical" and "complementary."

³ Schweitzer confuses complement with antithesis when he groups "in the spirit" and "in the body" with "in sin" and "in the flesh" as "antitheses" of union with Christ (p. 123).

mystical union for the purposes of this study. Conversely, John 17:23 involves a slightly different meaning for the term *world*, because here those who have Christ in them share no part in the world: “*I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.*” In this passage, one belongs either to the category *I in them* or to the category *world*. There are no other options, and the same individual cannot participate in both. Therefore, in this context *the world* qualifies as a mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive antithetical contrast to union with Christ.⁴

A second preliminary understanding is important to the methodology of this chapter. Identifying antitheses of union with Christ requires the ability to isolate the doctrine from contexts that involve an unrelated meaning for *you in Christ* or *Christ in you*. As noted earlier, various meanings for these phrases are identifiable, which do not necessarily shed light on the definition of union with Christ.⁵ One such meaning is the direct object usage. At times, both the *in Christ* and the *in you* phrases are part of a syntax in which the preposition *in* serves to complete the verbal idea of the sentence, while *Christ* or *you* functions as the

⁴ The same principle can apply to two different nuances for the phrase *in the flesh* in Paul. The apostle contrasts *in the flesh* with *in the Lord* in Philem. 1:16, but it is clear in this context that the believer exists in both realms. Although the passage includes a noticeable contrast between *in the flesh* and *in the Lord*, *in the flesh* is not here a true antithesis as required by this study. Conversely, in Rom. 8:9 Paul asserts regarding the Roman Christians that they are not *in the flesh* but *in the Spirit*. In this context, it is clearly impossible to be both *in the flesh* and *in the Spirit*. In addition, there is no room for a third option; one is either *in the flesh* or *in the Spirit*. Therefore, *in the flesh* communicates an antithesis to *Christ in you* in Rom. 8:9 that it does not communicate for *you in Christ* in Philem. 1:16.

⁵ See p. 30, n. 11.

direct object of that verbal idea. This is always a positive idea in the case of *in Christ*, *in God*, or *in the Spirit*: “believe in Christ” (πιστεύω, John 2:23, 3:15-18, 7:5, 11:25-26, 14:1, Acts 9:42, 10:43, 16:34, Tit. 3:8); “faith in Christ” (πίστις, Acts 3:16, 24:24, 26:18, Rom. 3:25, 3:26, Gal. 2:16, 3:26, Eph. 1:15, Col. 1:4, 2:5, 1 Tim. 1:14, 3:13, 2 Tim. 1:13, 3:15, 1 Pet. 1:21); “trust in Christ” (πείθω, 2 Cor. 1:9, Phil. 1:14, 2:24, 2 Thess. 3:4, Heb. 2:13); “rejoice in Christ” (ἀγαλλιάω, Luke 1:47, 1 Pet. 1:8; καυχάομαι [τὸ καύχημα περισσεύω], Rom. 5:11, 1 Cor. 15:31, 2 Cor. 10:17, Phil. 1:26, 3:3; χαίρω, Phil. 3:1, 4:4, 4:10); “stand fast in Christ” (στήκω, Phil. 4:1, 1 Thess. 3:8); “have confidence in Christ” (ἔχω + ἡ παρρησία, 1 John 5:14); “hope in Christ” (ἐλπίζω, Matt. 12:21, Rom. 15:12, 2 Cor. 1:10, Phil. 2:19, 1 Tim. 4:10, 5:5, 6:17, 1 Pet. 3:5; ἔχω + ἐλπίς, 1 John 3:3; προελπίζω, Eph. 1:12). By way of contrast, this syntax always communicates a negative idea in the case of *in you*—“trust in ourselves” (πείθω, Luke 18:9, 2 Cor. 1:9).

A second example of *in Christ* and *in you* usage that does not relate to an understanding of union with Christ is the attribute usage. In these contexts, *in Christ* and *in you* appear in sentences that describe the attributes of the object of this prepositional phrase: *Christ* or *you*. In the case of Christ, *in Christ* describes Him as the source of life (John 1:4, 5:26, Acts 17:28), as uniquely related to the Father (John 10:38, 14:10-11), as deity (Col. 1:19, 2:9), as the repository of truth (Eph. 4:21, Col. 2:3, 1 John 2:8) and the riches of glory (Phil. 4:19), as the supreme example of humility (Phil. 2:5), and as completely sinless (1 John 3:5). In regard to man, *in you* describes him as having no root (Mark 4:17), as more or less salty (Mark 9:50), as in possession of a character known by

Christ (John 2:25), as more or less void of the word of God (John 5:38, 8:37, 15:7, Rom. 2:15, Heb. 8:10), as void of the love of God (John 5:42), as void of the light of God (John 11:10), as full of the joy of Christ (John 17:13), as physically alive (Acts 20:10), and as recipients of the grace of God (2 Cor. 9:14, Philem. 1:6). These attribute usages do not contribute to a technical definition of the doctrine of union with Christ.

Two closely related meanings of *in Christ* that also lack a direct bearing on the doctrine of union with Christ are the agency usage and the representation usage. The first occurs in contexts in which the preposition ἐν can be translated “by” or “through” rather than “in.” Note, for example, the parallelism between “we request and exhort you in (ἐν) the Lord Jesus” and the “commandments we gave you by (διὰ) . . . the Lord Jesus” in 1 Thess. 4:1-2 (Rom. 14:14, Phil. 2:1, Col. 4:17). A few contexts may be understood either as agency usages or as passages significant to the doctrine of union with Christ (Acts 4:12, Rom. 16:8, 16:10, Gal. 2:17). This is not surprising, because union with Christ includes union with His agency or work. In spite of this close connection, however, this study of the doctrine’s antitheses does not treat agency usages as directly relevant to union with Christ in order to avoid conclusions that may lack a basis in the intentions of the author.

Like the agency usage, the representation usage includes an indirect rather than a direct relevance to the doctrine of union with Christ.⁶

⁶ Romans 16 provides a good example of the nature of the linkage between the agency and the representation usages of *in Christ* and usages that more directly refer to union with Christ. Paul repeats synonyms for the phrase *in Christ* 11 times in this passage. Some of these usages are representative in nature (vv. 2, 22), some could be examples of agency (vv. 8, 10, 13), and some must be taken as referring more directly to the union with Christ doctrine (vv. 7, 11). The proximity of these usages shows that

The representation usage is also very close to the agency usage, but it differs because it involves the action of one representing Christ rather than the action of Christ Himself. Representation usages are occurrences of the *in Christ* phrase that can denote “in the name of Christ,” “in the authority of Christ,” or “in the power of Christ.”⁷ The idea expressed by these passages is largely synonymous with the idea Paul communicates in 2 Cor. 5:20, “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” To act *in Christ* in this sense is to act on His behalf, under His authority, and as His representative. Because it is possible to conceive of representing Christ without a vital union with Him, representation usages of *in Christ* will not be used in this study of antitheses of union with Christ.

One final usage of the *in you* phrase excluded from this study concerns the doctrine of inspiration. Peter speaks of “the Spirit of Christ within them” (1 Pet. 1:11) as he refers to the miracle of the inspiration of Old Testament prophets. Although a reference to “the Spirit of Christ” at work in the Old Testament era is significant in terms of understanding pneumatology, this passage does not concern the focus of this chapter

Paul understood being in Christ as closely related to being loved by Christ (the agency usage) and doing good works in the name of Christ (the representation usage).

⁷ See Matt. 7:22, 10:41-42, 18:5, 18:20, 21:9, 23:39, 24:5, 28:19, Mark 9:37-41, 11:9-10, 13:6, 16:17, Luke 9:48-49, 13:35, 19:38, 21:8, 24:47, John 5:43, 10:25, 14:13-14, 14:26, 15:16, 16:23-26, 17:12, Acts 2:38, 3:6, 4:17-18, 5:28, 5:40, 8:16, 9:27-29, 10:48, 14:3, 16:18, 19:5, Rom. 16:2, 16:3, 16:9, 16:12, 16:22, 1 Cor. 1:13, 1:15, 5:4, 15:58, 16:19, 16:24, 2 Cor. 2:10, 2:17, 12:19, Eph. 4:17, 4:21, 5:20, 6:1, 6:4, 6:10, 6:18, 6:21, Phil. 1:8, 1:13, 2:29, 4:2, 4:21, Col. 1:8, Col. 2:6-7, 3:17-18, 4:7, 1 Thess. 1:3, 5:1, 5:12, 5:18, 2 Thess. 3:6, 1 Tim. 2:7, 2 Tim. 3:12, Philem. 1:6, 1:8, 1:20, 1:23, James 5:8, 5:14, and 1 Pet. 3:16.

because it does not refer to the universal experience of all believers.⁸ In contrast, Scripture's references to "the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you" (Matt. 10:20) and "the anointing" that "abides in you" (1 John 2:27) do describe the proper possession of every believer. Rather than the miracle of inspiration, these passages refer to the process of illumination. The 1 John passage connects this blessing directly to union with Christ with the phrase *you abide in Him*. Therefore, passages that refer to illumination are useful for our understanding of the antitheses of union with Christ, whereas passages that refer to inspiration are not.

Clearly, a variety of syntactical and semantic usages of the phrases *in Christ* and *in you* express a plurality of truths that have sometimes more and sometimes less to do with ascertaining a definition of union with Christ. Although the phraseology does not always refer to the doctrine, the claim of Bultmann that this variety of usage precludes the existence of a coherent union with Christ doctrine does not follow.⁹ Recognizing usage not related to union with Christ helps to isolate those passages that refer directly to the doctrine. These passages fall into two distinct categories. First, antitheses of union with Christ that do not include the Old Testament believer support viewing the Old Testament believer as a participant in the blessings of union with Christ. Next, antitheses of union with Christ that include the Old Testament believer argue against his participation.

⁸ More will be said about the nature of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament in chapter 6, "The Baptism of the Holy Spirit and Union with Christ."

⁹ R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 1:311.

Antitheses Not Inclusive of the Old Testament Believer

The majority of antitheses of union with Christ found in the New Testament cannot refer to the Old Testament believer. The opposites of *you in Christ* and *Christ in you* most often involve a soteriological import that describes the condition of the unbeliever. More specifically, antitheses of union with Christ that are not inclusive of the Old Testament believer fall into three soteriological conditions: (1) a lack of regeneration, (2) a lack of reconciliation, and (3) a lack of justification. The first category involves life in the flesh, the second life in the world, and the third life under the law.¹⁰

Not Regenerated: Life “In the Flesh”

For the most part, when the apostle Paul refers to life in the flesh, he is referring to a concept that does not constitute an antithesis of union with Christ.¹¹ The apostle teaches that the Lord was manifested “in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16) and that Christian couples will have trouble “in the flesh” (1 Cor. 7:28). Paul freely admits that he lives life “in the flesh” (Gal. 2:20, Phil. 1:22-24). In each of these instances, Paul is referring to human or natural existence when he speaks of life in the flesh. In so doing, he reflects his Hebrew background, which saw the concept of *בִּשְׂרָא* as human frailty, but never the essence of human sinfulness.¹²

¹⁰ Note that a fourth condition, life “in Adam,” actually includes elements of all three categories mentioned here: spiritual death (1 Cor. 15:22), spiritual alienation (Rom. 5:12), and spiritual condemnation (Rom. 5:18). Its special contribution to the question of union with Christ and the Old Testament believer will be treated in chapter 5, “The Old Testament Believer in Key New Testament Union with Christ Passages.”

¹¹ See n. 3.

¹² See Appendix C, “The Theology of *בִּשְׂרָא*.”

On the other hand, two passages indicate a different meaning for Paul's use of the phrase *in the flesh*, contexts where it clearly describes an antithesis of union with Christ. The more difficult passage is Col. 2:11, where Paul speaks of the need for "a circumcision made without hands" that can be experienced only "in Him." The metaphorical nature of Paul's teaching in this verse is clear from the phrase *made without hands*.¹³ He advances the metaphor by explaining what is removed by this spiritual operation: "the body of the flesh." Without leaving his metaphorical method, Paul then explains that spiritual circumcision is a circumcision of Christ, for He is the one performing the operation.¹⁴ Paul further defines the sense in which spiritual circumcision is *of Christ* in verse 12; it is *of Christ* because it is executed by His death and resurrection. Spiritual circumcision operates on the believer as he is united with or baptized into the redemptive work of Christ through faith (v. 12) resulting in regeneration (v. 13).¹⁵

¹³ Peter T. O'Brien notes regarding the phrase: "In all of its NT occurrences χειροποιήτος ('made with hands') is used to set forth the contrast between what is constructed by man and the work of God." *Colossians and Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 115. He lists the following passages as examples: Mark 14:45, Acts 7:48, 17:24, Eph. 2:11, Heb. 9:11, 9:24.

¹⁴ The subjective genitive interpretation of "circumcision of Christ" is supported by the emphasis on the work of God in this context as seen in the passive verbs, "made complete" (v. 10) and "circumcised" (v. 11), in the phrase "without hands" (v. 11), and in the reference to "the working of God" (v. 12). The subjective genitive also better accounts for the union with Christ emphasis of verse 11 ("and in Him").

¹⁵ O'Brien, an example of interpreters who seek to avoid infant baptism implied by the correspondence between "circumcision of Christ" in verse 11 and "baptism" in verse 12, argues that "of Christ" in verse 11 is an objective genitive and that the entire phrase, "the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ," is a reference to the death of Christ (pp. 116-117). This interpretation, however, involves the arduous task of making circumcision a metaphor for the death of Christ rather than a picture of regeneration. The approach is difficult in the face of Paul's clear application of the metaphor *circumcision* to regeneration in verse 13. It fails to follow Paul's use of circumcision as a metaphor pedagogically in this context. That Paul has the believer in

Although the correspondence between baptism and the Old Testament rite of circumcision in this passage has been useful to those who advocate the ordinance of infant baptism, this conclusion forgets the “without hands” focus of Paul’s teaching here.¹⁶ The point of similarity between baptism and circumcision is that both of these metaphors signify regeneration, being “made alive” after having been “dead in your transgressions” (v. 13). This correspondence, however, has nothing to do with anything that men do with their hands. Circumcision is the Old Testament metaphor for regeneration, and baptism is the New Testament metaphor for regeneration, but this commonality does not require or even imply a physical correspondence between the rites of circumcision and baptism.¹⁷ If such a physical correspondence were consistently applied, females would not be baptized.

The physical rites of circumcision and water baptism are separate dispensational ordinances that picture a common spiritual antitype—salvation’s work of regeneration. Their spiritual correspondence does not require the physical correspondence that the advocates of infant baptism insist on. Colossian believers were undoubtedly physically

mind as the object of a metaphorical circumcision throughout the passage is plain from the phrases “you were circumcised” in verse 11 and “the uncircumcision of your flesh” in verse 13. This same concept must be the focus of “the removal of the body of flesh by the circumcision of Christ” in verse 12.

¹⁶ See for example Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 929-930.

¹⁷ To illustrate further, consider two metaphors for the Holy Spirit: a dove (Matt. 3:16) and the wind (John 3:8). The fact that both a dove and the wind function as metaphors for the same spiritual reality, the Holy Spirit, does not imply that they share any physical correspondence whatsoever. We need not conclude, for instance, that doves are transparent or that the wind has feathers. Nor must we conclude that there is a physical correspondence between circumcision and baptism that involves infants.

uncircumcised, but all had experienced the circumcision “made without hands.” In the same sense, Paul refers in verse 12 to a baptism that is accomplished through faith, not through water. To see water baptism in verse 12 is to confuse Paul’s use of metaphorical pedagogy in this context with the made-with-hands realm. More troubling, this interpretation attributes to shadow what belongs only to substance, the central error Paul combats in this passage as a whole (v. 17).

But does accounting for the difference between Old Testament circumcision and New Testament water baptism in Colossians 2 mean that we can conclude also that the Old Testament believer was excluded from the vital blessings of union with Christ described in this chapter? The antitheses of “in Him” recorded here require a negative answer. Those still in the flesh opt for the deceptive traditions of men (v. 8); they are not made complete (v. 10); they are spiritually dead and not forgiven (v. 13); and they still must pay the debt required by the law (v. 14). While it is implicitly obvious that the Old Testament believer cannot fit these descriptions, Paul’s use of David as a model of the free forgiveness of imputation in Rom. 4:5-8 explicitly exempts Old Testament believers from the fleshly condition described here. Because union with Christ is a mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive antithetical opposite to this unregenerate condition, the regenerate Old Testament believer must belong to the category described as “in Him.”

The second passage in which Paul uses the phrase *in the flesh* as an antithesis for union with Christ is Rom. 8:8-11. The larger context teaches the reciprocal nature of *you in Christ* (vv. 1, 2, 9) and *Christ in you* (v. 10). In addition, the passage emphasizes the spiritual nature of

mystical union with its direct correspondence between *Christ in you* (v. 10) and *the Spirit in you* (vv. 9, 11), which implies an accompanying correspondence between *you in Christ* (v. 1) and *you in the Spirit* (v. 9). The condition antithetical to these spiritual blessings is life in the flesh (vv. 8, 9). *In the flesh* forms a mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive contrast to the category described as *you in Christ* and *Christ in you*. Romans 8 directly refers to those in the flesh as those who do not belong to Christ (v. 9), as those who are spiritually dead (v. 6), as those who cannot please God (v. 8), and as those who are not indwelt by the Spirit of Christ (vv. 9-11).¹⁸ It is impossible to belong to this unregenerate category while being in Christ, and no third option exists. Clearly, no believer is in the flesh in the sense meant here by Paul, for all believers are viewed as belonging to Christ, as spiritually alive, as able to please God, and as indwelt by the Spirit of Christ.¹⁹

Although it is arguable that Paul does not have the Old Testament believer directly in view as he describes the antitheses of union with Christ in this passage, his use of the Old Testament in the book of Romans overall to substantiate the gospel themes he communicates shows that the relationship between his gospel and the Old Testament is never far from this author's mind (Rom. 1:2). That the apostle felt no

¹⁸ Note that the interpretation of Romans 8 advocated here requires viewing the Old Testament believer as indwelt by the Spirit of Christ in the sense meant by Paul in verses 9-11. This understanding needs to be reconciled with other passages that seem to indicate that the Holy Spirit indwells only the New Testament believer. This topic is the concern of Chapter 6, "The Baptism of the Spirit and Union with Christ."

¹⁹ F. F. Bruce agrees: "To be 'in the Spirit' is for Paul the opposite of being 'in the flesh'. All believers, according to him, are 'in the Spirit': 'you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit', he tells the Roman Christians, 'if the Spirit of Christ really dwells in you. Any one who has not the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him' (Romans 8:9)." *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 209.

need to qualify his comments in Rom. 8:9-11 as somehow inapplicable to the Old Testament believer, in spite of his heavy concern for continuity with the Old Testament in Romans, puts the burden of proof on views that seek to exclude the Old Testament believer from union with Christ. Inclusion of all believers in the blessings of chapter 8 must be considered a basic assumption for Paul because the inclusion of all believers in the blessings of Paul's gospel is a basic assumption of Romans. What is assumed throughout receives explicit application to the Old Testament believer in chapter 4. Furthermore, chapters 9-11 account for the Old Testament believer in a way that identifies him with the soteriological blessings of the previous chapters. The remnant doctrine of these chapters indicates full participation in gospel blessings (9:27, 11:5). There is no dichotomy in Romans between Old Testament and New Testament soteriology. For these reasons, the antitheses of union with Christ in the context of Rom. 8:8-11 support the conclusion that the Old Testament believer participates in the blessing of union with Christ.

Various other themes in the New Testament support the conclusion that the antithesis of union with Christ involves a lack of regeneration that cannot be true of the Old Testament believer. The one who does not abide in Christ, and Christ in him, has no life in himself (John 6:53, 56). Without this abiding union, lifeless branches can bear no fruit; in fact, they can do nothing (John 15:4-5). Just as in Christ all shall be made alive, so also those still in Adam are spiritually dead and yet in their sins (1 Cor. 15:17-19, 22). To fail to confess weakness in Him is to fail to live by His power (2 Cor. 13:4), and to lack His death and His life in one's body is to be spiritually dead (2 Cor. 4:4, 10-12). If one is not

living in the Spirit, he is doing the works of the flesh and unworthy of the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:18-21, 25). Without having been quickened, raised, and seated with Christ, and unless created in Christ Jesus for good works, a sinner is still dead in his trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1-10). These truths are not only applicable in the New Testament era, for the same hardened heart that doomed the generation of Israelites that died in the wilderness belongs to all those who are not partakers of Christ (Heb. 3:12-19). On the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures, only unbelievers lack God's dwelling in them and walking among them (2 Cor. 6:14-16).²⁰ Simply put, "he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life," because "this life is in His Son" (1 John 5:11-12). A lack of union with Christ equals the unregenerate state, a condition that cannot be applied to the lives of Old Testament believers (Ps. 1:3).

Not Reconciled: Life "In the World"

Disunion with Christ also describes those who are not reconciled to God. The phrase *in the world* expresses the alienation that characterizes this condition. Many passages in the New Testament teach that the estrangement of the unreconciled state is the direct antithesis of *you in Christ* and *Christ in you*. The unreconciled category contains the same participants as the unregenerate group (2 Cor. 5:14-18), but this description of the enmity that exists between them and God sheds further light on what it means to be outside of Christ.

Excluded from the blessings of "ye in me [Christ], and I in you," the unreconciled collectively constitute "the world," those who do not love or

²⁰ For a more detailed discussion of Paul's use of the Old Testament here, see chapter 6 "The Baptism of the Holy Spirit and Union with Christ," pp. 186-192.

obey Jesus Christ (John 14:19-24) or know the Father (John 17:26).

Although they cause tribulation for those in Christ, Christ has overcome them (John 16:33). Those who are in Him have peace in spite of the world. The enmity between the world and Christ calls those in Christ to more than a defensive posture; their unity in Him enables the world to believe and know the Lord (John 17:21-23). Transcending demarcations between Jew and Gentile and Old and New Testament, the antithesis between those in Christ and those unreconciled marks both unbelieving Jews as the enemies of the gospel (Rom. 11:28, 12:5, 14, 21; Gal. 2:4; 1 Thess. 2:14) and unbelieving Gentiles as strangers and aliens who are far off (Eph. 2:13, 19). All who have not the love of God shed abroad in their hearts are the unreconciled enemies of God (Rom. 5:5, 10).

The distance of the unreconciled from God results in a proximity to Satan that brings practical consequences. Those who are not “in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ” belong to “the world” that “lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19-20). Consequently, they live in a domain of darkness (Col. 1:13-14) with a hostility of mind for the things of God (Col. 1:21-22). This darkness involves a hardened mind that cannot understand the Pentateuch the way those who have had their veil done away in Christ can (2 Cor. 3:14-16). Following the spirit of antichrist (1 John 5:24), they deny the Son and seek to deceive those who are in Him (1 John 2:23, 26). Their attraction to lies evinces their alienation from the Spirit of truth (John 14:17). They are liars void of truth (1 John 2:4-6).

Their corrupt mind leads to corrupt deeds. Those not in Christ join prostitutes with no harm to the body of Christ (1 Cor. 6:9, 17); they

abandon God-ordained authority structure for marriage because they are not in the Lord (1 Cor. 11:11); they disobey God and are objects of His wrath (Col. 3:6-11); and they have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13-16). Instead, they worship the beast, receive his mark, and are tormented forever and ever (Rev. 14:9-13). In each of the passages listed above, the condition of the unreconciled constitutes a mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive alternative to union with Christ. It is clearly not possible to include the Old Testament believer as somehow a part of the category of those unreconciled to Christ (Psalm 23). Therefore, this antithesis of union with Christ places the Old Testament believer firmly in Christ.

Not Justified: Life “Under the Law”

The final category of New Testament antitheses to union with Christ centers on the doctrine of justification. This category also precludes excluding the Old Testament believer from the blessings of the doctrine. Justification is the legal peace with God through faith in Christ (Rom. 5:1) available to those who formerly stood condemned, outside of Christ, and under the law (Rom. 3:19-20; Gal. 3:23-24). Throughout the New Testament this condemnation under the law defines the antithesis of union with Christ: “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). The justified state in Christ involves freedom from the law of sin and death because the requirement of the law finds fulfillment in those who experience justification (Rom. 8:2-4).

The law of God exposes those who are not “justified freely” through “the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” as sinners who “fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23-24). This justification is free because it is a work of God, not man. The love of God which is in Christ Jesus does not

begin with the justification of the believer, but rather with the foreknowledge of the believer before the foundation of the world (Rom. 8:28-30, 33-34, 39). Those not in Christ are not chosen (Rom. 16:13; Eph. 1:3-4; 2 Tim. 2:10; 1 Pet. 5:14), called (1 Cor. 7:22; 2 Tim. 1:9, 14; 1 Pet. 5:10), accepted (Rom. 16:10; Eph. 1:6), or redeemed (Eph. 1:7). Ultimately, they do not participate in the inheritance of the saints (Eph. 1:10-11); they possess no earnest of that inheritance (Eph. 1:13; 2 Cor. 1:20-22); and rather than glorification, they experience eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power (2 Thess. 1:8-12; 1 John 2:28). Outside of the promise, they are sons of Hagar rather than sons of Sarah (Gal. 4:19, 21-28).

They are not in Christ because they have not believed (1 Cor. 7:12-16, 39; 14:25; 1 John 3:23-24), failing to respond positively to the gospel message (1 Cor. 4:15-17; 9:1-2; Eph. 1:13). In this regard they glory in something other than the Lord, in spite of warnings from both the New Testament and the Old (1 Cor. 1:30-31; Gal. 2:17-21; 3:2-3). They are the unrighteous who do not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:16-21) because they remain unaffected by the vicarious atonement (2 Cor. 5:21). To be severed from Christ is to be required to keep the whole law and to fall from grace (Gal. 5:1-6).

Romans 4 clearly disallows the inclusion of the Old Testament believer among the ranks of the unjustified. After vividly describing the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:24), Paul offers Abraham and David as exemplars of the grace of God in this regard. The blessings of Abraham certainly have come to the Gentiles only in Christ Jesus, and calculating a different formula for how they may have come to Abraham

himself is theologically difficult if not impossible (Gal. 3:14). The Old Testament believer experienced freedom from the law after his faith in a sense analogous to the way the New Testament believer experienced bondage under the law before his faith (Gal. 3:23-29). All believers are “one in Christ Jesus,” “Abraham’s seed,” and “heirs according to the promise,” in contrast to all unbelievers, who are outside of Christ in a state of condemnation.

The great majority of antitheses to union with Christ in the New Testament fall under one of three conditions: life in the flesh, life in the world, or life under the law. The relationship between these conditions and life in Christ forms a mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive antithesis. In every case this antithetical relationship requires that the interpreter conclude that the Old Testament believer participates in union with Christ. Without that participation he could not be regenerated, reconciled, or justified.

Parameters that Exclude the Old Testament Believer

A few New Testament passages, however, describe an antithesis to union with Christ that may be interpreted as inclusive of the Old Testament believer. In so doing, these passages lend support to a conclusion that excludes the Old Testament believer from union with Christ. Interpreters who exclude the Old Testament believer from the blessings of union with Christ do not lack New Testament support. In particular these understandings claim that the New Testament doctrine of the Holy Spirit argues against seeing *you in Christ* and *Christ in you* as equally applicable in the Old Testament era. That doctrine teaches that the Spirit of Christ is active in a new way since Pentecost in fulfillment of

eschatological promises of Old Testament prophecy. In addition to the pneumatological evidence supporting these positions, four passages of the New Testament present parameters for *you in Christ* and *Christ in you*, which indicate that the Old Testament believer is not included in the blessings of union with Christ: 1 Cor. 12:27-31, Eph. 1:20-23, Eph. 3:21-4:16, and Col. 1:24-29.²¹ Although none of these passages specifically mentions the Old Testament believer as part of a category that is an antithesis to union with Christ, they do contain parameters related to *you in Christ* and *Christ in you* that necessarily limit applicability to the New Testament believer.

The immediate context of each passage clearly teaches that the New Testament believer is in Christ. The 1 Corinthians 12 passage begins by identifying the Corinthian believers as “Christ’s body, and individually members of it” (1 Cor. 12:27). The passage follows 1 Cor. 12:13, a key verse underpinning most pneumatological arguments for excluding the Old Testament believer from union with Christ: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” Eph. 1:20-23 follows the *in Him* emphasis of the entire epistle. It describes the nature of “the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ.” The exhortations of Eph. 4 also occur in a context which speaks of bringing glory to God “in Christ Jesus” (3:21). Finally, the concern of Col. 1:24-29 includes both “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (v. 27) and presenting “every man complete in Christ”

²¹ Note that Ephesians 2:11-3:13 shares the characteristics of this category of passages as well, but it will be treated in the next chapter as one of the three key NT passages related to the doctrine of union with Christ.

(v. 28). Within these four union with Christ contexts, Paul sets up three parameters for the doctrine that preclude the participation of the Old Testament believer: the body of Christ, the headship of Christ, and the foundation of new apostolic revelation.

The Body of Christ

First, each of the passages under consideration here specifically denominates those *in Christ* as both *the church* and as *the body of Christ*. 1 Cor. 12:27-28 follows “you are Christ’s body” with “God has appointed in the church”; Eph. 1:22-23 informs us that Christ is “head over all things to the church, which is His body”; Eph. 3:21-4:16 refers to believers as “the church” once (3:21) and as “the body” four times (4:4, 12, 16[2]); and Paul confesses in Col. 1:24 that he suffered and served for Christ’s “body’s sake, which is the church.” One of the key points of argumentation in the coherence debate centers on whether or not *the church* existed in the Old Testament era. The usage of ἐκκλησία in the passages under consideration here does not answer this question comprehensively.²² None of these passages explicitly excludes or includes the Old Testament believer from the church to which Paul is referring.²³

²² For a thorough treatment of the question of the meaning of ἐκκλησία in the New Testament, see Christopher D. Barney, “Ecclesiology and Theological System: A Survey and Analysis of the Influence of Covenant and Dispensational Theology Upon the Interpretation of Key Ecclesiological Passages” (Ph.D. diss., Bob Jones University, 2004), 62-117. Barney discusses both the development of the usage of ἐκκλησία in the New Testament and the origin of the church from Matthew 16. He classifies the usages of ἐκκλησία found in the passages under discussion here as “Non-Spatiotemporal” usages, the most technical and theologically significant form of usage (p. 79). Having distinguished this category of usage from other meanings, Barney concludes that the church as defined by these usages of ἐκκλησία began at Pentecost (p. 116).

²³ Although Col. 1:26 speaks of “the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but now has been manifested to His saints,” the passage does not specifically equate this hidden mystery with the church. Instead, “the

What is clear from them, however, is the fact that Paul identifies the church, whomever it may or may not include, as the body of Christ. All those included in the church are individually parts of this body (1 Cor. 12:27).

Interpreters understand Paul's terminology in this regard either literally or metaphorically. According to the literalist view, the sacraments play an important part in regard to initiation into and the sustenance of the body of Christ.²⁴ An extreme form of the literalist view teaches that the church as the body of Christ is an extension of the incarnation of Christ on earth.²⁵ Robinson even equates the resurrection body of Christ with the church in a physical sense, claiming that the Savior did not rise individually, but corporately.²⁶ More moderate sacramental views reject this physical connection with the resurrected body of Christ, preferring rather to speak of the church's connection with Christ as spiritual in nature, although inclusive of both the believer's body and a spiritual body of Christ.²⁷

mystery" is specifically "the word of God" (v. 25). It is the word of God, not the church, that has been hidden from past ages in this context. The other passages under consideration here do not mention past ages at all.

²⁴ See Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God* (New York: Friendship Press, 1953), 61.

²⁵ John A. T. Robinson argues for this position: "The Christian, because he is in the Church and united with Him in the sacraments, is part of Christ's body so literally that all that happened in and through that body in the flesh can be repeated in and through him now." *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), 47.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

²⁷ Lesslie Newbigin denies the physical connection, but he still claims that the phrase *body of Christ* is more than metaphorical by advocating a connection to a spiritual body of Christ (pp. 72-73).

Against the literalist interpretation of the body of Christ, other views advocate a metaphorical understanding of the phrase. According to these views the body of Christ is not the physical body of Christ, because the phrase acts as a metaphor that describes the nature of a believer's relationship to Christ rather than the nature of Christ Himself. The historical-redemptive metaphorical understanding seeks to distance itself from the literalist approach by mitigating the role of the Holy Spirit in the formation of the body of Christ.²⁸ Accordingly, Christ is not the soul of the body, the church, because the phrase *body of Christ* describes a strictly objective phenomenon unrelated to the work of the Holy Spirit. Interpreters with a pneumatological understanding of union with Christ, on the other hand, avoid the literalist approach by emphasizing the metaphorical nature of the phrase.²⁹ Although it is true that the baptism of the Holy Spirit has formed the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-13) and that the Holy Spirit indwells the believers (Rom. 8:9), Paul refers to neither of these truths when he employs the metaphor. *Body of Christ* does not mean that Christians are the physical part of Christ's presence on the earth today, which is inhabited by the Spirit of Christ in the same way a soul inhabits a body. On the contrary, to see Christ as the soul of the body is to misinterpret the metaphorical nature of the phrase. For Paul, Christ is never the soul of the body, but rather either the body itself (1 Cor. 12:12, 27), or the head of the body (Eph. 1:20-22, 4:8-10, 15).

²⁸ See the discussion of the views of Ridderbos on pp. 39-46.

²⁹ Robert H. Gundry argues conclusively for the metaphorical nature of the phrase against the literalist views of Robinson and others. *SOMA in Biblical Theology with Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 228-236.

Therefore, *body of Christ* does not refer specifically to the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit—a soteriological theme—but rather to the nature of the relationships that result from the Pentecostal work of the Holy Spirit, especially through baptism—an ecclesiological theme.³⁰ This is not to say that existence in the body of Christ is antithetical to experiencing the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit; it is only to say that the two concepts are not completely identical. For this reason the phrase *body of Christ* does not carry the same comprehensive soteriological significance borne by the larger doctrine of union with Christ in the theology of Paul. There is a contextual relationship between *in Christ* and *body of Christ*, but this relationship is not exact equivalence.

Paul's metaphorical use of *the body of Christ* involves parameters that preclude the participation of the Old Testament believer. First, Paul's use of the term to describe the results of baptism (1 Cor. 12:12-13, Gal. 3:27-29) indicates that an ordinance unknown to the Old Testament believer is related in an important way to the body of Christ. According to these passages, those who have not been baptized into Christ are not a part of the body of Christ. As already discussed, some have seen water baptism in these passages in an effort to understand union with Christ in a completely objectified way. But even for those who see Spirit baptism as the key to understanding Paul's meaning, these passages have provided pneumatological reasons for excluding the Old Testament believer from the body of Christ. In light of John's

³⁰ Gundry notes the rarity of the phrase *body of Christ* in soteriological contexts: "Paul rarely speaks of it in soteriological passages, and never at length. Only in parenetic passages, where being a member of the Body has to do with working relationships among Christians, does Paul develop the theme" (p. 232).

prediction regarding baptism with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11) and the events of Pentecost, it is difficult to include the Old Testament believer in an experience involving Spirit baptism. The pneumatological issues involved here will be treated in a later chapter, but it is clear at this point that if John the Baptist and Paul speak of the same baptism of the Holy Spirit, the Old Testament believer did not participate in the body of Christ.

Second, one of the results of this baptism is a unity that transcends social distinctions such as Jew and Gentile, slave and freeman, and male and female. Although some form of this transcendence appears in the Old Testament,³¹ Paul's *body of Christ* refers to a unity that does not remain merely transcendent. Instead, these transcendent relationships serve as the basis for a new practicum—"that there may be no division in the body" and "that the members may have the same care for one another" (1 Cor. 12:25).³² This body is not merely "knit together"; it also builds itself up in love (Eph. 4:16). While it is arguable whether or not the Old Testament believer participated in the transcendent relationship that unites all in Christ, they undoubtedly did not participate in this new practicum.

Finally, the *body of Christ* metaphor specifically designates a relationship that involves the headship of Christ over the church (Eph. 1:20-22, 4:8-10, 15). Because Paul uses the phrase in these passages in a way that is distinct from his emphasis in 1 Corinthians 12, the concept

³¹ Note, for example, the Lord's rebuke of Jonah's partisanship (Jon. 4:9-11).

³² Eph. 2:14, with its description of the fall of the barrier wall, describes explicitly the historical newness of this practical unity. See Chapter 5, "The Old Testament Believer in Key New Testament Union with Christ Passages."

of the headship of Christ over the body establishes a second parameter that supports the exclusion of the Old Testament believer from union with Christ.

The Headship of Christ

Some argue wisely against understanding Paul's description of Christ as *head* in organic terms, as though it is part of a slightly different *body of Christ* metaphor.³³ As pointed out by these interpreters, *head* can mean literally "leader" and refer strictly to the authority of Christ over the church rather than to a connection implying shared life. Whether taken as an organic metaphor or not, passages that refer to the headship of Christ over the body do contain a historical character on which all agree. We are told exactly when in history Jesus Christ became the head of the body: "when He [the Father] raised Him [Christ] from the dead, and made Him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places . . . and gave Him to be head over all things to the church" (Eph. 1:20-22). Paul points out that Psalm 68 speaks of Yahweh's ascending, which he applies to the ascension of Christ, noting that as a historical event it could only have happened after Yahweh had descended as the Messiah (Eph. 4:7-10). Because the headship of Christ has an inception predicated on the passing of these historical events—incarnation,

³³ Herman Ridderbos offers three reasons for rejecting an organic import to the relationship between *body* and *head* in Paul's description of the relationship between the church and Christ: (1) the idea of a body being nourished by and growing into a head is physiologically difficult; (2) Eph. 4:16 speaks of the church as the "whole body"; (3) the parts of the head of the body in 1 Corinthians 12, such as ear and eye, clearly belong to the church, not Christ in distinction from the church; and (4) viewing the church as the body below the neck requires seeing Christ as a growing part of His own body (Eph. 4:16). *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 380-381. See also C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 74-75.

resurrection, ascension—those who lived prior to these events were not under this headship of Christ over the church. Just as the transcendent unity illustrated by the body of Christ obtains a specific practicum in the church, so also the eternal sovereignty of Yahweh adopts a new historical expression in the headship of Christ over the church. For some Pauline contexts, being in Christ includes being under this headship.

The Foundation of Apostolic Revelation

A third parameter in the passages under consideration here, which precludes the participation of Old Testament believers from union with Christ, is Paul's reference to the foundation of the apostles and the corresponding role of a new revelation.³⁴ What Paul emphasizes in this regard is not apostolic succession, but rather the need for New Testament truth. Not only are apostles the guiding light for those in the body of Christ; so also are prophets, teachers, miracle-workers and other manifestations of the Spirit, evangelists, and pastor-teachers (1 Cor. 12:28, Eph. 4:11). Paul describes his own role in this process in Col. 1:24-29. God gave Paul a stewardship as a minister of the gospel so that the word of God might be filled or made complete unto the Colossian believers (v. 25).³⁵ Although the phrase he uses (πληρῶσαι λόγον) can refer to the notion of fulfilled prophecy or predictions (Luke 1:20, John 15:25, 18:9, 32), it is unlikely that Paul teaches here that his own

³⁴ Here again, the significant contribution Ephesians 2 makes in this regard (v. 20) is reserved for the next chapter.

³⁵ The phrase, πληρῶσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, may communicate the purpose of God's giving Paul his ministry, or it may function appositionally by more specifically defining the nature of Paul's ministry (οἰκονομίαν). O'Brien sees the closest parallel to Paul's meaning here in Rom. 15:19, where Paul speaks of having completed (πληρώω) the preaching of the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum (p. 82).

ministry fulfills prophetic predictions in any direct sense. Fulfilling prophecy was the accomplishment of Christ, not the mission of Paul. In fact, Paul's description of his ministry as "the mystery which has been hidden from past ages and generations" in verse 26 indicates that he is not focused on any of the predictions of prophecy in this context.

Instead, Paul's ministry filled or completed the word of God to the Colossians so that things hidden in past generations could now become manifest. In verse 24 Paul uses a synonym of πληρῶσαι when he speaks of the role he had in filling up the things that were in some sense lacking in the afflictions of Christ.³⁶ Paul is using the *fill* concept in this context to refer to making complete something that is in some sense incomplete. Understood this way, Paul's stewardship was given to him in order to make complete the incomplete word of God. The Old Testament was incomplete in the sense that it lacked the New Testament revelation. Paul calls the content of this mystery the riches of its glory, and these riches are summed up as "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (v. 27). This new proclamation of union with Christ enables Paul to present saints complete in Christ in a way that was impossible prior to the giving of this stewardship (v. 28).³⁷ Saints could not be presented complete in Christ before this ministry of the apostle.³⁸

³⁶ Here Paul uses ἀνταναπληρόω. BAGD notes in this regard: "Paul is glad, by means of the suffering which he vicariously endures for the church, to unite the latter for its own benefit w. Christ; he supplies whatever lack may still exist in its proper share of suffering." Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 72-73. Paul's point is clearly not to claim for himself a role in the atonement.

³⁷ The description *complete in Christ* here refers to the progressive sanctification of the believer and the importance of progressive revelation to this process of spiritual growth. Note Paul's emphasis on knowledge as he begins the next chapter (Col. 2:1-5).

Conclusions from Antitheses of Union with Christ

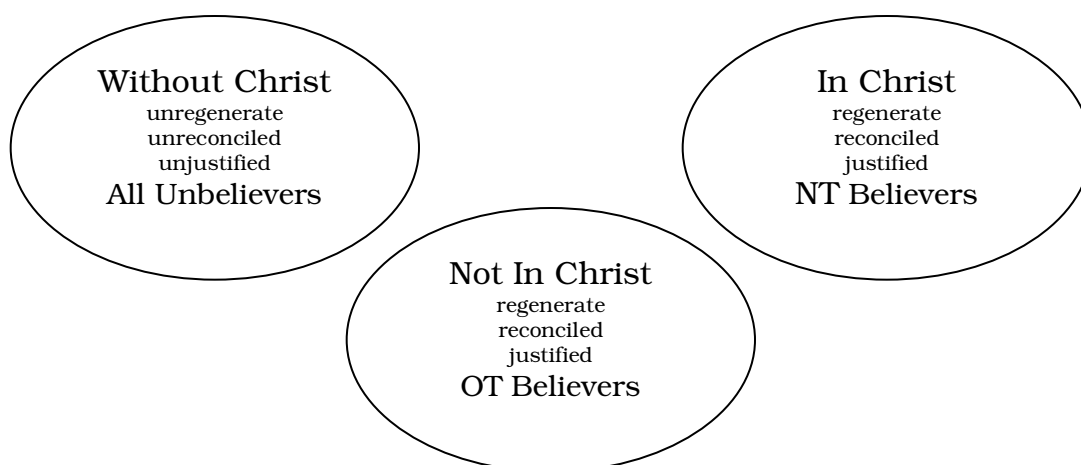
The antitheses of union with Christ in the New Testament force two conclusions related to the Old Testament believer. On the one hand, Scripture clearly identifies the unregenerate, unreconciled, and unjustified man as without Christ. To be *in Christ* is the mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive antithetical category to this soteriological condition. Having *Christ in you* is the necessary reciprocal of this existence in Christ. According to much of the New Testament, all believers must experience union with Christ in order to be saved at all. But on the other hand, some Pauline passages emphasize aspects of the doctrine of union with Christ that preclude the participation of Old Testament believers. These passages include three themes involving specific parameters that eliminate the Old Testament believer from consideration: the body of Christ, the headship of Christ, and the foundational importance of apostolic revelation.

The relationship between the completed word of God and a completed Christian (τέλος, v. 28) is a theme that Paul returns to in 2 Tim. 3:16 (here he uses a synonym for τέλος, ἄρτιος).

³⁸ The fact that the *Christ in you* doctrine was hidden from past generations and manifest through the ministry of Paul does not conclusively require that the Old Testament believer never experienced “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Augustus Strong draws an interesting parallel in this regard between the progressive revelation of the Trinity and the progressive revelation of union with Christ: “It is a mark of divine wisdom that the doctrine of the Trinity, for example, is so inwoven with the whole fabric of the New Testament that the rejection of the former is the virtual rejection of the latter. The doctrine of Union with Christ, in like manner, is taught so variously and abundantly, that to deny it is to deny inspiration itself.” *Systematic Theology* (1907; reprint, Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, n.d), 795. Strong could not, of course, make the same claim for the Old Testament in regard to the Trinity. The doctrine certainly exists there, but it is not manifested in a complete way as it is in the New Testament. The same may be claimed for the doctrine *Christ in you* without contradicting Paul’s assertion that the doctrine was hidden from past ages.

To reconcile these seemingly disparate lines of thought with a coherent understanding of union with Christ, one must demonstrate one of two things. First, if it could be shown that the soteriological antitheses to union with Christ expressed by the New Testament do not actually form a collectively exhaustive alternative to existence in Christ, then it would be possible to reconcile existence in Christ with the exclusion of Old Testament believers. This could be done without implying that Old Testament believers were unregenerate, unreconciled, and unjustified. The procedure requires demonstrating room for a third option—a regenerate, reconciled, and justified existence that is not in Christ. Figure 1 illustrates the approach.

Figure 1 – “In Christ” and “Without Christ” Not Collectively Exhaustive



While the logical problem finds a solution under this approach, there is no exegetical evidence for a regenerate, reconciled, and justified existence that is not in Christ. In addition, the propensity the apostles had for identifying the soteriology of their gospel with the authority of Old

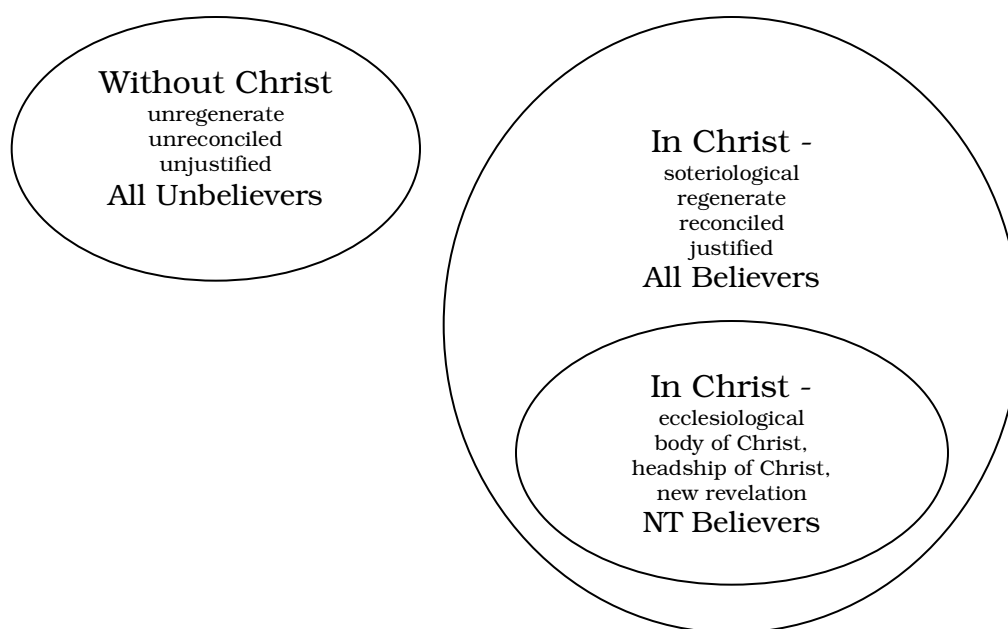
Testament revelation militates against this view. The soteriological problems with this approach are discussed more thoroughly in a later chapter.³⁹

Alternatively, a non-soteriological application of the *in Christ* theme in Paul could achieve the reconciliation needed here. Because the mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive antithesis between *in Christ* and *not in Christ* is soteriological in nature, it is possible that the additional parameters in Paul's theology that exclude the Old Testament believer represent a more specified ecclesiological application of the doctrine, a newly defined category that no longer forms a collectively exhaustive alternative with *not in Christ* in a soteriological sense. For example, compare the categories *female*, *male*, and *man*. It is clear that for human beings, *male* and *female* constitute a set of mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive antitheses. Under normal circumstances, a human is either a male or a female, never both, and never something else. But consider the category *man*. *Man* is a subcategory of *male* that involves more specific parameters such as *over the age of 18*. While all the characteristics of *male* are still true of *man*, additional concepts have been added to the *male* category to specify *man*. The comparison between *man* and *female* still constitutes a mutually exclusive contrast, but the antithesis between them no longer forms a comprehensive list of alternatives. Even though no man is a female, and no female is a man, humans may be neither female nor a man (boys). The parameters added to *male* to get *man* result in a category that is no longer a collectively exhaustive antithesis of *female*. In addition, because every man is a

³⁹ See chapter 7, "Theological Systems and Union with Christ."

male, *male* may serve to denominate accurately the category *man*. This convention is especially normal in contexts in which only females and men are in view. Figure 2 applies these understandings to the relationship between soteriological and ecclesiological applications of union with Christ.

Figure 2 – Soteriological vs. Ecclesiological Application of “In Christ”



While it is true that the ecclesiological application of the larger soteriological category shares all the soteriological import of union with Christ, just as *man* shares all the characteristics of *male*, the ecclesiological application of union with Christ in Paul need not form a collectively exhaustive antithesis to existence outside of Christ, just as *man* does not form a collectively exhaustive alternative to *female*. In addition, it is not more surprising to find the denomination *in Christ* used for a category that clearly only applies to the New Testament believer than it is

to hear *males* applied to a set of men exclusive of boys. This is especially true in light of the fact that by definition no Old Testament believers lived in Paul's day requiring such a clarification.

Paul's teaching on the body of Christ, the headship of Christ, and the importance of new revelation in the context of the doctrine of union with Christ creates a new ecclesiological application for the soteriological truth of this theme. God's work in this regard begins with the introduction of a practicum through the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13) that brings the transcendent unity of believers into a new historical expression unknown to the Old Testament believer, which Paul calls "the church" and "the body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12:27-28, Eph. 1:22-23, Eph. 3:21, 4:4, 12, 16, Col. 1:24).⁴⁰ The historical novelty of this institution is reinforced by Paul's emphasis on the headship of Christ over His body,

⁴⁰ That *church* and its synonym *body of Christ* are not directly equivalent to the category *in Christ* in Paul is indicated by the phraseology he uses in his doxology in Eph. 3:21: "To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." Whether we see a local or instrumental use of *ἐν* in this passage, the parallelism Paul uses indicates that the same understanding is communicated by both prepositions—either "in the church and in Christ Jesus" or "by the church and by Christ Jesus." The translation in the Authorized Version, "in the church by Christ Jesus" misses the parallelism created by the *καὶ* conjunction, although it does avoid the oddity that Paul is praying for God to be glorified by Christ Jesus in the same sense that he prays that God be glorified by the church. That God be glorified by Christ Jesus is not something for which believers need to pray. More likely, the translation of the NASB is preferable, and "in Christ Jesus" is to be taken locally as a reference to the doctrine of union with Christ, which is a major focus of Paul in this epistle. If this is a correct reading of the verse, then it is significant that Paul repeats the preposition *ἐν* in the phrase: *ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ*. Murray J. Harris explains the significance of the repeated preposition: "Sometimes, therefore, the non-use of a second or third prep. in NT Gk. may be theologically significant, indicating that the writer regarded the terms that he placed in one regimen as belonging naturally together or as a unit in concept or reality." "Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament," *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975-8), 3:1178. Where the preposition is repeated in a parallel phrase, some distance exists in the mind of the author between the concepts he is conjoining. In Eph. 3:21, this indicates that Paul could distinguish being "in the church" from being "in Christ Jesus" in some important sense. The passage indicates that the two concepts are not absolutely identical for him.

the church. This is a position He assumed only after His resurrection and ascension (Eph. 1:20-22, 4:8-10). Finally, all this occurs in the midst of an explosion of apostolic special revelation that delineated doctrines hid from past generations—"Christ in you, the hope of glory"—thereby making the understanding of New Testament believers "complete in Christ" in a way the Old Testament believer's never was (Col. 1:24-29).

The study of the antitheses of union with Christ leads to the conclusion that the Old Testament believer must be included in the soteriological blessings of this doctrine if he is to be saved at all. It also leads, however, to the deciphering of an ecclesiological application of the doctrine that was unknown to the Old Testament believer. Before these conclusions can be established firmly, however, the key New Testament passages on union with Christ call for examination: Romans 5, Ephesians 2-3, and Romans 11. Here the conclusions drawing implicit support from the antitheses of union with Christ receive explicit treatment.

CHAPTER 5

THE OLD TESTAMENT BELIEVER IN KEY NEW TESTAMENT UNION WITH CHRIST PASSAGES

The literature focused on the interpretation of Romans 5, Romans 11, and Ephesians 2-3 is extensive. What follows is not another examination of all the specifics of the exegesis of these passages. Instead, in light of the important relationship between these passages and the doctrine of union with Christ, their treatment of the Old Testament believer illuminates the applicability of the doctrine to believers who lived prior to Pentecost. This treatment reinforces the conclusion reached in the former chapter—that the Old Testament believer experienced the soteriological blessings of union with Christ even though he did not participate in a new ecclesiological application of the doctrine communicated by Paul.

Romans 5:12-21

The relevance of Rom. 5:12-21 to the doctrine of union with Christ is well known. Paul establishes the linkage between this passage and the doctrine in his discussion of the importance and nature of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. Verse 22 of that chapter explicates a parallelism between *in Adam* and *in Christ*: “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.”¹ In addition, verse 45 describes the

¹ In regard to the parallelism of 1 Cor. 15:22, Herman Ridderbos argues that the phrase *in Adam* comprehensively elucidates the meaning of *in Christ*: “What really matters, however, is that here ‘in Christ’ is paralleled with ‘in Adam.’ Herewith the

spiritual nature of the resurrected body by calling Christ “the last Adam,” who became a “life-giving spirit,” in comparison to “the first Adam,” who became “a living soul.” Typically, the importance of Rom. 5:12-21 to the doctrine of union with Christ falls under a discussion of “Federal Union” or “Covenantal Union,” which emphasizes the representative role of Christ in behalf of the believer.² The literature demonstrates, however, that one need not choose between the representative and vital benefits related to union with Christ;³ nor is it true that Paul in Romans 5 treats

character of this ‘in’ becomes plain.” *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 60.

² Michael P. V. Barrett sees federal covenant headship as foundational to the doctrine of union with Christ: “That Christ is the federal, covenant or representative Head of His people is the beginning point for any consideration of the believer’s union with Christ.” *Complete In Him: A Guide to Understanding and Enjoying the Gospel* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador-Emerald, 2000), 96. See also J. P. Baker, “Union with Christ,” *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 698; L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (1941; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 448; Charles A. Heurtley, *The Union Between Christ and His People* (London: Chas. J. Thynne, n.d.), 4-6; and Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (1873; reprint, Montville, NJ: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 3:104. John Flavel emphasized the foundational importance of vital union over federal union, but he too recognized the importance of the latter: “The union I here speak of is not a federal union, or a union by covenant only; such a union indeed there is between Christ and believers, but that is consequential to and wholly dependent upon this [vital union].” *Method of Grace: How the Spirit Works* (1680; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 39. Charles Hodge used the federal union of believers in Christ to explain the federal imputation view of original sin, which teaches that men are born sinners because Adam acted as the God-appointed covenantal head of the human race. According to this view, God imputed the sin of Adam to his progeny in much the same way the righteousness of Christ is imputed to His. Hodge believed the doctrine was necessary to counter views that misinterpreted imputation of Christ’s righteousness as impartation. See Appendix B, “Impartation Versus Imputation and Union with Christ.” For the views of Hodge on the doctrine of original sin in Romans 5, see *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (1886; reprint, Eerdmans, 1994), 142-191.

³ Although Demarest distinguishes between the view of “Reformed Covenant Theologians” as “A Covenantal Union” and the view of “Many Evangelicals” (including himself) as “An Experiential Union,” he goes on to describe this experiential view as “corporate,” “objective,” and “legal,” all characteristics taught by the Reformed view. *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 319, 323-325.

only representative benefits. As with 1 Cor. 15:22, Paul includes vital aspects of the doctrine in his discussion in the passage under consideration here. In 1 Corinthians 15, a positive vital result affects the believer through union with Christ (the resurrection of the body) just as a negative vital result affects the sinner through union with Adam (the death that necessitates resurrection). Those in Christ live; those merely in Adam do not. Paul's focus in Romans 5 differs slightly because a future vital result affecting the body in the grave is not in view, but rather a present vital result called "the justification of life" (v. 18). Paul's discussion of baptism into Christ in Romans 6 indicates that this new life comes to the believer long before his bodily resurrection (v. 11).⁴

Romans 5 teaches that existence in Christ differs from existence in Adam in important ways, but Paul does not start his discussion with this contrast. Instead, Paul begins with a commonality between Christ and Adam as indicated by his statement in verse 14: "Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come."⁵ The correspondence between Adam and Christ in this passage emphasizes the universal effect of each—the one affects the many (vv. 15, 18-19).⁶ This universalism is one of the important

⁴ Romans 6 is important for a contextual understanding of the import of Paul's discussion in Romans 5 to the doctrine of union with Christ. It is also critical to an understanding of the relationship of baptism to union with Christ. For this reason, treatment of Romans 6 is reserved for chapter 6, "The Baptism of the Holy Spirit and Union with Christ."

⁵ Augustus H. Strong lists two Old Testament references that are similarly related to the correspondence between Adam and Christ because they refer to the fatherhood of the Messiah (Isa. 9:6, 53:10). *Systematic Theology* (1907; reprint, Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, n.d.), 797.

⁶ Note that Paul's style in this passage likely includes an anacoluthon in verse 12. Having introduced the protasis of a comparison with ὡσπερ, Paul never grammatically completes the comparison he introduced. Nevertheless, Paul's comparison between the universal effect of Adam and Christ is clear from the overall context. Against

themes of the book of Romans.⁷ Although it is true that Romans 5 is a critical passage for systematic theology's study of original sin, Paul actually invokes the union with Christ theme to advocate the universality of salvation in Jesus Christ. Just as condemnation for sin is universal for all those who are in Adam,⁸ so also justification for obedience is universal for all those who are in Jesus Christ (vv. 16, 19). His obedience alone

understanding the καὶ οὕτως phrase in verse 12 as the apodosis, see Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 318-319.

⁷ Walter B. Russell discusses four principles of rhetorical analysis in "Rhetorical Analysis of the Book of Galatians, Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (1993): 343. The second of these involves defining the rhetorical situation or problem. When applied to Romans, this principle points to the fact that Paul wrote Romans just prior to venturing to Jerusalem with the offering he had collected from his Gentile churches (Rom. 15:25-29). His request for prayer indicates that all was not well between Jew and Gentile in the early church. Rome was to the Gentile what Jerusalem was to the Jew. As Paul writes Romans, the relationship between Jew and Gentile in the church concerned him. This concern appears in the thesis statement of the book ("to the Jew first, and also to the Greek," Rom. 1:16), and it constitutes a major emphasis throughout the entire epistle (Rom. 1:20 w. 2:1, 3:19, 22-23, 29-30, 4:9-12, 16-18, 5:12-14, 8:5-8, 14, 19, 29, 9:24-33, 10:18-21, 11:13, 11:17-24, 32, 12:2, 4, 13:1-7, 15:5-13, 16:26).

⁸ Paul's understanding of the role of Adam in man's sin was prepared undoubtedly in part by his Jewish background. Jewish tradition also emphasized universalism, although with embellishments not found in Paul. W. D. Davies describes the Jewish view of Adam's universalism: "It was in order to emphasize that in Adam all people were one that such strange stories were circulated as to the formation of Adam's body. According to a tradition going back to R. Meir (c. 150), God made Adam out of dust gathered from all over the earth. . . . Later speculations claimed that his head was formed from the earth of the Holy Land, the trunk of his body from Babylonian soil and his various members from the soil of different countries. . . . In the deepest sense 'there was neither Jew nor Greek'. . . . In addition to all this of course Adam was bisexual, so that in him there was neither male nor female. . . . How naïvely physical was all this speculation is seen from the fact that different individuals were conceived as being derived from or attached to different parts of Adam's body; one might belong to his hair, another to his ear, another to his nose, they literally formed different members of his body. There was speculation also on the meaning of Adam's name; the latter was found to suggest universality or the unity of all mankind in him. We read in 2 Enoch 30. 13: 'And I appointed him a name from the four component parts, from East, West, South and from North.' A stood for Ἀνατολή, D for Δύσις, A for Ἄρκτος, and M for Μεσημβρία. . . . Adam, then, stands for the real unity of mankind in virtue of his creation." *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 53-55.

provides salvation for the Jew and the Gentile. As noted in the previous chapter with *in the flesh*, *in the world*, and *under the Law*, *in Adam* constitutes a mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive category with *in Christ* in light of the universal emphasis of Paul's teaching in Romans 5.

The interpreter must find a place for the Old Testament believer in this set of categories. While it may be argued that Paul does not have the Old Testament believer in view in some union with Christ passages, this cannot be said about Romans 5.⁹ That the category *in Adam* reaches backward to the Old Testament era is obvious. Paul explicitly asserts that "death reigned from Adam until Moses" (Rom. 5:14). Then came the Law, which imputed sin to those in Adam in a new way but did not account for the universality of death. The cause of universal death can be found only in Adam irrespective of one's relationship to the Law (5:13). These references to existence during the Old Testament era clearly indicate that Paul does not dichotomize between Old Testament and New Testament as he defines existence in Adam. This existence is uncompromisingly universal—the one affects the many. Therefore, in light of the inclusion of Old Testament sinners within the scope of *in Adam*, and in light of the correspondence between *in Adam* and *in Christ*

⁹ R. David Rightmire attempts to exempt the Old Testament believer from the *in Christ* category in Romans 5: "Just as humankind is 'in Adam,' and Israel is God's son (or the Servant of Yahweh), so the New Israel is 'in Christ.' Those who believe in Christ and are baptized into him are a part of the new humanity; they are incorporated into the corporate personality of Christ." "Union with Christ," *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 791. In so doing, however, Rightmire has lost the universal correspondence that is the baseline of Paul's comparison between Adam and Christ (the one affects the many), and he consequently has added a third category to Paul's discussion, *God's son* or *the Servant of Yahweh*, which has no basis in Romans 5. Adding a category requires the assumption that Paul was not at all focused on the Old Testament era in this passage, yet the text shows clearly that he was.

on the point of universality, the interpreter must conclude that the Old Testament believer is included within the scope of Paul's doctrine of *in Christ*.¹⁰

Romans 11:1-36

Romans 11 is not normally referred to as a key passage for the doctrine of union with Christ. Rather, the chapter stands at the center of the coherence debate's discussion of the future of the nation of Israel.¹¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, however, references this passage under a section entitled "Organic Union" in his discussion of five things accomplished by the baptism of the Holy Spirit.¹² In addition, Augustus Strong contemplates a parallel between John 15 and Romans 11 in his discussion of union with Christ as illustrated "from the union between the vine and its branches." In this regard, Strong notes the importance of the *root* (ρίζα)

¹⁰ Note that one need not conclude that unbelievers are included within the scope of Paul's *in Christ* (see the phrase, "those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness" in v. 17). One brief comment from Charles Hodge is a sufficient answer to the Barthian universalistic interpretation of this passage: "Nothing is more familiar to the readers of the Scriptures than that such universal terms are to be limited by the nature of the subject or the context" (*Romans*, 171). For a detailed response to the views of Barth, see John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 1:384-390.

¹¹ The central question in this regard concerns what meaning the phrase *and so all Israel will be saved* has in Rom. 11:26. For the covenant theologian, this is a reference to the church, and national Israel has no future in the plan of God as His chosen people. See O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000), 167-192. The dispensational understanding sees a future for national Israel in the plan of God as His chosen people. See J. Lanier Burns, "The Future of Ethnic Israel in Romans 11," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 188-229; and Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 354-361. The relationship between issues related to the coherence debate and the doctrine of union with Christ is discussed in chapter 7, "Theological Systems and Union with Christ," and chapter 8, "Union with Christ and the Fulfillment of the New Covenant."

¹² *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 6:152.

concept found in Rom. 11:14 to Paul's union idea by citing Col. 2:6, 7: "Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted (ῥιζόω) and now being built up in Him and established in our faith."¹³ Strong quotes H. W. Warren, who also uses Romans 11 as a description of union with Christ.

In nature a thorn grafted on a pear tree bears only thorn. There is not pear-life enough to compel change of its nature. But a wild olive, typical of depraved nature, grafted on a good olive tree finds, contrary to nature, that there is force enough in the growing stock to change the nature of the wild scion.¹⁴

Paul emphasizes the *root* concept in Rom. 11:16-24, where he describes the Gentile grafts attached to the olive tree as "supported" or "borne" (βαστάζω) by the root. This linkage refers to more than an external structure, however, for the graft is a partaker (συγκοινωνός) "of the root and the fatness of the olive tree" (v. 17). This connection means that "since the root is holy, the branches are too" in the same sense that the first-fruit loaf offering consecrated the rest of the baking material of the Israelite household (v. 16).¹⁵

Clearly, the relationship between root and branch in Romans 11 bears many similarities to the vital union with Christ relationship between vine and branch in John 15, but commentators normally do not identify the root of Romans 11 as Christ. They see instead a reference to

¹³ Strong, 796.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ C. E. B. Cranfield comments on the importance of the firstfruit loaf: "The Old Testament nowhere says that this offering hallows the rest of the dough, but a comparison of Lev 19.23-25, according to which the fruits of the trees are to be regarded as 'uncircumcised' until an offering has been made to God from them, suggests that it would be quite natural for the Jew to think of the offering of the firstfruit cake as purifying the rest of his dough." *Romans: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 277.

the Jewish patriarchs or Abraham.¹⁶ Moo summarizes the reasons for seeing the patriarchs as the root of Rom. 11:16: (1) the imagery of verses 17-18 indicates that the natural branches are the Jews; (2) Paul's reference to the fathers in verse 28 designates the patriarchs as the root; and (3) Jewish texts refer to Abraham and the patriarchs as the root of Israel.¹⁷

Against this tide of interpretation, H. L. Ellison interprets the root, along with Chafer, Strong, and Warren, as a reference to Christ. Ellison denies that verse 28 is determinative evidence for a patriarchal interpretation of *root*, because "the readers must have been able to understand Paul without a clairvoyance that would show them what Paul was going to say."¹⁸ The reference to the patriarchs in verse 28 simply comes too late in Paul's presentation to define *root* adequately for the reader. In addition, note that verse 28 speaks of an important connection still existing between the patriarchs and unbelieving Jews, whereas Paul makes clear throughout the chapter that there is no connection between the root and the broken branches short of a re-grafting procedure (vv. 17, 19-22). The connection to the patriarchs makes the unbelieving Jews "beloved" from the standpoint of election, but in relationship to the

¹⁶ See C. E. B. Cranfield, 277; William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, The International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), 326-327; Moo, 699; Hodge, 366-367; Murray, 2:85; and F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (1963; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 216-217.

¹⁷ Moo, 699.

¹⁸ *The Mystery of Israel: An Exposition of Romans 9-11* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 86. J. Lanier Burns agrees that *root* probably does not refer to the patriarchs, although he concludes that the metaphor refers to "the concept of covenant" rather than Christ (p. 205).

gospel they are enemies (v. 28).¹⁹ Because the severity of God has separated the root from the branches (v. 22), these branches now have no part in the root in much the same way that they are enemies of the gospel. There is clearly no linkage remaining between the root and the broken branches of the unbelieving Jew that characterizes that Jew as “beloved.” They are “beloved” because of a linkage unrelated to the root. The sustained connection is with Abraham, not with the root. Therefore, it is unlikely that the root of Romans 11 refers to the patriarchs.

In addition to the difficulties related to the use of verse 28 for defining *root*, the vital relationship communicated by the phrase “partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree” (v. 17) is difficult to explain in terms of the relationship between the patriarchs and the Gentile believer. This comment follows and explicates the assertions of verse 16—that holiness is communicated from the firstfruit loaf to the lump of dough and from the root to the branches. The key to this communication of holiness is union. Those who see the patriarchs as the root claim that the holiness communicated is external and ecclesiological rather than internal and soteriological.²⁰ But this interpretation neglects the

¹⁹ Note that Paul never hesitates to call unbelieving Jews the sons of Abraham. See Rom. 4:16, where he describes two sets of Abrahamic descendants: “those who are of the Law” and “those who are of the faith of Abraham.” Abraham is the father of all the faithful, and he is the father of all the Jews. Both the soteriological and the ecclesiological implications of his fatherhood are critical to the future plan of God. Gentile unbelievers are not grafted and not sons of Abraham. Jewish unbelievers are not grafted, but still sons of Abraham. Therefore, being grafted into the root is not an exact equivalence to being a descendant of Abraham.

²⁰ Moo illustrates: “Their [the patriarchs] ‘holiness’ consists in their having been set apart by God for this salvation-historical role. Moreover, the word ‘holy’ (*hagios*) is taken from OT sacrificial language. The word will not, then, have the technical sense of ‘set apart by God for salvation’ that it usually has in Paul but will connote a being ‘set apart’ by God for special attention in a more general way. Paul does not here assert the

thrust of the paragraph that verse 16 completes (vv. 11-15). In this context Paul does not deal with ecclesiological consecration, but rather soteriological salvation. The issues in play are transgression versus salvation (v. 11-12), magnifying Paul's gospel ministry so as to save the lost (vv. 13-14), and rejection versus reconciliation, acceptance, and life from the dead (v. 15). There is simply no way Paul could end this paragraph referring to the transference of holiness without communicating an important soteriological truth, unless he included a point of clarification separating v. 16 from what has come before. That clarification is lacking. Instead, Paul teaches that connection to the root makes a man holy because it saves his soul and gives him life from the dead. No patriarch could do this.²¹

salvation of every Israelite but the continuing 'special' identity of the people of Israel in the eyes of the Lord" (pp. 700-701).

²¹ Note that Paul's olive tree metaphor does not seem to fit a soteriology that includes the eternal security of the believer (which he so emphatically asserts in Rom. 8:28-39) for two reasons. First, Paul describes unbelieving Jews as originally connected to the root (v. 17), and secondly he warns Gentile believers who are now connected to the root that continuance of faith is necessary in order to stay connected (vv. 20-22). Viewing the root as the patriarchs ultimately serves to alleviate neither of these difficulties, however, because Paul clearly teaches that connection to the root involves salvation by faith (vv. 15, 20, 23). Douglas Moo's insight, that "there is clearly an element of phenomenology in the metaphor that Paul uses throughout these verses" (p. 707), helps to clarify the first of these dilemmas. No metaphor corresponds in every detail with the truth the author desires to represent by it. Consequently, the interpreter must guard against pressing the metaphor to an extent that makes it teach things unintended by the author. We need not speculate, for instance, what the leaves on the branches might be or what the difference between green and black olives is in order to understand Paul's meaning in Romans 11. The point of correspondence that Paul uses between unbelieving Jews and broken branches is that unbelieving Jews are severed from the blessings of salvation in the same way broken branches are severed from a tree. The original connection aspect of the metaphor illustrates only that there is a historical connection between the unbelief of the Jews and the greater opportunity for the Gentiles to believe (v. 11, 15, 25). The metaphor says that Gentiles are grafted in where space has been opened up by the unbelief of the Jews; so one historical consequence of Jewish unbelief was that the gospel bore greater fruit among the Gentiles. Paul does not use the metaphor to indicate that the unbelieving Jews had at one time believed; nor does he use it to claim that no Gentile prior to the time of the fullness of

As to the assertion that Paul was following the Jewish conventions of his day by using *root* to refer to the patriarchs, note that both the Old Testament and Jewish Apocrypha referred to Israel as the vine, but Christ still claimed the title for Himself (Ps. 80:8, 14, Jer. 2:21, 6:9, 8:13, Ezek. 15, 19:10, Hos. 10:1, 2 Esdras 5:23). As the Servant Songs of Isaiah demonstrate,²² there is a strong identity between the Messiah and Israel in the figures of Old Testament prophecy. Christ capitalized on this fact in John 15. In the same way, Paul undoubtedly knew enough Old Testament theology to have used the *root* (שֹׁרֶשׁ) metaphor as a reference to Christ (Isa. 11:10, 27:6, 37:31, 53:2). Therefore, there is no historical necessity precluding Paul from using the grafting metaphor as a picture of union with Christ. Furthermore, seeing Christ in the latter part of verse 16 more adequately accounts for the parallelism of *root* with the firstfruit loaf.²³ Old Testament offerings are generally typical of the sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 9:11-14), and the Savior used a bread metaphor of Himself in much the same way He used the vine metaphor in John 15 (John 6:48). Though the firstfruit loaf and root of Rom. 11:16 are certainly Pauline variations of these themes, these parallels to the teachings of Christ are nonetheless striking. It is more difficult to imagine Paul's using the firstfruit loaf to typify the patriarchs.

the Gentiles was saved (Luke 11:31-32). In regard to the second issue raised by the warnings of verses 20-22, the Bible is clear that there are two kinds of faith, one that saves and one that does not (John 8:31-47; James 2:14-20). Paul's metaphor does not inhibit him from warning believing Gentiles of the importance of having the right kind of faith, the faith that continues, works, and saves.

²² Isa. 42:1-7; 49:1-9; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12; 61:1-3.

²³ F. F. Bruce points out that the same word Paul uses to identify the loaf (ἀπαρχή) is used by the apostle as a reference to Christ in 1 Cor. 15:23, "Christ the first fruits" (p. 217), although in this passage the firstfruit loaf is not in view.

In addition to these reasons for seeing Christ as the firstfruit loaf and root of Rom. 11:16, Paul's use of the Old Testament at the end of the chapter to describe the coming consummation of God's plan for His people also indicates that the olive tree is a metaphor for union with Christ. Consummation is a theme closely connected to the work of Christ in Pauline theology (Rom. 8:28-32, 1 Cor. 3:21-23, 8:6, 15:27-28, Eph. 1:10-11, 4:10, Phil. 3:21, Col. 1:20). In Romans 11 Paul's description of the end of the time he calls the "fullness of the Gentiles" expresses this consummation theme in verse 25. In the next two verses, Paul makes his only explicit reference to Christ in the chapter by quoting Isa. 59:20-21,²⁴ a passage that speaks of the Messiah as the Spirit-endowed Redeemer.²⁵ This passage also speaks of the Messiah as a covenant father, whose blessings extend to all His offspring. The father-descendant covenant relationship closely mirrors Paul's doctrine of union with Christ,²⁶ because it is the crux of the universalistic correspondence between Christ and Adam in Romans 5. Just as Adam affects all in him because he is their covenantal father, so also Christ affects all in Him because He is their covenantal father. Paul's reference to the covenantal

²⁴ Paul refers to "God" twelve times (vv. 1, 2 [2], 8, 21, 22 [2], 23, 29, 30, 32, 33) and "Lord" twice (vv. 3, 34) in the chapter. Paul's quotation from the Old Testament includes a phrase from either Isa. 27:9 or Jer. 31:34, "when I take away their sins."

²⁵ For evidence that Paul's reading of Isa. 59:20-21 agreed with contemporary Jewish interpretations, which applied the passage to the Messiah, see Sanday and Headlam, 336-337.

²⁶ John Murray is correct when he notes the emphasis Paul puts on the spiritual nature of this covenantal relationship: "It is worthy of note that although Paul distinguishes between Israel and Israel, seed and seed, children and children (c. 9:6-13) he does not make this discrimination in terms of 'covenant' so as to distinguish between those who are in the covenant in a broader sense and those who are actual partakers of its grace" (2:100).

fatherhood of Christ from Isa. 59:20-21 not only agrees with the Christocentric consummation theme elsewhere in Paul, but also defines the teleology of the olive tree. To be connected to the olive tree is to be covenanted with Christ. Therefore, the olive tree metaphor pictures redeeming covenantal union with Christ.

Understood this way, Romans 11 sheds additional light on the relationship between the Old Testament believer and union with Christ. As already noted, Romans 11 and John 15 exhibit many similarities. They differ, however, to the degree that Roman 11 includes Paul's overarching universalistic purpose for the book as a whole. Christ never discusses in John 15 the ethnicity of the branches connected to the vine. In Romans 11, however, the natural branches are clearly distinguishable from the unnatural branches that have been grafted in. Although this specificity may or may not have important implications for the future of Israel,²⁷ it unquestionably aids the interpreter in understanding the relationship of the Old Testament believer to the all-important root of the chapter. The answer to the question comes in verse 5, where Paul clearly asserts: "In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice." The chosen remnant of Old Testament Israel (vv. 2-7) clearly enjoyed union with the root "in the same way" that the New Testament remnant enjoys union with the root. For this reason, the grafted Gentile branches do not displace all

²⁷ J. Lanier Burns believes that the distinction is important to the coherence debate: "The latter are carefully distinguished as wild and natural branches. The two types are never mixed or confused. They are respectively removed, added, or restored. This point can hardly be overemphasized, because the characteristics of one cannot be ascribed to the other without destroying the argument of the metaphor (vv. 26-29)" (p. 206).

of the branches, but rather only “some” of them (v. 17). Understood as a chapter important to union with Christ, Romans 11 teaches that the Old Testament believer, at least those who may be described as Israel’s remnant, did experience a spiritually vital connection to the root, Jesus Christ.²⁸

Ephesians 2:11-3:13

Union with Christ is a major emphasis of the epistle to the Ephesians. At least thirty-two occurrences of *you in Christ* and four occurrences of *Christ in you* overspread these six chapters. The section under consideration here is not an exception. A reference to the vital characteristic of union with Christ precedes the section in verse 10: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,” and the parallelism of *in the Lord* and *in the Spirit* at the end of chapter 2 illustrates the spiritual nature of union with Christ (vv. 21-22). In Eph. 2:11-3:13 Paul applies the doctrine of union with Christ to his Gentile readers in terms of both soteriological and ecclesiological blessings. He does so by delineating the importance of three contrasts—then versus now, far versus near, and mystery versus revelation—each touching on the

²⁸ Note also that the passage does describe an ecclesiological distinction between the salvation of *all Israel* and the grafting period described as *the fullness of the Gentiles*. The salvation of *all Israel* comes after this period (v. 25). In addition, verse 28 further describes *all Israel* as both “enemies of the gospel” and “from the standpoint of election beloved for the sake of the fathers.” No Gentile believer is an enemy of the gospel; nor was he ever beloved for the sake of the fathers prior to trusting Christ. Therefore, *all Israel* in verse 26 describes a category exclusive of Gentile believers and cannot be a reference to the church. “And so all Israel shall be saved” is the same promise that is “guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law [the unbelieving Jew], but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham [the believing Jew and Gentile], who is the father of us all” (Rom. 4:16). After the second coming of Yahweh-Christ, every living Israelite (“those who are of the Law”) will be converted (Zech. 12:10).

relevance of both the soteriology and the ecclesiology of union with Christ for the Old Testament believer.

Soteriological and Ecclesiological Structures

A correct understanding of Eph. 2:11-3:13 must organize the unity and diversity of Paul's soteriological and ecclesiological themes in this passage. Misinterpretation results from an incorrect understanding of the relationship of these themes under the doctrine of union with Christ. Marcus Barth, for instance, fails to maintain the soteriological-ecclesiological unity of the passage when he advocates an ecumenical relationship between the commonwealth of Israel and the Christian church on the grounds of Paul's ecclesiological teachings in Eph. 2:14-18. For Barth this relationship need not involve a soteriological conversion of the Jew to Christ.²⁹ Barth's misinterpretation of Ephesians 2 depends on a bifurcation of Paul's ecclesiology from Paul's soteriology. It cites the ecclesiology as authoritative while leaving the soteriology

²⁹ "Conversion and Conversation: Israel and the Church in Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians," *Interpretation* 17 (1963): 3-24. Barth introduces his view by noting the impact of sociology on recent interpretations of the doctrine of union with Christ: "In our sociologically-oriented century, more often than in the idealist and individualist past century, it may be said that to believe and to live in Christ means for Paul not only (perhaps not even primarily) that a change would take place in the soul of the individual. In our time the communal, relational, corporate nature of conversion, repentance, service, witness, and so forth, is widely emphasized" (p. 7). He then goes on to apply this completely ecclesiastical-social view of union with Christ to the relationship between Judaism and Christianity: "But one thing may be overlooked even by some of the most ardent promoters of the common life of the body of Christ. This is the importance of the church's common life with Israel and the Christians' common life with the Jews" (pp. 7-8); "What Paul writes (in Eph. 2:14-18) about the peace between those far and those near, and about the common access of Jew and Gentile to God, concerns the Christians' relationship to the actual Israel, not to an idealized Israel. When Paul speaks of the 'one new man' created by God in Christ (Eph. 2:15), he thinks of both Jews and Gentiles just as they are" (p. 9). Barth recognizes that his interpretation of Eph. 2:14-18 conflicts with Paul's teaching in Rom. 9:6, but he claims that Paul conflicts with himself because he was in a process of development (p. 14).

behind. A second misunderstanding of the passage results from a failure to discern the diversity between Paul's soteriological and ecclesiological themes in Ephesians 2-3. Lewis Sperry Chafer, for instance, advocates a new soteriology for the church age in addition to a new ecclesiology because he fails to distinguish between these themes as they are related to the doctrine of union with Christ.³⁰

Balance between the unity and diversity of Paul's soteriological and ecclesiological themes in Ephesians 2 protects from the errors of both ecumenism and another gospel.³¹ Paul's basic theme in this chapter is that the Ephesian Gentiles have been converted to a new position in Christ. This position includes soteriological and ecclesiological import.³²

³⁰ Chafer teaches in this regard: "Therefore, because it is to the glory of His grace, each individual in this company, whether Jew or Gentile, is called and saved upon that distinct principle of selection—the sovereign grace of God, apart from all human merit. As a basis for this exercise of sovereign grace apart from human merit, the most startling divine decree was announced, startling, indeed, because never before heard of in the world, and because it is so contrary to the hitherto divinely sanctioned exaltation of Israel over the Gentiles. That decree declares that *now* there is 'no difference' between Jew and Gentile: they are all under sin (Rom. 3:9) [emphasis mine]. So, again, there is 'no difference' between Jew and Gentile, 'for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him' (Rom. 10:12). There was little for the Gentile to unlearn in connection with this new-age purpose and plan of salvation. He had no ground for hope before, and the gospel of salvation by grace became to him as life from the dead. But the Jew stumbled over the way of salvation through the cross, and only a few, though their national preference is set aside for this age (Rom. 11:1-36), have been able to abandon their assumed national standing with God and to accept the exceeding grace of God in Christ" (4:73-74).

³¹ Chafer would have denied teaching "another gospel" in the sense condemned by Paul in Gal. 1:6-9, and it is not the intent here to charge him with such an error. It seem unavoidable, however, in the light of some of the statements made by the theologian as he wrestled with the issues of the coherence debate, that his views led him to a "one gospel at a time" conclusion. For Chafer, the saving grace of the New Testament is not the same gospel as the saving national standing of the Old Testament.

³² Carl B. Hoch, Jr. sees three structures in Paul's *new man* theology. "The New Man of Ephesians 2," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 117-119. The first he calls *anthropological*: "The first structure is the anthropological structure. It is best seen in the Adam-Christ contrast of Romans 5:12-21. . . . This

What the new position means from a soteriological point of view is obvious from Paul's discussion in Eph. 2:1-10. Here we see the soteriological breadth of union with Christ in Paul's description of this new standing as the absolute antithesis of the spiritually lost condition. The Ephesians had been "dead in trespasses and sins" (v. 1), walking under the domain of this world (v. 2), living "in the lusts of the flesh" (v. 3), and consequently children of wrath (v.3). Paul confesses that his own people also existed in this condition prior to personal conversion, in spite of their ethnic heritage as Jews (v. 3). This is the unregenerate, unreconciled, and unjustified condition of all men outside of Christ. Only after undergoing "the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness . . . in Christ Jesus" does any man come to experience the blessings of salvation, whether he is Jew or Gentile.

Beginning in verse 11, however, Paul's description of the transfer of Ephesian believers from their lost condition to a new position in Christ becomes more complex. The apostle introduces ecclesiological themes that intermingle with the foundational soteriological truths of the previous section. More specifically, four ecclesiological categories in verses 11-22 are the product of two separate ethnicities and two separate periods of history: (1) Gentiles who lived prior to the destruction of the

change of status is depicted by the verb crucified in Romans 6:6" (p. 117). The second he calls *ecclesiological*: "This structure is in view in Ephesians 2:15. The new man here is the unity between Jew and Gentile through Christ" (p. 117). The third structure he calls *ethical*: "The third structure of the new man is the ethical structure. Whereas the anthropological and ecclesiological structures are relational, the ethical structure is functional" (p. 119). The interpretation of Ephesians 2 involves the "relational" structures of Paul's theology mentioned by Hoch. This study's category *soteriological* corresponds with Hoch's *anthropological*. Although the "new man" in Eph. 2:15 refers to an ecclesiological structure, the chapter is also replete with soteriological themes.

dividing wall (v. 14),³³ (2) Gentiles who lived after the destruction of the dividing wall, (3) Jews who lived prior to the destruction of the dividing wall, and (4) Jews who lived after the destruction of the dividing wall.³⁴ Adding to the complexity, these ecclesiae contain individuals to whom the soteriological realities of the previous section do not apply. Consequently, the product of the soteriology and ecclesiology of Eph. 2:11-22 equals the potential for eight separate ecclesiological categories as illustrated by Table 3.

³³ Paul's reference to the dividing wall is likely a use of the inner wall of the Temple complex bordering the Chel (חֵל) as an illustration of the ecclesiological importance of the death of Christ. The structure separated the Court of the Gentiles from the three inner courts of the temple, which were accessible to Jews alone. Alfred Edersheim describes the pathway to this inner wall: "Within a short distance, in the court, a marble screen 4½ feet high, and beautifully ornamented, bore Greek and Latin inscriptions, warning Gentiles not to proceed, on pain of death. . . . Beyond this enclosure a flight of fourteen steps, each 9 inches high, led up to a terrace 15 feet broad, called the 'Chel,' which bounded the inner wall of the Temple." *The Temple: Its Ministries and Services* (1874; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 23. The reader can capture some of the passion that Paul must have felt as he penned verse 14 when he remembers that Paul wrote this verse while undergoing an incarceration that began years prior with the accusation that he had brought Trophimus, a Gentile, beyond this dividing wall (Acts 21:28). This interpretation of the breaking down of the dividing wall also fits well with the temple-remodeling metaphor Paul employs at the end of the chapter.

³⁴ This is not to overlook the fact that the church forms a *tertium quid* after the destruction of the dividing wall, what Paul calls "one new man" (v. 15). Ernest Best makes this observation: "There are Jews and there are Gentiles; but the Jews that become Christians lose their Jewishness and are not Jewish Christians, and the Gentiles that become Christians lose their Gentileness and are not Gentile Christians; both are simply Christians—a third and new type of man distinct from the old twofold classification of Jew and Gentile. There are now three races of men, Jews, Gentiles, and Christians." *One Body in Christ: A Study in the Relationship of the Church to Christ in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul* (London: SPCK, 1955), 154. However, Best seems to overemphasize the distance of the former "Jewishness" and "Gentileness" in the church of Christ. He would not, for instance, claim that Christian men lose their "maleness" and Christian women their "femaleness" in the church, yet Gal. 3:28 teaches that there is "neither male nor female" in the same sense that there is "neither Jew nor Greek." For the purposes of this study, distinguishing New Testament Jewish believers from New Testament Gentile believers simply helps to interpret the passage. Furthermore, it is an organizational scheme Paul himself used in Romans 11 as noted earlier (see n. 28).

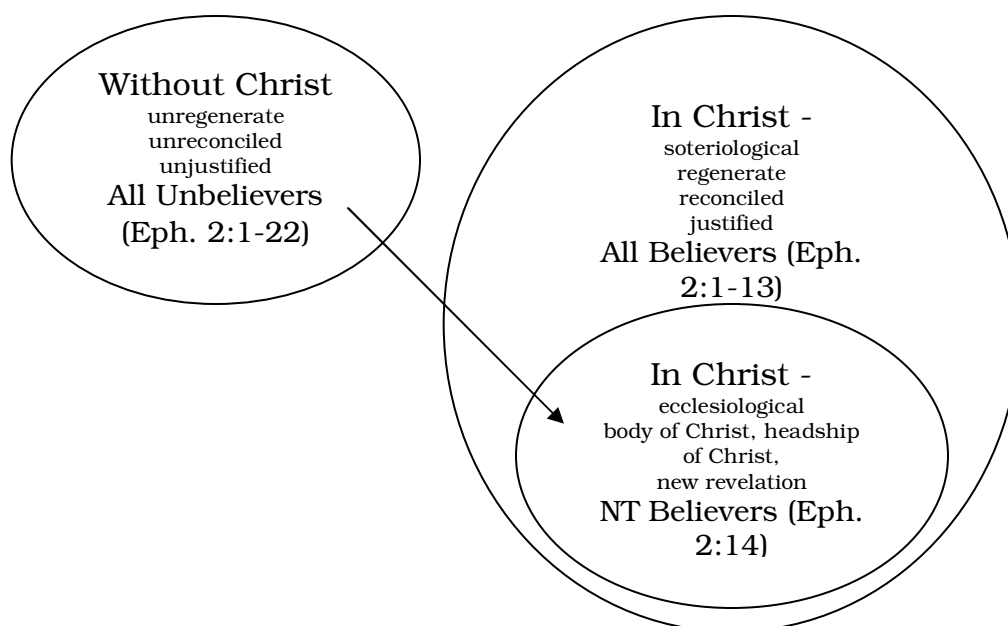
Table 3 – Potential Categories of Ecclesiology in Ephesians 2

		Soteriology	
		Believer	Unbeliever
Ecclesiology	Old Testament Gentile	OTG-B	OTG-U
	New Testament Gentile	NTG-B	NTG-U
	Old Testament Jew	OTJ-B	OTJ-U
	New Testament Jew	NTJ-B	NTJ-U

The pattern Paul uses as he weaves through these categories is a familiar one. After having begun with a baseline soteriological understanding of the doctrine of union with Christ (2:1-13), Paul adds an ecclesiological parameter—the breaking down of the dividing wall in the death of Christ (2:14)—which more narrowly applies union with Christ in a historically and ethnically specific way. In so doing, he teaches not only that conversion has transitioned the Ephesian believers to a new soteriological state in Christ, but also that conversion has transitioned them to a new ecclesiological state in Christ. The ecclesiological state is not an exact replica of the soteriological state, but rather a subset of it.³⁵ Members of both states possess the soteriological antitheses to life outside of Christ, but members of the ecclesiological state further conform to specific historical and ethnic parameters. Figure 3 illustrates these two related aspects of the transference of the Ephesian believers into Christ.

³⁵ See chapter 4, “The Old Testament Believer and Antitheses of Union with Christ,” for the analogy involving the categories *female*, *male*, and *man* (pp. 135-137). Just as *man* is a subset of *male*, so ecclesiology in Christ is a subset of soteriology in Christ, one that involves parameters that give the subset a greater level of specificity.

Figure 3 – The Soteriological and Ecclesiological Transference of Ephesian Believers into Christ



Ephesians 2 leaves little doubt about the soteriological and ecclesiological standing of the New Testament believer, Jew or Gentile, in union with Christ. The passage is less explicit, however, about the sense in which Paul understands the relationship of the Old Testament believer to union with Christ. To answer this question, the interpreter must examine further the place occupied by the Old Testament believer in the three major contrasts Paul employs in the chapter. His argument uses these contrasts to form a progression that brings the reader from the soteriological emphasis of the earlier part of the chapter to an ecclesiological emphasis in the latter part of the chapter. Both themes are critical to Paul's doctrine of union with Christ.

Then Versus Now

Paul begins this section (2:11-12) by continuing the *then versus now* contrast he used in the previous section (2:1-10) to describe the

salvation of the Ephesian believers. Verse 11 repeats a marker for this contrast, “formerly” (ποτέ), which Paul used twice in the previous section to describe the lost condition of all sinners apart from Christ (vv. 2, 3). After a parenthetical section at the end of verse 11, which further describes his addressees, Paul finishes his thought in verse 12 with the same soteriological look at the past: “that you were at that time (τῷ καιρῷ ἐκεῖνῳ) separate from Christ (χωρὶς Χριστοῦ).”³⁶ This phrase is the first of a list of five descriptions of the former soteriological state of the Ephesian believers. The last two of these, “having no hope”³⁷ and “without God in the world” (see v. 2), clearly function as descriptions of the soteriological condition of all the lost, Jew or Gentile (Jer. 2:25-28, 18:11-12).

The other pair of these five descriptions appears to communicate an ecclesiological sense, however. The parenthetical phrase of verse 11 introduces the ecclesiological theme, where Paul distinguishes the Ephesian believers as “Gentiles in the flesh” because they were not circumcised.³⁸ The phrase he uses at the end of the verse *performed in the flesh*

³⁶ Not only does the context support a soteriological interpretation of this phrase, but also the lack of the article prior to Χριστοῦ indicates that Paul’s focus is on a personal Savior rather than a national Messiah. Brooke Foss Westcott notes in this regard: “*Apart from, without Christ*, not as v. 13 τοῦ χριστοῦ. The thought is of the personal relationship now recognized and not of the national hope.” *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 35.

³⁷ H. C. G. Moule renders the phrase, “conscious of no hope,” and he makes an interesting comment about the subjective sense that ἐλπίδα μὴ ἔχοντες communicates: “Μὴ, not οὐ, indicates here not only fact but consciousness. Not only was there actually no bright future for them, in their path of condemnation and sin; they *felt* hopeless.” *Ephesian Studies* (1937; reprint, Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, n.d.), 86. Paul is not merely indicating that the Gentile believers did not have a Jewish eschatology; he is rather describing the condition of their hearts apart from Christ.

³⁸ Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Ephesians: The Glory of the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 41.

by human hands contrasts Paul's discussion in Col. 2:11 and indicates that the ecclesiological import of the physical ceremony is clearly in view here.³⁹ But because this section of verse 11 is parenthetical, its completion signals a return to soteriological issues at the start of verse 12. The parenthetical portion of verse 11 introduces an ecclesiological theme that Paul moves toward but does not completely reach until after the additional soteriological assertions of verses 12-13. Understood this way, Paul uses the phrases *excluded from the commonwealth of Israel* and *strangers to the covenants of promise* to describe further the soteriological desperation of Gentiles without Christ rather than the ecclesiological separation of Gentiles from Israel.

The second of these phrases more readily resembles a soteriological theme than does the first. The issue is whether Paul uses this phrase to teach that the Ephesians had been "strangers from the covenants of promise" because they were Gentile or because they were unsaved. An important observation supports the conclusion that the Gentiles were not categorically strangers to the covenants of promise in an ecclesiological sense. Paul refers to the Old Testament "covenants," not "covenant." The plural indicates that Paul does not have in mind any one specific covenant of promise but rather all the covenants of promise in the Old Testament as related together. Therefore, one must show that none of the Old Testament covenants applied to the Gentiles as an *ecclesia* in order to read Paul's exclusion as applicable to the Ephesians because of their Gentile status. Yet Paul could call himself both the minister of the

³⁹ For a discussion of Col. 2:11, see chapter 4, "The Old Testament Believer and Antitheses of Union with Christ" (pp. 113-116).

New Covenant (2 Cor. 3:6) and the apostle of the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13). Paul did not refer to his ministry to Jews when he spoke of himself as a minister of the New Covenant. He evidently did not view the Gentiles as an ecclesia excluded from this Old Testament covenant of promise. The foundational covenant of the Old Testament is the Abrahamic Covenant. This foundation included a blessing for the Gentiles, “and in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). Abraham received this promise before he was circumcised, and Paul uses a similar observation in the book of Romans to establish the fact that Abraham is a covenantal father of both the uncircumcised and the circumcised faithful (Rom. 4:9-16). Because Abraham was not circumcised when he received God’s promise, the Abrahamic Covenant is not limited to the Jewish people; it is a universal promise that incorporates rather than excludes the Gentile ecclesia.

In addition to the Gentile role in the Abrahamic Covenant, Paul’s description of the prior state of the Ephesians as “strangers to the covenants of promise” clearly excludes them from the promise that God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28-32). Again, the plural *covenants* indicates that there are no exceptions; the exclusion is absolute. So can this exclusion function as a description of all Gentiles in the light of Joel 2? The reference to *all flesh* in Joel 2:28 makes it difficult to exclude the Gentiles as an ecclesia from this covenant of promise. In addition, timing becomes important here, for by the time Paul preaches to Ephesian unbelievers it was no longer accurate to describe the Gentile ecclesia as “strangers to the covenants of promise” in light of Peter’s interpretation of Joel 2. The new era promised to all flesh in that Old

Testament passage had already begun at Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21) and affected Gentiles (Acts 11:15-17), but Paul still excludes these unbelieving Ephesian Gentiles from the covenants of promise. Therefore, the Ephesians to whom Paul preached were strangers to the covenants of promise because they were unsaved, not because they were Gentiles. Their unsaved neighbors were still strangers to the covenants of promise in spite of the dawning of this new era for the Gentile ecclesia years prior. The Old Testament covenants of promise are simply too broad for Paul to mean that the Gentiles as an ecclesia were excluded from them, and given these understandings, Paul must be referring to the Ephesians' lack of personal conversion rather than their Gentile ethnicity with the phrase "strangers to the covenants of promise."

The second of the five descriptions Paul uses in verse 12 describes the former state of the Ephesian believers as "having been alienated (perf. pass. part. of ἀπαλλοτριόω) from the commonwealth (πολιτεία) of Israel." While *the commonwealth of Israel* seems to speak of a national-political ecclesia, the verb Paul uses to describe the exclusion of the unconverted Ephesians from it is significant. Paul uses it on two other occasions, in each case defining a soteriological rather than an ecclesiological condition (Eph. 4:18, from the life of God; Col. 1:21, from God). More significantly, the verb is used in the Septuagint not as a description of the alienated ecclesiological condition of Gentiles, but rather as an assessment of the spiritual condition of Jews (Ezek. 14:5, 7). Although the ecclesiological impression of "commonwealth of Israel" is apparent, the verb Paul uses communicates strong soteriological overtones.

Three further observations lead to the conclusion that Paul uses the phrase *alienated from the commonwealth of Israel* to describe the lost condition of the souls of Gentiles rather than the ecclesiological exclusion of all Gentiles from Israel. (1) The soteriological context of the phrase indicates that Paul is dealing with an issue in verse 12 that matters in a way ecclesiology does not. The parenthetical section of verse 11 describes the old ecclesiology, but it does so in a way that mitigates the relative significance of these distinctions. There “circumcision” and “uncircumcision” are merely “so-called” distinctions (οἱ λεγόμενοι ἀκροβυστία ὑπο τῆς λεγομένης περιτομῆς). In addition, Paul describes the ecclesiological distinctions of verse 11 as “in the flesh” and “made with hands.” When Paul begins verse 12 with “separate from Christ,” he begins speaking about an entirely different realm, one that transcends distinctions that can be described as “so-called,” “in the flesh,” or “made with hands.” The soteriological solemnity of verse 12, in addition to the larger context of the chapter and epistle, indicates that Paul refers to a spiritual problem rather than a physical, social, or ecclesiastical one with the phrase *alienated from the commonwealth of Israel*. (2) A second reason for interpreting the phrase this way involves the word translated “commonwealth” (πολιτεία). It is translated “citizenship” elsewhere (Acts 22:28) and can mean even more generally “way of life” or “conduct.”⁴⁰ That Paul considered himself in possession of the πολιτεία of Rome indicates that he did not view the word by itself as descriptive of what made

⁴⁰ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 686. The lexicon notes all three definitions and gives preference to “commonwealth, state, body politic” in Eph. 2:12. It also notes the possibility of a figurative meaning in the verse, but it calls the possibility improbable.

someone a Jew rather than a Gentile. Because Paul enjoyed both the πολιτεία of Rome and the πολιτεία of Israel, the word seems to be an unlikely choice if Paul's desire was to distinguish Gentile and Jew in a political sense. This is especially true when one remembers that induction into the πολιτεία of Israel was open to the Gentile in the same sense that induction into the πολιτεία of Rome was open to the Jew. Gentiles were never absolutely alienated from the commonwealth of Israel in this political sense. In fact, Paul had battled against some within the early church who had argued that ecclesiastical induction into the commonwealth of Israel through circumcision was necessary to salvation (Gal. 5:1-6). He clearly had taught that to be so inducted through circumcision was to be severed from Christ. Would that same apostle also teach that the essence of being severed from Christ for Ephesian unbelievers involved an ecclesiological alienation from the nation of Israel, an alienation caused in part by a lack of circumcision? This interpretation of the phrase seems unlikely. (3) Finally, when Paul refers elsewhere to Israel as a national-political entity, he never uses πολιτεία (γενεά, Gal. 1:14; γενεά Ἰσραὴλ, Phil. 3:5; Ἰσραὴλ, Rom. 9:31; Ἰσραὴλ κατὰ σάρκα, 1 Cor. 10:18; τοὺς υἱοὺς Ἰσραὴλ, 1 Cor. 3:13). The phrase *commonwealth of Israel* has no Septuagint precedent.

For these reasons the description of the Ephesians as “excluded from the commonwealth of Israel” must mean more than that they were not proselytes of the nation. Instead, the phrase is best understood as referring to the alienation of Gentile unbelievers from “the spiritual privileges which were conveyed by [Israel's] divine ordering.”⁴¹ In other

⁴¹ Westcott, 35.

words, to be excluded from the citizenship of Israel means to be excluded from the soteriological standing that comes through God's work with Israel through the person of the Messiah. The coupling technique Paul uses in the syntax of verse 12 supports this conclusion. "Having no hope" and "without God in the world" are connected by καὶ, and "excluded from the commonwealth of Israel" and "strangers to the covenants of promise" are connected by καὶ. Just as there is a connection between "no hope" and "no God," so also there is a connection between "no citizenship rights" and "no covenants of promise." The soteriological import of "no covenants of promise" hints at a soteriological significance for "no citizenship rights." Therefore, verse 12 teaches in its entirety that prior to their conversion the Ephesian believers were outside of the saving blessings that are available only in Christ. Having already introduced ecclesiological themes in verse 11, the soteriological *then versus now* contrast of verses 11-12 begins to link the soteriological emphasis of 2:1-10 with the ecclesiological import of the death of Christ. Paul begins this focus in verses 13-14 by introducing a *far versus near* contrast.

Far Versus Near

Verse 13 is a transitional verse in Paul's presentation that brings the reader from a *then versus now* contrast to a *far versus near* contrast. The verse repeats the *then versus now* marker (ποτέ) and begins with the arresting and time-significant conjunction "but now" (νυνὶ δέ). This syntax thrusts the soteriological significance of all that has come before into the *far versus near* concept introduced in this verse. None who are salvifically outside of Christ have been brought near by the blood of Christ, Jew or Gentile. All who live in the *then* also live in the *far* of

v. 13, and all who live in the *now* also live in the *near*. The instrument for the transition between these conditions is the blood of the Christ. Whereas *then versus now* emphasizes the regeneration result of faith through the blood of Christ, *far versus near* emphasizes the reconciliation result of faith through the blood of Christ. Regeneration yields life with God, and reconciliation yields peace with God. Both Jew and Gentile are in need of this transition.

According to verse 14, Christ Himself is the emphatic focal point of this reconciliation. But Paul introduces an ecclesiological nuance to the description of Christ as “our peace” at this point. This nuance is explained at the end of verse 15, where Paul expresses the unity of Jew and Gentile in the church as the making of “two into one new man, thus establishing peace.” The vertical reconciliation between God and man accomplished by the blood of Christ in verse 13 has a horizontal counterpart, the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile, “both in one body to God through the cross” (v. 16). The cross accomplished not only the atonement, but also something ecclesologically significant. The death of Christ removed a horizontal barrier between Jew and Gentile, which Paul calls “the Law of commandments contained in ordinances” (v. 15). Moule explains the ecclesiological significance of the death of Christ in this regard.

He found us separated, race from race. And the separation was intensified and emphasized by those institutions which were, in part, designed to isolate Israel from the world, till the fit time for the wider blessing. And He ‘annulled’ them, by fulfilling them, in His sacrificial work; thus at once reconciling man to God and man to man.⁴²

⁴² Moule, 88.

This fulfillment work of the cross has a historical limitation that is not shared by the atonement work of the cross. The typical cultus of Israel, which separated Jew from Gentile, had a predictive revelatory function that could not be finished until Christ fulfilled in history the predictions made by that cultus. This is true because time-limited humans were the objects of this revelatory work of Christ (Heb. 8:5, 9:8-10, 23-25, 10:1). In contrast, the atoning work of the cross involved a time-limitless object, God the Father (Rom. 3:25-26).⁴³ Consequently, the soteriological

⁴³ John S. Feinberg makes some important observations in this regard as he explains how it is that the atoning sacrifice of Christ provided the ground of the salvation for the Old Testament believer prior to the historical event of the death of Christ: "In trying to understand how this can be so before the event occurs historically, we must distinguish between God's perspective and man's. God has known about Christ's death from all eternity. Since He decreed it, it was an accomplished fact in His thinking long before it was an accomplished fact in history. Because God knows that the deed will be done (since He decreed it), and because He sees all of history (including the completed work of Christ) at once, God can grant man salvation, even before the sacrifice is performed in history. There could never have been a time in human history when God would learn that He had been mistaken about the fact that Christ would sacrifice Himself for sin. Although there is no past, present, or future for God, He, as an omniscient being, cannot help but know what is past, present, and future for the creatures He has made. Thus, God always sees Christ's work as an accomplished fact. But before it was done within history God knew that the death of Jesus Christ had not been accomplished in history. Man, limited by his human perspective, did not know about the atoning work of Jesus Christ until God revealed it and then accomplished it within human history." "Salvation in the Old Testament," in *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 55. Rom. 3:25-26 is the New Testament passage that most directly treats the issue Feinberg explains. Here the eternity of God is not mentioned, but rather the forbearance of God is stressed. This forbearance caused the Lord to "pass over" sins previously committed. Many see a distinction here between "pass over" and "forgive," such that the forgiveness of the Old Testament believer was somehow incomplete, but that is not a distinction that holds up very well in light of Paul's use of David as an example of New Testament salvific forgiveness in the following chapter (Rom. 4:6-8). More likely, the distinction emphasized by Paul in Rom. 3:25-26 is a distinction between "the demonstration of His righteousness at the present time" and "forbearance regarding the demonstration of His righteousness during the previous time." The question is not whether or not God was righteous, but whether or not He had demonstrated that righteousness in a manner perceptibly understood to men. Forbearing is not the opposite of forgiving, but rather of judging. God was righteous in forbearing rather than judging believers prior to Calvary because He saw Christ slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). Calvary demonstrated this righteousness of God to man, who could see it only subsequent to the historical event of Calvary.

benefits of the cross work of Christ have a time-limitlessness that the ecclesiological benefits of His cross work do not. The soteriological blessings of the atonement in Christ were available to the Old Testament believer in the earlier era, but the ecclesiological blessings of the fulfillment of revelation in Christ were unavailable to the Old Testament believer in the earlier era.

Paul completes chapter 2 with a description of the new condition of Ephesian believers, which combines both the soteriological and ecclesiological benefits they now enjoy. In so doing, he introduces the foundation of the apostles and prophets, a theme that will carry him into the third contrast he seeks to highlight in this passage, *mystery versus revelation*.

Mystery Versus Revelation

Paul introduces a new metaphor for the church in Eph. 2:19-22. Not only is the church *one new man* (2:15) and *one body* (v. 16), it is also a part of *God's household* (v. 19), of *a holy temple in the Lord* (v. 21), and of *a dwelling of God in the Spirit* (v. 22). Foundational to this edifice are the apostles and prophets (v. 20). This foundation forms a contrast with "the Law of commandments contained in ordinances" (2:15) and the concealment of "the mystery of Christ" (3:4-5a).

That both Eph. 2:15 and 3:4-5a contrast the foundation of the apostles and prophets discloses three understandings critical to the interpretation of this foundation. First, Paul's focus here is clearly on revelation rather than apostolic succession. The new edifice is founded on the apostles and prophets in the same sense that the old edifice was founded on "the Law of commandments contained in ordinances." This

concerns revelation, not apostolic hierarchy. Because *mystery* is a term related to revelation (3:4-5a),⁴⁴ its counterpart, the apostles and prophets, must be related to revelation rather than ecclesiastical succession. Second, the passages clearly indicate that the prophets coupled with the apostles in Eph. 2:20 are New Testament prophets, not Old Testament prophets. The revelation of both the apostles and the prophets of Eph. 2:20 marks a historic break between the time of mystery and the time of mystery dispelled. The phrase “now has been revealed to” (3:5) applies not only to the apostles in view here, but also to the prophets.

Third, the dual contrast that compares Eph. 2:15 and Eph. 3:4-5a against the foundation of apostles and prophets helps to define both the concealment of the mystery of Christ and its manifestation (3:4). The concealment of this mystery corresponds to life under the Law of commandments (2:15)—life under an incomplete revelation. The manifestation of this mystery corresponds to the introduction of a new revelation through the apostles and New Testament prophets (3:5)—life under a completed revelation. Under the ordinances of the Law, God’s revelation demanded a strict ecclesiological separation between Jew and Gentile, although God was clearly at work as the sovereign Savior of both (Jonah 1-4). Under the limitations of this old revelation, the saving gospel did not result in an ecclesiological expression of the fact that both Jew and

⁴⁴ Robert Saucy notes recent developments from Qumran studies related to the meaning of *mystery* in the New Testament, which favor a sense of *incomprehensibility* in addition to the concept *secret*. *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 146-147. Whether or not Paul desired to communicate that the union of Jew and Gentile in Christ was in some sense incomprehensible with his choice of the word *mystery*, it is plain that he viewed this mystery in terms of hidden revelation that is subsequently manifested in a new way through the ministry of the apostles and New Testament prophets (Eph. 3:5, 9-10).

Gentile were “fellow heirs,” “fellow bodies,”⁴⁵ and “fellow partakers” of the promise in Christ (3:6). When the Old Testament spoke of an ecclesiology uniting Jew and Gentile through the gospel, it spoke only in eschatological terms (Eph. 2:17, Isa. 57:19).⁴⁶ Its ecclesiological separation between Jew and Gentile was designed to teach the particularistic characteristics of biblical soteriology: salvation is in Christ alone, and His people are to be consecrated to Him. These particularistic soteriological truths, applicable to believers of all ages, are the revelatory burden of the

⁴⁵ The term σύσσωμα in Eph. 3:6 has not been an easy one to translate. Westcott notes that the term is not found elsewhere in the New Testament, the Septuagint, or in classical writers (p. 46). Moule translates the phrase as “co-members in the one Body,” but he admits sacrificing “a literal rendering to preserve the balance in form” of the sentence (p. 113). Walter Bauer’s lexicon translates the word in an adjectival way, “belonging to the same body” (p. 794). The Authorized Version follows this approach by rendering the phrase “and of the same body,” while the NASB translates similar to Moule: “fellow members of the body.” Three facts regarding the translation of σύσσωμα are clear. First, Paul coins a new word in this context rather than using the typical phrase for “members of the same body” (μέλη τοῦ σώματος), which he normally uses to refer to the new ecclesiology (1 Cor. 12:12-27). Eph. 2:16 is an example of this ecclesiological usage. Second, the list of σύν- words should be taken together either in a substantive or adjectival sense. The parallelism of the list signals similar form. A preference for a substantive sense of σύσσωμα matches the typical substantive translations for συγκληρονόμα and συμμετοχα (NASB: “fellow heirs” and “fellow partakers”; AV: “fellowheirs” and “partakers”; NIV: “heirs together” and “sharers together”; RSV: “fellowheirs” and “sharers”). Finally, the word σύσσωμα is plural rather than singular. This plurality applies to the root of the word (*body*) just as plurality applies to *heir* in συγκληρονόμα and *partaker* in συμμετοχα. For these reasons, the meaning of Paul in Eph. 3:6 must be that Jews and Gentiles are “fellowheirs,” “fellowbodies,” and “fellow-partakers” in the promise of Christ. Under both the old and new ecclesiologies, saved Jews and Gentiles were “fellowbodies” in the same soteriological sense that they were “fellowheirs” and “fellowpartakers” of the promise in Christ Jesus. They became “one body” rather than “fellowbodies” only when the new ecclesiology was established in the New Testament church.

⁴⁶ Note that Paul’s use of Isa. 57:19 in Eph. 2:17 contradicts the assertion of many dispensationalists that the church is not a fulfillment of any Old Testament prophecy. Saucy illustrates the view as he cites two conclusions of dispensationalism that result from the *mystery* concept in Scripture: “(1) The church is not found in the Old Testament. Rather, it is a new unique work of God related to the coming of the Spirit and the indwelling presence of the resurrected Christ; (2) the church is not the fulfillment of any revelation found in the Old Testament” (p. 144). Paul’s use of the prediction of Isa. 57:19 in Eph. 2:17 confirms the first of Saucy’s assertions, but it argues against the second.

old ecclesiology. In contrast, the new ecclesiological unity of Jew and Gentile in the church is designed to teach the universalistic characteristics of soteriology in Christ: salvation in Christ is offered freely to all, and His people are to be busy with the ministry of reconciliation. These universalistic soteriological truths, equally applicable to all ages, are the revelatory burden of the new ecclesiology founded on a new revelation, the New Testament church.

The fact that generations prior to the new revelation were never exposed to an ecclesiology that illustrated the universality of the gospel's saving power does not demonstrate that the gospel lacked this power during that era. On the contrary, the men of Nineveh and the queen of the South were made partakers of the promise of Christ as assuredly as Jonah, Solomon, or any New Testament believer is today (Matt. 12:38-42). This is so in spite of the fact that neither the Ninevites nor the queen ever became proselytes of the nation of Israel. What was missing in their day was not their soteriological standing as fellows in the promise of Christ, but rather a full understanding of that standing, which God has given through the new revelation's ecclesiology. These soteriological truths are no longer hidden mystery; now they are plain for all to see in the church founded on the revelation of the apostles and prophets.

The Holy Temple and the Old Testament Believer

With the foundation of the apostles and prophets firmly established as the revelatory transition between a new and old ecclesiology, the metaphor of the temple becomes an important clue for understanding the connection of the Old Testament believer to union with Christ. Verse 21 is the doorway to this clue, and the phrase "in whom the whole

building, being fitted together” (ἐν ᾧ πᾶσα οἰκοδομὴ συναρμολογουμένη)⁴⁷ is the key to the door. Westcott explains the meaning of the phrase: “*Every building, each several building*: council chambers, treasuries, chambers for priests, cloisters, all become part of the sanctuary (ναός not ἱερόν), the parts contributing to the one whole, as the limbs to the one body.”⁴⁸ The metaphor Paul speaks of in this passage is not only a temple building, but also a temple complex to which a number of edifices have been added over time. The metaphor is not a confluence of body and building; instead, the growth mentioned in this verse refers to an expansion of the temple complex. The latest addition is the church, and this addition is built on a brand new foundation, the New Testament revelation of the apostles and prophets. This new foundation is appended to an already existing structure, Jesus Christ, the Chief Cornerstone. The church founded on the apostles and New Testament prophets is not the first structure to go up in this temple complex. The holy temple metaphor describes the New Testament church as a new ecclesiological unit added on to the already existing soteriological blessings of union with Christ, which have been illustrated throughout history in other ways by different ecclesiological structures. Long before the apostles or the New Testament prophets lived, the holy temple in the

⁴⁷ Moule notes that the πᾶσα οἰκοδομὴ reading is to be preferred over the πᾶσα ἡ οἰκοδομὴ reading, but he concludes against Westcott’s translation, citing a flexibility in the Koinē usage of the article and a contextual preference for the translation “whole building” as a unity rather than several parts (p. 92-93). However, the participle (συναρμολογουμένη) indicates that Paul did conceptualize several parts coming together in this context.

⁴⁸ Westcott, 41. He further renders πᾶς οἶκος Ἰσραὴλ in Acts 2:36 as “‘every house of Israel,’ each in its peculiar place and with its peculiar character.” Note also the rendering of the 1901 American Standard Version: “in whom each several building, fitly framed together.”

Lord thrived as a dwelling of God in the Spirit. The growth of this construction project intimates two important conclusions about union with Christ and the Old Testament believer. First, the Old Testament believer enjoyed the soteriological blessings of union with Christ as part of the holy temple in the Lord in which the Spirit of God dwelt. Second, the Old Testament believer had no part in the new ecclesiological addition, the New Testament church built on a new foundation of New Testament revelation.

Conclusion

Three key passages hold important ramifications for our understanding of the relationship between the doctrine of union with Christ and the Old Testament believer. Romans 5 formulates the comparison between Adam and Christ in universal terms—one affects the many. Paul links the significance of this comparison to the doctrine of union with Christ in 1 Cor. 15:22, 45. To be dead in Adam is a mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive antithesis to being alive in Christ. This corresponding universalism indicates that Paul views the Old Testament believer as *in Christ*. Although Paul does not explicitly mention Old Testament believers in the passage, he does refer explicitly to Old Testament sinners and the reign of death in Adam during their era (Rom. 5:14). The transcendence of Jew versus Gentile and Old Testament versus New Testament is a key assumption underlying Paul's doctrine of man's sin in Adam. This transcendence must also, therefore, be considered a key underlying assumption for his assertion: "through the obedience of the one, the many will be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19). The Old Testament believer participates in this vicarious obedience and forensic justification

in union with Christ, just as he participated in the effects of the sin of Adam. The conditions are similarly universal.

Romans 11 is not normally thought of in terms of union with Christ, although parallels between its olive tree metaphor and the vine of John 15 appear at times in discussions of the doctrine. This is true because most interpreters understand the root of Rom. 11:16 as Abraham or the patriarchs. But three considerations argue against this interpretation: (1) verse 28 comes too late in Paul's discussion to determine the meaning of *root* in verse 16; (2) the connection between the patriarchs and the broken branches in verse 28 contrasts rather than parallels the relationship between the root and the broken branches in verse 16; and (3) the metaphor communicates an organic and vital relationship between the root and grafted branches that is difficult to explain in terms of the relationship between the patriarchs of Israel and Gentile believers (v. 17). In addition to these factors, Paul's use of Isa. 59:20-21, which refers to the covenantal fatherhood of the Messiah, to describe the teleology of the olive tree indicates that the metaphor is a significant description of union with Christ. Understood this way, Romans 11 teaches that the Old Testament believer, at least those who were the remnant of Israel (Rom. 11:5), did experience union with Christ, the root. Only "some" of the branches were broken off (Rom. 11:17).

Perhaps the most significant passage for understanding the relationship between union with Christ and the Old Testament believer is Eph. 2:11-3:13. Both the soteriological import and the ecclesiological import of the doctrine are the focus of this passage. It begins with a *then versus now* contrast that emphasizes the soteriological transition from

outside of Christ to *in Christ* at the moment of conversion. Next Paul uses the *far versus near* contrast to transition from a soteriological to an ecclesiological discussion. From the standpoint of soteriology, the lost man afar off has been reconciled through the atonement cross work of Christ (v. 13). From the perspective of ecclesiology, Jews and Gentiles have been reconciled through the fulfillment cross work of Christ (v. 14). That fulfillment resulted in a new man and a new addition to the temple of God. This new addition is built on the foundation of a new revelation, the New Testament, and it involves a new ecclesia with a different revelatory purpose than that possessed by the old. Each of these ecclesiologies, every separate addition, is appended together through time into the holy temple of the Lord, the dwelling of God in the Spirit. This is union with Christ, for He is the Chief Cornerstone.

What has been discovered to this point of the study regarding the relationship of the Old Testament believer to union with Christ indicates that the Old Testament believer did enjoy the vital and spiritual blessings of union with Christ, which are foundational features of New Testament soteriology. In addition, the Old Testament believer did not participate in a new specification of the doctrine applicable only to the New Testament church. The first of these conclusions raises important questions related to the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament era and the significance of Pentecost, the topic of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND UNION WITH CHRIST

Spirit baptism is a New Testament doctrine. The ministry of John the Baptist announces the arrival of a new Messianic age with the promise that his Successor would baptize his followers with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11-12; Mark 1:7-8; Luke 3:15-18; John 1:27, 33). Peter remembers this introduction and interprets it in terms of the events of the Day of Pentecost following the ascension of Christ (Acts 11:16). *Spirit baptism* is also a concept closely related to the doctrine of union with Christ: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). To clothe yourself with Christ is to experience baptism into Him (Gal. 3:27-28, Rom. 6:3-4).¹ These facts of biblical theology cause many to conclude that the Old Testament believer, who lived prior to Pentecost and knew nothing about Spirit baptism, could

¹ This study of Spirit baptism adheres to the counsel of John R. Stott, who calls for giving Paul “credit for a little consistency of thought”: “By sheer grace He places us ‘into’ Jesus Christ. That is the essence of the Christian life, visibly signified in baptism. Not, of course, that the outward rite of baptism by itself secures our union with Christ. By no means. It is inconceivable that the apostle, having spent three chapters arguing that justification is by faith alone, should now shift his ground, contradict himself and make baptism the means of salvation. We must give the apostle Paul credit for a little consistency of thought.” *Men Made New: An Exposition of Romans 5-8* (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1966), 35. The ordinance of baptism signifies a spiritual reality Paul describes as “baptized by one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13) and “baptism into death” (Rom. 6:4). The ceremony is not effective in an *ex opere operato* sense. For a further discussion of issues related to baptismal regeneration, see “Baptismal Definitions” in chapter 2, “Treatment of the Old Testament Believer in Definitions of Union with Christ – Part 1,” pp. 29-32.

not have been united with Christ as the New Testament believer was. Consequently, issues related to the baptism of the Holy Spirit are highly relevant to the focus of this study.²

A related pneumatological doctrine is *Spirit indwelling*. The question at hand in this regard is whether or not the Old Testament believer was indwelt by the Holy Spirit in a sense that would account sufficiently for his union with Christ. Bruce Demarest correctly describes the importance of Spirit indwelling to the doctrine of union with Christ; he then concludes on the basis of this connection that the Old Testament believer was excluded from this blessing:

The Holy Spirit is the bond by which believers are united to Christ. The indwelling Christ and the indwelling Spirit are a coincident reality. But Jesus promised his disciples that he would return to them in a dynamic way through the Counselor after he was glorified (John 15:26; 16:7). Not in OT times but only following Pentecost would the Counselor “live with you and be in you” (John 14:17). . . . The OT does not speak this language of the Spirit’s baptizing, indwelling, and sealing ministries, as does the NT with such richness and variety.³

If Old Testament believers were not indwelt by the Holy Spirit, their deficiency in this regard would preclude an experience of the vital and spiritual blessings at the center of the doctrine of union with Christ (Gal. 2:20).⁴ The indwelling Holy Spirit is the agent of these blessings.

² Representatives of this understanding include Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997), 330-331; Rene Pache, *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. J. D. Emerson (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1954), 32; Charles C. Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 49; and D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *God the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997), 102-103.

³ Demarest, 338-339.

⁴ See the discussion of these characteristics in chapter 2, “Treatment of the Old Testament Believer in Definitions of Union with Christ—Part 1,” pp. 25-29.

However, an alternative approach to these questions proceeds from a different starting point. Rather than grounding conclusions regarding the doctrine of union with Christ on pneumatology, it is possible to construct conclusions regarding pneumatology on the doctrine of union with Christ. Although some pneumatological passages seem to indicate that an insufficient work of the Holy Spirit eliminates the Old Testament believer from union with Christ, many more passages related to the doctrine of union with Christ indicate that the Old Testament believer must have been the object of a sufficient work of the Spirit of God. Without union with Christ, the Old Testament believer could not have been justified, reconciled, and regenerated.⁵ Hermeneutically, the question at hand becomes whether accounting for the exclusion of the Old Testament believer from union with Christ is more or less perspicuous than accounting for his inclusion as an object of the Spirit's work at the center of union, Spirit baptism and Spirit indwelling. This study suggests that the latter approach confronts fewer difficulties.

Accounting for the inclusion of the Old Testament believer in the doctrine of union with Christ requires an examination of three areas of New Testament pneumatology: (1) the pneumatological use of the Old Testament in the New Testament; (2) the use of *baptism* as a metaphor for the Spirit's work; and (3) the relationship between the novelty of Pentecost and Spirit indwelling.

⁵ See chapter 4, "The Old Testament Believer and Antitheses of Union with Christ," for "Antitheses Not Inclusive of the Old Testament Believer" (pp. 112-123).

The Pneumatological Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament

Understanding how Christ and the apostles used the Old Testament to teach pneumatology enlightens the Spirit's work in both the Old and New Testament periods. Their emphatic conviction regarding the authority of the text of the Old Testament provides an authoritative canon for measuring the degree of correspondence between the Spirit's work in each era. The most significant pneumatological use of the Old Testament in the New occurs on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Because of the significance of this passage to an understanding of the relationship between Spirit baptism and union with Christ, Peter's citation of Joel 2 concerns the section of this chapter that discusses *baptism* as a metaphor for the Spirit's work.⁶ Six other New Testament passages serve as examples of either explicit or implicit use of the Old Testament by Christ and the apostles to teach pneumatology: John 3, John 6, Acts 7, James 4, 1 Corinthians 2, and 2 Corinthians 6.⁷

John 3 – Are You the Teacher of Israel?

Pentecost is not the first time a prophet cites the Old Testament to teach important pneumatological truth. Christ utilized the Old Testament to teach about the importance of the Holy Spirit on two occasions recorded in the book of John. The first of these involves Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, where He makes a general reference to the Old Testament rather than a reference to a specific passage (John 3:1-21).

⁶ In addition, a discussion of the specific difficulties related to understanding the sense in which Peter interpreted the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy appears in chapter 8 of this study, "Union with Christ and the Fulfillment of the New Covenant."

⁷ Christ's pneumatological use of the Old Testament in John 7 is treated under the section of this chapter dealing with Spirit indwelling.

When Jesus rebuked Nicodemus with the question, “Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?” (John 3:10), He was expressing disappointment over Nicodemus’s deficient grasp of the pneumatology of the Old Testament.⁸ More specifically, Nicodemus ought to have known as a professor of Old Testament that a sinner must be born again in order to see the kingdom of God.⁹ Christ’s expectation for this teacher of Israel clearly indicates that, when adequately understood, the Old Testament teaches the necessity of the Holy Spirit’s work of regeneration for entrance into the kingdom of God. Christ

⁸ Nicodemus has trouble with the term *born again*, which Christ explains as *born of water and of the Spirit* (John 3:4-5). Murray J. Harris notes that the single preposition followed by the conjoining of water and Spirit (ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος) in John 3:5 identifies a unified concept: “*ex hydatos kai pneumatatos* (Jn. 3:5) shows that for the writer (or speaker) ‘water’ and ‘Spirit’ together form a single means of that regeneration which is a prerequisite for entrance into the kingdom of God No contrast is intended between an external element of ‘water’ and an inward renewal achieved by the Spirit. Conceptually the two are one” (p. 1178). Zane Hodges interprets “born of water and of the Spirit” (John 3:5) as “born of water and of wind.” He shows that both water (Isa. 44:1-4) and wind (Ezek. 37:1-10) are metaphors for the new birth in the Old Testament, and he concludes that this understanding accounts best for Jesus’ disappointment with Nicodemus: “The choice of the metaphor is based on the Lord’s desire for imagery which was evocative of the form in which the Old Testament presents this doctrine, since ‘new birth’ is not an unfamiliar datum predicated on new revelation, but is actually present in the old revelation for every discerning mind to see. It was, therefore, tragic as well as pointed in its implications for a man who professed to teach the nation of Israel to be found ignorant of so fundamental a reality as this (John 3:10).” “Water and Spirit—John 3:5,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135 (1978): 218.

⁹ The book of Ezekiel is to Old Testament pneumatology what Romans 8 and Galatians 5 are to New. Daniel I. Block lists eight categories of usages of רִיחַ in Ezekiel: *wind, direction, side (related to direction), agency of conveyance, agency of animation, agency of prophetic inspiration, mind, and sign of divine ownership*. He describes the *agency of animation* as follows: “Judging by frequency, for Ezekiel the employment of רִיחַ to denote the animating, vitalizing force was more important than any other. The primary difference between this usage and that described in the preceding is the locus of the influence. When the רִיחַ lifts someone/something up and wafts him/it from place to place, it operates upon the object from the outside. As ‘agency of animation,’ however, the רִיחַ operates internally, like the breath of a living creature.” “The Prophet of the Spirit: The Use of רִיחַ in the Book of Ezekiel,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32 (March, 1989): 33-35.

challenges Nicodemus with his need for regeneration from the Old Testament, and He does so prior to the epochal events of Pentecost.

John 6 – Taught of God

The second passage in which Christ utilizes the Old Testament to teach a principle related to pneumatology occurs in the middle of the Bread of Life Discourse (John 6:41-58). In verse 45 of this passage, Christ quotes a phrase from the Old Testament, which supports His assertion that none can come to Him without the Father's drawing: "And they shall all be taught of God." The quotation summarizes the New Covenant prophecies found in Isa. 54:13 and Jer. 31:34.¹⁰ Concerned over the unbelief of his audience, the Lord uses the New Covenant doctrine found in these Old Testament passages to teach about the spiritual needs of all hungry hearts. Unless the Father teaches a person directly as described by the New Covenant, thereby drawing him to salvation, that person cannot come to Christ, the Bread of Life. Although this quotation does not explicitly mention the role of the Holy Spirit in the drawing process, it is impossible to exclude Him from this activity in light of Christ's use of New Covenant truth to substantiate His assertion. Because the work of the Holy Spirit is central to the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant (Ezek. 36:26-27), it must be central to the Father's drawing referenced from the New Covenant by Christ in John 6:45. That Christ calls on His audience to recognize their need for this New

¹⁰ Leon Morris explains in this regard: "The Isaiah passage seems the more likely source. Perhaps both are in mind for 'the prophets' is an unusual way to cite a passage It may signify the general tenor of what is written in more than one prophet, no one passage being singled out." *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 329.

Covenant work of God prior to Pentecost is on the one hand obvious, but on the other incongruent with interpreting Pentecost as the inception of the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant in an absolute sense.¹¹

Christ did not interpret the spiritual realities of the New Covenant as novel or yet future in John 6:45; instead, He saw that the spiritual blessings contained in that prophecy are the key to the availability of the Bread of Life to hungry souls in any era.

Acts 7 – Just As Your Fathers Did

In addition to these instances from the life of Christ, the defense of Stephen in Acts 7 employs Old Testament data in support of a critical pneumatological assertion. Luke records the response of Stephen's audience in verse 54: "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him." The antecedent of "this" in that verse is Stephen's pneumatology in verse 51: "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; *you are doing just as your fathers did.*" Stephen clearly focuses on the Holy Spirit's ministry as it relates to His soteriological work on the human heart, and it is also plain from the last phrase of the verse that this saving work is nothing new. Not only had Stephen's opponents resisted the Holy Spirit's ability to change their stiff necks and uncircumcised hearts, but also their fathers had done the same thing in the same way during their era. Certainly, if the Holy Spirit

¹¹ This is a common treatment of the New Covenant found among some dispensationalists. They understand the New Covenant as partially fulfilled at Pentecost in terms of its spiritual ramifications. See Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton: Baker Books, 1993), 151-159. More discussion of partial fulfillment and the New Covenant appears in chapter 8, "Union with Christ and the Fulfillment of the New Covenant."

were soteriologically active in Stephen's day in a way that He had not been in the Old Testament, it could not be true that the fathers had resisted the Holy Spirit with their uncircumcised hearts just as Stephen's opponents did. Stephen's pneumatological assertion follows his quotation of Isa. 66:1-2, which authorizes his claim that the presence of God on earth was not restricted to the temple of Solomon during the Old Testament era (vv. 47-50). The truth that "the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands" launches Stephen into his description of the results of resisting the Holy Spirit. The error of both Stephen's opponents and their fathers assumes that God's dwelling could be restricted to a man-made building while leaving untouched the human heart.

James 4 – The Spirit Dwelling Within

The epistles use the Old Testament sparingly as a tool for teaching pneumatology. The earliest example of this pedagogical method occurs in James 4:5, where James supports his call to separation from the world (v. 4) with a summation of the Old Testament's teaching regarding the Holy Spirit: "Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: 'He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us?'"¹² The quotation James uses in this verse has caused much

¹² Commentators point out that τὸ πνεῦμα may refer either to the human spirit or to the Holy Spirit in this context. See Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 190. The contextual distinction between the world and those betrothed to God (v. 4) argues for identifying τὸ πνεῦμα as the Holy Spirit. This πνεῦμα is that which distinguishes these two, and the human spirit does not make this distinction. In addition, the human spirit is not normally conceptualized in Scripture as "dwelling within" (κατῳκισεν) a person. See D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistle of James: Tests of a Living Faith* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), 256-257; and Homer A. Kent Jr., *Faith That Works: Studies in the Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 147. Because τὸ πνεῦμα is neuter, it

discussion because it is found in neither the Old Testament nor any other extant Jewish literature.¹³ Some suggest that the first phrase of the verse is not a formula introducing a quotation, but rather a statement completing the thought of verse 4.¹⁴ This seems unlikely, however, given the similarity between the introductory formula in verse 5 (ἡ γραφή λέγει) and the introductory formula in verse 6 (διὸ λέγει). James is utilizing a parallel construction. The formula in verse 6 clearly introduces a quotation from the Septuagint's rendering of Prov. 3:34. Consequently, the end of verse 5 must be at least a general reference to the teaching of the Old Testament, rather than an assertion unrelated to James's interpretation of the Old Testament. James's teaching in 4:4-7 parallels the theme of the larger context of Prov. 3:34 (3:31-34). Both passages address the offence of friendship with the world. The reference in James 4:5 to the Old Testament's teaching regarding the Spirit's role in divine jealousy may be a summary of the author's interpretation of the larger context in Proverbs.¹⁵ Whatever the specific origin and nature of James's use of the Old Testament in this passage, it is apparent that he conceptualizes God's jealous love for His adulterous people in terms of

may function grammatically as either the subject or object of the verb (ἐπιποθεῖ). Whether the indwelling Spirit jealously longs for believers or God jealously longs for the Spirit indwelling believers, James's use of the Old Testament teaches the Spirit's indwelling.

¹³ Moo, 190. Given the early date of the epistle, the reference to "the Scripture" in verse 5 must be a reference to the Old Testament rather than the New. Hiebert comments: "The epistle may thus be dated at about A.D. 46, at least not later than A.D. 49. This view makes James the earliest book in the New Testament" (p. 41).

¹⁴ Hiebert, 254. See also the American Standard Version.

¹⁵ Note especially in this regard Solomon's reference to God's intimacy (סוד) with the upright (v. 32) and God's blessing on the dwelling (בית) of the righteous. This same intimacy is said to have dwelt upon the tent or sanctuary (מִשְׁכָּן) of Job (Job 29:4).

the work of the indwelling Spirit of God. Though clearly difficult exegetically, the passage as a whole indicates that James understood the Spirit's indwelling ministry as something attested by the Old Testament and as active during that era.

1 Corinthians 2 – So That We May Know

Two Pauline passages contribute to our understanding of the pneumatological use of the Old Testament in the New Testament. In 1 Cor. 2:9 Paul uses the authoritative *it is written* formula to establish from the Old Testament that only the Holy Spirit can make known “all that God has prepared for those who love Him.”¹⁶ The preceding verses speak of the hidden mystery of the wisdom of God (vv. 6-8), but this is not a mystery hidden to the Old Testament era per se. Rather, this wisdom is concealed from “the rulers of this [New Testament] age.” Those who do not understand this hidden mystery are not Old Testament believers, but unbelievers of all ages. Verses 10-11 describe the unique qualifications of the Spirit of God to know and reveal the truth of God. Verse 12 goes a step further by teaching that we must receive not only the revelation of the Spirit of God, but also “the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God.” Paul substantiates all this

¹⁶ Paul's use of the Old Testament in this passage lacks the specificity of a direct quotation in much the same way James's use of the Old Testament in James 4:5 does. Some of the language employed resembles Isa. 64:4, but the sense of that passage is different from the sense of Paul in 1 Corinthians 2. Charles Hodge suggests that the apostle cites a generally revealed Old Testament axiom: “A third explanation of this difficulty is, that the apostle did not intend to quote any one passage of scripture, but to appeal to its authority for a clearly revealed truth. It is certainly taught in the Old Testament that the human mind cannot penetrate into the counsels of God; his purposes can only [*sic*] be known by a supernatural revelation. This is the truth for which the apostle cites the authority of the Old Testament.” *A Commentary on 1&2 Corinthians* (1857-1859; reprint, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 38.

with his citation of the teaching of the Old Testament. Just as the natural man in the Old Testament era could not know God's truth apart from the Spirit of God (v. 9), so also the natural man in the New Testament era must receive the Holy Spirit to know God's truth (v. 12). The pneumatological need and solution in each era are the same.¹⁷

2 Corinthians 6 – I Will Dwell In You

The most explicit pneumatological use of the Old Testament in the epistles occurs in 2 Corinthians 6. In this passage Paul seeks to develop separatist convictions in the immature believers of Corinth (2 Cor. 6:17-18). His concerns include their potential for accepting the grace of God in vain (6:1) and discrediting the gospel ministry (6:3). Obedient separation protects God's people from these pitfalls (6:14-16). Paul supports this doctrine with a series of antitheses that should never be synthesized, and the last of these is the antithesis between the temple of God and idols. He applies this last antithesis personally by reminding the Corinthian believers that they are "the temple (ναός) of the living God" (6:16). *Temple* is a metaphor Paul typically uses to describe believers as indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16, 6:19, Eph. 2:21-22). Because believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit as the temple of the living God, Paul claims that they should have nothing to do with idols. He goes on to substantiate his assertion that believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit with a

¹⁷ Robert V. McCabe develops this point further from 1 Cor. 2:14-15 as he argues for the importance of Spirit-indwelling in the Old Testament. He sees indwelling as a continuance of regeneration, which constitutes the believer's deliverance from total depravity: "In 2:6-16 Paul presents two mutually exclusive categories of people that relate to the Spirit's salvific ministry, those without the Spirit and those with the Spirit. The soteriological ramifications are profound. Those without the Spirit are absolutely hostile to and unable to accept the wisdom of the gospel." "Were OT Believers Indwelt by the Spirit?" *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 9 (2004): 238.

quotation from Lev. 26:11-12: “just as God said, ‘I will dwell in them (ἐνοικήσω ἐν αὐτοῖς)¹⁸ and walk among them (ἐμπεριπατήσω); and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (2 Cor. 6:16). Paul clearly believed that this Old Testament passage contains important instruction for the New Testament believer regarding his status as a member of the Spirit-indwelt temple of God. The question remains, however, whether Paul, on the point of Spirit-indwelling, saw a correspondence between the New Testament believer and the Old Testament believer or between the New Testament believer and the Old Testament tabernacle and temple. The answer depends in part on whether the Old Testament reference to God’s dwelling is a reference to the tabernacle.

Leviticus 26 begins with God’s prohibition against idols, a characteristic that further demonstrates its adequacy to the purposes of Paul in 2 Corinthians 6. Lev. 26:4 begins a series of blessings that would accrue to God’s people if they would live godly lives according to the commandments of the Lord. This list of blessings ends with the verses quoted by Paul. These contain five specific promises for the obedient people of God, two of which are especially significant to our understanding of Paul’s pneumatological use of this passage in 2 Corinthians 6: “I will make my dwelling among you” (וְנִתַּתִּי מִשְׁכְּנִי בְּתוֹכְכֶם) and “I will also walk among you” (וְהִתְהַלַּכְתִּי בְּתוֹכְכֶם). When the Lord speaks of His *dwelling* in this passage, He uses the word that refers typically to the tabernacle in the Pentateuch and elsewhere (מִשְׁכָּן). Moses had received detailed plans for this structure from the Lord (Exodus 26, 27, 35, 36, 38-40) and had

¹⁸ Paul’s translation of the Hebrew may be deliberately avoiding the Septuagint’s gloss: καὶ θήσω τὴν διαθήκην μου ἐν ὑμῖν (“and I will establish my covenant with you”).

completed its construction as instructed (Exod. 39:32, 40:17-18).

Therefore, one way to understand Lev. 26:11-12 is to see God's promise to bless the nation of Israel in such a way that His presence related to the tabernacle structure persists.¹⁹ Understood this way, Paul uses the Lev. 26:11-12 reference to the tabernacle as an analogy for the doctrine of Spirit indwelling in 2 Cor. 6:16. He argues that the indwelt New Testament believer ought to be holy because he is the dwelling place of God, just as the tabernacle was the holy dwelling place of God in the Old Testament era.

However, a careful reading of 2 Cor. 6:15 indicates that Paul uses the Leviticus text to do more than illustrate from the tabernacle that God's presence sanctifies His dwelling place. More specifically, Paul establishes the truth that "we are the temple of the living God" with this quotation from the Old Testament. His argument utilizes three steps: Leviticus 26 → believers are the temple/people of God → believers should be holy. It uses the Leviticus passage to substantiate the believers' identity as the temple and people of God. This identity next requires separation from idols. Therefore, Paul sees two parallels between the Old Testament believer described in Leviticus 26 and the New Testament believer of Corinth: both are indwelt by God and both are the people of God. If Leviticus 26 fails to teach that God promised to indwell believers, Paul's argument is left with the same lack of support it would suffer were it demonstrable that Leviticus 26 does not teach that believers are the people of God. Were the recipients of this Old Testament promise not

¹⁹ See the treatment of this passage by James M. Hamilton, Jr., "God with Men in the Torah," *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003): 127.

indwelt, they would not have been the dwelling or temple of the living God, and the ground for separation from idols in the argument of Paul disappears. He clearly draws upon a pneumatological continuity between Old and New Testament believers as he argues for the importance of separatist convictions in this passage. In addition to the argument of Paul, three other considerations indicate that the blessings of Lev. 26:11-12 include the personally indwelling presence of God.

First, the verb employed by the Lord's promise in Lev. 26:11 (נָתַתְּ, *make, set*) is not the normal verb associated with the erection of the tabernacle in the Pentateuch. When Moses describes setting up the structure of the tabernacle, he uses a word that means *to raise up* (קָוַם).²⁰ The verb in verse 11 occurs only one other time in the Old Testament with the word for *dwelling* or *tabernacle* (מִשְׁכָּן), but there the dwellings are plural and do not refer to the tabernacle of the Lord (Ezek. 25:4). In contrast to an earlier reference to His sanctuary (מִקְדָּשׁוֹ, Lev. 26:2), the Lord's promise regarding His dwelling in verse 11 does not focus specifically on the physical structure known as the tabernacle. The tabernacle locale is too limited to fit God's dwelling as described by Lev. 26:11, especially in light of the companion phrase in verse 12, "I will also walk among you."²¹

²⁰ The verb normally occurs in the hophal theme in a causative sense and is translated "the tabernacle was erected" (Exod. 40:17, 18, Num. 1:51, 9:15, 10:21).

²¹ The use of the hithpa'el in "I will also walk" (וְהִתְהַלַּכְתִּי בְּתוֹכָם) in Lev. 26:12 clearly describes more than a specialized presence of God restricted to the tabernacle or temple in the Old Testament era. Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor note parallels between the hithpa'el of הִתְהַלַּךְ and the Akkadian *alāku*, and they cite the experience of Enoch's walking with God as a usage of the hithpa'el of הִתְהַלַּךְ meaning "to walk with, commune" (Gen. 5:22, 24). *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), sec. 26.1.2b. This *communion* idea fits Lev. 26:12 well, and it argues against

Paul is not the only canonical author to reference the Leviticus promise. Ezekiel does so in a New Covenant context (Ezek. 37:27).²² This connection to the New Covenant is the second indication that the promise of Lev. 26:11-12 involved the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. Although the immediate context also describes the establishment of the Lord's sanctuary (מִקְדָּשׁ) as important to God's future dwelling (Ezek. 37:26), the indwelling Spirit of God in the hearts of believers forms the foundation of all the New Covenant blessings of the chapter (vv. 1-14). All who experience God's sanctuary in their midst and God's dwelling upon them in Ezekiel 37 possess life from the Holy Spirit of God indwelling their hearts. Because Leviticus 26 and Ezekiel 37 make the same promise, they likely involve a similar indwelling work of the Holy Spirit.

A third indication that Lev. 26:11-12 refers to the Spirit of God indwelling the hearts of believers comes from the prophet Haggai. The burden of this post-exilic prophet's ministry was the reconstruction of the temple that lay in ruins due to the captivity (Hag. 1:7-11). The book describes the response of the Israelites to Haggai's message as a stirring up of the spirit of God's people to repair the temple (1:14). Roughly two months prior to the completion of the temple, Haggai prophesies again to counteract the discouragement felt by those who compared their meager results with the former glory of Solomon's temple (2:1-5). In verse 5 of this section, Haggai uses the promise of Lev. 26:11-12 in much the same

viewing the promise of God's dwelling here as restricted to the tabernacle building in an impersonal way.

²² Ezekiel's phrase is וְהָיָה מִשְׁכְּנִי עִלְיָהֶם.

way Paul does in 2 Cor. 6:16: “As for the promise which I [the Lord] made you when you came out of Egypt, ‘My Spirit is abiding in your midst’; do not fear!” Haggai called upon the truth of Lev. 26:11-12 to encourage God’s people during a time when the glory of the presence of God in the physical structure of the sanctuary no longer provided the encouragement they needed.²³ Because God had promised that His Spirit would abide in the midst of them, they need not feel dismayed about the condition of the physical temple. The abiding presence of the Spirit of God described by Lev. 26:11-12, therefore, could not be something restricted to the tabernacle or temple.²⁴

At least six New Testament contexts beyond Acts 2 provide examples of a pneumatological use of the Old Testament. While the exegetical difficulties of these passages leave room for disagreement, the overall emphasis exhibited by Christ and the apostles in them displays a basic conviction that a pneumatological continuity exists between the old and new eras. The phrase *just as* found in three of these passages (Acts 7:51, 1 Cor. 2:9, 2 Cor. 6:16) summarizes well this basic conviction. Acts 2

²³ The prophecy of Hag. 2:1-5 came roughly two months prior to the completion of the work on the temple (Hag. 2:18). Ezekiel’s vision had seen the glory of the Lord’s presence depart from the temple years prior (Ezek. 10:18-19), and this prophet had prophesied that it would return only with the construction of the millennial temple (Ezek. 43:4-5), a structure very different from the edifice built in the days of Haggai.

²⁴ One final note in regard to the interpretation of Lev. 26:11-12 is useful. The preposition employed in this and similar passages (בְּתוֹכָם) is a compound of two prepositions (בְּ, “in” + תוֹךְ, “in the middle of”). While mundane usages of this preposition are common (Gen. 1:6), the word can involve a theologically significant emphatic sense. For example, the dwelling of the Lord “in the midst of you” (בְּתוֹכְכֶם) in Lev. 26:11 likely includes a nuance more theologically significant than the dwelling of the people of the east “among you [the Amorites]” (בְּתוֹכְךָ) in Ezek. 25:4. This nuance may be understood as “in the very heart and midst of.” See Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (1906; reprint, Hendrickson, 2003), 1063.

breaks this pattern. Here Peter's use of Joel 2 on the Day of Pentecost explains a new work of the Spirit that is truly epochal. Only with the ascension of the Messiah would men and women experience the outpouring of the Spirit in fulfillment of this prophecy (Acts 2:33). The combination of continuity and discontinuity characterizing the pneumatological use of the Old Testament in the New parallels a similar blending of the Spirit's work found in the New Testament under the term *baptism*.

"Baptism" As a Metaphor for the Spirit's Work

Baptize, a transliteration of the Greek word βαπτίζω, means *dip* or *immerse* in the active voice and *dip oneself* or *wash* in the middle voice.²⁵ Six words comprise the family of Greek words related to baptism: βαπτίζω, βάπτω, εμβάπτω, τό βαπτισμα, ὁ βαπτισμός, ὁ βαπτιστής. The last of these is the appellation of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ. The usage of the other terms breaks down into six broad categories: (1) mundane usages; (2) a water ceremony conducted by John the Baptist; (3) a water ceremony conducted by Christ and His disciples; (4) the work of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; (5) the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration; and (6) other metaphorical usages. The first three of these categories are literal usages of the word group, whereas the last three have a metaphorical significance. Two metaphorical usages unrelated to the work of the Holy Spirit depict the sufferings of Christ and the

²⁵ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 131.

identification of the Israelites with Moses. Table 4 organizes the various usages of the βαπτ- root under these categories.²⁶

Table 4 – New Testament Usages of the βαπτ- Root

	Usage	βαπτίζω	βάπτω	εμβάπτω	τό βαπτισμα	ὁ βαπτισμός
Literal	Water – John	Matt. 3:6, 11, 13, 13, 14, 16, Mark 1:4, 5, 8, 9, 6:14, 24, Luke 3:7, 12, 16, 21, 7:29, 30, John 1:25, 26, 28, 31, 33, 3:23, 10:40, Acts 1:5, 19:3, 19:4			Matt. 3:7, 21:25, Mark 1:4, 11:30, Luke 3:3, 7:29, 20:4, Acts 1:22, 10:37, 13:24, 18:25, 19:3, 19:4	
	Water – Christian	Matt. 28:19, Mark 16:16, John 3:22, 26, 4:1, 4:2, Acts 2:38, 41, 8:12, 13, 16, 36, 38, 9:18, 10:47, 48, 16:15, 33, 18:8, 19:5, 22:16, Rom. 6:3a , 1 Cor. 1:13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 15:29 (2), Gal. 3:27			Eph. 4:5 , 1 Pet. 3:21	
	Mundane	Luke 11:38	Luke 16:24, John 13:26, Rev. 19:13	Matt. 26:23, Mark 14:20		Mark 7:4, Heb. 6:2, 9:10
Metaphorical	Pentecost	Matt. 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33, Acts 1:5, Acts 11:16, 1 Cor. 12:13				
	Regeneration	Rom. 6:3a , Rom. 6:3b, 1 Cor. 12:13 , Gal. 3:27			Rom. 6:4, Eph. 4:5 , Col. 2:12	
	Other	Christ's suffering: Mark 10:38, 39, Luke 12:50 Moses: 1 Cor. 10:2			Christ's suffering: Mark 10:38, 39, Luke 12:50	

²⁶ Specific usages that may be categorized in more than one way are highlighted in bold font.

Literal usages of the βαπτ- root require little interpretive effort because they generally involve the immersion of an object or person in water in some sense.²⁷ Two occurrences of βαπτίζω (Rom. 6:3a, Gal. 3:27), however, seem to cross over between a literal reference to the water ritual and a metaphorical sense. These are contexts in which it is difficult to decipher whether Paul intends baptism by water or baptism by the Holy Spirit with his reference to *baptized into Christ Jesus* and *baptized into Christ*. Because these phrases give no description of the instrument used to baptize (water or Spirit) and because they lack any contextual indicators clarifying whether Paul means *baptism* literally or figuratively, they create an interpretive question.²⁸ In Rom. 6:3, βαπτίζω occurs twice. The second of these is a metaphorical reference because it is a *baptism into His death*. Although the first usage, “all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus,” may refer to immersion into water, the second usage clearly refers to immersion into the death of Christ, a

²⁷ Three passages are an interpretive challenge because they may be either literal or metaphorical references: Rom. 6:3a, Gal. 3:27, and Eph. 4:5. The first two of these are treated above. Eph. 4:5 simply refers to baptism as “one baptism,” an important basis for unity in the church. In light of Paul’s experience with a party spirit that identified itself with the person performing the water ceremony (1 Cor. 1:10-17), Paul’s assertion that there is “one baptism,” which ought to be a source of unity among believers, is likely a reference to water baptism. His meaning is probably similar to his assertion in 1 Corinthians 1—that water baptism is performed in the name of Christ alone and that this ought to discourage a party spirit among believers.

²⁸ Paul’s description of circumcision as “made without hands” in Col. 2:11 is an example of this kind of indicator, as are the phrases “baptism into His death” (Rom. 6:3b-4) and “buried with Him in baptism” (Col. 2:12). The phrase “baptize *into* Christ” is very similar to the phrase “baptize *into the name of* Christ” (Matt. 28:19, Acts 2:38, 19:5, 1 Cor. 1:13), which is the same as “baptize *in the name of* Christ” (Acts 10:48). All of the New Testament baptism passages that use “in/into the name of Christ” refer to water baptism. The question left unanswered in Rom. 6:3a and Gal. 3:27 is whether Paul uses this shortened form, “baptize into Christ,” as a substitute for the longer form, “baptize into/in the name of Christ,” indicating water baptism, or whether the phrase in these instances means specifically Spirit baptism.

metaphorical sense. Gal. 3:27 has much in common with Rom. 6:3. The phraseology of the first part of the two verses is identical.²⁹ While nothing indicates a metaphorical sense for βαπτίζω in Gal. 3:27, Paul clearly employs a metaphor that paints a picture similar to βαπτίζω with his description of believers as *clothed* (ἐνδύω) with Christ. In these passages, substance (the truth symbolized by the metaphor) is never far removed from shadow (the literal ritual that constitutes the metaphor). Consequently, whether Paul means “as many as have been water baptized” or “as many as have been Spirit baptized” in these two passages, he clearly uses the phrase in each case to introduce a concept that involves something more than water can provide. If Paul means the former, he does so only because he assumes that every believer who is water baptized has also been baptized in a metaphorical sense. For these reasons Rom. 6:3a and Gal. 3:27 fall within the parameters of a metaphorical usage of the ordinance, even though they may be described technically as references to the literal ceremony.

Metaphorical usages of *baptism* do not involve a physical activity obvious to the senses that results in something or someone getting wet. Instead, metaphorical usages employ *baptism* as a theological word picture to illustrate the spiritual activity of the Holy Spirit. These metaphorical usages are those that most directly impact whether or not it is accurate to describe the Old Testament believer as united with Christ. Two sets of metaphorical usages of *baptism* relate to the work of the Holy Spirit: those that refer (1) to regeneration and (2) to Pentecost.

²⁹ Both passages contain the following ὅσοι phrase: ὅσοι ἐβαπτίσθημεν εἰς Χριστόν.

Baptism As a Metaphor for Regeneration

At times Paul uses *baptism* as a metaphor for the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration. Paul's use of circumcision to characterize the regeneration of the physically uncircumcised Colossians is an analogous metaphorical usage of a ritual (Col. 2:11).³⁰ The Colossian believers were circumcised "with a circumcision made without hands." Paul clearly uses baptism in Colossians 2 with a sense that is parallel to his use of circumcision in that passage (Col. 2:12). Here *baptism* is a metaphor that teaches the importance of identification with the death and resurrection of Christ to the regeneration of the believer. Therefore, the baptism of Colossians 2 is not an activity that makes a believer wet, just as the circumcision mentioned here does not make a believer bleed. Instead, this baptism involves being "buried with Christ" and being "raised with Christ." It corrects the believer's deadness in transgressions and makes him alive through forgiveness (v. 13). In short, this baptism is the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration, not a ritual ceremony involving water. The water ceremony merely provides a word picture that better conceptualizes the truth of regeneration for Paul's readers.

As indicated by the usage chart, six other occurrences of βαπτίζω and τό βαπτισμα may refer to regeneration with the same metaphorical sense Paul uses in Col. 2:11. Two of these six passages are unambiguous metaphors of regeneration (Rom. 6:3b, 4). As already discussed, three others likely refer to water baptism, but two of these do so to introduce a metaphorical truth and therefore belong in a discussion of

³⁰ For a fuller discussion of the use of metaphor in Colossians 2, see chapter 4, "The Old Testament Believer and Antitheses of Union With Christ," pp. 113-116.

metaphorical usage (Rom. 6:3a, Gal. 3:27). Eph. 4:5 probably refers to water baptism. The remaining reference, 1 Cor. 12:13, clearly speaks of a baptism “by/in the Spirit,” so a metaphorical reference to the work of the Holy Spirit is clearly in view; but the larger context of this verse contrasts the metaphorical usages related to regeneration in important ways, indicating a reference to Pentecost rather than regeneration.

In Rom. 6:3-4, Paul teaches about “baptism into His [Christ’s] death” in much the same way that he refers to a baptism that resulted in burial and resurrection with Christ in Colossians 2. As in Colossians 2, this baptism results in the crucifixion of the old self (Rom. 6:6) and the gift of new life (v. 8).³¹ The Romans 6 reference to baptism into the death of Christ is clearly a reference to the regeneration of the believer.

Gal. 3:27 treats the same truth in terms of being clothed with Christ. The chapter emphasizes the relationship between the New Testament believer and Abraham. He is a son of Abraham (3:7), blessed with Abraham (3:9), a descendant of Abraham (3:29), and an heir of Abraham’s promise (3:29). The salvation of the Gentiles can be summarized accurately both as the coming of the blessings of Abraham and as the receiving of the promise of the Spirit through faith (3:14). The baptized Gentiles hold these blessings in common with Abraham in spite of the fact that Abraham was never baptized literally. In addition, the

³¹ Note that the phrase *united with Him in the likeness of His death* (Rom. 6:5) refers to the spiritual regeneration of the believer, not the physical baptism of the believer. Union with “the likeness of His death” is the same thing as having “our old self crucified with Him” (v. 6). The “likeness” between our regeneration and the death of Christ is that both involve a crucifixion. Similarly, our new life is very much like the resurrection of Christ because in both cases death, the result of our sin, no longer serves as the master (vv. 8-11). See G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 153.

chapter asserts an analogous continuing relationship between the New Testament unbeliever and the Law. Because the Law shuts up everyone under sin (3:22), even the New Testament unbeliever languishes under its custody and tutelage until faith comes (3:23-25). The coming of faith, not the coming of a new historical era, frees the New Testament unbeliever from the condemnation of the Law. Fellowship with Abraham and freedom from the Law are the blessings Paul summarizes when he says: “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ” (3:27). To be clothed with Christ as a baptized believer, therefore, is to share the same regeneration that imparted life to Abraham apart from the Law (3:21). This is a blessing available to all—Jew or Greek, slave or freeman, male or female (3:28). Given the larger context, the reader may safely add “Old Testament or New Testament.”³²

Understood as a metaphor for regeneration, Spirit baptism cannot be a term that excludes the Old Testament believer. Just as Paul applies the *circumcision* metaphor to New Testament believers who have never been circumcised (Col. 2:11-12), so also he applies the *baptism* and *clothed* metaphors to Old Testament believers like Abraham who were never baptized. The larger contexts of Rom. 6:3-4 and Gal. 3:27 indicate that this is the case. In regard to the former, Romans 5 establishes the union with Christ foundation for the discussion of the practical results of regeneration in Romans 6. As already demonstrated,³³ the Old

³² Col. 3:11 is a parallel passage to Gal. 3:28, although a context that does not use the *baptism* metaphor. Like Galatians 3, Col. 3:11 is decidedly soteriological. It is very difficult to exclude the Old Testament believer from the soteriological “new self” described there (v. 10).

³³ See chapter 5, “The Old Testament Believer in Key Union with Christ Passages,” pp. 139-144.

Testament believer is a participant in the union with Christ blessings of chapter 5 in the argument of Paul. As he moves into chapter 6, Paul does not exclude the Old Testament believer.³⁴ That he uses the significance of baptism as a metaphor for regeneration does not change the applicability of these new-life truths to the Old Testament believer.³⁵ Similarly, Paul's use of the metaphorical significance of circumcision to regeneration does not change the applicability of these truths to the New Testament believer. There exists a soteriological continuity between the Old and New Testaments in Paul's use of *baptism* and *circumcision* as metaphors for the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration. Yet just as soteriological continuity fails to account for all of the *you in Christ* and *Christ in you* theology of the New Testament, so also it cannot exhaust all the metaphorical usages of *baptism* for the Spirit's work in the New Testament. Some of these usages educe an ecclesiological discontinuity between the Testaments because they refer to Pentecost.

Baptism As a Metaphor for Pentecost

The metaphorical usage of *baptism* in the New Testament as a reference to Pentecost is clearly distinguishable from the literal water ceremony. John the Baptist sharply contrasts the two: "As for me, I baptize

³⁴ The ὅσοι phrase in Rom. 6:3a does not function in the argument of Paul as an exclusion of the Old Testament believer from the realities of regeneration. It rather serves to introduce the baptism metaphor and to apply the results of regeneration specifically to the practical needs of the recipients of Paul's epistle.

³⁵ Most interpreters today who see Spirit baptism as strictly applicable to the age subsequent to Pentecost would also admit that regeneration must have been the experience of the Old Testament believer. One such interpreter, Merrill F. Unger, comments in this regard: "It is evident that Old Testament saints were regenerated, and, no doubt, Ridout is correct in calling regeneration 'the common blessing of all dispensations.'" *The Baptism & Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 41. Unger quotes S. Ridout, *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit* (New York: Loizeaux, n.d.), 12.

you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me . . . will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matt. 3:11). The element of the baptism of Pentecost is the Holy Spirit, not water.³⁶ Peter interprets both the prophecy of John the Baptist and the Old Testament prophecy of Joel in terms of the events that took place on the Day of Pentecost. This baptism was a work of the Spirit predicted by John in Matt. 3:11 and remembered by Peter in Acts 11:15-16.

Peter’s reference in Acts 11:15-16 compares the Holy Spirit’s descent upon the household of Cornelius to the events of Pentecost,

³⁶ Luke and Matthew also quote John the Baptist’s reference to baptism with fire. The syntax of these passages (αὐτὸς ὑμᾶς βαπτίσει ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρὶ) indicates that John the Baptist viewed both the baptism of the Spirit and the baptism of fire as a single event. Murray J. Harris explains: “Sometimes, therefore, the non-use of a second or third prep. in NT Gk. may be theologically significant, indicating that the writer regarded the terms that he placed in one regimen as belonging naturally together or as a unit in concept or reality. . . . Similarly, in Matt. 3:11 the phrase *en pneumati hagio kai pyri* points not to two baptisms (vis., the righteous with the Holy Spirit, the wicked with fire), but to a single baptism in Spirit-and-fire, that may be interpreted either as the messianic purification and judgment that would be effected by the Spirit (cf. Isa. 4:4; 30:28) and experienced by all, or as the outpouring of the Spirit on believers at Pentecost that would refine and inflame them” (p. 1178). Both Matt. 3:12 and Luke 3:18 speak of the judgment of the wicked in unquenchable fire. Some interpreters account for baptism by fire by concluding that John the Baptist, as an Old Testament prophet, viewed the two advents of Messiah as a single event. See Théo Preiss, *Life in Christ*, trans. Harold Knight (Chicago: Alec R. Anderson, 1952), 71; and Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 177. Beasley-Murray sees a “twofold use of fire for refinement and consuming judgment,” but he indicates that the fire is one fire, not two; therefore, “Mt. 3.12 is not a precise exegesis of 3.11 but an application of it in respect to the wicked” (p. 38). John likely comments on both Pentecost (Acts 11:16) and the Parousia (Matt. 3:12, Luke 3:18) in this passage. He also teaches that Pentecost was in some sense a baptism with fire. In addition to the syntax employed in Matthew and Luke and the omissions of *and fire* in Mark and John, two further considerations indicate that John describes Pentecost as a baptism with fire (Matt. 3:11). First, the objects of *baptism with fire* in verse 11 and the objects of the *burning of the unquenchable fire* in verse 12 are unrelated. The first are the disciples of John whom he had baptized with water for repentance; the second are chaff contrasted with wheat, that are burned up rather than gathered into the barn. The two fires should therefore not be identified as the same fire. A second reason for viewing Pentecost as John’s baptism with fire is that fire appeared at Pentecost (Acts 2:3). F. F. Bruce concludes that the fire of Pentecost signified God’s presence, as in the burning bush of Exod. 3:2, and His power. *Commentary on the Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 54.

identifying them as the same work of the Spirit. Two other passages may be added to this category of Spirit baptisms in Acts: the Samaritans (Acts 8:14-17) and the disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7). Though clearly related by the interpretation Peter gives to this phenomenon, the Spirit's work in each context demonstrates a variety that is difficult to explain in terms of normative soteriology. Specifically, four issues have occupied the attention of exegetes: (1) the timing of this Spirit baptism relative to conversion; (2) the timing of this Spirit baptism relative to water baptism; (3) the role of the apostles in regard to this Spirit baptism; and (4) the role of sign gifts in regard to this Spirit baptism. Table 5 organizes these issues.

Table 5 – Spirit-Baptism in Acts

Passage	Timing Relative to Conversion	Timing Relative to Water Baptism	Apostolic Role	Miraculous Signs
Acts 2 – 120 Jewish Disciples	post-conversion	post-baptism	co-recipients with the other disciples	noise; tongues of fire; speaking in tongues
Acts 8 – Samaritan Disciples	post-conversion	post-baptism	Philip's preaching and miracle working; Peter and John lay on hands	none noted, but evidently similar to Pentecost in some respects ³⁷
Acts 10 – Gentile Disciples	either concurrent with conversion (Acts 11:14) or post-conversion (Acts 10:1)	pre-baptism	the preaching of Peter	speaking in tongues; new revelation or prophesying ("exalting God")
Acts 19 – Disciples of John the Baptist	post-conversion	post-baptism; post-rebaptism ³⁸	Paul lays on hands	speaking in tongues and prophesying

³⁷ Note that even Simon perceived that the Spirit had fallen on the Samaritan believers (Acts 8:18). F. F. Bruce remarks in this regard: "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" (p. 181).

³⁸ Beasley-Murray accounts for the difference between the Ephesian disciples of John as re-baptized and Luke's silence about any re-baptism of Apollos in the previous

Pentecostal Baptism As Localized Event

At issue in much of the debate concerning these passages is whether or not they provide a normative model that teaches all believers to expect a soteriological second blessing of the Holy Spirit, and if so what the nature of that second blessing must be.³⁹ Most of the disciples described by these passages received a baptism of the Holy Spirit subsequent to their conversion and water baptism. This fact is difficult to reconcile with the view that Pentecostal Spirit baptism occurs at the moment of conversion for the New Testament believer.⁴⁰ Only in the case of Cornelius in Acts 10 can it be argued from explicit evidence that this

chapter, who also knew only the baptism of John (Acts 18:25), by claiming that the disciples of John in Ephesus had not truly completed their conversion in faith (p. 112). However, Paul describes the ministry of John the Baptist in terms that preclude this understanding of the situation involving these men (Acts 19:4). They had been subjected to a ministry that taught them to repent and believe on Him who was coming. Acts 19 does not explicitly give the cause for the rebaptism of the men in Ephesus, but in light of the contrasting experience of Apollos it may have been less a proscriptive requirement than a voluntary public identification with Jesus Christ and the ministry of Paul in Ephesus.

³⁹ The debate has historically included more than proponents of the Charismatic movement. Charles Webb Carter reflects the traditional Wesleyan interpretation of these passages in Acts, interpreting them as a second-blessing crisis experience leading to final sanctification: "Thus it is evident that this great redemptive purpose of God in Christ was initially realized on the Day of Pentecost when the disciples 'were all filled with the Holy Spirit,' and were reunited in their spirits with the Spirit of God. Their sanctification had its inception in their regeneration (prior to Pentecost), and it had its developmental continuation following their crisis experience at Pentecost." *The Person and Ministry of the Holy Spirit: A Wesleyan Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), 173. The fundamentalist leader R. A. Torrey also advocated the need for a second-blessing experience of the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer. See R. A. Torrey, *Person and Work of the Holy Spirit: As Revealed in the Scriptures and in Personal Experience* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1910).

⁴⁰ This position is the goal of Unger's response. His view forces him to argue that the Samaritans in Acts 8 were not saved until Peter and John laid hands on them to receive Spirit-baptism (pp. 77-78). Beasley-Murray sees this argument as untenable in light of the Holy Spirit's blessing on the ministry of Philip (Acts 8:13), Luke's theological understanding of the relationship between faith and eternal life (Acts 13:48), and the similarity between the rejoicing of the Samaritans after believing and the post-conversion rejoicing of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:8, 39) (pp. 118-119).

work of the Spirit happened in direct relation to the conversion experience of new believers. In addition, it is also apparent from these passages that the exercise of apostolic authority and the phenomena of sign gifts involving new revelation are common characteristics of all the events.

Second-blessing advocates assume that the Spirit baptism experienced by these disciples had a soteriological significance related to the salvation or sanctification of their souls. In so doing, however, they fail to distinguish between the two different senses in which *baptism* functions as a metaphor for the Spirit's work in the New Testament. As a metaphor for regeneration, baptism by the Spirit involves the normative conversion experience of the individual believer of any age. In this metaphorical sense, every believer in every era is either baptized into and clothed with Christ through the Spirit's work or not saved at all (Rom. 6:3-4, Gal. 3:27, Col. 2:11-12), for *baptized* and *clothed* in this case mean *regenerated*. As a metaphor for the Pentecostal experience, however, baptism by the Spirit exhibits a localization and individualization uncharacteristic of normative soteriology. Prior to Pentecost no individual believer experienced the Spirit baptism of Pentecost at the moment of his conversion or at any time thereafter. After Pentecost a few individual believers may have experienced Pentecostal Spirit baptism at the moment of their conversion (Acts 10), and a few more individually experienced Pentecostal Spirit baptism subsequent to their conversion (Acts 2, 8, 19, 1 Corinthians 12-14); but three facts regarding this work of the Spirit as described in Acts and 1 Corinthians suggest a localized and

limited experience of Pentecostal Spirit baptism among believers of the New Testament church, something less than normative.⁴¹

First, every instance in Acts of the Spirit baptism of Pentecost requires the presence of apostolic authority,⁴² but Luke also records examples of normative conversions that never require the benefit of direct

⁴¹ The relationship between the nature of tongues in Acts and tongues in Corinth has been the subject of some debate, but a connection of some kind between the revelatory signs of 1 Corinthians 12-14 and the Acts passages is generally accepted. On the tongues question, three possibilities present themselves: (1) both Luke and Paul use the term *γλωσσῶν* to describe ecstatic speech; (2) both men use the term to describe known human language; or (3) the men use the term differently, Paul as ecstatic speech and Luke as known language. There is no linguistic evidence for the third of these options. Both men utilize the word *γλωσσῶν* in their passages in a technical way to describe a spiritual gift. The proximity of the lives of these men argues that their technical understanding of the gift of *γλωσσῶν* must have agreed. W. G. Putman, who argues for an ecstatic speech interpretation, recognizes that the men must have agreed in their understanding, and he argues that Luke describes ecstatic speech. "Tongues, Gift of," *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas, 2nd ed. (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1982), 1207. Putnam also offers three arguments against the hearing-miracle interpretation: 1) it transfers the miracle from believers to unbelievers; 2) it fails to account for the existence of the miracle apart from hearers (Acts 2:4, 6); and 3) those who did not know the foreign languages in question thought the disciples were intoxicated (v. 13). With the different-usage option eliminated by the relationship between Luke and Paul, the question becomes how to best interpret the united testimony of Luke and Paul so as to choose between either the first or second of the possible understandings. Luke's usage is clearly decisive. He employs a lengthy passage (Acts 2:5-13) complete with a list of the languages in question while describing the known-language reality of New Testament *γλωσσῶν*. The arguments for ecstatic speech from Paul's usage in 1 Corinthians are not nearly as convincing. These include the phrase "tongues . . . of angels" (13:1), the phrase "in his spirit he speaks mysteries" (14:2), the use of *φωνή* rather than *γλῶσσα* (14:10-11), and the phrase "my mind is unfruitful" (14:14). Angels nowhere employ ecstatic speech. Speaking "mysteries" is parallel to "no one understands," and it describes the negative effect on those who did not know the foreign languages spoken as in Acts 2:13. The term *φωνή* is a synonym for *γλῶσσα*, not a replacement of it. And the "unfruitful mind" is not a state of unconsciousness, but rather a state of isolation. It is a mind that can only edify itself (14:4).

⁴² Note that Ananias, though not an apostle, laid hands on Paul that he might regain his sight (Acts 9:17-19). Paul was healed, trusted Christ for salvation, submitted to baptism, and was filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17, 22:16). When Acts 9:17 is understood in the light of Acts 22:16, it becomes clear that the filling of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the former passage is not a direct result of the laying on of Ananias's hands in a sense that parallels the authority executed by the apostles in Pentecostal Spirit baptism. Paul's filling was a consequence of his subsequent repentance and conversion attested by his water baptism, not a consequence of Ananias's hands.

apostolic involvement. Contrast, for instance, the ministry of Philip to the Samaritans in Acts 8:4-17 and his ministry to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:25-40. In the former case, Philip had to call up John and Peter in order for the Samaritans to receive the Spirit baptism of Pentecost. In the latter case, he pursues no such procedure. Taken as a whole, Acts 8 teaches that the presence of the apostles was necessary in Samaria because a localized experience of Pentecostal baptism of the Holy Spirit was also necessary, whereas on the desert road to Gaza the presence of the apostles was unnecessary because this baptism was unnecessary there. The Pentecostal Spirit baptism of Acts 8 was a localized event, not the universal experience of every believer.

Second, the Spirit baptism of Pentecost in Acts always demonstrates its presence through the gift of miraculous signs and new revelation, but this does not appear to be the shared experience of every believer during the New Testament era. Many of the thousands saved in response to Peter's Pentecostal preaching probably lacked these revelatory experiences (Acts 2:41-47) in spite of their repentance, water baptism, and reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Luke notes that the apostles were exceptional among the brethren because they performed wonders and signs in the newborn church (Acts 2:43). The rule of faith and practice for the church in general creates a corporation characterized by doctrine, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, prayer, generosity, worship, and evangelism, not signs and wonders.

Clearly, Acts 2 and other passages indicate that the category of believers who individually experienced the revelatory gifts of Pentecostal baptism was broader than the twelve of Acts 1:26. All of the 120

disciples in the upper room were recipients of these experiences (Acts 1:15, 2:4). In addition, Joel 2 identifies the recipients of the outpouring of the Spirit of the Lord as “all flesh” (Acts 2:17) and describes the prophesying of various classes of people, including women, who were not a part of the twelve. 1 Corinthians 12 describes these spiritualities (πνευματικός, v. 1) or manifestations of the Spirit (φανερώσεις τοῦ πνεύματος, v. 7) as given to many in the early church who were distinguishable from the apostles (vv. 4-11, 27-31). But the observation that others beyond the apostles individually experienced Pentecostal baptism falls short of conclusively demonstrating that all believers subsequent to Pentecost shared the same experience in the same sense. Many in the first Jerusalem church evidently did not experience directly the phenomenon. Their experience mirrored that of the Ethiopian eunuch in this regard.

A third reason for understanding the individual experience of Pentecostal baptism in terms of a series of localized events rather than normative universal experience is the contrast between Paul’s description of these phenomena in 1 Corinthians 12-14 and his description in Romans 12 of the normative spiritual gifts that accrue to believers as a result of God’s grace in their lives. The description of the worship practices of the uniquely problem-riddled congregation in Corinth provides the only New Testament epistolary instruction regarding the miraculous sign gifts, such as tongues, which characterize the personal experience of Pentecostal Spirit baptism in Acts. On the other end of the spectrum of Christian maturity stands the normative testimony of the church at Rome (Rom. 1:8). This church also received a letter from the apostle

Paul in which gifts are mentioned (Rom. 12:3-8), but the contrast between the Corinthians' list (1 Cor. 12:7-11) and the Romans' list is instructive. Note the differences between the lists of spiritual gifts outlined in Table 6.

Table 6 – Spiritual Gifts Contrasted in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12

Romans 12:3-8	1 Corinthians 12:7-11
χαρίσματα κατὰ τὴν χάριν τὴν δοθεῖσαν ἡμῖν “gifts according to the grace having been given to us”	φανερώσεις τοῦ πνεύματος “manifestation of the Spirit”
<p>prophecy</p> <p>service</p> <p>teaching</p> <p>exhortation</p> <p>giving</p> <p>leadership</p> <p>mercy</p>	<p>the word of wisdom</p> <p>the word of knowledge</p> <p>faith</p> <p>gifts of healing</p> <p>effecting of miracles</p> <p>prophecy</p> <p>distinguishing spirits</p> <p>tongues</p> <p>interpretation of tongues</p>

Although the Romans list contains seven gifts and the Corinthians list contains nine gifts, they have only the gift of prophecy in common.⁴³ If

⁴³ *Prophecy* is a broad term in New Testament theology. The ministry of the New Testament prophet typically involved the reception of special revelation (Acts 21:10). This may be Paul's meaning in both the Romans and the 1 Corinthians passages, yet the 1 Corinthians context clearly has a greater emphasis on the miraculous signs required to validate such new revelation. Paul's grammar in 1 Cor. 12:8-10 utilizes the two Greek words for *another* (ἄλλος—another of the same kind, ἕτερος—another of a different kind) in an alternating construction to create three categories of manifestations of the Spirit as follows: (1) word of wisdom + (ἄλλω) word of knowledge; (2) (ἐτέρω) faith + (ἄλλω) healing + (ἄλλω) miracles + (ἄλλω) prophecy + (ἄλλω) distinguishing of Spirits; (3)

both lists were intended to describe an ongoing normative reality in the local church, the passages would display greater overlap. Second, whereas both the Romans list and the Corinthians list are called *gracious gifts* (χαρίσματα, Rom. 12:6, 1 Cor. 12:31), the Corinthians list has a more specific designation that emphasizes their revelatory nature, *manifestations of the Spirit* (1 Cor. 12:7). The manifestations of the Spirit are a specialized subset of spiritual gifts that created special problems in Corinth, which were unknown in Rome. Third, the Romans list does not require ranking, but the ranking of the Corinthians list is a major theme of the entire three chapters. This ranking is designed to bring these miraculous experiences under apostolic authority in a more effective way (1 Cor. 12:27-31, 14:37-38). Finally, the Romans list is to be practiced in an unmitigated fashion, whereas the Corinthians list requires specific regulations (1 Cor. 14:27-36) in anticipation of the time that they would pass away (1 Cor. 13:8-10). The Romans list evidences spiritual maturity

(ἐτέρω) tongues + (ἄλλω) interpretation of tongues. His inclusion of *prophecy* in the second category shows the importance of miraculous acts of faith to the form of prophecy Paul refers to here. This form of prophecy is closely associated with the ministry of the apostles and the revelatory foundation of the New Testament church (Eph. 2:20, 3:5, 2 Pet. 3:2). But *prophecy* also refers to a spiritual ministry of New Testament believers that is distinguishable from new revelation and miraculous sign gifts. More specifically, Paul cites three separate ministries that he considers *prophecy* in his contrast of the benefits of prophecy and tongues in 1 Corinthians 14. Verse 26 of that chapter lists these components of New Testament prophecy as (1) sharing a psalm, (2) sharing a teaching, and (3) sharing a new revelation. The components of speaking in tongues are also mentioned: (1) sharing a tongue, (2) sharing an interpretation. Prophecy as sharing a psalm or testimonial praise is likely the form of prophecy that is closely connected to the prayer and worship of Christian women in 1 Cor. 11:5. Prophecy as teaching accounts for the interchangeability of *prophecy* and *teaching* in some New Testament passages (2 Pet. 2:1, Rev. 2:20). The men who led the church of Antioch were likely considered both prophets and teachers, not one or the other (Acts 13:1). Prophecy as new revelation shares the temporary miraculous character of tongues and would pass away (1 Cor. 13:8-10), whereas prophecy as praise or singing and teaching continues today. The focus of the list of 1 Corinthians 12 is especially on the former; the Romans 12 focus is likely the latter.

in the lives of believers who practice its gifts (Rom. 12:1-2), whereas the Corinthians list evidences spiritual immaturity (1 Cor. 13:11-12).⁴⁴ The uniqueness of the Corinthian setting and its connection to the characteristics of the Pentecostal Spirit baptism of the Acts passages demonstrate that this form of Spirit baptism involves a series of localized experiences centered on new revelation, not normative soteriological experience.

Pentecostal Baptism As Universal Effect

In spite of the localized nature of the experience of Pentecostal baptism as described in Acts 2, 8, 10, 19 and in the church at Corinth, a number of New Testament passages indicate that the Spirit's outpouring on the Day of Pentecost was a universal event. Joel promises an outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28), and that is what happens on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16-17).⁴⁵ Also in anticipation of this outpouring, Christ had promised his disciples that He would send a Comforter (παράκλητος) that would keep all His people from being orphaned (John 14:15-17) and convict the entire world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). When John the Baptist promised his disciples that the one following him would baptize them with the Holy Spirit, he

⁴⁴ This same immaturity characterized the life of Simon in Samaria (Acts 8:18-19).

⁴⁵ Issues related to the nature of Peter's use of Joel 2 will be discussed in chapter 8, "Union with Christ and the Fulfillment of the New Covenant." F. F. Bruce recognizes the importance of the universalism expressed in Peter's use of Joel to the theme of Luke in Acts: "But the prominent feature of the passage which Peter actually quotes is the prediction of the outpouring of God's Spirit 'upon all flesh.' Luke probably sees in these words an adumbration of the worldwide Gentile mission, even if Peter himself did not realize their full import when he quoted them on the day of Pentecost. Certainly the outpouring of the Spirit on a hundred and twenty Jews could not in itself fulfil the prediction of such outpouring 'upon all flesh'; but it was the beginning of the fulfilment" (p. 68). For the theological significance of כָּל־בָּשָׂר (*all flesh*), see Appendix C, "The Theology of כָּל־בָּשָׂר."

meant all of them (Matt. 3:11), and Paul clearly indicates in the context of 1 Corinthians 12-14 that all New Testament believers were baptized by one Spirit into one body (1 Cor. 12:13). It is this coming of the Spirit that gives every Christian a new normative power to be a witness (Acts 1:8) and to have a share in doing even greater things than Christ did during His ministry on the earth (John 14:12, 16:7). One of the great difficulties in regard to the interpretation of Pentecostal Spirit baptism, therefore, is the need to reconcile the universalism of the Pentecostal promise with the localized and specified events affecting limited groups of people who actually experience the miraculous signs, gift of tongues, and new revelation.

Unger reconciles the localization and universalism of Pentecostal Spirit baptism under a soteriological framework. He sees the local event of Pentecost as an initial *deposit* of the saving work of the Holy Spirit that now becomes available to all who believe subsequent to Pentecost:

The gift—given, received, and permanently deposited in God’s people at Pentecost—contains all the ministries. The permanent deposit of the gift assures instant salvation to the sinner the moment he believes. His salvation is not a receiving of the Spirit as at Pentecost, but an automatic entrance into all the benefits of the permanently deposited gift of the Spirit. This gift has been available to each believing sinner the moment he believes, ever since its bestowal at Pentecost.⁴⁶

When Unger speaks of “all the ministries” of the Holy Spirit in this passage, he mentions that there are thirty-five of these and that five are especially important: regenerating, baptizing, indwelling, sealing, and the potential for filling.⁴⁷ According to this view, a localized *deposit* of the

⁴⁶ Unger, 63.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Spirit on the 120 disciples in the upper room on the Day of Pentecost produces a new soteriological opportunity for all believers. Subsequently, all believers may benefit from the soteriological work of the Holy Spirit the moment they believe, similar to the way an account holder can make a withdrawal on a deposit already existing in a financial institution. Unger's concern in this context especially argues against the need for a second blessing experience to obtain these soteriological blessings.

There are two problems with this soteriological approach to the reconciliation of the localized and universal aspects of Pentecostal Spirit baptism. First, the soteriological framework Unger uses leaves unexplained how any believer prior to Pentecost might have experienced a saving work of the Spirit without the soteriological *deposit* of Pentecost. Unger concedes that the Old Testament believer must have been regenerated by the Spirit of God,⁴⁸ but he fails to see the trouble this concession brings to his assertion that the deposit of the Spirit at Pentecost contains all the saving ministries of the Holy Spirit (including regeneration). He does not address how regeneration could be available at the moment of faith to believers prior to Pentecost, while the other saving benefits were not.

The second difficulty with Unger's view is that it requires that Pentecostal Spirit baptism happen at the moment of conversion for all believers subsequent to the experience of the 120. Luke's account of this phenomenon in Acts, however, does not cooperate very well with this requirement. Luke clearly describes the Samaritan believers (Acts 8) and the disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 19) as experiencing a post-

⁴⁸ Ibid., 12.

conversion and post-water-baptism Pentecostal Spirit baptism. Viewing Acts 2, 8, 10, and 19 as four separate soteriological “deposits” that made the saving work of the Spirit available in four stages to four separate groups does not help, for Apollos evidently knows no soteriological or pneumatological deficiency prior to the Spirit baptism of the disciples of John in Ephesus, even though he knew only John’s baptism (Acts 18:25). In addition, the Ethiopian eunuch experiences salvation in a satisfactory way (Acts 8: 38-39) even though these God-fearing Gentile converts to Judaism did not experience Pentecostal Spirit baptism as a group until Peter’s ministry at the house of Cornelius in Acts 10 (Acts 10:2). Luke’s description of the work of the Spirit in the early days of the church simply precludes viewing Pentecost as an unrepeated initial soteriological deposit.

Four considerations indicate that revelation provides a better framework for reconciling the local and universal aspects of Pentecostal Spirit baptism than soteriology does. First, revelation is the common emphasis of both the universal promise and the localized experiences of fulfillment. Peter uses the Joel text to show that the recipients of new miraculous revelation on the day of Pentecost were not drunk with wine: they were prophesying (Acts 2:15-17). The promise of the Paraclete in Christ’s farewell discourse introduces the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Truth (John 14:17) who does a great work of new revelation on behalf of His people (John 14:26, 16:13). The prophecy of John the Baptist regarding the baptism of the followers of Christ with the Holy Spirit precedes a warning that refers to the burning of chaff with unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:12). This warning may have been an allusion to the warning

of Isa. 5:24-25, where God promises the burning of chaff because the Israelites had rejected the word of God. The Isaiah passage speaks specifically of a tongue of fire (לִשׁוֹן אֵשׁ) consuming the chaff, a word picture that immediately reminds of the new revelation begun at Pentecost.⁴⁹ When Paul teaches the Corinthians that all believers were baptized into one body, he does so because revelatory gifts had been used by that carnal church to create divisions (1 Cor. 12:15-27). Paul's point is that the revelatory work of Pentecostal Spirit baptism ought to be a source of Christian unity, not division. Finally, all the Acts passages that mention the individualized and localized experience of Pentecostal Spirit baptism also describe the effects of a new work of special revelation involving miraculous sign gifts. Revelation is a theme common to both the localized experiences and the universal promise of Pentecostal baptism.

Secondly, revelation allows for both a variety in the individual experiences of Pentecostal Spirit baptism and a normative unity in the corporate effect of Pentecostal Spirit baptism in a manner that a soteriological interpretation of Pentecost does not. The concept of a soteriological *deposit* that can be drawn on by later believers suffers from definitional inconsistency because it flutters between describing this work of the Spirit both as something absent and present in a spatial and temporal sense (before and after Pentecost) and as something available for all believers in a non-spatial and non-temporal sense (after

⁴⁹ Donald Guthrie notes an interesting parallel between the giving of the Law and the phenomenon of miraculous gifts in Jewish tradition from the Midrash: "Rabbinic tradition maintained that although the law on Sinai was given with a single sound, the voice went forth into seventy tongues and every people heard in their own language." *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 538.

Pentecost).⁵⁰ Reality must be either spatio-temporal or non-spatio-temporal, or it defies logical definition. If new soteriological benefits can be made available to all believers after Pentecost without reference to space and time, then by definition these benefits must have been equally available prior to Pentecost because they are non-spatio-temporal realities. “*Non-spatio-temporal* soteriological benefits available *after* Pentecost” is an oxymoron.

The revelation interpretation of Pentecost avoids this definitional ambiguity because its understanding of the Spirit’s work at Pentecost stays firmly rooted in a spatial and temporal sphere. Revelation can impact individual experience in a localized and temporary way and still have a universal effect in a spatial and temporal sense as that revelation is published more broadly. Those who experience the reception of new revelation do not merely keep it for themselves; rather, they communicate that revelation to others who did not share the original miraculous experience. This communication transforms the individual experience into a universal blessing in terms of its effect. The universal effect becomes absolute when the new revelation results in Scripture available for all to read (1 Cor. 13:8-12).

Third, understanding Pentecostal Spirit baptism as new revelation rather than new soteriology better accounts for the effect of the Holy Spirit’s coming beyond the people of God. The reference to *all flesh* (כָּל־בָּשָׂר) in Joel 2 uses a compound construction that typically means all humanity in its frail contrast to God, who is transcendent over all

⁵⁰ This problem becomes particularly acute when one begins to think of four separate soteriological “deposits” in Acts in this way.

flesh.⁵¹ All flesh is grass that withers and fades in contrast to the abiding word of the Lord (Isa. 40:6-8). God had privileged Israel uniquely among those who comprise all flesh, for Israel had been given a direct revelation from God as no other nation had (Deut. 5:26). Joel universalizes this blessing, which had once been limited to Israel, when he predicts that God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh. This outpouring would produce a new revelation available to all in a new way.

Christ also speaks of an effect beyond the people of God related to Pentecostal Spirit baptism: “And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8). The next verse specifically teaches that this is a ministry to those who fail to believe on Him (v. 9). Clearly, there is a sense in which the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost involved an outpouring of the Spirit on men and women beyond believers. Understanding this outpouring as a new soteriological work leaves no place for the effect of Pentecost on unbelievers. However, if the outpouring of the Spirit was a new work with revelatory rather than soteriological innovation at its core, the effect on those described as *all flesh* and the unbelieving *world* in these passages becomes clear. The new revelation equips God’s people as powerful witnesses to those who are not God’s people (Acts 1:8), and it introduces a new disciple-making institution, the church or body of Christ, which focuses on incorporating both Jew and Gentile, even to the remotest part of the earth (1 Cor. 12:13, Eph. 2:11-22, 3:4-7).

The fourth reason new revelation better explains the nature of Pentecostal Spirit baptism than does new salvation is the special focus of

⁵¹ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, 142.

this study—the Old Testament believer. Most interpreters who see Pentecost as the introduction of a new soteriology never account for the sense in which an Old Testament believer could have been saved without a complete saving work of the Spirit. Understanding Pentecost as a novel revelatory work greatly mitigates this difficulty. In spite of his lack of a completed revelation, the Old Testament believer could still be saved by a complete work of the Holy Spirit.

Pentecostal Baptism and Acts 2:38

A soteriological interpretation of the novelty of Pentecost relies heavily upon Peter's invitation to repent and be baptized followed by the assurance that those who do so would receive *the gift of the Holy Spirit* (Acts 2:38). *Gift of the Holy Spirit* involves an objective genitive; therefore, receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit is synonymous with receiving the Holy Spirit in some sense (Acts 8:19-20). In addition, this *gift* is clearly associated with the miraculous revelatory events of Acts 2:1-4 (Acts 10:45-48, 11:17). Taken together these passages teach that God rewards a positive response to the gospel message after Pentecost in a way He did not reward that same positive response to the gospel message prior to Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is in some sense at the center of this new reward for a positive gospel response.

Donald Guthrie concludes from this evidence that the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38 relates directly to the conversion experience, not to an empowerment of existing believers.⁵² Others have acknowledged the evangelistic context of the verse while maintaining a distinction

⁵² Guthrie, 539-540; see also Bruce, 77-78.

between the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38 and the gift of salvation.⁵³ The question concerning the interpretation of the novelty of this gift of the Spirit is whether the interpreter must choose between empowerment through revelation and the Spirit's saving work as Guthrie's conclusion suggests, or could Peter's *gift* in Acts 2:38 have referred to a work of the Spirit that was both something old (soteric) and something new (revelatory). W. D. Davies explains that Peter's first-century Jewish audience would have made a close connection between access to the Holy Spirit and access to His work of revelation:

According to the second view it was claimed that the Holy Spirit had ceased with the death of the last prophets. This of course accords with that very close connection, which is found in Rabbinic thought, some would even call it an identification, between prophecy and the Holy Spirit, a connection which made it difficult if not impossible to conceive of the active presence of the Holy Spirit without some form of prophecy. Of the belief in the cessation of prophecy there is evidence in the Old Testament where we read: "We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long." The same attitude is also expressed in 1 Macc. 4. 46, 9. 27, 14. 41, and also in Josephus [Antiquities 13.1.1]. For the Rabbinic view we quote: "When the last prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi died the holy spirit ceased out of Israel; but nevertheless it was granted them to hear (communications from God) by means of a Bath Qol."⁵⁴

⁵³ Abraham Kuyper distinguishes between the gift of salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38. He does so, however, by taking the genitive *of the Holy Spirit* in a subjective sense and thereby equating the gift of Acts 2:38 with miraculous sign gifts administered to the believer by the Holy Spirit. *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri De Vries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 181. As already discussed, it is unlikely that all the believers experienced the revelatory miracles required by Kuyper's interpretation (Acts 2:43).

⁵⁴ *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 209. The Old Testament passage Davies quotes is Ps. 74:9. The *Bath Qol* is the heavenly voice. The observations Davies makes also illumine John's comment in John 7:39, "the Holy Spirit was not yet." In referring to the nonexistence of the Holy Spirit in this text, John merely means the nonexistence of the inspired prophet.

It would have been difficult for Peter's audience to distinguish between a new promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit and a new promise of prophecy. But did Peter refer to something more than his audience would have grasped—a saving work of the Holy Spirit unavailable prior to Pentecost?

Three considerations indicate that when Peter promised the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit to these lost Jews, he was not promising access to a new saving work of the Spirit that was somehow unavailable prior to Pentecost. Instead, the focus of his promise was access to a new revelatory work of the Spirit that testified in a novel way to the same salvation opportunity Joel had called his people to (Acts 2:21). First, reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit in the key Acts passages is closely associated with the reception of the miraculous sign gifts of the Holy Spirit, His work of revelation, not with the conversion of the believers involved, His work of regeneration (Acts 2:4, 8:18, 10:46, 11:15).

Second, Peter identifies *the gift of the Holy Spirit* throughout Acts as the same work of the Spirit that occurred in Acts 2:1-4 (Acts 10:47, 11:15-17). Consistently understanding the *gift* of Acts 2:38 as an offer of a new saving work of God's Spirit requires the conclusion that Acts 2:1-4 also describes a new saving work for the 120 disciples, for Peter calls these experiences the same work of the Spirit. Few claim that the 120 disciples were saved in a New Testament sense for the first time in the upper room; instead, interpreters who see soteriology in Acts 2:38 but not in Acts 2:1-4 assert that the experience of the 120 disciples was a unique form of the gift of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁵ Note, however, that Peter

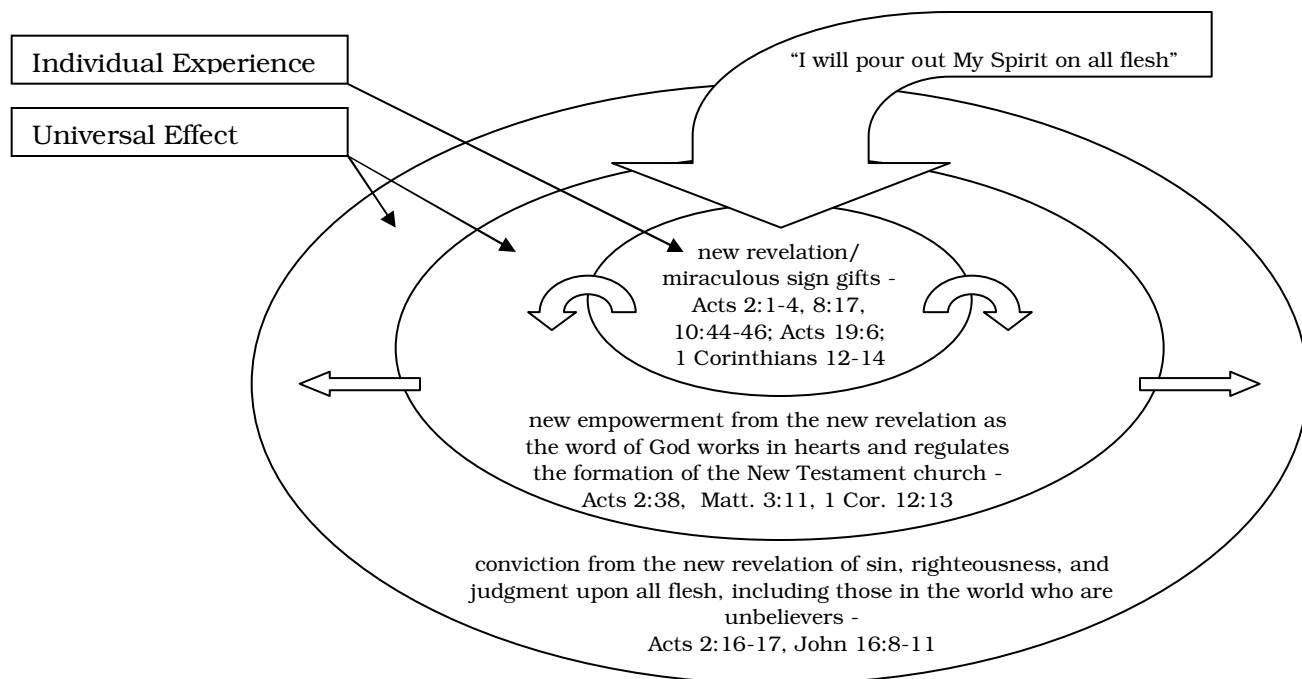
⁵⁵ Beasley-Murray comments: "There would seem to be good reason for regarding their [the 120 disciples] experience as unique" (p. 106).

never shares this view of the uniqueness of the upper room experience. Rather than interpreting the Acts 2:1-4 experience as exceptional due to its initial position, Peter refers to it as the normative event that gives definition to the experiences that follow in the other passages. Although it is true that in the former case believers were the object of the Spirit's work and in some of the latter cases unbelievers were, Peter still teaches that the work of the Spirit in these separate contexts was the same work. The interpreter must therefore choose whether the nature of the experience of 2:1-4 helps illuminate 2:38, or whether the nature of the promise in 2:38 helps illuminate the experience of 2:1-4. While it is clear that unbelievers may have been challenged for the first time to receive the Spirit's revelatory work in Acts 2:38, it is less discernable how believers could have received for the first time a complete experience of His saving work in Acts 2:1-4.

Finally, Acts 2:39 explains the verse 38 gift of the Holy Spirit as related to a specific promise. The promise noted here refers to the text of Peter's message that day—Joel 2—which clearly describes a revelatory rather than regenerating work of the Holy Spirit poured out on all flesh. What has changed in terms of the reward for a response to the gospel after Pentecost is access to the fulfillment of this promise, access to this new revelation from the Spirit of God. Receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38 is receiving the fulfillment of the promise of new revelation made in Joel 2. This new revelation testifies with new power about the same gospel that Joel preached: "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21).

The specific nature of this new access to new revelation differs among believers. For some it means that the Spirit of God inspires them directly with new revelation. This is an individualized and localized experience. For others it means that they benefit from the power of this new revelation both as it operates in their lives engendering the faith of powerful witnesses, and as it defines their new ecclesia, the New Testament church. This is a corporate and universal effect. For the world new revelation means that they would be convicted of sin, righteousness, and judgment because they refuse to believe on Christ. Taken as a whole, New Testament theology teaches that the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit creates revelatory splashes and ripples that ultimately water all flesh. Figure 4 illustrates.

Figure 4 – Pentecostal Spirit Baptism as Revelation



Peter's promise in Acts 2:38 assures his audience that they have the opportunity to move from the outer circle to the middle circle, from those who have rejected the revelatory gift of the Holy Spirit poured out on them to those who have received the revelatory gift of the Holy Spirit poured out on them. This gift is the promise made to them and their children and to "all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."

Correspondence between the Baptism Metaphor and Union with Christ

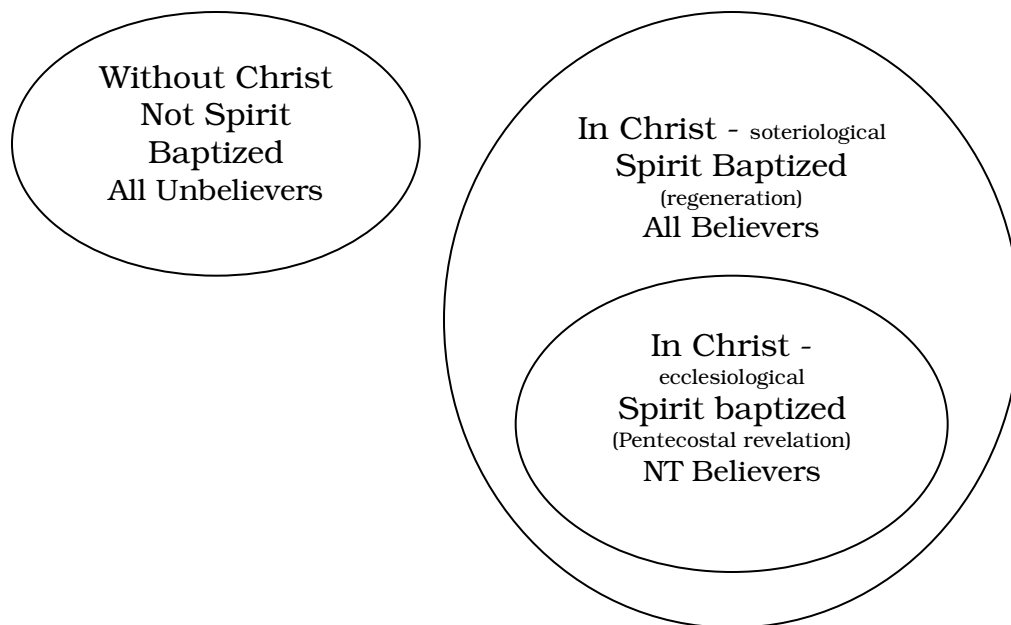
The metaphorical usages of *baptism* in the New Testament parallel the soteriological and ecclesiological aspects of Paul's union with Christ doctrine in an important way.⁵⁶ Earlier conclusions regarding the *you in Christ* and *Christ in you* themes of New Testament theology found that the antitheses of this blessing are at times soteriological in nature and at times ecclesiological.⁵⁷ In the former case, Paul includes Old Testament believers with those who are united with Christ. In the latter case, specific parameters define a more specialized understanding of union with Christ, which excludes the Old Testament believer. It does so because it refers to something ecclesologically new, the New Testament church. These parameters include Paul's unique description of this church as

⁵⁶ Warren Vanhetloo recognizes a relationship between union with Christ and Spirit baptism that is similar to the understanding reflected here. He distinguishes between soteric union and somatic union, a distinction similar to this study's soteriological and ecclesiological distinction, and he concludes that the Old Testament believer was a part of the soteric union with Christ but did not participate in somatic union. Vanhetloo's conclusions regarding Spirit baptism differs from those reached by this study because he never sees *baptism* as a metaphor for the work of the Spirit that regenerated Old Testament believers. "Spirit Baptism," *Calvary Baptist Theological Journal* 3 (Spring, 1987): 55-56.

⁵⁷ See Figure 2, "Soteriological vs. Ecclesiological Application of 'In Christ'" (p. 136).

Christ's body, submitted to His headship, and founded on the new revelation of His apostles and New Testament prophets. This last parameter parallels the key distinction between the two ways *baptism* occurs in the New Testament as a metaphor for the Spirit's work. This is true because the new revelation that helps delineate ecclesiological union with Christ is the same new revelation that distinguishes the definitions of *regeneration-baptism* and *Pentecostal-baptism*. Figure 5 illustrates the relationship between the Old Testament believer and the two metaphorical usages of baptism in the New Testament, and it shows how this relationship is analogous to the conclusions drawn earlier about the Old Testament believer's relationship to union with Christ.

Figure 5 – Spirit Baptism as Regeneration and Pentecostal Revelation



As Figure 5 shows, the relationship of the Old Testament believer to the metaphorical usages of *baptism* in the New Testament parallels his relationship to the union with Christ doctrine in Paul. The metaphorical

usages of baptism include the Old Testament believer when they refer to the beneficiaries of regeneration, but they exclude the Old Testament believer when they speak of the recipients of new revelation given first at Pentecost.

Spirit Indwelling and the Novelty of Pentecost

A final issue related to the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Old Testament believers requires treatment. Many have correctly insisted that without an indwelling work of the Spirit of God in the life of the Old Testament believer, he could not have been united to Christ as the New Testament believer is. The position of Bruce Demarest outlines this understanding well and deserves review.

The Holy Spirit is the bond by which believers are united to Christ. The indwelling Christ and the indwelling Spirit are a coincident reality. But Jesus promised his disciples that he would return to them in a dynamic way through the Counselor after he was glorified (John 15:26; 16:7). Not in OT times but only following Pentecost would the Counselor 'live with you and be in you' (John 14:17).⁵⁸

Understood as a vital and spiritual reality in the life of the believer, mystical union requires the agency of the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit. If this Spirit indwelling was unavailable to the Old Testament believer as Demarest suggests, his assertion that the saint of the former era could not have been united to Christ logically follows. This study has already uncovered some evidence suggesting that the Old Testament believer was indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Paul's description of the New Testament church as a new appendage to an already existing temple of God called the dwelling of God in the Spirit clearly implies that the Old

⁵⁸ Demarest, 339.

Testament believer must have been indwelt by God's Spirit (Eph. 2:20-22). James 4:5 and 2 Cor. 6:16 suggest that the apostles believed that the Old Testament taught an indwelling presence of the Spirit of God in the lives of His saints. As Demarest's comments intimate, however, two passages in the Gospel of John seem to controvert this interpretation of Old Testament pneumatology.

John 7:39 – The Holy Spirit Not Yet

John 7:38-39 bears many similarities to the passages identified earlier in this chapter as examples of a pneumatological use of the Old Testament by Christ and the apostles. Verse 37 describes the context of Christ's proclamation as the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles.⁵⁹ At the climactic moment of the entire feast schedule, Christ stands up and proclaims: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" John explains the water metaphor used by Christ

⁵⁹ Alfred Edersheim describes the significance of the timing of Christ's proclamation: "It was on that day, after the priest had returned from Siloam with his golden pitcher, and for the last time poured its contents to the base of the altar; after the 'Hallel' had been sung to the sound of the flute, the people responding and worshipping as the priests three times drew the threefold blasts from their silver trumpets—just when the interest of the people had been raised to its highest pitch, that, from amidst the mass of worshippers, who were waving towards the altar quite a forest of leafy branches as the last words of Ps. 118 were chanted—a voice was raised which resounded through the Temple, startled the multitude, and carried fear and hatred to the hearts of their leaders." *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services* (1874; reprint, Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 222-223. William Barclay describes the significance of the water ceremony associated with this feast: "The symbolism of this ceremony is clear; it had a threefold impact, of every part of which the thronging people were very conscious. First, it was a thanksgiving for God's good gift of water, in memory of the waterless and thirsty days in the desert. Second, it was what might be called an acted prayer for rain, so that the harvest would never fail. Third, it was a forecast of the days of the Messiah, when God's people would draw water from the wells of salvation, and when God's Spirit would be poured into the thirsty souls of men." *The Promise of the Spirit* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 31.

in verse 39: “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.” Clearly, the flowing of the Spirit described by Christ’s reference to flowing rivers of water does not occur until after the glorification of Christ on the Day of Pentecost.

The nature of this outflow of the Spirit is less clear. Some have argued that the source of water must be Christ, not the believer, but in view of similar language used by Christ in his discussion with the woman at the well (John 4:14), He more likely refers to believers as the new source of rivers of living water.⁶⁰ The John 4 passage is clearly a reference to the Spirit’s work of regeneration because the water of the believer in this case becomes “a well of water springing up to eternal life.” This is a salvific water available to this thirsty woman of sin, and it quenched the need she had as well as that of many of her neighbors (John 4:27-30, 39-42). John gives no indication that anyone in Samaria had to await the glorification of Christ or the events of Pentecost to drink the waters of regeneration offered by Christ in John 4.

The flowing river of the work of the Spirit in John 7 would have to wait, however, and this difference between John 4 and John 7 suggests that Christ focuses on a different work of the Spirit in the latter passage. Some have used this passage’s reference to the innermost being or belly

⁶⁰ Citing Christ as the source of the living water requires punctuating verse 39 with a full stop after “He who believes in Me”: “Let him who is thirsty come to me, and let him who believes in Me drink.” Leon Morris, however, points out that even with this new approach to punctuation, there is no clear indication of a shift in subject from “he who believes” and “out of his belly.” Morris concludes that the believer becomes the source of the river of water (p. 375). D. A. Carson also accepts the believer as the correct interpretation. *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 323-325.

(κοιλία) of the believer to distinguish between a work of regeneration available prior to Pentecost and a work of indwelling available only after Pentecost. Interpreting John 7:37-39, Unger states: “Our Lord’s words clearly predict the Spirit’s coming at Pentecost to perform individually and corporately during this age His various ministries of regenerating, baptizing, indwelling, sealing, and filling.”⁶¹ The blessing received by the woman at the well in John 4 argues against this understanding of the Pentecostal change described in John 7. John 4:14 describes an indwelling of the Spirit of God that is closely connected to the blessing of regeneration and that is available to this woman prior to Pentecost: “the water that I will give him will become *in him* (ἐν αὐτῷ) a well of water spring up to eternal life.”⁶² Water and wind are metaphors for the Holy Spirit in John’s Gospel.⁶³ The Holy Spirit corresponds to a well of water deep within the believer that provides a renewing source of eternal life.

⁶¹ Unger, 53. Although Unger allows for the regeneration of the Old Testament believer, he limits Spirit indwelling to the New Testament. Carter also sees the indwelling ministry of the Spirit as a unique emphasis of John 7, which accounts for the need to wait for Pentecost: “In the Old Testament the Spirit was, as we have seen, for the most part an external experience, usually ‘a coming upon.’ Here He is to be an internal experience of man’s deepest spiritual nature. In fact, He is to dwell in and flow out from man’s ‘innermost being,’ as a fresh, pure stream of water that flows from the mountainside spring by reason of the pressure exerted upon it from within the bowels of the earth” (p. 121). See also Larry D. Pettegrew, *The New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), 57.

⁶² This passage supports the conclusion of McCabe who asserts that indwelling plays an indispensable role in the Spirit’s work of regeneration: “In essence, *indwelling*, as defined in this paper, is the Spirit’s work of sustaining ‘regenerate desires and purposes.’ The Spirit’s work of renewal unavoidably must include two aspects: an initial work of regeneration and the continuance of this initial work through his permanent indwelling ministry. Without the Spirit’s continued work of permanently renewing the core of a man’s being, a regenerate man would undoubtedly fall back into his unregenerate condition” (p. 246).

⁶³ Henry Barclay Swete comments on the connection between John 3 and John 4 in this regard: “Here is the same conception of a new life entering into men and rising to its source in God. But there is progress in the teaching, for the water of life is now

A revelatory understanding of John 7:38-39 more adequately distinguishes the work of the Spirit mentioned there from the work of the Spirit available to all prior to Pentecost in John 4. A connection between the Holy Spirit and inspired prophecy better illuminates the form John's statement takes in 7:39: "The Holy Spirit was not yet." As has been already noted, the person of the Holy Spirit was closely associated with His work of revelation in John's day.⁶⁴ In addition, the water ceremony of the Feast of Tabernacles signified the gift of inspiration according to some authorities in Christ's day. D. A. Carson comments in this regard:

Water sometimes served as a symbol for the Holy Spirit (SB 2. 434-435), and, in at least one Jewish interpretation, the ceremony in question was called the "water-drawing" ceremony because "from there they *draw* the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as it is written, 'With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation' [Is. 12:3]." ⁶⁵

Christ obviously uses this ceremony to picture the coming blessing of Pentecost for those who believed on Him. The nature of this coming blessing is a new work of revelation.

Carson sees Christ's reference to the Old Testament Scripture as a reference to the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles recorded in Neh. 8:5-18.⁶⁶ He notes that the song of the Levites written as part of this

seen to be the gift of Jesus, and its vitality appears not only in the depths of the spirit where none but the man himself can be conscious of its presence, but in the overflow that rises, strong and sparkling, into the light of day." *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament: A Study of Primitive Christian Teaching* (London: MacMillan, 1919), 138.

⁶⁴ See note 53. B. F. Westcott adds: "When the term [πνεῦμα] occurs in this form [without the article], it marks an operation, or manifestation, or gift of the Spirit, and not the personal Spirit." *The Gospel According to St. John* (1881; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 123.

⁶⁵ Carson, 328-329. He cites H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (München: C. H. Beck, 1926-61).

⁶⁶ Carson, 326-328.

month-long celebration applied the symbols of bread and water to God's gifts of the law and the instructing Spirit:

By Nehemiah 9:20, however, the manna and the water, elsewhere in this chapter linked with the law, are now tied to the provision of the Spirit: "You gave your good Spirit to instruct them." The last three words demonstrate that the provision of the Spirit, according to Nehemiah, was bound up with the instruction of the people (i.e. in the law). So the gift of the law/Spirit is symbolized by the provision of manna/water.⁶⁷

This Nehemiah connection between the Feast of Tabernacles, the work of the Spirit, and the gift of instruction in the law likely serves as the basis for Christ's proclamation that those who believed on Him would become sources of living water. The water would flow from them because God would give them a new revelation. For some believers being a channel of this water means experiencing the prophetic gift of prophecy in a direct and miraculous sense; for others it means witnessing to the prophetic truth so given with its new power and authority.⁶⁸

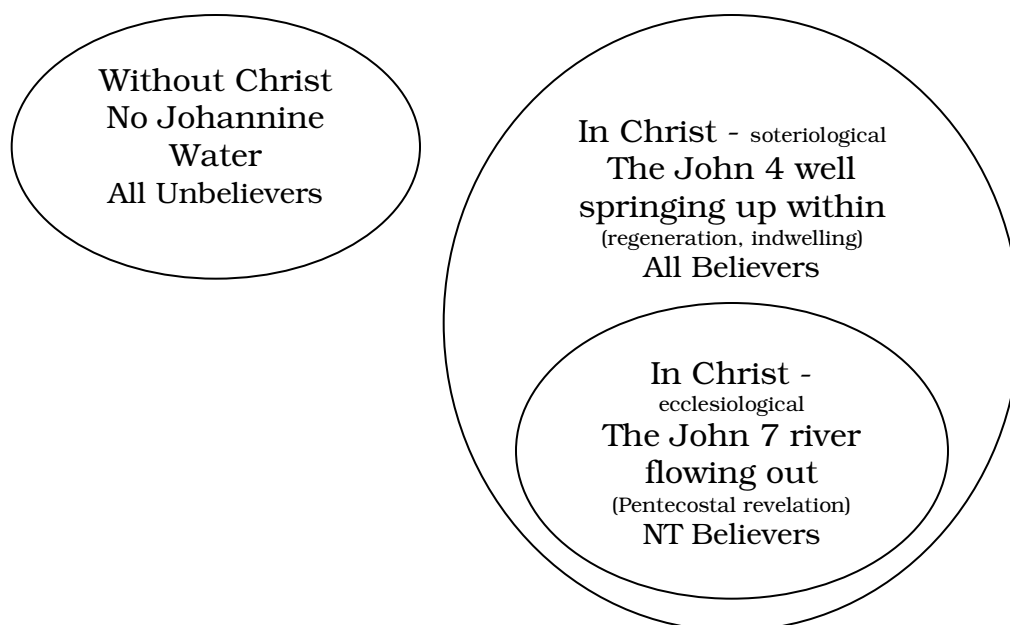
What emerges from Christ's pneumatology as recorded in John 4 and 7 looks very much like the picture drawn by Acts and the epistles in regard to Spirit baptism. Christ describes a work of the Holy Spirit involving a well of water that signifies regeneration in John 4, and He promises a work of the Holy Spirit involving a river of water that signifies Pentecostal revelation in John 7. The first category includes all believers, like the Samaritan woman at the well who lived prior to Pentecost, and

⁶⁷ Ibid., 327.

⁶⁸ Westcott interprets John's use of the aorist participle (οἱ πιστεύσαντες) rather than the present participle (οἱ πιστεύοντες) in verse 39 as an indication that Christ referred to the original disciples with the phrase "whom *those who believed* in Him were to receive," intimating that not all believers were in view. The present participle in verse 38 (ὁ πιστεύων, "He who believes in Me"), however, seems to offer a blessing available to all disciples in some sense. In addition, there is strong textual support for both the aorist and the present tense in verse 39.

the latter category includes only those who live after Pentecost. Consequently, the water metaphor in John 4 and 7 further illuminates the status of the Old Testament believer in regard to union with Christ. Figure 6 illustrates.

Figure 6 – Johannine Water as Regeneration and Pentecostal Revelation



Understood in terms of its relationship to the water message of John 4, in terms of its relationship to the significance of the water-pouring ceremony of the Feast of Tabernacles, and in terms of its relationship to the pneumatological vernacular of the day, the revelatory orientation of John's comment that "the Spirit was not yet" becomes clear. The phrase does not preclude a permanently Spirit-indwelt Old Testament believer; rather, it describes a coming revelation that would empower the disciples of Christ to be a new source of gospel life.

John 14:17 – The Holy Spirit Abides With You and Will Be In You

Questions related to a Spirit-indwelt Old Testament believer are not completely addressed unless John 14:17 is accounted for. Many ground their understanding of the novelty of Spirit indwelling on this promise of Christ to His disciples: “but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.” Interpreters see in these words a distinction between the Spirit’s ministry prior to Pentecost, “He abides with you,” which falls short of indwelling, and after Pentecost, “He shall be in you,” which constitutes indwelling. The conclusion of Larry Pettegrew illustrates this position: “So, even though the disciples had the Spirit with them in an Old Covenant sense, they did not have His ministry as the Paraclete, intimately and personally living in them, in the New Covenant sense. The present ‘with’ is contrasted with the future ‘in’ in order to make vivid the discontinuity between the Old and New Covenant activities of the Spirit.”⁶⁹

Understood in this sense, John 14:17 is used to buttress a theological understanding that it is poorly suited for. Four issues expose this unsuitableness. First, Pettegrew’s understanding of the phrase is exegetically difficult. It sees a contrast in the last phrase of the verse that misses the meaning of Christ’s promise as a whole. It states that Christ intended to contrast the deficiency of the current condition of the disciples with the greater sufficiency of a future condition.⁷⁰ However, a contrast between the disciples’ present and future states fails to conform to

⁶⁹ Pettegrew, 59. See also Demarest, 339; Beasley-Murray, 229; Unger, 54.

⁷⁰ Note that this contrast is an emphasis of the Lord in John 16:7, but that verse does not mention a *with* vs. *in* contrast.

Christ's logic in the verse as a whole. The verse does contain a contrast, but this contrast compares the condition of the world and the condition of the disciples. Unlike the world, which cannot receive, see, or know the Spirit of Truth, the lives of the disciples possess a knowledge of Him because "He abides with you and shall be in you." Christ assures them that their knowledge of the Spirit of Truth is sufficient, not deficient like the world's. The contrast He defines separates those who do not know the Spirit from those who do; it says nothing about those who know Him more or less intimately. *Abides with you* and *shall be in you* are conjoined conditions that describe the singular advantage of the disciples over the world – they know the Spirit of Truth. A difference clearly exists between the conditions these phrases describe, but this difference must be a difference in methodology rather than substantive effectiveness. The disciples would know the Spirit of Truth through a different means, not necessarily with a greater intimacy.

Second, the novel-indwelling interpretation of John 14:17 requires a spatial distinction between "is remaining with" and "shall be in" that is theologically difficult. The immaterial essence of the Spirit of God causes the theological difficulty for this view. While describing those born of the Spirit in John 3, Jesus describes the Spirit's work as wind that "blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going." Christ seems to describe the Spirit's work as imperceptible in spatial terms. This nature of the Spirit's work makes distinguishing between "with" and "in" in a spatial sense in John 14:17 unintelligible. Pettegrew describes this distinction in terms of intimacy and personalized life within, but his definition assumes a

spatial limitation for the Holy Spirit that precludes the bestowal of this intimacy while He is merely *with* the believer.⁷¹ Stated differently, the Holy Spirit's presence *with* the believer cannot be in any sense a spatial limitation for Him, correctible only through a relocation *within*. One must conclude that the true meaning of Christ's distinction in this phrase focuses upon a new work for the Spirit, not a new place in a physical sense. Even Pettegrew's interpretation emphasizes work rather than place as he describes the new reality as greater intimacy. But this focus on intimacy rather than location as the novelty of Pentecost cannot account for the sense in which the lives of Old Testament believers exhibit an intimacy with Jehovah that is exemplary for the New Testament believer. The intimacy of worship reflected in the Psalms and the lives of faith chronicled in Hebrews 11 are dreadfully rare qualities in this age of supposed greater intimacy. *Personally living within* may do a better job than *intimacy* at defining the post-Pentecost advantage, but now the definition reverts back to a benefit that overcomes spatial limitations. Circular reasoning begins to affect this view: if asked what difference indwelling makes, the answer is intimacy; if asked in what sense this intimacy is better than that enjoyed by the Old Testament saint, the answer is indwelling. This definitional ambiguity originates in a lack of congruence between the nature of the Holy Spirit and the spatial limitations implicit in a locative interpretation of "abides with you and shall be in you."

⁷¹ A related issue involves the need to reconcile the omnipresence of the Holy Spirit with His specialized presence in a believer over an unbeliever. McCabe wrestles with this issue and concludes by distinguishing a salvific presence of the Holy Spirit from a locative presence, the former being more closely linked to a specialized manifestation of the Spirit's saving work than His omnipresence (p. 233-234).

A third difficulty is a contextual one. Like John 14:17, verse 20 speaks of a relationship that Jesus used to comfort His disciples as they faced the hour of His departure: “In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” The future date Christ refers to here as *in that day* is likely the day of the coming Paraclete.⁷² Those who see the novelty of Spirit indwelling in John 14:17 normally understand this reference to union with Christ in verse 20 as a blessing yet future to this context and attendant with the Spirit’s coming at Pentecost. Unger illustrates the view.

Likewise, our Lord alludes to the baptizing work of the Spirit in the new age. “In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you” (Jn 14:20, NASB). “I in you” describes the Spirit’s permanent indwelling in this age. “Ye in Me” indicates that baptizing ministry of the Spirit, for the only way a believer can be placed “in Christ” is by a spiritual baptism. (Ro 6:3, 4; Col 1:12, 13; Gal 3:27)⁷³

Many of the biblical theological problems related to confining union with Christ to a post-Pentecost era have been discussed at length in this study. Unger’s understanding of John 14:17 requires this confinement as he interprets verse 20. What Unger misses, however, is that Christ’s promise guarantees a future knowledge or understanding of present relationships, not future relationships. Although the phrase “I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you” is elliptical, containing no verb,⁷⁴ translations correctly render it with the present tense in view of the

⁷² Carson notes three possible interpretations of “that day” in John 14:20: the glorification of Christ, the coming of the Paraclete, and the resurrection of Christ (p. 502). He chooses the latter. The need the disciples have for the Spirit of Truth in order to *know* the spiritual truths He is communicating in this context (14:26) argues that the day He refers to in verse 20 is indeed Pentecost.

⁷³ Unger, 54-55.

⁷⁴ The Greek phrase is ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ μου καὶ ὑμεῖς ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ ἐγὼ ἐν ὑμῖν.

content of each phrase. *I am in My Father* refers to an essential union true of the Godhead long before the day of new knowledge promised by Christ in this verse (John 10:38; 17:21). The states of being described as *you in Me*, and *I in you* share the same syntax and therefore a sense parallel to *I am in the Father*. The disciples enjoyed this relationship with Christ prior to Pentecost, just as Christ enjoyed the relationship He had with the Father prior to Pentecost. John 14:17 cannot be interpreted in a manner that requires the blessings of verse 20 to wait for Pentecost.

The final reason John 14:17 is an unsuitable passage for significant conclusions about the novelty of the Spirit's indwelling is the textual difficulty involved with the phrase.⁷⁵ As the comments of Pettegrew cited earlier indicate, his view places great weight on a shift from the present to the future tense.⁷⁶ While this understanding may correspond with the text of the original, the textual evidence as a whole indicates that the

⁷⁵ Carson notes in this regard: "It is uncertain whether *menei* should be accented *ménei* ('he remains', NIV 'he lives') or *meneî* ('he will live'). Further, the textual evidence is finely divided between *estin* ('and is in you') and *estai* ('and will be in you', as in NIV). On the whole, it seems best to follow the NIV" (pp. 509-510).

⁷⁶ Even if it is granted that the future "will be in you" is a part of the original, John may have used the future in a less than standard way. The progressive future refers to a condition normally existing in the present that continues on into the future. See H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: MacMillian Publishing, 1927), 192. Swete translates John 14:20 with a progressive future: "In the coming life of the Spirit they, if not the world, would realize more and more (γνώσθε) the perfect union of the Father and the Son and their own union with the Incarnate Son through His Spirit in them and their life in Him" (p. 152). Note that the futures in the immediate context of John 14:20 probably need to be taken as progressive futures as well. The future ideas of *you will see Me* (θεωρεῖτε) and *you will live* (ζήσετε) likely mean *you will continue to see Me* and *you will continue to live* (v. 19), because the disciples obviously were both seeing Christ and spiritually alive as He spoke to them. What this means for the interpretation of John 14:20 is clear from Swete's translation. The future knowledge that Christ promised His disciples was actually a knowledge they possessed in the present to a lesser degree. They needed to wait for Pentecost to know these truths more fully, or to "realize [them] more and more" as Swete translates. If Christ used a progressive future in John 14:17, His meaning would be that the Holy Spirit would continue to be in the disciples even after Jesus departed.

understanding may be unsupported. Under these circumstances an interpreter must refrain from making the phrase in question a foundational pillar of a major theological position. Nonetheless, the preferred reading of John 14:17 provides the theological foundation of the novel-indwelling view.

Interpreting John 14:17 as a promise of new revelation rather than a promise of a new indwelling presence alleviates the difficulties discussed above. When Christ comforts the disciples with the words, “He abides with you,” He does not describe a deficient condition hampering the disciples. On the contrary, He refers to the presence of the Holy Spirit in His own life as the Incarnate Word (John 1:1). Carson’s interpretation reflects this understanding: “the Holy Spirit, even as Jesus spoke with his disciples, was living with them inasmuch as Jesus was present with them, for to him the Father had given the Spirit without limit (3:34).”⁷⁷ The ministry of Christ as the Incarnate Word made Him a Paraclete in His own right; for this reason, Christ labels the Spirit of Truth another Paraclete of the same kind (ἄλλον παρακλήτοιν, John 14:16). The future change, *shall be in you*, means that the revelatory and prophetic ministry of the Holy Spirit, which belonged to the Lord Jesus during His earthly ministry, would belong to the apostles on the Day of Pentecost. The Spirit that inspired these preachers of the gospel is the Spirit of Christ, the same Spirit who inspired the prophets of the old era from within (1 Pet. 1:10-12). Although the Incarnate Word would be with them no longer, the Spirit of Truth would inspire them from within and give them a powerful new revelation that would enable them to continue

⁷⁷ Carson, 510.

to see Christ and allow them to continue to grow in their new life in Him (John 14:19). The new revelation would teach more fully the importance of union with Christ (v. 20) and help discern between those who love Christ and those who do not (v. 21).

This revelatory understanding of John 14:17 alleviates the exegetical difficulty of the novel-indwelling view. Now the contrast between the world and those who know the Spirit of Truth is consistently maintained, for no deficiency must be cited in the lives of the latter. The theological difficulty of the new-indwelling view is also mitigated because Christ was incarnate in a way the Spirit is not. The revelation of the Spirit was spatially limited, merely *with* the disciples, because His revelation came to them in the incarnate person of Christ. Anointed with the prophetic Spirit, Christ was *with* the disciples as the promised Prophet, but He was not *in* them in this way. This involvement of the incarnate Word meant that the Holy Spirit's work of revelation was with them although not yet accomplishing a similar work of revelation from within them. That work would await Pentecost. Then the prophetic Spirit would be in them as it was in Christ, producing revelatory sign gifts and ultimately inspiration.

Identifying this new work of the Spirit as revelation in John 14:17 also better accounts for the larger context of the Farewell Discourse than does indwelling. The titles given the Holy Spirit in this passage—Paraclete and the Spirit of Truth—speak of His work of encouragement through revelation, not His work of indwelling. Christ uses no title for the Holy Spirit indicative of a new ministry of indwelling.⁷⁸ In addition,

⁷⁸ Note that morphologically *παράκλητος* has more in common with the preposition translated *with* (*παρά*) in John 14:17 than it does with the word translated *in* (*ἐν*). Barclay describes the history of our English translation *Comforter*: “The translation

Pettegrew notes five new works of the Spirit he sees in the Farewell Discourse: “In it we learn that the Holy Spirit, when He comes, will be the Comforter (14:16), the one who indwells the believer (14:17), the teacher (15:26; 16:13-15), the one who convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:7-11), and the one who will help the disciples remember the events of Christ’s earthly ministry (14:26).”⁷⁹ The importance of a work of revelation is perceptible in all of these except indwelling. No other verse in the Discourse mentions a novel indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit. This contextual incongruity disappears if John 14:17 promises a new work of inspiration through the apostles with the same emphasis on revelation found throughout the Discourse.⁸⁰ Finally, a revelatory understanding of *He is with you, and He shall be in you* no longer requires that a textually uncertain phrase function as the

Comforter goes back to Wiclif; but he was not using it in the narrow sense of a comforter and consoler in sorrow. Wiclif translates Ephesians 6¹⁰: ‘Be ye *comforted* in the Lord.’ There the word *to comfort* is *endunamoyn*, which is derived from the Greek word *dunamis* which means *power*, and which comes from the same root as the English word *dynamite*. Tyndale retranslated Ephesians 6¹⁰: ‘Be strong in the Lord’, a translation which the Authorized Version retains. This same word *endunamoyn* occurs again in 1 Timothy 1¹², where again Wiclif translates: ‘I do thankings to Him who *comforted* me.’ Here Tyndale has: ‘I thank Him who has *made me strong*,’ and the Authorized Version has: ‘I thank Him who *hath enabled me*.’ The basic fact is that when Wiclif used the word *Comforter*, he was using it in its literal sense. It is derived from the Latin word *fortis*, which means *brave*, and for Wiclif *Comforter* did not mean simply one who tenderly and sympathetically consoles in sorrow; it meant one who puts courage into us, one who enables us to be brave, one who empowers us to cope with the chances and the changes and the struggles and the battles of this life. Time has narrowed the meaning of the word *Comforter*, but the word was intended to mean that the Holy Spirit gives us strength and courage to meet the demands of this exacting life” (p. 33). John 14:26-27 describes the connection between the Spirit’s work of revelation and the need of the disciples for spiritual strength in the absence of Christ. See also John 16:33.

⁷⁹ Pettegrew, 57.

⁸⁰ For this emphasis on revelation in the passage, see John 14:15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 29, 30, 31, 15:3, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 16:1, 3, 4, 6, 8-11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 25, 33. The emphasis on revelation continues into the High Priestly Prayer of John 17.

foundation of a major theological conclusion. Many New Testament passages attest that Pentecost was a new revelatory event, passages in which no textual questions require an answer.

Conclusion

The Scriptures teach that a sufficient work of the Holy Spirit was active in the lives of Old Testament believers, which accounts for their union with Christ in a soteriological sense. The pneumatological use of the Old Testament by Christ and the apostles assumes a basic continuity related to the Spirit's saving work of regeneration and indwelling in both the old era and the new. The metaphorical use of *baptism* to illustrate the Spirit's work of regeneration is applicable to the Old Testament believer in much the same way that the metaphorical use of *circumcision* to illustrate this same spiritual work is applicable to the New Testament believer. The water of John 4 became a deep well within springing up to eternal life for the Samaritan woman long before Pentecost. Regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the Old Testament believer experienced union with Christ in a soteriological sense.

The Scriptures also teach the novelty of Pentecost. At the core of this newness is the powerful gift of New Testament revelation. For some, reception of this gift means that they became the recipients of experiences involving inspiration, dreams, sign gifts, and prophecy resulting in new revelation. For others the gift meant that they heard from those who so prophesied, responded positively to this new revelation, and became powerful witnesses to the uttermost part of the earth. This last activity ensures that even those who reject the new revelation know the baptism of its convicting power.

The new revelation of Pentecostal Spirit baptism forms a foundational parameter for a specialized ecclesiological application of the doctrine of union with Christ in Paul. Just as those living prior to Pentecost were not recipients of the outpouring of the Spirit on that day, so also they were never baptized into the one body by the Spirit, whose new revelation defined the nature of this new ecclesia. This one body founded on Pentecostal revelation is the New Testament church, unknown to the Old Testament saint.

Deciphering between the soteriological congruity and ecclesiological distinctions related to the doctrine of union with Christ holds important implications for today's coherence debate. The next chapter applies understandings gleaned from the doctrine of union with Christ to discussions prevailing in that context.

CHAPTER 7

THEOLOGICAL SYSTEMS AND UNION WITH CHRIST

One of the tasks of biblical theology is the identification of a central theme that adequately summarizes the unity of scriptural revelation. This goal occupies the efforts of Old Testament theology especially. Candidates for a comprehensive theme of the Old Testament include *covenant*, *testament*, *promise*, *sovereignty*, *kingdom*, *holiness*, *Christ*, and *monotheism*.¹ Proponents of various positions related to the coherence debate also see the importance of a unifying theme to their conclusions. Charles Ryrie's landmark work on dispensationalism measures the identification of a unifying theme of biblical theology as equal to a third of the *sine qua non* of his position.² Because the doctrine of union with Christ

¹ Walter Eichrodt emphasizes *covenant* in *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961); J. Barton Payne emphasizes *testament* in *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962); and Walter Kaiser emphasizes *promise* in *Toward An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978). Theologies that cite *sovereignty* or *kingdom* as the central theme of biblical theology include Herman Schultz, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. J. A. Paterson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895); Ludwig Koehler, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. A. S. Todd (London: Lutterworth Press, 1957); and Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. Arthur W. Heathcote and Philip A. Allcock (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1958). Ernst Sellin emphasizes *holiness* in *Introduction to the Old Testament*, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: George H. Doran, 1923); Wilhelm Vischer emphasizes *Christology* in *The Witness of the Old Testament to Christ*, trans. A. B. Crabtree (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949); and Walther Zimmerli emphasizes *monotheism* in *Old Testament Theology in Outline*, trans. David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978).

² Ryrie identifies this theme as *the glory of God*, and he distinguishes his dispensational point of view in this regard from covenant theology's emphasis on *salvation*. *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 40. The work cited here is a revision of Ryrie's influential *Dispensationalism Today* (1965). A distinction between Israel and

is a comprehensive theological theme, it contributes to a more adequate understanding of biblical theology in general and of the coherence debate in particular.³

W. D. Davies charges Pauline theology with three areas of inconsistency that parallel the key concerns of the coherence debate. First, Davies cites a soteriological inconsistency between Paul's universalism and nationalism.

Nevertheless, although the universalism that we have noticed was implicit in the depth of Paul's experience of God in Christ from the first, its explicit formulation in thought was a slow process, and its strict logical expression in life was never achieved. In fact, both in life and thought, the Book of Acts and the Epistles of Paul reveal a conflict in the latter which was never completely resolved, a conflict between the claims of the old Israel after the flesh and the new Israel after the Spirit, between his "nationalism" and his Christianity. It is, indeed, from this tension that there arise most of the inconsistencies that have puzzled interpreters of Paul.⁴

According to Davies this tension reflected in Pauline theology is noticeable first in the contrast between the universalism of Jeremiah's soteriology and the nationalism of Ezekiel's. Davies claims that a preference for the soteriological nationalism reflected by Ezekiel gave birth to the proselytizing practices of the Judaism of Paul's day.⁵ In this context to

the church and a grammatical-historical hermeneutical approach to prophecy comprise the other two-thirds of Ryrie's *sine qua non* of dispensationalism.

³ Kenneth L. Barker defines "The Central Focus of Biblical Theology" as "God's Rule," and he does so by referring to a key union with Christ passage: "Significantly, Ephesians 1:9-10 appears to indicate that God's ultimate purpose in creation was to establish his Son—the Christ—as the supreme Ruler of the universe." "The Scope and Center of Old and New Testament Theology and Hope," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 318.

⁴ W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 58-59.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

be saved always means *to become a Jew*. The coherence debate seeks to answer Davies's charge of Pauline inconsistency by accounting for the supposed conflict between Paul's universalism and Paul's nationalism. It does so most effectively when it defines the nature of Paul's universalism in terms of soteriology and the nature of Paul's nationalism in terms of ecclesiology. The doctrine of union with Christ helps to define the nature of Paul's universalism and nationalism in these terms. It shows that biblical soteriology in Christ is always uncompromisingly universal, especially in Pauline theology. The nationalism reflected in Paul and its parallel in the uniqueness of the church are strictly ecclesiological issues according to a correct understanding of the doctrine of union with Christ.

A second charge levied by Davies criticizes Paul's view of the continuing relevance of the law. Davies sees pragmatism in Paul in regard to his own practice of the law, which was inconsistent with his teaching that salvation could be obtained without the law.⁶ The relevance of the law for both today's believer and unbeliever is a central question for the coherence debate. Rather than accepting the notion of Pauline inconsistency, the debate struggles to define a hermeneutical policy that delineates the sense in which the law applies in the New Testament age. The distinction between soteriology and ecclesiology in Paul's union with Christ doctrine offers a useful framework for interpreting and applying the law to the setting of the New Testament era.

Finally, Davies charges Paul with inconsistency in regard to his philosophy of history. Specifically, Paul fails to eliminate national Israel from future consideration to the satisfaction of Davies: "Despite his

⁶ Ibid., 70-72.

noble universalism he finds it impossible not to assign a special place to his own people. The Jews' rejection of Jesus is in the purpose of God, i.e. it is for good: it will be the means of bringing in the Gentiles: but it does not mean that God has cast off his people in the process: when all the Gentiles are saved then all Israel will be saved."⁷ Understanding the sense in which the New Testament church can constitute a fulfillment of Old Testament promises while accounting for Paul's optimism about the future of national Israel is a third key concern of the coherence debate. Here again the charge of Pauline inconsistency is unsatisfactory. Instead, the coherence debate seeks to understand the relationship of the church to the fulfillment of the promises of God given to Israel. Union with Christ helps to reconcile the existence of the church with the possibility of a future for national Israel in the plan of God because it illustrates the relationship between ecclesiastical distinctiveness and timeless soteriological promise in New Testament theology.

Union with Christ, therefore, illumines three important foci of the coherence debate: soteriological universalism versus soteriological nationalism, the continuing relevance of the law, and the relationship between the church and the future of national Israel. Under the spotlight of this doctrine, the views of covenant theology, classical dispensationalism, revised dispensationalism, and progressive dispensationalism reveal varying degrees of adequacy in their common rejection of charges of scriptural inconsistency.⁸

⁷ Ibid., 75-76.

⁸ Craig Blaising outlines this taxonomy of the positions related to the coherence debate: "We will use the designation *classical dispensationalism* to refer generally to the views of British and American dispensationalists from the writings of John Nelson

Soteriological Universalism Versus Soteriological Nationalism

Progressive dispensationalist Robert L. Saucy claims that the correctness of a universal soteriology over a nationally distinct soteriology is one of the “Resolved Issues” between dispensationalists and covenant theologians: “Dispensationalists have recently been careful to explain that the progression in the dispensations involves no change in the fundamental principle of salvation by grace.”⁹ To the degree that Saucy’s assessment of the situation is accurate, the concessions that brought about this agreement among theological systems required modifications to the classical dispensationalist position in response to the criticisms of covenant theology. The classical dispensationalists taught that the salvation available to the New Testament believer was unavailable to the Old Testament believer.¹⁰ Whereas the New Testament believer knows

Darby, the foremost theologian of the early Brethren Movement, to the eight volume *Systematic Theology* of Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder and first president of Dallas Theological Seminary. The interpretive notes of the *Scofield Reference Bible* might be considered a key representative of classical dispensationalism. . . . *Revised dispensationalism* designates the views of dispensational theologians writing primarily between the late 1950s and the late 1970s, although it also applies to some publications in the 1990s as well. The designation *revised* is taken from the *revision* of the *Scofield Bible*, completed in 1967 and offering views much more compatible to writers of this second period. Some of the more well-known *revised dispensationalists* include Alva J. McClain, John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, J. Dwight Pentecost, and Stanley Toussaint. *Progressive dispensationalism*, the subject of this book, is a more contemporary form of dispensational thought which has developed through continued biblical study of the concerns and emphases of the dispensational tradition. . . . Sufficient revisions had taken place by 1991 to introduce the name progressive dispensationalism at the national meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society that year.” Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton: Victor, 1993), 22-23.

⁹ *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 14.

¹⁰ Lewis Sperry Chafer illustrates this teaching: “Two revelations were given to the Apostle Paul: (1) that of salvation to infinite perfection for individual Jew and Gentile alike through faith in Christ and on the ground of His death and resurrection (Gal. 1:11-12). That this salvation is an exercise of grace which far surpasses anything

redemption on an individual basis, the Old Testament believer knew redemption only on a national basis.¹¹ The key to the redemption of the Old Testament believer was his physical birth, whereas the key to the redemption of the New Testament believer is a spiritual birth.¹² The soteriological deficiency of the Old Testament believer becomes especially pronounced in light of the classical dispensationalist's approach to the doctrine of union with Christ. Chafer comments in this regard: "The Old Testament saints were in right and acceptable relation to God, but it could not be said that they were in the new federal headship of the resurrected Christ, nor that their lives were 'hid with Christ in God' (Col. 3:1-3)."¹³ At the heart of Chafer's advocacy of a nationalistic soteriology for Israel is his equation of the soteriological significance of the doctrine of union with Christ with a new ecclesiology. He quotes the 1917 edition of the Scofield Reference Bible in this regard.

The true church, composed of the whole number of regenerate persons from Pentecost to the first resurrection (1 Cor. 15:52),

hitherto experienced in the Old Testament, is clearly revealed in 1 Peter 1:10-11, where it is stated, 'Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you.'" *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 4:33. Also according to Chafer, the salvation by grace of this dispensation is equally unavailable to the millennial dispensation (4:19). Chafer eventually faced charges from the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. that he taught "various plans of salvation for various groups in various ages." He defended his position by claiming that the passages cited in this regard spoke of a rule of life rather than salvation. For a defense of Chafer, see Ryrie, 107-109. The context of the passages cited here from Chafer's *magnum opus*, however, clearly fails to communicate this distinction. Although Chafer believed that the law does not justify (4:18), he also believed that the Old Testament believer, with the possible exception of Abraham, was not justified by grace. For him salvation was a blessing of physical birth (6:154).

¹¹ Ibid., 4:15.

¹² Ibid., 7:206.

¹³ Ibid., 4:24.

united together and to Christ by the baptism with the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12, 13), is the body of Christ of which He is the Head (Eph. 1:22, 23). As such, it is a holy temple for the habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph. 2:21, 22); is 'one flesh' with Christ (Eph. 5:30, 31); and espoused to Him as a chaste virgin to one husband. (2 Cor. 11:2-4)¹⁴

The soteriological aspects of union with Christ meld together with the new ecclesiology of the doctrine in Scofield's description of the church. As a result the classical dispensationalist's interpretation of union with Christ produces a theological barrier against interpreting the soteriology of Scripture in a consistently universal sense. Consequently, he identifies a nationalized soteriology unique to Old Testament Israel.

Contrary to the Saucy's claim, a lack of soteriological unity persists among the views of revised and progressive dispensationalists, due in part to their understanding of union with Christ, which has not changed significantly since the days of Scofield and Chafer. Saucy addresses the doctrine of *Christ in you* in his treatment of Colossians 1:27. He quotes the revised dispensationalist John F. Walvoord, who taught that "the Old Testament 'never once anticipates such a situation as "Christ in you."'"¹⁵ Saucy makes some concessions not found in Walvoord as he describes the concept of corporate personality in the Old Testament, but he

¹⁴ Ibid., 4:40. *The Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1304. The annotation appears under Hebrews 12:23. It survived the revision of 1967 with the original basically intact, although the revised dispensationalists added a comment about the rapture: "and will be translated to heaven at the return of the Lord to the air (1 Th. 4:13-17)." *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 1324.

¹⁵ Saucy, 168. He quotes from John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Findlay, OH: Dunham Publishing, 1959), 238. See also Walvoord's article "Identification with Christ," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001), 588. There the author distinguishes between the spiritual union of the believer with Christ and the physical union both of mankind with Adam and of Israel with the Son of David. This spiritual union receives its "first announcement" in John 14:20 and therefore does not apply to the Old Testament believer.

nonetheless draws a distinction between the Testaments that holds soteriological ramifications because it focuses on the doctrine of union with Christ: “This [the Hebraic corporate personality concept] was not the spiritual union that is found in Christ, but it nevertheless provided the type of which ‘the unity of the Church is the anti-type, the real thing.’”¹⁶ Saucy’s exclusion of the Old Testament believer conflicts with a correct understanding of the doctrine of union with Christ, however, because the doctrine disallows a saved believer who lacks “the spiritual union that is found in Christ,” whether in the old or new era.¹⁷ When it comes to union with Christ, if one lacks “the real thing,” he lacks salvation by grace. Saucy’s claim to the maintenance of soteriological unity between the Testaments ultimately yields to the pressure of his failure to distinguish between the soteriological and ecclesiological components of union with Christ.

The problem Saucy encounters due to his interpretation of union with Christ is even more apparent in other recent dispensational authors. Progressive dispensationalist Craig Blaising links the doctrine of union with Christ inseparably to the fulfillment of the new covenant.

It is in this regard that we should understand the Pauline doctrine of blessing *in Christ*. It is a covenantal term combining the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, in which the latter functions as the means for the fulfillment of the former. We will see that the phrase also has preference to the new covenant, since as revealed in the Old Testament, the new covenant is the form in which Abrahamic covenant blessing will be everlastingly enjoyed.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid., 170. Saucy is quoting Russell Phillip Shedd, *Man in Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 199.

¹⁷ See chapter 4, “The Old Testament Believer and Antitheses of Union With Christ.”

¹⁸ *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 191.

According to Blaising's interpretation of Galatians 3, this New Covenant fulfillment of Old Testament eschatology includes two new soteriological blessings related to union with Christ: "the reception of the Holy Spirit" (Gal. 3:2, 5) and "the gift of righteousness" (3:21-22).¹⁹ But if both the reception of the Holy Spirit and the gift of righteousness are union with Christ blessings that constitute a New Testament fulfillment of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants, questions concerning the Old Testament believer begin to surface. First, Abraham clearly enjoyed the union with Christ blessing of the gift of righteousness in spite of the fact that the fulfillment of these covenants was yet future to him (Rom. 4:3, Gal. 3:6-9). Second, given the important linkage between the gift of righteousness and the regenerating ministry of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 3 (v. 14), the fact that Abraham received the gift of righteousness must also mean that he received a sufficient work of the Holy Spirit to regenerate him. This blessing in Christ also accrued to Abraham prior to the fulfillment of these covenants. These questions arise because a unified soteriology between the Testaments cannot be considered a resolved issue if the soteriological blessings of union with Christ are strictly eschatological from the perspective of the experience of the Old Testament believer.²⁰

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ The persistence of dual soteriologies in the dispensational tradition is illustrated also by Bruce Ware's chapter "The New Covenant and the People(s) of God" in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992). Ware sees four new soteriological distinctives of the New Covenant age: (1) the internalization of the law, (2) faithfulness to God, (3) full and final forgiveness, and (4) universal scope – all participate (p. 75). Asserting this level of soteriological uniqueness for the church age is ultimately incompatible with a claim to a unified interpretation of soteriology between the Testaments.

In his discussion of Old Testament soteriology, dispensationalist John S. Feinberg offers an important principle dispensationalists need to keep in mind as they address the question of soteriological unity between the Testaments. The principle distinguishes between the demands of the interpretation of specific dispensationalists and the demands of dispensationalism as a system.

Though this discussion of what dispensationalists claim is interesting . . . , it would seem that there is a much more important question to be asked and answered. The question of greater significance is whether dispensationalism as a system necessitates holding a view of multiple ways of salvation. A description of what dispensationalists hold is one thing, but a much more important question is whether the system is consistent with a single method of salvation view, a multiple method of salvation view, or both. In other words, what position could a dispensationalist hold without contradicting his system on the matter of the ways of salvation?²¹

Viewed strictly as systems, the classical dispensational position and the progressive dispensational position disallow a correct understanding of the universalism of the soteriology of union with Christ. The classical dispensationalist fails to distinguish between the soteriological and ecclesiological themes of union with Christ in New Testament theology. He identifies the church age not only as an ecclesiological parenthesis, but also as a soteriological “intercalation.”²² Consequently, the new ecclesiology demands a new soteriology for the classical dispensationalist. Similarly, the progressive dispensationalist locks together the soteriological aspects of union with Christ with the eschatological fulfillment

²¹ “Salvation in the Old Testament,” in *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 44.

²² Chafer, 4:41. For Chafer, the difference between a parenthesis and an intercalation is that the former contains some direct or indirect relationship with what has come before, whereas the latter bears no such relationship. Chafer saw the break between Israel and the church as absolute, encompassing both soteriology and ecclesiology. The break is analogous to the difference between men and angels (4:4-5).

of the New Covenant. As a result, the soteriological experience of the New Testament *in Christ* doctrine must wait for the coming of New Testament salvation history. This need to wait precludes a consistently unified view of salvation between the Testaments, for the blessings of New Testament salvation become anachronistic to the experience of the Old Testament believer.

The two views consistent with the universality of union with Christ soteriology are the revised dispensationalist position and the position of covenant theology. In regard to the former, although the revised dispensationalist generally agrees with the classical interpretation of union with Christ, his system does not technically require this understanding. The revised dispensationalist's intentional move away from soteriology in regard to the key components of his system allows for identifying the uniqueness of the church age as something non-soteriological. Under this view, discontinuity is essentially ecclesiological. The revised dispensationalist interprets dispensations as administrations undertaken for the glory of God that may or may not have anything to do with the salvation of souls.²³ This non-soteriological definition of the novelty of the church provides room for the conclusion demanded by the soteriology of union with Christ—that salvation is the same in both Testaments.

²³ Note that each of Ryrie's three indispensable characteristics of dispensationalism have nothing to do with soteriology (see note 2). Alva J. McClain facilitates this move away from soteriology by delineating a distinction between the Universal Kingdom and the Mediatorial Kingdom of God. McClain's view that the Mediatorial Kingdom is in "abeyance" during the Church Age illustrates the distance that exists between the coherence system of revised dispensationalists and soteriological concerns. *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (1959; reprint, Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1974), 439.

The system that has historically best accounted for the universal soteriological requirements of union with Christ is covenant theology. With the soteriology of the covenant of grace as its unifying principle, this framework has no trouble consistently maintaining a single soteriology throughout both Testaments. James Buchanan illustrates the suitability of covenant theology to this aspect of union with Christ in his interpretation of the soteriology of the Psalms.

It may be safely affirmed, that every point in the Gospel doctrine of Justification is there brought out by anticipation, and strikingly exhibited in connection with the faith and worship of Old Testament believers. There is the same confession of sin . . . there is the same conviction of guilt and demerit . . . there is the same fear of God's righteous judgment . . . there is the same sense of inevitable condemnation on the ground of God's Law . . . there is the same earnest cry for undeserved mercy . . . there is the same faith in His revealed character as the just God and the Saviour . . . there is the same hope of pardon, resting on a propitiation . . . there is the same pleading of God's name, or the glory of all His perfections . . . there is the same joy and peace in believing . . . there is the same trust in God and the faithfulness of His promises . . . there is the same trust in the Saviour of sinners . . . there is the same confidence in another righteousness than their own . . . there is the same patient, persevering, hopeful waiting upon God.²⁴

This understanding best agrees with the universal soteriology of the doctrine of union with Christ. Salvation is “the same” in both the Old and New Testaments.

The Continuing Relevance of the Law

How to use the law of Moses as Scripture that is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness in the era of the church is one of the difficult issues that has occupied the

²⁴ *Justification: An Outline of Its History in the Church and of Its Exposition from Scripture* (1867; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955), 42-43. The omissions in the quotation above pass over the copious references Buchanan cites from the Psalms.

coherence debate from its inception.²⁵ John MacArthur, sensitive to the spiritual decay he has witnessed in circles of broad Evangelicalism, laments the legacy of classical and revised dispensationalists in his advocacy of lordship salvation.²⁶ He equates antinomianism with easy-believism and argues that the nature of saving repentance as defined by the legacy of dispensationalism has resulted in many false professions. Whether or not this is a fair assessment of the legacy of dispensationalism,²⁷ the relevance of the law to the life of the Christian church is clearly a question of great consequence.

²⁵ For a brief but informative discussion of the inception of the coherence debate, see Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 50. The church-state struggles between the Reformers and the Anabaptists led to the need for both to address the applicability of the theocracy defined in the law of Moses to the church age.

²⁶ *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean When He Says "Follow Me"?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 29-33.

²⁷ See the response of Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation* (Wheaton: Victor, 1989). MacArthur's identification of the source of the problems he sees seems misplaced. *The Gospel According to Jesus* makes clear that issues related to lordship salvation center on how we are to understand the distinction between justification and sanctification. The author's discussion of these issues begins well by warning against the Roman Catholic failure to distinguish between the two (p. 197-198). Rome interprets justification in terms of sanctification truth. She makes getting saved a lifelong process of obedience, one that robs the believer of any hope of security in the grace of God. MacArthur claims that antinomianism has taken the Protestant distinction between justification and sanctification too far, and that the corrective must bring justification and sanctification back together again. Yet the reunion MacArthur calls for cannot be accomplished consistently without a return to the error of the Vatican. With lordship salvation, repentance becomes changed behavior, and saving faith an embrace of every claim. On the contrary, the historic corrective to the error of Rome—faithful maintenance of the biblical distinction between justification and sanctification—also protects against antinomianism. Whereas Rome confuses justification in terms of sanctification truth, antinomianism confuses sanctification in terms of justification truth. For example, the antinomian sees the legalist as one who teaches error about sanctification, whereas the Bible teaches that the legalist is one who teaches error about justification. This is Rome's confusion of justification and sanctification reapplied. For decades New Evangelicalism has accepted this definition of sanctification in terms of justification truth—no works, no law, no rules, and no standards. The result has been the theological and spiritual landscape so appalling to MacArthur. Men are saved apart from works and without the law, but Christians grow neither apart from

The classical dispensationalist mitigates the relevance of the law for the church age. The General Baptist Abraham Booth distinguished between the earthly people—Israel, and the heavenly people—the church, and he believed that the law was applicable only to the earthly people.²⁸ Chafer agreed, although he affirmed a “moral, spiritual, or secondary application” of the law for today’s church.²⁹ On the other hand, covenant theologians interpret the Mosaic covenant as simply another step in the progressive revelation of the covenant of grace.³⁰ While affirming this basic relevance for the Law of Moses to the doctrines of grace, however, the specific sense in which its commandments are applicable to the New Testament church lies untreated largely because the system emphasizes a continuation of the old economy rather than an introduction of something new.³¹

works nor apart from the law. Whereas MacArthur has charged the legacy of dispensationalism with the spiritual failure of modern evangelicalism, a more likely culprit is New Evangelicalism’s rejection of the separatist principles and standards of their Fundamentalist predecessors.

²⁸ *The Reign of Grace from Its Rise to Its Consummation* (1768; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 19.

²⁹ Chafer, 4:20.

³⁰ Buchanan, 19.

³¹ Robert Reymond’s fourth support for the unity of the covenant of grace seeks to establish the idea that the New Testament views the church as the addition of Gentiles to an already existing ecclesia rather than the creation of something new. *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 525-528. Although there is a sense in which it is true that an addition to something existing has occurred with the founding of the New Testament church, this does not preclude its formation of something new in a different sense (Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 10:32; 12:13). Reymond’s position depends on a false choice. See the discussion of Ephesians 2:11-3:13 in chapter 5, “The Old Testament Believer in Key Union With Christ Passages,” 152-173. Note also John Owen’s policy in this regard: “No dispensation of the Spirit, no Church.” *The Holy Spirit, His Gifts and Power* (1674; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1954), 109. Owen saw the founding of the Christian church as original with Pentecost.

Progressive dispensationalist authors discuss the question of the continuing relevance of the law from opposite positions. In keeping with the classical view, David K. Lowery argues that the Law of Moses has been superseded with the advent of Christ: “Paul uses the word *end* in this passage in the sense of supersession. The ‘law,’ the focus of righteousness in the old-covenant era of salvation history, has been superseded by the revelation of Christ and the era of the new covenant that he instituted.”³² From Rom. 10:4 Lowery argues for the soteriological obsolescence of the old covenant with the coming of the new.

If the law is to be understood as that which defined righteousness in one era in the history of salvation, as Paul seems to describe it in [Rom.] 5:14, it can similarly be said to be “salvifically obsolete” in view of Christ’s coming and the ministry he carried out. The old covenant has been superseded by the new. With the initiation of the new, the old is rendered obsolete.³³

The line of reasoning that Lowery’s interpretation of Romans 5 follows concludes that because there was a time when the law did not exist, it is therefore not necessary to salvation in this day. The problem with this logic is that the criterion of necessity according to Paul is existence, and that criterion still applies in the church age in spite of the coming of Christ. On the contrary, Rom. 5:14 actually teaches that now that the Law is here, it simply cannot be ignored. Sin is imputed today with a specification that did not exist prior to Moses. This is soteriological relevance, not salvific obsolescence. Lowery also argues for the obsolescence of the law from Galatians 3:24-25.

³² “Christ, the End of the Law in Romans 10:4,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 230.

³³ *Ibid.*, 236.

There Paul compares the law to a schoolboy's overseer, whose authority ends when the era of tutorial instruction comes to a close. The law, says Paul, functioned in a similar capacity until the coming of Christ. With the coming of Christ, what he said and did became the focus of faith, and the authority of the law came to an end.³⁴

What Lowery calls the coming of Christ, however, Paul calls the coming of faith.³⁵ It is not the coming of Christ, but the coming of faith that has graduated Paul from the schoolmaster's class. Paul was under the tutor prior to his faith in spite of the fact that he lived after the historical coming of Christ. In the same way, unbelievers today are under the condemnation of the law, which pressures them to seek refuge in Christ.

Kenneth L. Barker reflects an understanding of the continuing relevance of the law that contrasts with Lowery's view. Like Lowery, Barker sees a salvific incapacity related to the law, but he never sees this incapacity as obsolescence because he interprets it as part of the original design of the law. The law is not weak because Christ came; it is weak because it was never designed to justify the sinner. When it comes to justification, the law has always been weak. According to Barker the law was designed to sanctify the believer. "It must first be borne in mind that the law was given to the *redeemed* people of God as a means of expressing their love to God as well as a means of governing their

³⁴ Ibid., 236-237.

³⁵ Craig Blaising seeks to equate the coming of faith with the coming of Christ in Galatians 3 as follows: "But when God the Son, the Redeemer, became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth, faith in God focused itself specifically upon Jesus. The law (Mosaic covenant) functioned like a 'tutor to lead us to Christ' (3:24), 'But now that faith has come [that is faith in Jesus Christ, since Jesus Christ has now come] we are no longer under a tutor' (3:25). Since the 'tutor' is the Mosaic covenant, Paul is saying we are no longer under the covenant" (*Progressive Dispensationalism*, 197). This reading of Gal. 3:25 introduces a contextual problem in addition to the theological problems noted above. It forces Paul to say that there is a distinction between Abraham's faith and the faith of the Galatians in a context in which Paul's chief concern is to prove that they are the same.

relationship to God and to each other. It was not a way of salvation but a way to enjoy an orderly life and God's fullest blessing within the covenantal, theocratic arrangement."³⁶ Barker lists over twenty New Testament passages that use the Pentateuch to regulate the life of the New Testament believer.³⁷ From these he concludes that the law possesses moral and ethical authority applicable to the church age: "If the ethical and moral law reflected in the Torah has been abrogated, how can New Testament writers legitimately use the references listed above to express, substantiate, support, reinforce, or give authority to the points they make? Surely this common New Testament practice strongly implies that the cited passages are authoritative for the church today."³⁸ The position Barker articulates regarding the continuing relevance of the law in the church age is preferable to the conclusions of Lowery.

Yet the hermeneutical question regarding how one may consistently and objectively implement the teaching of the law for the sanctification of believers and the schoolmastering of unbelievers in the church age persists. Barker offers a useful general principle in this regard. "The most satisfying approach to me personally and, I believe, the one most consistent with the precepts and practice of Scripture as a whole is

³⁶ Barker, 295 (emphasis his). For a similar understanding from a covenant theologian, see Reymond, 518-521.

³⁷ Barker, 296. The passages listed are Matt. 4:4, 7, 10; 15:4; 19:5, 18-19; 22:37-40; Acts 23:5; Rom. 4:3; 7:7; 9:15; 12:19; 13:9; 1 Cor. 5:13; 9:9; 2 Cor. 4:6; 6:16; 8:14-15; 13:1; Gal. 3:6; 4:30; 5:14; Eph. 6:1-3; 1 Tim. 5:18; Heb. 10:30; 13:5; James 2:8-11, 20-24; and 1 Pet. 1:15-16.

³⁸ Ibid. Barker believes that a neglect of the law in sanctification has contributed to the lamentable condition of broad Evangelicalism: "Perhaps one of the reasons for the lamentable behavior of many Christians today—including leaders—is that they do not take the abiding moral, ethical, and profoundly spiritual commands of the Old Testament seriously enough" (p. 297).

simply to hold that, in the area under discussion, whatever the New Testament has not clearly abrogated or modified in Old Testament revelation is for us today.”³⁹ Although this understanding is very helpful, it leaves undefined the policy by which the interpreter may ascertain what has and has not been “abrogated” by the New Testament revelation. For instance, the New Testament nowhere specifically cancels the law’s regulation that forbids farmers from harvesting the corners of their field (Lev. 19:9); in fact, Christ seems to reinforce the importance of this practice during the course of His ministry (Matt. 12:1). Yet the New Testament believer is left with the distinct impression from the general tenor of New Testament theology that a local church in Iowa would be mistaken if it were to discipline a member for failing to execute this command. Hermeneutically, what is needed is a policy or model for ascertaining the reason for this general impression.

This is the point at which the doctrine of union with Christ offers assistance to the coherence debate’s struggle with the question of the continuing relevance of the law. Because the doctrine defines the nature of continuity and discontinuity between the Testaments, it offers a model for interpreting the nature of the applicability and obsolescence of the law in the church age. Union with Christ encompasses three separable components, two that define a continuity between the Testaments and one that defines a discontinuity. The book of Ephesians evidences all three components: (1) 1:1-2:10, the soteriological component of *in Christ*; (2) 2:11-3:21, the ecclesiological component of *in Christ*; and (3) 4:1-6:24,

³⁹ Ibid., 301.

the ethical component of *in Christ*. As discussed in an earlier chapter,⁴⁰ it is the second of these understandings that excludes the Old Testament believer. The ecclesiology of union with Christ is founded on the revelation of the apostles and New Testament prophets and therefore not applicable to the Old Testament believer (Eph. 2:20). On the other hand, the soteriology of union with Christ and the ethical obligations necessary for life in the Lord are clearly the same for the Old and New Testament believer, according to Ephesians. When Paul teaches that believers are salvifically “chosen in Him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4), he must include Old Testament believers. When he desires to obligate children ethically to obey their parents in the Lord, he assumes that the fifth commandment of the Decalogue applies directly to the Christian offspring of Ephesus (Eph. 6:1-3).

What all this means for the continuing relevance of the law is that union with Christ helps to define more specifically what about the law the New Testament revelation has abrogated. The introduction of a new ecclesiology makes the ecclesiology of the law obsolete. Yet because the ecclesiology of the law both typifies soteriology and administers ethical principles, the obsolescence of the ecclesiology of the law happens in a qualified sense. It is not that ecclesiological sections of the law are no longer useful; it is rather that no section of the law is applicable to the church in an ecclesiological sense. The New Testament church does not discipline a farmer who harvests his entire field because that would be an ecclesiastical application of the law to the church—an ecclesia entirely distinct from the Israel whose ecclesia this instruction regulates.

⁴⁰ See note 31.

Nevertheless, the New Testament church may discipline a member who refuses to show the generosity exemplified by this regulation, for the ethical application of the law has not been abrogated by the New Testament revelation. In addition, a New Testament evangelist might use this regulation to expose the sin of greed and the need for unbelievers to repent and trust the work of Christ. In an ecclesiastical sense, the regulation of Lev. 19:9 used to apply to farmers, and now it no longer does. In an ethical sense, the regulation of Lev. 19:9 always taught merchants as well as farmers to be generous, and it still accomplishes this task today. In a soteriological sense, the regulation of Lev. 19:9 highlights the natural selfishness of human hearts in both the old and new eras. This law exposed the sinner's need for salvation by grace in Moses' day, and it does the same in ours.

The Future of National Israel

Historically, the question of the future of national Israel and its relationship to the existence of the church in the plan of God has encompassed more than strictly exegetical data. On the one hand, missiological concerns have occupied efforts to answer this question. In keeping with his Anabaptist theological forefathers, the dispensationalist emphasizes the importance of the separation of church and state to the mission of the church. Chafer taught that the heavenly people of God ought not concern themselves with the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth, and he warned his opponents against not merely an error of the Reformers, but rather a "Romish fiction."

Without these keys the casual reader is left with little else to do other than to fall in with the Romish fiction of a world-conquering church under a supposed supremacy of an irresistible kingdom of

God on the earth. No doubt will be raised by any intelligent Christian concerning the truth that it is within the range of divine power to transform society in this age, or at any other time. The question is really one of whether world-transformation is the divine purpose for this age; and until the one who believes that this is the divine purpose has made a reasonable exposition and disposition in harmony with his views of the vast body of Scripture that discloses the confusion and wickedness with which this age is said to end, there is little to be gained by accusing those who believe God's present purposes to be the outcalling of the Church of "dishonoring the Spirit of God," or of "minimizing the value of the cross."⁴¹

This warning shows the alignment that classical dispensationalism and its successors possess with premillennialism. This alignment undoubtedly accounts for much of the popularity experienced by dispensationalism over the last century. Even some who would not identify themselves as dispensationalists express the same missiological concern, which dispensationalism addresses with such force. Edmund Clowney cautions against the influences of process theology and "a trend toward the socializing of the church."⁴² This socialization is a legacy of the social gospel of the 19th century, which rejected the church's focus on individual spiritual conversion and gave birth to the liberation theologies of the 20th century.

A second concern unrelated to exegesis pertinent to the theological question about the future of Israel involves the politics of the Middle East. W. D. Davies authored *The Gospel and the Land* (1974) in response to a letter he received prior to the Six-Day War seeking his support for Israel. Both the Six-Day War and the Gulf War influenced his later work

⁴¹ Chafer, 4:17.

⁴² *The Doctrine of the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 2-3. Clowney describes two other dangerous trends: "secularizing" and "sacramentalizing." The former is the lust for secular power embodied in the World Council of Churches; the latter is a return to Greek Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism.

on this topic, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism* (1982, 1991).⁴³ O. Palmer Robertson expresses sympathy for the condition of Palestinian Christians and Muslims in his treatment of Israel's future, although he rejects the liberation theology their plight has produced.⁴⁴ Whereas dispensationalism implicates global anti-Semitism as Satanic opposition to the plan of God, covenant theology discounts this connection.⁴⁵

In spite of the influences of these other concerns, the participants of the coherence debate agree that exegesis is determinative for understanding the role of national Israel in the future plan of God. The doctrine of union with Christ offers important understandings for assessing the treatment of Israel's future in the coherence debate. In general, the positions represented here are essentially two: (1) the covenant theologian teaches that the church has superseded God's plan for national Israel; (2) dispensational systems teach that the church has not superseded God's plan for national Israel. The crux of the debate between these positions is a disagreement over the non-spiritual aspects of the Abrahamic and New Covenants. The focus of this disagreement is God's promise to make Abraham a great nation and to give Abraham the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:1-2). A related issue concerns the role of the literal city of Jerusalem in regard to the Davidic throne of Christ promised by

⁴³ O. Palmer Robertson, who aligns himself with Davies's position regarding the future of national Israel, notes these facts in *The Israel of God: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000), 27.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 28.

⁴⁵ For a fascinating discussion of the linkage in church history between anti-Semitism and Protestant eschatology, see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "An Evangelical Response," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 361-363.

the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:14-16). The New Covenant is the sequel to the Abrahamic and Davidic promises (Jer. 33:25-26, Ezek. 36:24), and it too contains significant references to the land of Israel and Judah (Jer. 32:6-44, 33:10-14, Ezek. 36:22-32, 37:12-14). Dispensational systems argue that these non-spiritual aspects of the promises made to Israel and Judah (Jer. 33:14) must be fulfilled literally by the nation of Israel. Conversely, covenant theologians interpret these aspects as types that have reached antitypical fulfillment in the coming of Christ and the New Testament church.

Therefore, a hermeneutical question stands at the heart of this debate over Israel's future, which requires the interpreter to determine a correct approach to the Testaments' use of type and antitype as scriptural revelation.⁴⁶ Robertson represents the covenant theology position that sees the Old Testament land promises to Israel as types that are fulfilled in the antitypical spiritual realities of the New Testament era. Robertson correctly observes that many "authors of new covenant documents develop a significant aspect of their theology by contrasting old covenant shadows with new covenant realities."⁴⁷ This observation

⁴⁶ Note that this issue bypasses whether or not the Abrahamic Covenant and the others related to it were conditional. Paul N. Benware calls the unconditional nature of the Abrahamic covenant "probably the most significant issue." *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 34. Yet no covenant theologian who advocates the conditionality of the Abrahamic Covenant would argue that Abraham failed to meet the conditions involved. The more significant issue is the nature of the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. Now that Abraham has met the condition, or given that the promise had no condition, must God give Abraham a literal nation and land? Although the conditionality of the covenants becomes important in light of Israel's unbelief, no dispensationalist defends the participation of unbelieving Jews in the literal land and nation promises. The key issue is the nature of the fulfillment—literal/typical or spiritual/antitypical—not the conditionality of the covenants.

⁴⁷ Robertson, 5.

and others like it lead Robertson to an axiom of type-antitype interpretation: “It must be remembered at the outset that any transfer from the old covenant to the new covenant involves a movement from shadow to reality.”⁴⁸ This axiom provides Robertson with a methodology for interpreting the promise of land to Abraham: “In speaking of Israel’s land under the old covenant, it is necessary to think in categories of shadow, type, and prophecy, in contrast to reality, substance, and fulfillment under the new covenant.”⁴⁹

Robertson bolsters his axiom with a number of observations from New Testament theology. Three of these carry most of the weight of his position: (1) Paul calls Abraham the heir of the *world* rather than the heir of the *land* in Rom. 4:13;⁵⁰ (2) the promise from the Decalogue that obedient Jewish children would live long in the *land* becomes a promise to Ephesian Gentile children of long life on the *earth* in Eph. 6:3;⁵¹ and (3) Abraham looked forward to the heavenly country and God-prepared city according to Heb. 11:16, not a literal land and literal Jerusalem.⁵²

⁴⁸ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 26.

⁵¹ Ibid., 28. The phrase in verse 3 of Paul’s quotation, ἵνα εὖ σοι γένηται καὶ ἔση μακροχρόνιος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, parallels closely the Septuagint’s rendering of Exod. 20:12: ἵνα εὖ σοι γένηται καὶ ἵνα μακροχρόνιος γενῇ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. The most significant parallel between Paul and the Septuagint is the fact that both use the same word for *land* or *earth* (γῆς). Robertson’s analysis requires that the Septuagint translators meant *land* and Paul meant *earth*, not *land*. Such a scenario seems unlikely. Robertson’s basic assertion, however, that the promised reward for the Jew in Exodus 20 differs in some sense from the promised reward for the Ephesian in Ephesians 6, identifies a valid and important distinction.

⁵² Ibid., 13.

In regard to Rom. 4:13, Robertson's conclusion that Paul's use of the term *world* in this passage replaces the idea of *land* in the Abrahamic Covenant commits a false choice fallacy. From the beginning of the Abrahamic Covenant, the promise to Abraham encompassed all the nations of the world. Paul makes this clear in verse 17 of this passage: "as it is written, a father of many nations have I made you." This quotation from Gen. 17:5 demonstrates that there is no transition from type to antitype occurring in Rom. 4:13. According to Paul, to be the heir of the world is to be the father of many nations. According to Gen. 17:5, the promise of fatherhood over many nations was part of the original promise, what Robertson refers to as the "old covenant shadow." Therefore, Paul never transforms the literal type promised to Abraham into a new spiritualized antitype in Romans 4. The *world* promise occurs in Genesis 17, as it does in Romans 4. Nor does Paul ask us to choose between Abraham's being a great nation in the *land* and his being the father of many nations as heir of the whole *world*.⁵³ Both shall happen "so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law [national and eventually saved Israel in the land], but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham [saved Gentiles from many nations overspreading the whole world], who is the father of us all" (Rom. 4:16).

⁵³ Saucy sees significance in the political force of God's promise to make Abraham a great *nation*: "It is significant that Abraham's posterity at first mention are termed 'a great nation ['עַם, goy]' (Ge 12:2; cf. also 18:18). . . . Noting that the usual term for Israel as the seed is 'people,' a kinship term expressing the closeness of their relationship to God, William Dumbrell sees the use of 'nation' in this initial promise to Abraham as signifying 'Israel's later political constitution'" (p. 43). Saucy cites William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation* (Nashville: Nelson, 1984), 66-67.

Robertson's citation of Eph. 6:3 as an example of a New Testament era transition from shadow-type to substance-antitype misses the understanding reached under the previous section of this chapter on the continuing relevance of the law. In Eph. 6:3 Paul interprets a promise for Jews in the *land* as applicable to Gentiles in the *earth*, but he does not do so because the promise for blessing in the land is a shadowy type that has become obsolete. Rather, Paul applies the ethics of the fifth commandment's promise in Ephesus in much the same way Jonah might have applied these principles in Nineveh, had he cared to. Without the morality outlined in the Decalogue, the "wicked ways" of the Ninevites requiring their repentance are unintelligible (Jon. 3:8-10). The Ninevites stood condemned before the ethical and soteriological ramifications of the Law of Moses (Rom. 3:19, 5:13-14, 20). In light of this understanding, the ethical applicability of the promise in Eph. 6:3 extended far beyond the borders of Israel long before Paul's day. The children of Ninevite believers could expect God's blessing for obeying their parents and God's chastening for disobeying them, even though neither the blessing nor the chastening could have had anything to do with the land of Canaan, as it did for Jonah's children. In Jonah's day, ecclesiological applications of the law could be made to Israel alone, just as in Paul's day. Therefore, the nature of the applicability of the fifth-commandment promise is a function of one's ecclesia, not of one's era. Paul's use of this promise in Eph. 6:3 does not reflect a time-sensitive supersession of an old shadowy type by a new antitype.

Robertson's third point is an emphasis of Raymond's defense of the unity of the covenant of grace. In an extended footnote, Raymond uses

Hebrews 11 to argue that God's land promise to Abraham finds "final fulfillment, in the 'substance' days of New Testament *Heilsgeschichte*."

I say this because the Bible declares that Abraham dwelt in the Old Testament land of promise "as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents" (Heb. 11:9) and never possessed it (Acts 7:25), since, as with so many other of God's promises made during the "shadow" days of Old Testament *Heilsgeschichte* (Col. 2:17), he looked forward to this promise's final fulfillment, in the 'substance' days of New Testament *Heilsgeschichte*, that is in the new heaven and new earth of the Eschaton, whose country 'is a better one, that is, a heavenly one' (Heb. 11:16), whose 'city (the redeemed church; Rev. 21:9-27) has foundations, whose builder and maker is God' (Heb. 11:10), and in which he would be 'the heir of the world.' (Rom. 4:13)⁵⁴

It is difficult to deny that the writer of Hebrews teaches that the land promise made to Abraham is typical of a heavenly country.⁵⁵ After making this observation, Reymond quotes an earlier work of Robertson's in support of his hermeneutical axiom: "Jesus cleared the way for the old covenant 'type' to be replaced by the new covenant 'antitype.'"⁵⁶

The doctrine of union with Christ contributes to a better understanding of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant in an important way. Gal. 3:16 makes clear that union with Christ stands at the center of the soteriological blessing of this important covenant: "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as referring to many, but rather to one, 'And to your seed,' that is, Christ." Consequently, the hermeneutical type-antitype

⁵⁴ Reymond, 513. Note that the author intended to refer to Acts 7:5 rather than Acts 7:25.

⁵⁵ Saucy concedes the point, but he responds to the interpretation of Hebrews 11 shared by Reymond with two primary points: (1) *heavenly* does not necessarily mean *non-earthly* (p. 55); and (2) spiritual blessings *in Christ* do not automatically preclude material blessings *on the land* (p. 57).

⁵⁶ Ibid., 515. Reymond quotes O. Palmer Robertson, *Understanding the Land of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1996), 13.

relationship between land and heavenly country contained in the Abrahamic Covenant has a revelatory parallel in the relationship between Isaac and Christ (Gen. 17:18-21).

The Abrahamic Covenant promises a seed and a land. The first typifies Christ, and the second typifies the heavenly country. Covenant theology's interpretation of the fulfillment of the land promise concludes that the promise of land is not fulfilled with terra firma. But this understanding conflicts with the fulfillment of the parallel seed promise. God's promise of a seed was fulfilled in both typical and antitypical form. Covenant theologians recognize that the gift of Isaac is a crucial component of God's faithful fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. Ishmael would not do. Had Abraham gone completely childless, the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant would be incomplete in spite of the incarnation of Christ. Accordingly, the mechanism of type-antitype revelation exhibited by the seed promise does not demonstrate that promised types are superseded by their antitypes; rather, it shows that promised types are fulfilled with the type promised. Both the promise of the type and the fulfillment of the type promised are equally essential components of the revelation of antitypical truth. Because the promise of the seed type had to be fulfilled literally, the promise of the land type also must be fulfilled literally; its antitype cannot supersede it.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Robert D. Bell applies this hermeneutical principle to the role of Solomon in the Davidic Covenant in 2 Sam. 7:12-16. "The Day of the Lord Theme in the Old Testament Prophets," *Biblical Viewpoint* 29 (1995): 46-48. He observes also that at times a prophecy promise with antitypical significance comes chronologically subsequent to the literal type used to prefigure it, as in Joel 1:1-2:17, where Joel uses the history of a locust plague to prophesy the eschatological Day of the Lord.

Conclusion

The doctrine of union with Christ informs the coherence debate with important understandings. In regard to the soteriological unity of the Scriptures, the doctrine insists on a single gospel of the grace of God. There is no room in the doctrine of union with Christ for a New Testament variety of salvation that in any way contrasts the work of God that saved the soul of the Old Testament believer. The plan, provision, and application of God's work of salvation are exclusively in Christ; therefore, without Him none of these blessings are available to any believer.

In regard to the continuing relevance of the law, the doctrine of union with Christ offers a model for understanding ecclesiological versus soteriological and ethical application. The coming of the new era established a new ecclesia in Christ, and for this reason the law does not apply in an ecclesiological sense to this new institution any more than it did to Gentile believers in the days of Jonah. The soteriological and ethical authority of the entire law continues unabated today as it always has. Finally, in regard to the future of Israel, the doctrine of union with Christ stands at the center of the Abrahamic Covenant as the seed promise, and it therefore offers an enlightening parallel to the controversial land promise. Just as existence in Christ did not supersede God's literal gift of Isaac to Abraham, so also the existence of the heavenly country does not supersede God's literal promise of land to Abraham.

These conclusions implicate three of the four major theological systems in the coherence debate. The classical dispensational view and the progressive dispensational view fail to account consistently for the

soteriological unity of the Testaments demanded by the doctrine of union with Christ. The former approach fails to distinguish between the soteriological and ecclesiological aspects of the doctrine, and consequently it postulates a nationalistic soteriology for the Old Testament believer. The latter approach locks the soteriological aspects of the doctrine of union with Christ with Old Testament eschatology. The need to await a fulfillment of the New Covenant for *in Christ* experience makes New Testament salvation anachronistic to the Old Testament believer. More must be said about the New Covenant in the next chapter, but it is clear at this point that both the classical and the progressive dispensationalist fall short of accounting for a unified soteriology between the Testaments due in large measure to their understanding of the Old Testament believer's non-participation in union with Christ.

Covenant theology passes the test of soteriological unity demanded by the doctrine of union with Christ, but its misunderstanding of the type-antitype revelatory mechanism causes it to fail to account for the sense in which union with Christ is something both soteriologically old and ecclesiologically new. New antitype supersession conflicts with old *in Christ* soteriology and fails to account for new *in Christ* ecclesiology. As demonstrated by the relationship of Isaac to the Christological antitype, the promises of land and the making of a great nation are still due Abraham in spite of the fact that these things taught him about the heavenly country to come.

Revised dispensationalism holds an advantage over the other participants in the coherence debate because it consistently separates soteriological issues from the *sine qua non* of its position. In an important

sense, revised dispensationalism actually addresses ecclesiology from a comprehensive biblical theological perspective. In the context of systematic theology, ecclesiology is always the study of the New Testament church. What revised dispensationalism shows, however, is that the biblical doctrine of ecclesiology is actually much larger than the New Testament church. The New Testament church is only a single ecclesia in Scripture. God has used many ecclesiae throughout the Old and New Testament eras, and He plans to use still others in the future. More remains to be said regarding the nature of type-antitype in the light of the doctrine of union with Christ and the help this understanding offers to the interpretation of controversial passages at the center of the coherence debate. The next chapter will address these issues from a revised dispensationalist perspective.

CHAPTER 8

UNION WITH CHRIST AND THE FULFILLMENT OF THE NEW COVENANT

One of the difficult issues that has occupied the attention of the coherence debate originates in the New Testament's use of the New Covenant promise to Israel and Judah to describe the soteriological blessings enjoyed by New Testament believers (Jer. 33:14). The membership of the New Testament church must not forsake their assembling together because they have been sanctified by the blood of the New Covenant (Heb. 10:25-29); the cup of the New Testament church is the cup of the New Covenant in Christ's blood, which proclaims His death (1 Cor. 11:24-26); the ministers of the New Testament church's saving gospel are ministers of the New Covenant (2 Cor. 3:6); and the ratification of the New Covenant explains the reason the New Testament church no longer brings sacrifices to their priest at the temple in Jerusalem (Heb. 8:1-10:25). In point of fact, *New Testament* means *New Covenant*.¹ The sense in which a promise made to Israel and Judah becomes a central focus of New Testament truth holds serious ramifications for the coherence debate. Ryrie correctly understood that the fulfillment of the New

¹ The earliest use of the Latin term *Novum Testamentum* occurs in Tertullian (190-220 A.D.). Since at least the middle of the second century, the New Testament church has called the Scriptures it was given the "New Testament." *Testamentum* is the Latin translation of the Greek διαθήκη, which equates to the Hebrew word for covenant (בְּרִית). See James Orr, "The Bible," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr, John L. Nuelsen, and Edgar Y. Mullins, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 1:460.

Covenant is the debate's watershed issue: "If the Church is fulfilling Israel's promises as contained in the new covenant or anywhere in Scripture, then premillennialism is weakened."²

The revised dispensationalist's core principles disintegrate if the church age fulfills Israel's New Covenant promise. For instance, Willem A. VanGemen's questions incriminate the dispensational distinction between Israel and the church if the New Covenant finds fulfillment in the church age: "Since the older dispensational distinctions between a new covenant for the church and another new covenant for Israel have apparently been abandoned, how can a distinction between Israel and the church be maintained? If this distinction were to be abandoned, is there still a *sine qua non* of dispensationalism?"³ VanGemen correctly observes that if God made a promise to one people and He fulfills that same promise in behalf of another people, the interpreter of this promise must emphasize the sense in which these peoples can be identified as the same rather than the sense in which they must be distinguished. Consequently, a distinction between Israel and the church breaks down.

An insistence on the normal historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture is also in trouble if the New Covenant finds fulfillment in the New Testament church. Walter C. Kaiser, who would not label his position in this regard as dispensational, warns progressive dispensationalists that their understanding of New Covenant partial fulfillment is

² Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1953), 118.

³ "A Response," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 336-337.

“denying (or seriously diminishing the point) that the Old Testament text predicted or supported what was being claimed by the New Testament writers.”⁴ If New Testament authors believed that the New Covenant promise to Israel was in some sense fulfilled in behalf of the New Testament church, they likely did not believe in a grammatical-historical approach to hermeneutics in the area of prophecy.

What remains of the *sine qua non* of dispensationalism, the glorification of God as the unifying theme of Scripture and history, also no longer provides much distinction from covenantal systems for those who see provisions of the New Covenant as fulfilled today. Progressive dispensationalist Robert L. Saucy is ready to concede this point: “While non-dispensationalists do tend to put more emphasis on the unity in God’s program, they clearly view the ultimate goal as the glorification of God, even as dispensationalists do.”⁵ Ultimately, acquiescence to the

⁴ “An Epangelical Response,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 375. The progressive dispensationalist Darrell Bock argues that the presence of a divine author and a distinction between meaning and significance demonstrate that a text can “speak beyond its human author, so that once a text is produced, commentary on it can follow in subsequent texts. Connection to the original passage exists, but not in a way that is limited to the understanding of the original human author.” Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton: Victor, 1993), 66-67. The hermeneutics of progressive dispensationalism have come to be known as *complementary hermeneutics* because the significance of the text intended by the divine author is required to complete the meaning of the text intended by the human author. Kaiser correctly observes that the bifurcation of divine significance from human meaning is dangerous because it leads to the conclusion that the meaning of the Old Testament text does not support the assertions of the New Testament authors who use it for support. For a thorough response to complementary hermeneutics from the perspective of revised dispensationalism, see R. Bruce Compton, “Dispensationalism, the Church, and the New Covenant,” *Detroit Baptist Theological Journal* 8 (2003): 40-47.

⁵ *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 20. Revised dispensationalists do not claim that covenant theology lacks an emphasis on the glorification of God as His ultimate goal. What they deny is that the covenant of grace is comprehensive enough to account for the unity of Scripture and God’s plan for history. Saucy’s concession misses the issue raised by revised dispensationalism. See Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 40-41.

position of covenantal theology in regard to the fulfillment of the New Covenant produces an abandonment of an essentialist view of dispensationalism altogether. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock note that the history of dispensational thought is a history of developing conclusions. They therefore call for understanding progressive dispensationalism not only as a “search for definition,” but also as “postessentialist.”⁶ Ultimately, the conclusion that the New Covenant has in some sense reached fulfillment in the New Testament church causes not only the disappearance of the revised dispensationalists’ *sine qua non*, but also a serious mitigation of the value of a common propositional confession of truth (1 Tim. 3:16).

Revised dispensationalism refuses to yield this ground. The challenge for this position’s treatment of the New Covenant, therefore, requires a definition of the relationship between the New Testament believer and the New Covenant that does not demand the fulfillment of the New Covenant. Revised dispensationalists have typically used concepts such as the New Testament believers’ *participation* in the New Covenant and the New Covenant’s *establishment* to explain its relationship to the New Testament church in terms unrelated to fulfillment.⁷ Conclusions drawn from the Old Testament believer’s relationship to the doctrine of union with Christ help to better specify the nature of the relationship of the New Testament believer to the unfulfilled New Covenant. Hebrews 8-10 is especially significant in this regard.

⁶ “Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: Assessment and Dialogue,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 379.

⁷ Compton, 46-47.

In addition, two other New Testament passages have challenged the revised dispensationalists' insistence on a consistently normal approach to the interpretation of Scripture: Peter's use of Joel 2 on the Day of Pentecost, and James's use of Amos 9 at the Jerusalem Council. Progressive dispensationalists correctly understand the challenge these passages pose to revised dispensationalism, but their partial fulfillment answer needs modification.⁸ The exposure of the miscalculations of partial fulfillment provided by the doctrine of union with Christ offers a correction that better answers the interpretive difficulties of Acts 2 and Acts 15. This answer need not introduce the concessions of complementary hermeneutics.

Indications That the New Covenant Is Not Fulfilled

An examination of the less perspicuous aspects of the relationship of the New Covenant to the New Testament church ought to follow a preliminary understanding of the promise's plain provisions. In order to understand adequately the New Testament's treatment of an Old Testament promise, the interpreter must first know what the Old Testament promise says. Especially in light of the inadequacy of the typology hermeneutics of the supersession view,⁹ a reading of the provisions of the

⁸ Specifically, the objection of Bruce K. Waltke must be answered: "This already-not yet model of dispensationalism, entailing a less than one-for-one correspondence between Old Testament covenants and prophecies and their partial fulfillment in the church, shakes the very foundations of dispensational hermeneutics, which includes a consistent literalistic interpretation of the Old Testament, another sine qua non of the system." "A Response," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 348. In this context Waltke criticizes Bock's interpretation of Acts 2.

⁹ For a discussion of these inadequacies, see "The Future of National Israel" in chapter 7, "Theological Systems and Union with Christ," 259-268. Whereas George Ladd argues that an interpreter's conclusions regarding the New Covenant are a

New Covenant must function as the interpreter's starting point. These provisions argue against concluding that the New Covenant is fulfilled today in the New Testament church.

Perhaps the most obvious indication that the New Covenant has not yet been fulfilled follows from a reading of the beneficiaries of the covenant. Jeremiah specifically describes these parties as *Israel and Judah* (Jer. 33:14).¹⁰ There is a level of specification in this description that undermines a non-political understanding of the promise. The fulfillment of the New Covenant would not merely benefit *my people* or even *Israel* in the sense of a saved remnant. Rather, the fulfillment of the New Covenant would benefit the two political entities that separated in the days of King Rehoboam (1 Kings 12). Israel had already experienced God's judgment at the hands of the Assyrians by the time of Jeremiah's ministry in Judah, yet the promise of the New Covenant is made to both Israel and Judah. The New Covenant heals the political breach between

function of whether he starts with the Old or New Testament, John S. Feinberg correctly responds that the real issue is a correct understanding of the type-antitype revelatory mechanism: "The matter of typology can be summarized as follows: (1) a type must have meaning in its own context; (2) the meaning of the type in its own context is essential for a type/antitype relationship (otherwise we have an example of a parable or perhaps an allegory, but not an example of typology); and (3) ignoring items 1 and 2 threatens the very integrity of the Old Testament. The problem that arises from nondispensational approaches to typology is that they seem to neglect items 1 and 2, at best, and deny them, at worst. Consequently, whether one begins with the New Testament and goes to the Old Testament or vice versa, should not make a bit of difference in one's interpretation of the Old Testament as long as one properly understands the implications of typology." "Salvation in the Old Testament," in *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 47. Feinberg is responding to George E. Ladd, "Historic Premillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1977), 20-21, 27. On the grounds of common sense and perspicuity alone, the Old Testament's description of the New Covenant logically functions as a precursor to an understanding of the New Testament's treatment of it.

¹⁰ Walter C. Kaiser offers this point as his key objection against the covenantal interpretation of the New Covenant (p. 361).

them because it involves a national reunification (Ezek. 37:15-23). The political reunion of the nation of Israel remained unfulfilled until 1948; it did not occur with the coming of Christ and the establishment of the New Testament church.

The unconditional nature of the New Covenant is a second indication that it is yet unfulfilled. The disobedience of Israel is often cited as justification for God's supersession of the nation of Israel in favor of the church in regard to the covenant's fulfillment.¹¹ Yet in the same context that emphasizes the political realities of the divided nation, Jeremiah describes exactly how God would respond to these realities in the face of the disobedience that caused them. In fact, Jeremiah rebuts the supersession position directly as though he were engaged in today's coherence debate on the side of the future of the nation in the plan of God. He begins by defining this position: "And the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah saying, 'Have you not observed what this people have spoken, saying, "The two families which the Lord chose, He has rejected them"? Thus they despise My people, *no longer are they as a nation in their sight*'" (Jer. 33:23-24). By defining the issue in terms of this proposal, Jeremiah makes some very clear assertions about the future of Israel *as a nation*. First, the specification of *two families* indicates again that this promise solves political problems; it does not merely address a believing non-national remnant. Second, Jeremiah's description of those who wrongfully claim rejection for Israel identifies their miscalculation specifically as their denial of her national status (גֵּוֹלָה) in the future.

¹¹ See for example, O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000), 12-13.

Finally, Jeremiah illustrates the certainty of God's refusal to reject Israel in a national and political sense by citing the certainty of God's covenant for the maintenance of natural law: "Thus says the Lord, 'If My covenant for day and night stand not, and the fixed patterns of heaven and earth I have not established, then I would reject the descendants of Jacob and David My servant, not taking from his descendants rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them'" (Jer. 33:25-26). Here again, the plural *rulers* (מְשֻׁלִּים) demonstrates that the New Covenant involves more than the rule of Christ from heaven in the hearts of a believing true Israel in the church. The promise guarantees a functioning, national, political entity involving varying levels of political authority and leadership, all in spite of the disobedience of the nation. Only once the laws of nature have ceased, may the fulfillment of the New Covenant be interpreted accurately as a supersession of the nation by the church (Jer. 31:35-37).

The third indication of an unfulfilled New Covenant originates in the fact that the passages communicating this Old Testament promise provide a chronological marker for its fulfillment. Specifically, the fulfillment of the New Covenant ensues after the restoration of the Jewish people from the nations of the world to the land of Palestine (Jer. 31:27-29; 32:36-38; Ezek. 34:25-29; 37:21-26). Jeremiah purchases land with plans to return, which are rooted in the hope of the New Covenant (Jer. 32:6-44). In addition, three characteristics of this restoration preclude understanding it in terms of the return of the exiles from captivity seventy years after the destruction predicted by Jeremiah (Jer. 25:12). First, the promises of the regathering to the land include eschatological

markers that point to the consummation of Israel's future in the day of the Lord. Compton notes that the phrase *the days are coming* (31:31) appears five times in Jeremiah's Book of the Covenant, and he concludes that this marker indicates a future and final fulfillment that does not correlate well with Jeremiah's seventy-year promise: "[the phrase] identifies the events associated with the new covenant as transpiring in the eschaton, specifically in connection with the nation's final dispersion and subsequent restoration to the land of Palestine."¹² Furthermore, Compton points out that the restoration promised by the New Covenant is a permanent blessing.

While the statements in both passages [Jer. 34:27, 37:21] could refer to the experiences of the post-exilic community, the evidence taken at face value argues against this. According to 34:28-29, the nation once delivered will never again experience deprivation or national dispersion. In addition, according to 37:25, the nation's restoration to the land is permanent.¹³

The regathering of Israel and Judah to the land of Palestine under the fulfillment of the New Covenant is never undone. This has clearly not been the experience of the nation of Israel since the days of its post-exilic return to Jerusalem.¹⁴

A fourth indication involves the spiritual dimensions of the Old Testament promise. This issue involves Jeremiah's emphasis about what exactly is new about the New Covenant. The prophet contrasts the newness of the New Covenant with the oldness of the Mosaic Covenant,

¹² Compton, 13-14. Compton also notes the phrase *in that day* in Hos. 2:16, 18, and 21 (p. 15).

¹³ Ibid., 21.

¹⁴ Note that should the current nation of Israel cease to exist, this would force the conclusion that the events of 1948 were not the regathering indicated by the New Covenant either.

and he defines the oldness of the Mosaic Covenant in terms of its having been broken: “not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them, declares the Lord” (Jer. 31:32). The newness of the New Covenant guarantees that once the promise is fulfilled, God’s people would keep the law of God: “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it” (Jer. 31:33). They will not break the New Covenant the way they broke the Mosaic Covenant by violating God’s law. The internalization of the law of God through the Spirit of God makes this impossible. God promises: “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances” (Ezek. 36:27). In addition, the need for evangelism, discipleship, and confession of sin ceases in the nation because all have experienced equal and universal knowledge of God, the final forgiveness of perfect fellowship, and a complete sanctification described as nothing short of a full cleansing from iniquity and the gift of a new heart and spirit no longer in need of transformation (Jer. 31:34, Ezek. 36:25-26, 33).

Whether one sees the New Covenant as entirely fulfilled in the New Testament church or as fulfilled only in terms of its spiritual provisions, finding believers today whose lives can account for this fulfillment presents difficulties. The task becomes especially problematic when one remembers that according to these views, the spiritual state defined by these New Covenant blessings describes the New Testament believer in a way that it does not describe Enoch, Job, Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, Asaph, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and many others who serve as

convicting examples of lives of obedience (Hebrews 11). Yet in spite of the scarcity of New Testament believers (if not the complete nonexistence of them) who put these Old Testament giants of the faith to shame as predicted by the New Covenant, the systems of supersessionists and progressive dispensationalists require the conclusion that the New Testament believer has nevertheless obtained a level of sanctification superior to that of the Old Testament believer. Bruce A. Ware illustrates the effort to meet this systematic requirement: “By giving them new hearts and the indwelling Spirit, he fulfills his pledge to them not only that he would be their faithful God but that they would truly and fully be [sic] his faithful people, for he says that they will ‘follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws’ ([Ezek.] 36:27). The internalization of the law by the indwelling Spirit, then, has its necessary and comprehensive change in the lives of God’s people, producing in them consistent and abiding faithfulness.”¹⁵

Common experience and common sense advocate a different conclusion. Few New Testament believers would claim to have more in common with the sanctified perfections of the beneficiaries of the New Covenant than they do with the struggling imperfections of the old covenant believers who had not yet experienced its fulfillment. Not the former, but the latter are examples of the life-lessons New Testament believers need to learn (1 Cor. 10:6, 11, Heb. 11:39-40, 12:1). Most

¹⁵ “The New Covenant and the People(s) of God,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 80. Ware’s comments are in support of his partial fulfillment interpretation of the New Covenant: “The preliminary nature of the new covenant’s fulfillment can be seen in two ways. First, only the spiritual aspects of new-covenant promise are now inaugurated in this age; the territorial and political aspects, though part of God’s new-covenant promise, await future fulfillment” (pp. 94-95).

would confess a continuing need to know the Lord better through the teaching of others (Phil. 3:10, Rom. 1:11, 1 Pet. 5:1-3), a continuing need for the renewing of the mind due to the lack of a completely new heart and spirit (Rom. 7:18, 12:2, Gal. 2:20), and a continuing need for God's fellowship-restoring forgiveness through confession of sin in the face of repeated failure (1 John 1:6-10). Whereas some theological systems may place the New Testament believer in the category of the perfections of the New Covenant experience in contrast to those who lived under the Old Covenant, the ethical instruction of the New Testament and an honest practical appraisal of the church's spiritual experience clearly indicate that he has far more in common with the redeemed of the Old Testament era who had not yet seen the sanctifying effects of the fulfillment of the New Covenant in their lives. Both the sanctification similarity between Old Testament believers and believers during the church age, and the sanctification contrast between church-age believers and New Covenant believers indicate that the spiritual provisions of the New Covenant are just as unfulfilled in the church age as are its political provisions.

In summary, four indications argue that the New Covenant promise of the Old Testament has not found fulfillment in the New Testament church: (1) the beneficiaries are political entities—Israel and Judah; (2) the promise given to these entities is unconditional and irrevocable; (3) the chronological markers of the promise indicate a time subsequent to the church age; and (4) the sanctified experiences of the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant are not a part of real life in the New Testament church. In addition to these understandings from the Old Testament, Rom. 11:25-32 indicates that the New Covenant

promises of Isa. 59:20-21 and Isa. 27:9 are yet future from the perspective of the New Testament church.¹⁶ Taken together, this evidence clearly indicates that the New Covenant is an unfulfilled promise today.

As has already been noted, however, an important connection does exist between the New Testament church and the Old Testament New Covenant promise to Israel. The relationship between the Old Testament believer and the doctrine of union with Christ specifies the nature of this connection, because it clarifies the similarity and distinction between antitype-type and promise-fulfillment revelatory mechanisms.

Typology and the Fulfillment of Promise—Hebrews 8-10

Much of the discussion in the coherence debate regarding the correspondence between typology and the fulfillment of promise emphasizes the similarity of these two revelatory mechanisms under a chronological framework. This paradigm accounts for W. Edward Glenny's term *typological-prophetic hermeneutics*. Under this schema types are old and lesser and contained in the Old Testament, and antitypes are new and greater and contained in the New Testament. The latter always fulfill the former: "A pattern or correspondence must exist between the Old Testament type and the New Testament antitype. . . . There must be an escalation or heightening from the Old Testament type to the greater New Testament antitype."¹⁷ Following this chronological understanding of the relationship between type and antitype, Glenny's interpretation of 1 Pet.

¹⁶ For a discussion of the significance of this passage to the question of the fulfillment of the New Covenant, see Compton, 34-36.

¹⁷ "The Israelite Imagery of 1 Peter 2," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 157-158.

2:9 relies heavily on the tense of the first three words of the verse: “But you are.” He claims that the present tense of this elliptical phrase (ὑμεῖς δέ) contrasts the future tense of both the Hebrew (וְהָיִיתֶם) and the Septuagint (ὑμεῖς δέ ἔσεσθε) rendering of Exod. 19:6. Glennly concludes from this observation: “While Israel was promised that they would be God’s people, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation if they would obey him and keep covenant with him, Peter’s recipients are all of these things now.”¹⁸ The distinction Glennly draws between the past type and the present antitype is that Israel’s experience was potential whereas the church’s experience is actual.

This chronological understanding of type and antitype in Exod. 19:6 and 1 Pet. 2:9 forces the conclusion that the people of Israel were never God’s people in view of their disobedience. Only the church managed this status. This is what makes Israel a type and the church the corresponding antitype. While it may be argued that the rejection of Israel as the people of God eventually transpires (Hos. 1:9), this argument assumes that Israel first actually achieved identification as the people of God. The fulfillment of the promise in Exod. 19:6 did not have to wait for the heightened experience of the New Testament church

¹⁸ Ibid., 182. Two considerations caution against Glennly’s sharp grammatical distinctions in this regard. First, had Peter intended to emphasize a chronological contrast between the future tense of either the Hebrew or the Septuagint, he would have been better served with the present tense of εἰμί rather than with the elliptical construction he used. Second, it is not clear that the modal use of the Hebrew imperfect state in Exod. 19:6 carries a strictly future sense. The verb form in this context expresses the potential result of a fulfilled condition, and this condition need not await the future for fulfillment. See E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, trans. A. E. Cowley, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), sec. 107x.

(Deut. 7:6).¹⁹ In addition, the New Testament often admonishes believers of this age that obedience is critical to remaining the people of God (Heb 10:35-39). The New Testament believer never “surpasses” the Old so as to transcend the admonition of Exod. 19:6. No potential versus actual distinction exists between Exodus 19 and 1 Peter 2, or between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church. Glenny misinterprets Peter’s analogy as an example of typological-prophetic hermeneutics, and this error originates in his assumption that the New Testament church fulfills in some sense the prophetic significance of Old Testament typology. His chronological framework for understanding the connection between typology and the fulfillment of promise accounts for this mistaken assumption.

The relationship of the Old Testament believer to the doctrine of union with Christ aids our understanding of the relationship between type and antitype because it demands that the interpreter think of this mechanism without an emphasis on chronology. A chronological understanding of type-antitype causes those who follow Glenny’s thesis to see a correspondence on the one hand between promise and type, and on the other between fulfillment and antitype. Chronological sequence categorizes these revelatory mechanisms as old versus new and lesser versus greater. Table 7 illustrates.

¹⁹ Note Glenny’s assertion in this regard: “The point of Peter’s catena of Old Testament references is that by virtue of their relationship with Jesus, the elect Messiah, his recipients are the elect people of God in these last days. He does not explicitly call them the new or the true Israel; instead he shows that they are the people of God, whose salvation and spiritual benefits under the new covenant follow a pattern established in God’s promised relationship with his chosen people, the nation of Israel. However, although their relationship with God follows a pattern seen in the nation of Israel, the spiritual aspect of their relationship with God and their relationship with the resurrected Christ surpass the experience of Old Testament Israel” (p. 179).

Table 7 – A Chronological Framework for Typology and Fulfillment

Old Testament/Lesser	New Testament/Greater
Type	Antitype
Promise	Fulfillment

Under this chronological organization *type* is to *antitype* what *promise* is to *fulfillment*. Type and promise go together as Old Testament realities, and antitype and fulfillment combine as New Testament realities.

By way of contrast, the biblical theological fact that the Old Testament believer is a full participant in the blessings of union with Christ turns this chronology backwards. The Old Testament believer enjoys the soteriological antitype involving regenerating life in Christ prior to the establishment of the New Testament ecclesiological type involving corporate fellowship in the body of Christ—the church. Both the soteriological antitype in Christ, which includes the Old Testament believer, and the ecclesiological type in Christ, which excludes the Old Testament believer, are central components of Pauline theology (Ephesians 1-3).²⁰ The inclusion of the Old Testament believer in the former and his exclusion from the latter demonstrate that antitype reality may chronologically precede a corresponding type.

Under the weight of these considerations related to union with Christ, the chronology-based identifications of, on the one hand, antitype with fulfillment and, on the other, type with promise begin to break

²⁰ See chapter 5, “The Old Testament Believer in Key Union with Christ Passages,” pp. 152-173.

down. Type no longer has to precede antitype chronologically the way promise must always precede fulfillment. What emerges after this collapse conforms better to the semantics of the word *type*.²¹ The characteristic distinguishing type from antitype is not related to chronology, but rather to visibility. Types are pictures of antitypes because they make the invisible visible. The correspondence between a type and an antitype does not depend on accurate fulfillment, but rather accurate depiction. This adjustment from a chronological distinction to a visibility distinction shifts the former paradigm regarding the relationship between typology and promise-fulfillment. Now both promise and fulfillment may involve types that communicate transcendent antitypical truth. Promises, fulfillments, and types are all components of special revelation. The antitypes are the things revealed. Table 8 illustrates this shift in understanding.

Table 8 – A Visibility Framework for Typology and Fulfillment

Invisible – Old & New/Greater	Visible – Old & New/Lesser
Antitype	Types
	Promises
	Fulfillments

As Table 8 shows, antitype realities exist in both the Old and New Testaments, and both the Old and New Testament types, promises, and

²¹ Bauer's first definition of τύπος is "visible impression." Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University Press, 1979), 829.

fulfillments reveal them. For this reason, the Old Testament believer enjoyed the soteriological blessings of union with Christ even though this doctrine had not yet undergone its fuller revelation in the types, practices, and doctrines of the New Testament church (Col. 1:24-27). Furthermore, the equal presence of types in both the Old and New Testaments intimates that the New Testament church is a visible type in much the same way that the nation of Israel is a visible type. The church is not the antitype of Israel, for the church is visible. In addition, the chart predicts that identifiable similarities between the distinct types, promises, and fulfillments of the Old and New Testaments will appear because they are different pictures of the same central antitypical reality, the person and work of Christ—salvation and consummation in Him. Peter finds these similarities pedagogically useful in 1 Pet. 2:9.

Finally, a visibility framework for typology and fulfillment demonstrates that the invisible realities of antitype truth are superior to the visible realities of types in much the same way that circumcision made without hands is superior to circumcision made with hands. The thing revealed is greater than the mechanism God uses to reveal it, for ultimately His person and work are these objects of revelation. It is neither status as the fulfillment of a promise nor recent chronology that makes reality greater or heightened; rather, it is the status of the invisible and supernatural work of God in Christ, the Savior of believers of all ages.

The visibility distinction between type and antitype is not a new one. Thomas Arnold, the 18th century headmaster of England's famous Rugby School who is remembered today as the father of secondary

education, used this visibility distinction between type and antitype to argue against sacramentalism.

Thus again, the summary of the tenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, as given in our English Bibles, runs thus: 'The Jews' sacraments types of ours.' Here is the self-same error, of making the outward rites or facts of the Jewish religion *subordinate* to the outward rites of ours, instead of regarding them both as *coordinate with one another*, and *subordinate* to some spiritual reality, of which both alike are but signs. In the passage referred to, St. Paul is showing that outward rites are no security for the existence of the real thing which they typify. . . . It is altering the whole scope of the passage to say that it represents the Jews' sacraments as types of ours, as if our sacraments, any more than theirs, were necessarily or in themselves a reality. . . . The Jews had their sacraments, as we have ours, and both are types of the same thing.²²

Arnold's observation contributes an important understanding to the coherence debate: continuity exists in the antitype, whereas discontinuity exists among the types. When Arnold refers to a "spiritual reality" in this passage, he means the opposite of an outward or visible rite or fact of religion. Note, however, that a visibility distinction is not exactly the same as a spiritual/non-spiritual distinction. Some spiritual realities are completely invisible and therefore antitypical (e.g., saving faith, regeneration), whereas other spiritual realities may be visible and therefore indicative of a distinctive type (e.g., perfect obedience of the law).²³

²² *Fragment on the Church*, 2nd ed. [book on-line] (London: B. Fellowes, 1845), 77-79; available from Google Book Search (<http://books.google.com>) (emphasis his).

²³ James Bannerman also emphasizes the visibility distinction in his classic on ecclesiology: "This is the visible Church of Christ, known to men by the outward profession of faith in Him, and by the practice of those Church ordinances and observances which He has appointed for His worshippers. It is not to be identified with the invisible Church, for men may belong to the one society, who do not truly belong to the other; and the relation in which the one body stands to Christ is different from the relation occupied by the other. Neither are the two to be wholly placed in opposition to each other; for they form, not so much two separate Churches, as one Church under two distinct and different characters or aspects,—the invisible Church being spiritually united to Christ, the visible being externally united to Him for the sake of the

The decoupling of type-antitype and promise-fulfillment provides a context for understanding the New Testament believer's relationship to the New Covenant in terms that do not require the fulfillment of the New Covenant promise made to Israel. This relationship may now be defined as participation in the antitypical realities typified by the New Covenant's past promise and future fulfillment. Three distinctions can now define the relationship of the New Covenant to the church: (1) the difference between the ratification of the covenant in the blood of Christ and the fulfillment of the covenant in the nation of Israel, (2) the difference between the ministry of the covenant in the servants of Christ and the fulfillment of the covenant in the nation of Israel, and (3) the difference between the mediation of the covenant in the priesthood of Christ and the fulfillment of the covenant in the nation of Israel.

The Synoptic Gospels record Christ's declaration that the cup and broken bread of their Last Supper signified the ratification of the New Covenant (Matt. 26:28, Mark 14:24, Luke 22:20). Paul quotes Christ: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (1 Cor. 11:25). But the ratification of a covenant is clearly distinguishable from the fulfillment of a covenant. Compton makes this very clear with observations from the Abrahamic Covenant.

Using the Abrahamic covenant as an example, the answer is that the fulfillment of covenant promises is not necessarily collocated with the ratification of the covenant nor with participation in covenant benefits. Virtually all recognize that Genesis 15 describes the formal ratification of the Abrahamic covenant between God and Abraham. . . . To say that Abraham died 'without receiving the

other." *The Church of Christ: A Treatise on the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline and Government of the Christian Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1868), 10-11.

promises' is simply another way of saying that this promise was not fulfilled in the lifetime of the patriarch.²⁴

Because the Abrahamic Covenant demonstrates a clear distinction between the ratification and the fulfillment of the covenant, references to the offering of the blood of the New Covenant in the New Testament need not imply that the New Covenant has been fulfilled in some sense in the church age. The New Covenant made with Israel has been ratified, but not fulfilled.

Paul describes himself as a minister of the New Covenant (2 Cor. 3:6). Some have argued that this passage cannot teach the fulfillment of the New Covenant in the church because Paul does not use the definite article in this description. Compton points out that this is an unlikely solution.²⁵ Paul undoubtedly thinks of the prophecy of Jeremiah in this context as he contrasts his own ministry with the old covenant ministry of Moses. But this fact immediately raises the question whether or not Paul would have put Jeremiah and Ezekiel in the same category he found himself in as ministers of the New Covenant. In 2 Corinthians 3 the visibility theme plays a more prominent role than does a chronological theme. When Paul speaks of his work as ministry of the New Covenant, he refers to the greater light that the covenant's ratification in Christ has produced. His ministry as apostle and missionary, which he describes in 2:14-17, is an important tool for the exposure of this additional light. Jeremiah and Ezekiel held similar revelatory ministries related to the

²⁴ Compton, 47-48.

²⁵ Ibid., 40. He notes that the contrast between the New Covenant descriptive of Paul's ministry and the old covenant mentioned in verse 14 intimates that the New Covenant Paul refers to here is the same as Jeremiah's, and he observes that Paul's emphasis on the Spirit parallels the New Covenant promise of Ezekiel.

advancement of New Covenant light and glory. In this sense their ministries contrasted Moses' ministry in the same way Paul's did.

In addition, two features of this passage fail to conform to a chronological understanding of Paul's status as a minister of the New Covenant. First, if the insights of this status had to wait for the New Testament era, Moses was on the wrong side of the veil. The revelatory glory Moses possessed, illustrated by his shining face, was not qualitatively different from the glory of Paul's New Covenant ministry. Paul is not teaching that everyone in the Old Testament lacked New Covenant light because the era in which they lived put a veil before them. He teaches clearly that Moses possessed the truth many did not in spite of the limitations of the revelation He received. Moses' glory was only quantitatively different in a revelatory sense (2 Cor. 3:9-11).²⁶

Second, Paul speaks of a heart-veil that inhibits the reading of the old covenant even in his day. The limitations of the Old Testament Israelite were therefore two: fading glory (limited revelation) and a heart-veil. The second of these problems persists in the age of Paul's New Covenant ministry in spite of the correction of the first. The heart-veil is removed only in Christ (v. 14). Therefore, the central issue to ascertaining New Covenant light is not whether you are reading the old covenant in the old

²⁶ Daniel I. Block asserts in a similar way that the novelty of Ezekiel's New Covenant prophecy lies in the scope of its blessings rather than in their nature: "It is unlikely that Ezekiel was self-consciously introducing a new notion with his promise of the transforming work of the indwelling *rw*h of Yahweh. He would have been well aware of Psalm 51. What concerns him, however, is the fundamental incongruity between the idealistic designation of his own people as 'the people of God' and the reality that he observed. The problem was not the absence of the Holy Spirit to transform lives, but that this was not occurring on a national scale. The issue was one of scope." "The Prophet of the Spirit: The Use of *rw*h in the Book of Ezekiel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32 (1989): 41.

era or hearing Paul's preaching in the new; it is whether you have had your heart-veil removed in Christ. Moses certainly had in spite of the age in which he lived. Therefore, Paul speaks of himself as a minister of the New Covenant not because he lived in an age in which this covenant was fulfilled, but rather because like Jeremiah and Ezekiel he had been used of God to further enlighten the import of the New Covenant's ratification.

The most important distinction defining the relationship between the New Covenant and the church clarifies the difference between the mediation of the covenant in the priesthood of Christ and the fulfillment of the covenant in the nation of Israel. Hebrews 8-10 continues a focus on the superiority of Christ's priestly ministry over the Levitical priesthood. The author introduces this theme in chapters 3-4 with a brief contrast between Moses and Christ and continues it in chapters 5-7 with an extended comparison between Melchizedek and Christ. In chapters 8-10 the focus intensifies on answering the charge outlined in 10:28: "Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses." The erroneous assumption in this charge claims permanence for the ecclesiological application of the law. The writer of Hebrews finds Jeremiah's New Covenant promise especially effective for attacking this faulty assumption. For this reason, he introduces his quotation of Jeremiah by noting that the promise of the New Covenant proves that the old covenant was in an important sense insufficient or faulty (Heb. 8:7), but this usage of the New Covenant stops short of claiming that it has been fulfilled in the church.

A detailed exposition of these three chapters is beyond the scope of this study. Instead, some observations significant to the question of

fulfillment require contextual examination. The first occurs in 8:6, where the author speaks of Christ as “the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.” Mediation is similar to ratification,²⁷ and it has already been shown that ratification is distinguishable from fulfillment. Therefore, Christ’s mediation of the New Covenant promise made to Israel need not imply that the covenant is fulfilled in the church age. The enactment (νενομοθέτηται²⁸) of the New Covenant described by this verse clearly relates to the days of Jeremiah and Ezekiel rather than to New Testament times, because it refers to the time of promises, not the time of fulfillments. The verse teaches that the enactment of the New Covenant was grounded on better promises and that these promises were guaranteed and mediated by the priestly ministry of Christ. It says nothing about the fulfillment of the promises. Enacted in the promises of Old Testament prophets and mediated by the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ, the New Covenant remains unfilled in the New Testament age.

The next series of passages directly engages the role of the New Covenant in the argument of these chapters. The New Covenant proves two things relevant to this argument: (1) the old covenant is passing away (8:7, 13), and (2) there is no longer a need for an offering for sin

²⁷ Note the author of Hebrew’s description of Christ as the guarantor of the New Covenant in 7:22. *Guarantor* and *mediator* are related terms in the argument of Hebrews—both refer to the ratification of the New Covenant in the blood of Christ (10:29). Compton describes the relationship between these concepts as follows: “A mediator is one who intercedes between two parties to secure an agreement and, in this context, to secure or establish a covenant. Parallel to this is the concept of a guarantor who guarantees the stipulations of an agreement or, as here, a covenant” (p. 32).

²⁸ This is the perfect passive of νομοθετέω meaning, “function as a lawgiver, legislate.” Bauer’s lexicon translates the phrase in 8:6: “a covenant which has been legally enacted on the basis of better promises” (pp. 541-542).

(10:9, 15-18). But here again, it is not the fulfillment of the New Covenant that proves these things; the covenant's enactment and ratification prove them. In order to prove that the old covenant is not permanent in every respect, the author of Hebrews cites the enactment of the New Covenant (note especially the phrase *When He said* in 8:13). Had the old covenant the character of permanence, the new covenant would never have been enacted through Jeremiah's prophecy. The New Covenant need not be fulfilled to prove that the old is passing away, only enacted.

Similarly, in order to prove that the old covenant's sacrificial system is passing away, the author of Hebrews documents the inadequacies of the old covenant ritual from Ps. 40:6-8 and concludes: "He takes away the first in order to establish the second" (10:4-9). But here the first and second are not covenants. The old covenant is not abolished (ἀναίρέω) any more than the New Covenant is established (ἱστημι). Rather, *first* refers to the sacrifice of animals and *second* to the sacrifice of the body of Christ (v. 10). *Establish* does not refer to the fulfillment of the New Covenant, but rather to the execution of the death of Christ. This death ratified and guaranteed the New Covenant; it did not fulfill it. The New Covenant becomes valuable to this segment of the argument concerning sacrifices because it speaks of the complete abolishment of sin (Heb. 10:14-18). The corollary of a complete abolishment of sin is the complete abolishment in the death of Christ of the need for ongoing sacrifice: "Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin" (v. 18). As the New Covenant promise proves, Christ's death yields absolute perfection for all time and in all ages (v. 14). Just as it is true that no further sacrifice for sin is needed, it is

equally true that the blood of bulls and goats never actually had taken away sins in the first place (v. 4).²⁹

A third issue involves the newness of the believer's access to the presence of God (9:8-9, 10:19-22). This access is described as both new and living in 10:19-22: "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, his flesh . . . let us draw near." This application of the priesthood of Christ to the prayer lives of believers echoes an earlier chapter of Hebrews (4:14-16). A chronological understanding of this *new* way must conclude that finding grace before God's throne in prayer began when God provided new access through the one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5).³⁰ Yet this conclusion does not correlate well with what is known of the prayer lives of godly saints who prayed prior to the incarnation and mediation ministry of Christ as the God-man. Luke describes the senior saint Anna, who never left the temple, serving God night and day with fastings and prayers (Luke 2:37). A chronological understanding of "the new and living way" in Heb. 10:20 seems to require that Anna's prayers

²⁹ Note that the phrase *sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh* in 9:13 does not refer to God's dealing with the sinful nature of saints under the Old Testament. The context discusses the qualifications of the High Priest for entrance into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. Christ's own blood qualified Him. In contrast, the earthly high priest was qualified through a ceremonial cleansing involving the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer. This qualification is what the author of Hebrews calls "the cleansing of the flesh." See F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 201-204.

³⁰ Many interpreters reflect evidence of this chronological framework. Bruce, for example, states: "No longer is the privilege of access to Him carefully fenced about by conditions like those laid down for the high priest when he made his annual entrance into the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement" (p. 249).

be viewed as somewhat defective, failing to penetrate the veil and enter the presence of God. Luke's praise of her service indicates that the opposite was true. The prayer lives of the Psalmists are the envy of every New Testament believer. Psalm 120:1 summarizes well the access we find there: "In my trouble I cried to the Lord, and He answered me." The prayer warrior could not ask for more. Access to God's presence is a major theme of this songbook of Israel, as it is for the hymnals of the New Testament church.³¹ There is no normative evidence in the religious experience of Old Testament believers of an impenetrable veil prohibiting access to the presence of God in prayer.

The visibility distinction provides a better framework for understanding the newness of access to God described by the author of Hebrews. The issue is not new access per se, but newly visible access. No man had ever come to the Father but by Him, because He has always been the only way (John 14:6). The way through the veil is new in the church age because it is newly seen, and it is living because it is newly seen through the mediation of the God-man.

Heb. 10:19-22 must be interpreted in light of 9:8-10. That passage tells us exactly what the Holy Spirit is teaching in regard to access to God: "that the way into the holy place *has not yet been disclosed* while the outer tabernacle is still standing, which is a symbol for the present time" (v. 8). Christ replaces the tabernacle and temple as the *disclosure* of the way to God. His flesh is the veil because His ministry as the incarnate mediator points the way to God's presence just as the veil did

³¹ See Ps. 16:11, 17:15, 22:24, 24:6, 27:8-9, 30:7, 31:16, 20, 41:12, 51:11, 67:1, 69:17, 80:3, 7, 19, 88:14, 95:2, 100:2, 102:2, 105:4, 119:135, 132:10, 140:13, 143:7.

in the tabernacle. Although access to the throne of grace always existed for the Old Testament believer as he participated in the eternal, anti-typical, soteriological blessings of the mediation of Christ, the revelatory type God had given him to picture access to God's presence malfunctioned in this regard. God designed the tabernacle to communicate truths about restricted access, and this picture still communicates the same applicable truth today. Access to God's presence in prayer on the merits of Christ alone was always available to the Old Testament believer under God's plan of eternal redemption (9:12, 26, 10:14).

The tabernacle type has been replaced with the revelation of the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ into the heavenly temple. This new and living revelation is far superior to the tabernacle in its effect on the believer. The results are a new confidence (10:19), a new full assurance of faith (10:22), and a newly persistent confession of the believer's hope (10:23). The mediation of the God-man results a new visibility of this access, which yields a powerful and new understanding. The New Testament believer can look back with the perfections of hindsight on the full revelation of access to God. The Old Testament believer could only look forward in faith believing. The visibility interpretation of the newness of access as outlined by Hebrews affects the interpreter's view of the fulfillment of the New Covenant, for since the access is not chronologically new, the interpreter need not conclude that it provides evidence for the historical fulfillment of the New Covenant in the church.

Compton emphasizes a final important indication from Hebrews 8-10 that argues against viewing the New Covenant as already fulfilled in

the church age. He notes that the author of Hebrews changes the second person of the Old Testament promise to the third person in 10:16: “This is the covenant that I will make with them [not you].”³² This observation agrees well with the plain fact that the author’s quotation of Jeremiah includes the section that specifically describes God’s New Covenant promise as for the house of Israel and the house of Judah (8:8). These characteristics of the author’s use of Jeremiah are difficult to reconcile with the view that he advocates a fulfillment of the New Covenant in the church age.

The Test Passages

Although Hebrews 8-10 is the highest hurdle for the revised dispensationalists’ explanation of the relationship of the New Testament believer to the New Covenant in terms other than fulfillment, it is not the only difficult passage. Two others require treatment: Peter’s use of Joel 2:28-32 (Acts 2:16-21) and James’s use of Amos 9:11-12 (Acts 15:16-18).³³

Partial Fulfillment Redefined

Partial fulfillment is normally associated with the inaugurated eschatology and complementary hermeneutics of progressive dispensationalism. The view understands the New Testament church as the spiritual antitype of Old Testament Israel and interprets the New

³² Compton, 34.

³³ Kenneth L. Barker calls these passages “classic examples” of the need for a progressive/partial view of fulfillment. “The Scope and Center of Old and New Testament Theology and Hope,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 323.

Covenant's spiritual provisions as fulfilled in the New Testament. The other provisions of the New Covenant are fulfilled in the future for the benefit of national Israel, according to this view. In addition to the hermeneutical problems associated with these views, theological difficulties originate in decoupling the fulfillment of the spiritual and political provisions of the New Covenant. Kaiser best identifies the central problem with partial fulfillment as defined by the progressive dispensationalist. His warning bears repeating: "But another liability has reared its ugly head: the possibility that some of the spirit of modernity might snatch away these gains when midrashic techniques and legitimate forms of escalation in typologies are used as the bases for denying (or seriously diminishing the point) that the Old Testament text predicted or supported what was being claimed by the New Testament writers."³⁴ The complementary hermeneutics of partial fulfillment in progressive dispensationalism no longer require the Old Testament text to mean or support what the New Testament authors claimed it did. This is the position's most critical miscalculation.

There is a better model for understanding the nature of partial fulfillment of prophecy in Scripture. Christ provides this example with His interpretation of Isa. 61:1-3 in Luke 4:16-21. Standing in the synagogue, Christ reads the first portion of Isaiah's passage up to the phrase *To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord* (v. 19). Luke tells us that at this point Christ closes the scroll, hands it back to the attendant, sits before the fixed eyes of the synagogue crowd, and forcibly declares, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21). The stopping point

³⁴ Kaiser, 357.

in Christ's presentation is significant because the following phrase in Isaiah continues: "And the day of vengeance of our God" (Isa. 61:2b). The "favorable year" clearly contrasts the "day of vengeance" in Isa. 61:2. The former period is longer than the latter period. The former period is a period of judgment withheld, whereas the latter period is a period of judgment poured out. The former period does not explicitly involve a blessing on national Israel, but rather upon the afflicted, the broken-hearted, captives, and prisoners in general. The latter period includes great comfort for Zion (Isa. 61:2b-9). The New Covenant is not mentioned in the former promise of blessing, but it is in the latter (Isa. 61:8). Clearly, the purpose of Christ's use of Isaiah 61 involved His desire to distinguish His first advent from His second advent.³⁵ The first ushers in a favorable year of universal blessings; the second brings vengeance upon the enemies of Israel and fulfills the New Covenant promise.

Christ's use of Isaiah 61 informs the interpreter's methodology for reading Old Testament prophecy and interpreting its fulfillment. In the space of three verses, the prophet Isaiah predicts two ages that will span at least three thousand years before the fulfillment of this passage is complete. In addition, although the two advents of the Lord are closely coupled together by the prophet, they are clearly distinguishable to the informed reader. Most importantly, the prophecy says exactly what Christ needed His audience to understand. It required no heightening or complementary significance, only application. For Christ, correct

³⁵ For this reason it is unlikely that Christ saw his first advent as involving an offer to the nation of Israel of the Messianic kingdom. This view, still popular among even progressive dispensationalists, does not account well for Christ's interpretation of Isaiah 61, nor can it explain the Messianic secret and Christ's preference for the "Son of Man" appellation. For a defense of the traditional dispensational view, see Saucy, 91.

interpretation of Isaiah 61 depends upon a correct stopping point in the text, not a heightened understanding. In this case, a correct interpretation of the relationship between the prophecy of Isaiah and Christ's "Today" requires that the reader stop at Isa. 61:2a.

Christ's example in this regard redefines the notion of partial fulfillment. He does not teach a partial fulfillment of this prophecy; He rather teaches a complete fulfillment of a part of this prophetic passage. This distinction offers an important correction to the partial fulfillment hermeneutics of progressive dispensationalists because it ties the interpreter down to the meaning of the text once more. Rather than one prophecy and two fulfillments, Isa. 61:1-3 contains two prophecies with two fulfillments. This restored one-to-one relationship between prophecy and fulfillment means that the text of the promise always directly defines the nature of its fulfillment. The interpreter merely reads the prediction to understand the fulfillment rather than reading the fulfillment to understand the prediction in a heightened or completed way.³⁶ Christ's example in Luke 4 is useful for the correct interpretation of Peter's use of Joel 2 and James's use of Amos 9.

Peter's Use of Joel 2

Most of the discussion regarding Peter's view of the fulfillment of Joel 2 has focused on the meaning of his words on the day of Pentecost. Specifically, Acts 2:16 stands at the center of the storm: "but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel." Bock summarizes well

³⁶ This second approach ultimately undercuts the validity of prophecy in the eyes of its recipients as scriptural revelation, for one must await the fulfillment before he can correctly understand the significance of the prediction.

the competing interpretations of this verse: "In other words, a careful study of the use of Joel in Acts 2 shows that 'this is that' is not 'this is all of that' or 'this is like that'; the meaning, rather, is 'this is the beginning of that,' since the cosmic signs of Joel 2 are not fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus."³⁷ Bock's summary mentions three possibilities for Peter's introductory formula: (1) "this is all of that" (covenant theology); (2) "this is like that" (revised dispensationalism); and (3) "this is the beginning of that" (progressive dispensationalism). He prefers the last of these because he does not see a fulfillment of the sign predictions included in Peter's quotation: "And I will grant wonders in the sky above and signs on the earth below: blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come" (Acts 2:19-20).³⁸ Yet it is difficult to interpret the distributed tongues of fire on the Day of Pentecost as anything short of a sign involving at least fire, if not also vapor and smoke (Acts 2:3). F. F. Bruce cautions against arriving too quickly at Bock's conclusion in this regard.

The wonders and signs to be revealed in the world of nature, as described in vv. 19 and 20, may have more relevance in the present context than is sometimes realized: it was little more than seven weeks since the people in Jerusalem had indeed seen the sun turned into darkness, during the early afternoon of the day of our Lord's crucifixion. And on the same afternoon the paschal full

³⁷ Darrell L. Bock, "The Reign of the Lord Christ," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, 48.

³⁸ Revised dispensationalists also rely heavily on Bock's conclusion regarding the cosmic signs. See Compton, 45-46. Other progressive dispensationalists who emphasize this point include Larry D. Pettegrew, *The New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), 98; and Barker, 328.

moon may well have appeared blood-red in the sky in consequence of that preternatural gloom.³⁹

In addition to the phenomena outlined by Bruce, Matthew remembers that the period surrounding the day of the crucifixion witnessed multiple earthquakes and even the resurrection of the dead, who then entered Jerusalem and appeared to many of Peter's addressees (Matt. 27:51-53, 28:2). Were Peter alive today, and were he to claim that this day is the day the prophet Joel predicted would come, sinners could correctly reject his interpretation of Joel out of hand because the cosmic signs are lacking. In this context, the drunkenness thesis still would provide a better explanation (Acts 2:15). Yet on the Day of Pentecost many thousands of positive respondents understood that such a rejection was not available to them (Acts 2:41). They had simply witnessed too much to deny the force of Peter's reference to the signs of Joel 2. They had to confess that they had crucified the Lord of Glory and call on His name for salvation. The view that the era of Pentecost lacked the cosmic phenomena of Joel 2, held by many today, was completely lacking on the Day of Pentecost, and with good reason.

The problem with these discussions, focused as they have been on the nature of the New Testament fulfillment of Acts 2, is that they fail to learn from Christ's example in Luke 4.⁴⁰ The coherence debate has sought to interpret the relationship between Joel 2 and the New Testament as either a relationship between one prophecy and one fulfillment

³⁹ *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 69.

⁴⁰ Note that Christ's post-resurrection instruction of the disciples may have included a discussion of the proper interpretive approach to Joel 2 and Amos 9 (Acts 1:3).

(covenantal theology), one prophecy and two fulfillments (progressive dispensationalism), or one prophecy and an analogy and a fulfillment (revised dispensationalism).⁴¹ These approaches are understandable in one sense, because Isaiah likely would have viewed his prophecy (61:1-3) as a singular prediction as well. Yet Christ made clear that Isaiah predicts two advents, not one. Isaiah's three verses contained two prophecies. Applied to the interpretation of the relationship between Joel 2 and the New Testament, the interpreter must begin to think in terms of two prophecies and two fulfillments. In so doing, the focus shifts from a discussion of the fulfillment passage in pursuit of an understanding of the prophecy passage to a discussion of the prophecy passage in pursuit of an understanding of the fulfillment passage.

When the interpreter turns to the prophecy of Joel, he immediately notices important chronological markers in much the same way Christ must have noticed the difference between *year* and *day* in the prophecy of Isaiah: "It will come about after this" (2:28); "in those days" (2:29); "Before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes" (2:31); "in those days and at that time" (3:1). In addition, when the outpouring of the Spirit in Joel 2:28 is compared with similar eschatological promises of the outpouring of the Spirit on Israel (Isa. 32:15, 44:3, Ezek. 39:29, Zech. 12:10), the uniqueness of Joel's universal focus on all flesh becomes

⁴¹ For a defense of the analogy position, see Compton, 44-47. Claiming "this is that" means "this is like that," however, seems to be an example of theological system driving exegesis rather than the reverse. If "this" was only "like that" from the perspective of Peter on this day, ethical considerations seem to require a qualification from the preacher. In addition, the view has a difficult time explaining what Peter means if he refers to Joel's promise in Acts 2:39: "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." In light of 2:33, the promise to Peter's audience is the promise of the Holy Spirit's outpouring that came from Joel.

obvious because it contrasts the narrow focus of the other passages on Israel. The New Covenant outpouring of the Spirit on Israel in the Old Testament prophets is concomitant with the destruction of all flesh, not the outpouring of the Spirit on them (Zeph. 1:18, 3:14-20). This contrast parallels the difference between the two advents noticed by Christ in Isaiah 61: “the favorable year of the Lord” and “the day of vengeance of our God.” Just as the Old Testament predicted two comings of Christ, so also it predicts two outpourings of the Spirit.

Like Christ’s use of Isaiah 61, Peter’s use of Joel 2 employs a critical stopping point that perfectly delineates the two predictions Joel makes in his prophecy. Joel begins verse 28 with a phrase designed to point to what is next on the prophetic calendar from the perspective of Joel’s ministry: “It will come about after this.” Peter interprets this marker as a reference to the *last days*, a period that includes the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17, Heb. 1:1-2, 1 Pet. 1:19-20). The first part of Joel 2 describes promised relief from the locust plague that devastated Israel in Joel’s day (2:1-27). The outpouring of the Spirit is next on the schedule. Verse 31 states specifically that “those days” (v. 29) come “before the great and awesome day of the Lord.” Finally, the end of the section from which Peter quotes concludes with verse 32a: “whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” The universalism of this “whoever” parallels the universalism of “all flesh,” creating a significant contrast with the focus on Israel that follows.

Beginning after Peter’s stopping point in verse 32b, Joel’s prophecy turns from all flesh to implications specific to Israel. The times of blessing involving the outpouring of the Spirit for all flesh have clearly come to

an end by this time, because “in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations [to Armageddon]” (3:1-2). God sends judgment, not revelation, in this context. Now references to national Israel abound because the blessing of that day is exclusively theirs: “Mount Zion” (2:32b, 3:16, 17, 21), “Jerusalem” (2:32b, 3:1, 6, 16, 17, 20), “Judah” (3:1, 6, 8, 18, 19, 20), “Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations” (3:2, 16), “My land” (3:2). Whereas the days Peter refers to come before the day of the Lord, the time of Israel’s deliverance sees the arrival of the Day of the Lord in the valley of decision (3:14).

What all this means for Peter’s “this is that” formula in Acts 2:16 is that it means exactly what he said—“this is *that*.” The critical issue for understanding Peter is not the need to redefine his use of the word *is*; it is rather the need to recognize correctly the referent of Peter’s use of the word *that*. His level of specificity must be ascertained carefully. When Peter says “this is *that*,” by *that* he means Joel 2:28-32a. Just as Christ chose an important stopping point for the correct interpretation of the fulfillment of Isaiah 61, so also Peter employs the same specification to his use of Joel 2. Therefore, Joel’s prophecy of the Spirit’s outpouring is distinct from the other eschatological promises related to the New Covenant with Israel because it deals with the favorable year of the Lord available to all flesh. Because Joel also deals with the day of vengeance of our God (2:32b ff.), there are actually two prophecies in Joel just as there are two prophecies in Isaiah 61. Peter’s use of Joel 2 is an example of citing the full and literal fulfillment of the correct part of a prophetic passage.

James's Use of Amos 9

These same hermeneutical understandings help interpret James's use of Amos 9 in Acts 15:16-18. The scene is the Jerusalem Council. After hearing Peter's review of his visit to Cornelius's household and observing the presentation of God's work among the Gentiles from Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:12), James announces to his Jewish-Christian congregation that he supports the claim that God was taking "from among the Gentiles a people for His name" (15:14).⁴² James next asserts that the words of the prophets agree with this truth, and he supports this assertion from Amos 9:11-12: "After these things [I will return], and I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen, and I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord and all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from long ago" (Acts 15:16-18).⁴³ At issue with this quotation, as with Peter's quotation of Joel, is whether or not James understands Amos's prophecy regarding the restoration of the tabernacle of David as fulfilled in the church age. Here again, the answer ought to begin with an examination of the prophecy, not James's citation of its fulfillment.

⁴² Walter Kaiser comments on the forceful nature of this claim: "The English hardly conveys the surprising connection of the words 'to take from the nations' (eth-nōn—the word used, when a distinction is made, for heathen or Gentiles) 'a people' (laos, a term for chosen people)." "The Davidic Promise and the Inclusion of the Gentiles (Amos 9:9-15 and Acts 15:13-18): A Test Passage for Theological Systems," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20 (1977): 106.

⁴³ James follows the reading of the Septuagint, which differs from the Masoretic Text. Bruce explains: "The LXX text presupposes Heb. yidreshu ('will seek') and 'adam ('man') in place of MT yireshe ('will inherit') and 'edom ('Edom'); it also treats Heb. she'erith ('remnant') as subject, whereas in MT it is plainly object, being preceded by the accusative particle 'eth' (Acts, 310).

Amos predicts the destruction of a very prosperous nation in the initial portion of chapter 9 (vv. 1-10). A chronological marker appears next that introduces the passage quoted by James: “In that day” (v. 11). The phrase identifies the timing of the passage James cites as the day of Israel’s judgment, when the nation is shaken among all nations as grain is shaken in a sieve (v. 9). The prediction relevant to this time period promises the erection (קָם) of David’s booth, tent, or hut (אֹכֶל).⁴⁴ Amos’s description of this activity raises the question whether the tent he mentions refers to a rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple or the restoration of the house of David in some sense.⁴⁵ Both would lie in ruins according to the chapter (9:1, 8-9). The prediction is clearly a poetic one. Whether it refers to the rebuilding of the temple of Solomon or to a restoration of the kingdom of David, the nature of this poetic metaphor is too diminutive and transient to communicate Old Testament conceptions of the Messianic temple or the Messianic throne. It is difficult to imagine an Old Testament reader of Amos 9 understanding either of these bases for his consummative eschatological hope as a אֹכֶל.

⁴⁴ אֹכֶל is a temporary structure that pales in comparison to the more permanent בַּיִת (house). See Gen. 33:17. Both the temple of God and the kingdom of David are called a בַּיִת in 2 Samuel 7.

⁴⁵ Kaiser argues from the Hebrew against interpreting אֹכֶל as the temple (“The Davidic Promise,” p. 101), but his analysis ignores the import of the Greek translation used by James. The Septuagint has σκηνην, which, unlike the Hebrew word, often refers to the tabernacle of the testimony in both the Old Testament and the New Testament (Exod. 27:21, 29:4, Acts 7:44, Heb. 8:5, 9:21). In Rev. 15:5 John mentions heaven’s “temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven” (ὁ ναὸς γῆς σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου ἐν οὐρανῷ). In spite of these observations, however, it still seems unlikely that James would have referred to the temple (whether the Herodian complex that housed many of the worship services he led as the pastor of the Jerusalem church [Acts 2:46, 3:1-8, 4:1, 5:20-25, 5:42, 21:15-30, 22:17, 25:8, 1Co 9:13] or the future eschatological complex predicted in Ezekiel 40-47) as a σκηνην. Kaiser’s conclusion that the phrase refers to the house of David provides the best understanding in light of the pronominal suffixes in verses 11-12 referring to David’s hut (pp. 101-102).

James's quotation includes the next verse before reaching its critical stopping point. The Septuagint translation of Amos 9:12 informs our understanding of the significance of the reference in the Hebrew Bible to the possession of Edom.⁴⁶ The point intended by Amos is not military domination, but spiritual inclusion. In this context, Edom is representative of "all the nations who are called by My name." Therefore, the Hebrew rendering of verse 12 refers to the salvation of the Gentiles in much the same way the Septuagint translation James uses does: "So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord." James does not see a significant semantic difference between the Hebrew and the Greek in 9:12 because one does not exist.

This brings our reading of Amos 9 to the stopping point employed by James's quotation. After this point, another prophetic chronological marker appears that identifies a different time from the one cited by James in the earlier two verses: "Behold, days are coming, declares the Lord." This is a period that involves the permanent implanting of the children of Israel in their land (9:15) and the complete restoration of the captivity of Israel.⁴⁷ The lush conditions and promised permanence of this reconstruction project contrasts the spartan and temporary

⁴⁶ Kaiser points out that the phrase employed, "possess the remnant of Edom," is reminiscent of Balaam's prophecy in Num. 24:17-18. Balaam predicted a "star" and a "scepter" who would rise out of Israel to take possession of Edom. Kaiser concludes with a question: "Can serious students of Scripture fail to observe the obvious Messianic reference to our Lord's first ('star') and second ('scepter' and 'rule') coming?" ("The Davidic Promise," 103). Although Numbers 24 alludes to both the first and second advent of Christ, it uses the "possession of Edom" phrase differently from Amos, because Balaam's prophecy refers to a military conquest of Edom related to the second advent and similar to the crushing of the forehead of Moab and the tearing down of the sons of Seth.

⁴⁷ Note that the same phrase used to describe the entity that came to an end—*My people Israel*—is used to describe the entity that is here restored (Amos 8:2, 9:14).

characteristics of the earlier erection of David's hut cited by James. The restoration motif of Amos 9:14 appears in Acts 1:6 where the disciples ask whether the Lord would restore the kingdom to Israel in their day. Both passages are talking about the same restoration—one that brings “the kingdom to Israel” and one whose epoch is yet future to the age of the church.

Thus the pattern of Isaiah 61 and Joel 2 repeats in Amos 9. Verses 11-12 constitute a prophecy related to the favorable year of the Lord and the days of the outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh. James appropriately uses these to prove authoritatively that God's plan included the calling out of a people of His name from among the Gentiles. To accomplish this God had to first erect the tent of David after his house's collapse at the hands of Assyria and Babylon. In order for Christ to accomplish active obedience for our redemption, at least a shell of what existed prior to Israel's fall had to be temporarily set up again in the land. Long before a scepter could rise from Israel, a star had to first rise from Jacob. Amos promised that after this temporary restoration of Israel in the land, salvation would spread throughout the Gentile nations. James understood this, and he was excited to see it beginning in his day. He stopped at verse 12 in Amos 9 because he never confused this promise with the New Covenant promises of the following verses. James understood that there was coming a reconstruction project that far surpasses the temporary Davidic tent in which he resided in first century Palestine. This tent was ultimately destroyed in A.D. 70, but the New Covenant restoration would last forever.

CHAPTER 9

SUMMARY: UNION WITH CHRIST AND THE COHERENCE DEBATE

A biblical theological understanding of the doctrine of union with Christ leads to a clearly defined position in regard to today's coherence debate, which conforms to the essentials of revised dispensationalism. Because of the comprehensiveness of this important doctrine, no covenantal or dispensational theological system ought to treat its implications lightly. Where a neglect of the doctrine of union with Christ persists, theological systems yield to the temptation of a less comprehensive accounting of scriptural data. All conservative participants in the coherence debate agree that a defense of the unity of Scripture in view of the plan of God in history is critical to the confidence of God's people in the Bible's authority and their accuracy in its application. The doctrine of union with Christ is uniquely positioned to provide answers to questions that threaten this confidence and accuracy.

Unfortunately, a plethora of definitions exist for the doctrine of union with Christ. This variety likely accounts for much of the neglect of the doctrine in today's New Testament church.¹ Much of this variety

¹ Michael P. V. Barrett comments on the paucity of knowledge of this important doctrine in today's church: "Sadly, the reality of the believer's union with Christ, which is so much a part of gospel theology, is so little a part of modern Christianity. I don't know how many times in my teaching career I have addressed this particular theme only to find students supposing it to be some new doctrine. They have often asked me, 'Why haven't we ever heard this before?' I could never answer that question." *Complete in Him: A Guide to Understanding and Enjoying the Gospel* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador-Emerald, 2000), 94-95.

originates in differences reflected among theological systems. The sheer comprehensiveness of the doctrine causes its definition to conform to the theological systems of interpreters who start their understanding of the doctrine with their system. Incarnational, baptismal, and pneumatological approaches are three broad categories of definitions of union with Christ, which the history of doctrine has bequeathed to our generation. The question of the Old Testament believer incriminates many of these. Two conclusions are manifest from this history: (1) pneumatological definitions of union with Christ best account for Scripture's emphasis on the agency of the Spirit related to this blessing; and (2) the methodology that proceeds from theological system to union with Christ yields inconsistent definitional results of mystical union and a lack of comprehensiveness in its treatment of the doctrine.

Moving from union with Christ to theological system provides better results not only for the definition of mystical union, but also for the development of a consistent position in the coherence debate, which can account well for the key issues dividing today's participants. The key question for both defining the doctrine and using it to develop a system of coherence is whether or not the Old Testament believer was in Christ. The correct answer is twofold. First, the Old Testament believer must have participated in the soteriological blessings of union with Christ. If a man in any age is not in Christ, he is condemned under the law, alienated in the world, and spiritually dead in his fleshly trespasses and sins. No one is justified, reconciled, or regenerated unless he is first in Christ. Second, Paul specifies an ecclesiological category of union with Christ, which conforms to three parameters that eliminate the Old Testament

believer: participation in the body of Christ, the foundation of the revelation of the apostles and prophets, and the headship of the risen Lord. This category constitutes an ecclesiological subset of those who experience the soteriological blessings of mystical union. The doctrine's soteriological/ecclesiological distinction is traceable in the way key union with Christ passages of the New Testament treat the Old Testament believer: Romans 5, Romans 11, and Ephesians 2-3.

This definition of union with Christ, with its ability to distinguish between soteriology and ecclesiology as it views the Old and New Testaments together, holds important direction for developing a position in the coherence debate. Because the methodology of this study moves from union with Christ to a theological system, it is not surprising that the resulting system bears similarities in various areas to multiple positions in the debate. The pneumatological conclusions that result from this process look very much like the historic conclusions of covenantal theology in support of the covenant of grace. Under that system God's work of salvation is the same in every age, because Christ is the only provision that He has made in this regard and because God is eternal. In order for the Old Testament believer to have participated in the soteriological blessings of union with Christ as the New Testament clearly teaches he did, that believer must have experienced a sufficient work of the Spirit. The New Testament defines this sufficient work in terms of regeneration and permanent indwelling. Pentecost was a revelatory and ecclesiological, not a soteriological, work of the Spirit.

But because the covenant theologian rejects the ecclesiological distinctiveness of the new era reflected in the doctrine of union with

Christ, his position in the coherence debate must ultimately be rejected by the careful student of the doctrine. Of the options available, only the revised dispensational system maintains the careful distinction between soteriology and ecclesiology demanded by a comprehensive definition of union with Christ. With Feinberg's distinction between the views of dispensationalists and the systematic requirements of dispensationalism and Ryrie's *sine qua non* still intact, the consistent student of the doctrine of union with Christ must conclude that he is a revised dispensationalist. The visibility distinction between type and antitype he gleans from mystical union agrees with the importance of a literal one-to-one correspondence in the hermeneutics of prophecy and fulfillment; his union with Christ definition as soteriological reality with ecclesiological subset supports a consistent ecclesiastical distinction between Israel and the church; and the glory of God as the ultimate purpose and plan of Scripture and history need only be understood as the glory of God in Christ to fit well.

The doctrine of union with Christ indicates that progressive dispensationalism is retrogressive in important areas of theology such as Old Testament soteriology and biblical hermeneutics. Although the doctrine of union with Christ admittedly exposes the need for adjustments to the conclusions of revised dispensationalists, especially in the area of pneumatology, it also shows that the adjustments proffered by progressives create more difficulties than they solve. Dispensationalism need not move beyond its essentialist roots to account accurately for scriptural coherence in light of union with Christ. The New Covenant is not fulfilled in the New Testament church. To conclude otherwise is to

conflict with the soteriological and ecclesiological implications of the doctrine of mystical union.

Undoubtedly, the most important understanding related to this study is the fact that God's revelation of the doctrine of union with Christ was never given to function merely as a test case for theological systems. Should the theological system of no interpreter of Scripture adjust as a result of what appears here, God's purpose for revealing the doctrine will still be accomplished. All of the theological systems discussed in this study agree that Eph. 3:20-21 better summarizes God's purposes for revealing mystical union than does the phrase *test case*: "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."

Appendix A

APPENDIX A: SOME DANGERS OF PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONALISM

The title of this discussion is carefully chosen. The word *some* suggests *not all*. What follows here will fail to express an appropriate appreciation for the skillful labors of progressive dispensationalists. Much good has come of their diligent work. God's plan truly is a cohesive unit progressing through time toward a final consummation. The emphasis of progressive dispensationalists on this truth clarifies much that has been formerly dim in the coherence debate. Yet the word *danger* also appears in the title. Webster's Dictionary defines danger as "exposure or liability to injury, pain, harm, or loss."¹ While interpretations of Scripture are often inadequate because redeemed sinners make mistakes, these mistakes can move beyond *inadequate* to *dangerous* if they expose God's people to real spiritual harm. Finally, the letters *-ism* are important to the title. The discussion here is not about progressive dispensationalists, but progressive dispensationalism. It does not intend to intimate that progressive dispensationalists are dangerous. Feinberg's distinction between the requirements of a system and the views of those who bear the label guards this discussion from personalized attack.² The writings of progressive dispensationalists demonstrate a diligent love for

¹ Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1986), 324.

² John S. Feinberg, "Salvation in the Old Testament," in *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 44.

Christ and Scripture that is exemplary, and those whom this author knows personally are godly examples in their lives and teaching ministries. With the title of the discussion clarified, four dangers of progressive dispensationalism are relevant: (1) the danger of complementary hermeneutics; (2) the danger of post-essentialism; (3) the danger of mis-siological confusion; and (4) the danger of a lack of appreciation for theological heritage.

Darrell Bock's approach to hermeneutics seeks to allow *literary-theological* to be added to the traditional historical-grammatical idea of Bible interpretation. He describes three key understandings necessary to accurate methodology: "To deal adequately with interpretation of a mediated corpus involving multiple human authors and one divine author, three issues need attention: (1) inspired authorship, (2) the text and meaning, and (3) the reuse of texts by later human authors."³ He furthermore makes a distinction between "meaning" and "significance": "Meaning is what the author intended to say in the original setting in which his text was produced; significance refers to all subsequent uses of the text."⁴ This distinction along with the presence of a divine author leads Bock to his complementary hermeneutical conclusion.

The reality of a mediated text about events and the presence of a divine author carries with it important implications for meaning in the biblical text. These factors allow a text to speak beyond its human author, so that once a text is produced, commentary on it can follow in subsequent texts. Connection to the original passage exists, but not in a way that is limited to the understanding of the original human author. . . . But it is the presence of a divine

³ Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton: Victor, 1993), 63.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

author that gives such commentary the possibility of development.⁵

Bock clarifies that this is not a description of allegorical interpretation, where the presence of the divine author is no longer needed for the development of the meaning.

However, Bock's ability to distinguish between "inspired authorship" and "the text and meaning" is as troubling as his division between "the text and meaning" and "the reuse of texts by later human authors." Bruce Compton describes well the untenable nature of the first of these distinctions by exposing the fact that it actually requires a redefinition of verbal plenary inspiration.

Divine inspiration did not circumvent the human author's intellect, but superintended the human author so that the words the human author understood and used communicated precisely what the divine author intended. This does not imply that the human author shares in God's omniscience or that the human author understood all the implications or significance of the text. It does imply that a text can only mean what the human author understood in the choice of words that were used to communicate that meaning.⁶

The text and its meaning are a direct product of divine authorship. Though verbal plenary inspiration never involved circumvention of the human author, it always involved enough superintending to ensure that there was no separation between authorship and textual meaning. The meaning of the human author is the meaning of the divine author. Distinguishing human meaning from divine significance incriminates human meaning in a way that precludes perspicuity.

⁵ Ibid., 66-67.

⁶ Bruce R. Compton, "Dispensationalism, the Church, and the New Covenant," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 8 (2003): 43-44.

Walter Kaiser's objection to the division of "text and meaning" from "the reuse of text by later human authors" has already been mentioned. His insightful warning bears repeating: "But another liability has reared its ugly head: the possibility that some of the spirit of modernity might snatch away these gains when midrashic techniques and legitimate forms of escalation in typologies are used as the bases for denying (or seriously diminishing the point) that the Old Testament text predicted or supported what was being claimed by the New Testament writers."⁷ If the New Testament authors used the Old Testament text and meaning as support (not merely as analogy or illustration) for conclusions unsupported by the Old Testament text and meaning, the inerrancy of the New Testament simply fails.

A third objection to complementary hermeneutics may be added to the insights of Compton and Kaiser. If the significance of an Old Testament text was not communicated by its meaning in the Old Testament, then the Old Testament text did not constitute a valid revelation from God to its recipients. Stripping significance from meaning changes progressive revelation into a progressive development of a future revelation. If the significance of the meaning of the Old Testament cannot be understood until the coming of the New Testament author's use of that meaning, what must an understanding of the significance of the New Testament wait for (2 Pet. 3:16)? Complementary hermeneutics begins to look very much like an argument for continuing authoritative revelation beyond the foundation of the apostles and New Testament prophets

⁷ "An Evangelical Response," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 357.

rather than a reinforcement of an authoritatively complete scriptural canon.

Postessentialist is a term coined by Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock in their concluding chapter of *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: A Search for Definition*.⁸ Evidently desirous of retaining the label *dispensationalist* while dropping Ryrie's *sine qua non* of dispensationalism, the authors argue that their new approach is still legitimately called dispensational because dispensationalism has a long history of modification. Consequently, Ryrie is now defined as an essentialist dispensationalist, while those who have moved beyond his conclusions are post-essentialist dispensationalists. Whether or not retaining the label *dispensationalist* after moving beyond the *sine qua non* of revised dispensationalism is adequate, the term *postessentialist* is clearly a dangerous concept. No Christian ought to take a postessentialist approach to the definition of doctrine. The New Testament speaks of the critical importance of defining the essentials of a doctrinal position. This definition defines not only our faith as a common confession (1 Tim. 2:16), it also delimits our fellowship as our call to arms (Jude 3). Postessentialism as an approach to truth smacks of postmodernism and encourages a mitigation of clearly defined doctrine as the basis of unity in the truth and love (John 17:17-21). When it comes to truth, essentials do require definition. Someone is right and someone is wrong, and the church needs to know who and why.

The third danger of progressive dispensationalism is missiological confusion. Progressives clearly anticipate a greater social and political

⁸ "Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: Assessment and Dialogue," 379.

influence provided by their progress beyond a distinction between Israel and the church. Blaising and Bock again provide a clear illustration of this proposed advance: “Since redemption will be extended in national and political dimensions in the future, and since progressive dispensationalism does not see the church as a parenthesis, unrelated to what came before and to what comes after, the question is raised about the present role of the church as a witness to and advocate for social and political righteousness. The present form of the kingdom as a ‘sneak preview’ (Bock) of the future kingdom requires this progressive dispensationalism to develop a clear theology of social and political concern.”⁹ Notice the quick jump from “national and political dimensions in the future” to the need to become socially and politically relevant in the present age. “Sneak preview” or not, historic premillennialism has always denied the connection. The fact that national and political dimensions are *future* means that they are not *present*. The fact that they are also clearly *past* in the nation of Israel means that we do indeed have today a parenthesis in an important sense. Progressive dispensationalism is in danger of losing the premillennial distinction between *future* and *present* in a hot pursuit for political and social relevance because it fails to recognize correctly the distinction between *past* and *present*. The call to a theology of social activism and political influence is nothing new. It has been a common component of the inception of liberal apostasy throughout the church’s history.¹⁰

⁹ Ibid., 382.

¹⁰ Note that David F. Wells cites the evangelical’s loss of status in the 1960’s as a cultural outsider as the tipping point in the development of New Evangelicalism’s

Finally, progressive dispensationalism can reflect a lack of appreciation for its theological heritage. The nuances of the term *progressive* may be related to this problem. Although the movement uses the term to describe the cumulative movement of God's plan through the ages, it is clear that the label's suggestion of progress beyond former dispensationalists communicates more than the term *secondary revised dispensationalist* might. Yet the real concern here is attitudes rather than nuances. This is admittedly a difficult danger to cite while still separating progressive dispensationalism from its adherents. Yet the danger is still real. Blaising illustrates this attitudinal danger present within sections of the progressive dispensationalist movement when he complains that dispensationalism has been wrongly identified with certain movements and viewpoints he finds embarrassing: "This has left some with the impression that dispensationalism is equivalent to Scofieldism, fundamentalism, and separatism."¹¹ According to this observation, the work of Scofield can be reduced to an *-ism* that ought to be avoided. In addition, the comment also implicates the doctrine of separation as part of what tarnished the reputation of dispensationalism in the past. Finally, viability requires *de facto* the distancing of a position from the doctrinal heritage of fundamentalism in general. An explanation for why this might be true is not even required. The reader is left wondering what the contributors to Torrey's project did to deserve such a reproachable

theological wasteland. *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 24.

¹¹ Craig A. Blaising, "Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: Assessment and Dialogue," 15-16.

reputation.¹² According to at least some within the ranks of the progressives, the correction of dispensationalism is positively correlated with the move away from fundamentalism: “Over the years, some of these schools have become more self-consciously ‘evangelical’ than fundamentalist, and the dispensationalism which they teach has undergone changes as well.”¹³ These statements all assume that moving away from the doctrinal heritage of fundamentalism is a positive development, yet some even within New Evangelical circles are questioning today whether this movement has been true progress.¹⁴

¹² R. A. Torrey and others, ed., *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* (1917; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998).

¹³ *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 12.

¹⁴ See David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 129.

Appendix B

APPENDIX B: IMPARTATION VERSUS IMPUTATION AND UNION WITH CHRIST

The debate between impartation and imputation as it relates to union with Christ is actually an argument over the nature of original sin and its correction (Rom. 5:12). What follows is not a detailed historical examination of the controversy, but rather a suggestion for defining the essence of original sin in a way that satisfies Hodge's concerns for the defense of imputation within the context of the soteriological definition of union with Christ represented in this study.¹ By way of review, that definition stipulates that no man is justified, reconciled, or regenerated, unless he is in Christ. It also cites the regenerating and indwelling work of the Holy Spirit as the agency of this union in both the Old and New Testaments.

Charles Hodge emphasizes an objective approach to understanding how it happened that all mankind became sinners the day that Adam sinned.² His views of the fall are known as the Federal view. The concern he manifests especially is the avoidance of any intimation that the righteousness of Christ is anything but an imputed righteousness. Against the teachings of Roman Catholicism, Hodge's interpretation of Romans 5 affirms that when it comes to saving righteousness, it is all

¹ For the historical controversy, see William Borden Evans, "Imputation and Impartation: The Problem of Union with Christ in Nineteenth-Century American Reformed Theology" (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1996).

² Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (1864; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 142-190.

about what God does legally to our account the moment we believe, not about what must be done gradually to our nature over time. So if the saving righteousness of Christ in this passage is a matter of legal imputation, so must also be the impact of the sin of Adam, its contrasting parallel in this regard.

Hodge's defense of imputation and his recognition of the parallel between Christ and Adam in Romans 5 cause him to define the effects of Adam's sin as legal imputation as well. He interprets "because all sinned" (v. 12) as meaning that all sinned in God's eyes by virtue of the fact that He had designated Adam to play this role.³ Furthermore, he interprets the phrase "the many were made sinners" (v. 19, καθίστημι) to mean "the many were categorized as sinners."⁴ Yet the theologian seems to have trouble defining original sin with this understanding: "These Confessions teach that original righteousness was lost, as a punishment of Adam's sin, and by that defect, the tendency to sin, or corrupt disposition, or corruption of nature is occasioned."⁵ Trying to make the sin of Adam the "occasion" of corrupt nature without making it the cause of corrupt nature is not entirely satisfying, for it leaves open the possibility of a different outcome from corruption. No other possible outcome appears to be in view in Romans 5.

Preferable to Hodge's strictly objective approach to original sin is an understanding that incorporates both subjective and objective effects of Adam's sin. While Hodge's concern for imputation is important, it

³ Ibid., 151.

⁴ Ibid., 173.

⁵ Ibid., 185.

must also be admitted that the salvation experience in Christ involves a subjective aspect called regeneration. Our natures are not changed or infused with the character of righteousness when regenerated, but they are revived by union with the life of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. “Christ lives in me” is subjective, not objective, soteric truth (Gal 2:20). This life begins with regeneration, the new birth of a sinner, and is entirely complete from its beginning. Regeneration does not grow over time. The newly born do grow, but they do not become more alive. The transformation of the mind or nature happens gradually over time (Rom. 12:2), but this is not more regeneration. It is this distinction between new life and new nature that enables the interpreter of the effects of Adam’s sin to admit to a subjective aspect without capitulating to the Roman Catholic soteriological heresy of a gradually infused saving righteousness. Our natures do not change the moment we are saved, but our lives do. Something is either alive or dead—there is nothing gradual about it—and consequently the doctrine of imputation is reinforced in the subjective realm rather than denied.⁶

What then is the correct answer to the question, “How did Adam’s sin make us all sinners?” Rom. 5:12 gives the answer in the phrase, “and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.” Death in this passage as well as in Genesis 3 is primarily spiritual death. Note that God told Adam, “In the day that you eat of the tree you shall surely die” (Gen.

⁶ Note that this distinction between new life and new nature also helps to interpret 2 Pet. 1:4, which teaches that Christians have become “partakers of the divine nature.” Because life is a subset of nature, when believers receive the eternal life of Christ in regeneration, they become partakers in the divine nature. They do not receive the other aspects of God’s nature, but they do receive a spiritual life that is Christ in them, the hope of glory (Col. 1:27).

2:17). In fact, the possibility of physical immortality may not have been completely withdrawn until after the pronouncement of the curse and the denial of access to the tree of life (Gen. 3:22). But the moment Adam sinned brought him and his race with him spiritual death, and this is what Paul refers to in Rom. 5:12. By virtue of the fact that God chose to create mankind as a human race with Adam at its head, all mankind sinned when Adam sinned [the objective truth], and all mankind lost their spiritual lives when Adam lost his [the subjective truth]. Men and women, the sons of Adam and Eve, are born sinners because they were born spiritually dead, spiritually separated from Christ. The virgin birth is the one exception, for here the incarnation of the Son of God with the complete human nature of man precludes the birth of someone who is spiritually separate from God—someone spiritually dead.

Appendix C

APPENDIX C: THE THEOLOGY OF בָּשָׂר¹

The Hebrew word בָּשָׂר is a more general word than the English words that are required to translate its wide range of usages: *flesh, meat, body, mankind, animal life*. Used widely (about 270 times—half of which occur in the Pentateuch), the word always occurs in the singular with the exception of Proverbs 14:30, where English translations typically opt for the singular anyway. Applied to both human life and animal life, בָּשָׂר is first “flesh,” or the soft tissue of the anatomy of humans and animals which combines with other components to make up a living body. Edible flesh or meat is an extension of this meaning. Second, בָּשָׂר is used to denote the entire body of an individual. It is that part of us which is fresher in youth and wastes away when we grow old (Job 33:21-25). Closely related to this meaning is its catch-all use for specific parts of the body. And finally, בָּשָׂר is often used to describe mankind or animal life in general. Often the word is combined with כָּל in contexts where mankind as a whole is in view.

The first occurrence of this word tells us that when God finished extracting the rib He used to make woman, he closed up the בָּשָׂר of

¹ Sources for this study include John N. Oswalt, “bāśār,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:136; G. Gerleman, “בָּשָׂר, bāśār, flesh,” *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 1:283-85; N. P. Bratsiotis, “בָּשָׂר,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 2:317-32; Stephen T. Hague, “בָּשָׂר,” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. W. A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1:775-77; and William P. Dickson, *St. Paul's Use of the Terms Flesh and Spirit* (Glasgow: James Maclehose & Sons, 1883).

Adam (Gen. 2:21). This is the first meaning of the word, the fleshy part of the body. Satan, frustrated by the faith of Job, confronts the Lord with the objection, “Skin for skin!” and he then asks that Job’s bone and בָּשָׂר be affected (Job 2:4-5). The cows of Pharaoh’s dream were either fat of בָּשָׂר or lean of בָּשָׂר (Gen. 41:2-19). Animal בָּשָׂר in this sense becomes food or meat for the first time after the flood in Gen. 9:3-4. Yet God places a restriction on this new opportunity. The life/soul (נֶפֶשׁ) of the בָּשָׂר, its blood, was not to be eaten. The second meaning is the physical body, the body’s surface, or specific parts of the body. When Levites were cleansed for service, they were required to shave their entire בָּשָׂר. Various discharges of the בָּשָׂר required special hygienic regulations (Lev. 15:3, 16, 19), and Israelites were not to cut or tattoo their בָּשָׂר like the heathen nations around them (Lev. 19:28, 21:5). Ezekiel’s imagery of Israel’s political dependence upon Egypt uses this meaning of the word (Ezek. 16:26, 23:20). Finally, God promised judgment on Assyria, both soul (נֶפֶשׁ) and בָּשָׂר (Isa. 10:18). While certainly not describing the Platonic view of a dichotomy in conflict, the Old Testament does teach that man is more than his בָּשָׂר.

The third meaning of בָּשָׂר is its most theologically significant meaning. Here various relationships are described, including marriage (Gen. 2:24), family (Gen. 29:14, 37:27), ethnicity (1 Chron. 11:1), and mankind in general (Isa. 58:7). The בָּשָׂר of each of these relationships defines the commonality of the relationship described. These relationships are uniformly positive in nature, and herein lies the chief contrast between בָּשָׂר and our current usage of the English *flesh*. In English we follow Paul’s fully developed doctrine of the sinful nature of man as part

of our understanding of the term *flesh*. By contrast, בָּשָׂר is negative only in its weakness in comparison to God, who is not בָּשָׂר. He is transcendent above כָּל-בָּשָׂר (all mankind) such that the opportunities to hear His voice which were enjoyed by Israel were truly unique (Deut. 5:26). כָּל-בָּשָׂר is grass, which withers and fades in contrast to the abiding word of the Lord (Isa. 40:6). Although בָּשָׂר is never the sinful nature of man, the Old Testament understanding of the frailty of כָּל-בָּשָׂר laid the foundation for the Pauline doctrine of the conflict between the Spirit and the flesh.

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