

“LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT”:
PROBING THE CENTER OF PAUL’S PNEUMATOLOGY

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A survey treatment, in short compass, of so rich and multifaceted a topic as the Holy Spirit in Paul is bound to be superficial. A surely more promising alternative is to identify and reflect on those viewpoints in his teaching on the Spirit that are dominant and most decisive.

My subtitle reflects certain convictions: (1) Paul had a theology, (2) this theology has a center, and (3) his teaching on the Spirit is tethered to that center/core.

These sweeping—and for some, I recognize, debatable—assertions, along with related questions of method in doing Pauline theology, will largely have to be left in the background here. I limit myself to some brief comments.

Does Paul have a theology? Paul, as Albert Schweitzer has put it, is “the patron-saint of thought in Christianity.”¹ We need not agree with Schweitzer’s particular analysis of Paul’s thought or play Paul off as a thinker against the other NT writers to appreciate that this statement captures an undeniable state of affairs. Is this to suggest, then, that Paul is a (systematic) theologian? Yes and no, depending on how one defines theology. Obviously Paul does not write systematic theology, at least not as we usually conceive of it. From beginning to end, even in the more generalized and reflective sections, say, of Romans and Ephesians, his writings are “occasional”—that is, genuine letters, pastoral pieces addressing specific problems and circumstances in particular church situations.

At the same time, however, over against a recurrent tendency, most glaring in the failed old-liberal effort to enlist him as an exponent of idealistic, post-Kantian religiosity, neither are Paul’s letters marred throughout by the *ad hoc* expression of ideas that are poorly thought through, disconnected, or mutually contradictory.² In their fully occasional and contingent character Paul’s letters are fully coherent—to adapt Beker’s well-known distinction

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¹ A. Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (New York: Henry Holt, 1931) 377; cf. 139.

² Perhaps the classic elaboration of this older liberal tendency is H. J. Holtzmann, *Lehrbuch der neutestamentlichen Theologie 2* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1911) 1–262; cf. the assessment of H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 19–21. Currently the same tendency is particularly clear, in discussing Paul on the law, in the work of H. Räisänen; cf. e.g. *Paul and the Law* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1987) esp. 264–269; cf. the critique of S. Westerholm, *Israel’s Law and the Church’s Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 93–101.

here.³ They evince a unified, consistent body of teaching, a thought-out worldview and in that sense, especially given their relative size and quantity, a theology. The Pauline corpus discloses, in the words of Geerhardus Vos, “the genius of the greatest constructive mind ever at work on the data of Christianity.”⁴ Not to appreciate this doctrinal and synthetic dimension inhibits a proper understanding of Paul’s teaching and maximizes the ever-present danger of reading our own ideas and prejudices into him.⁵

Does Paul’s theology have a “center”? By that metaphor I mean principally to affirm that there is in his letters an identifiable hierarchy of interests. Some concerns are more important to him than others. Present in the overall coherence of his teaching is a pattern in which each part is more or less dominant in relation to the rest. Certainly Paul may be approached from a variety of perspectives, and it is valuable to do so. But all are not equally controlling.

The center of Paul’s teaching, as it finds expression in his writings (and in Acts), is his Christology. It could indeed be insisted otherwise that the center, say, is the Triune God of Israel, the Creator of heaven and earth. But, as Paul reminds Timothy, Christ is the “one mediator between God and man” (1 Tim 2:5). Christ, for Paul, has a unique mediatorial indispensability and hence centrality.

With that said, however, it must also be noted that this center is not the person of Christ in the abstract but his person and work focused in his death and resurrection. “Of first importance” (ἐν πρώτοις) in the gospel tradition that Paul has received and passes on is “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter and then to the Twelve” (1 Cor 15:3–5). Death and resurrection, not as isolated events but in their significance and as the fulfillment of Scripture (entailing revelatory, tradition-establishing appearances of the resurrected Christ to the apostles), are central to Paul’s message.

Again, in a nutshell the gospel, which the apostle holds in common with the Romans, “concerns [God’s] Son, who was begotten of the seed of David according to the flesh and who was declared to be Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead” (Rom 1:3–4). Similarly to the Corinthians, reflecting in a sweeping fashion on his ministry focused in “the word of the cross” (1 Cor 1:18), he declares his fundamental epistemic commitment “to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (2:2). And he enjoins Timothy: “Remember Jesus Christ raised from the dead, descended from David. That is my gospel” (2 Tim 2:8).

³ E.g. J. C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

⁴ G. Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979 [1930]) 149.

⁵ For some further reflections on the appropriateness and hermeneutical value in viewing Paul as a “theologian” (applicable as well in some degree to other NT writers) see my “The Vitality of Reformed Dogmatics,” *The Vitality of Reformed Theology* (ed. J. M. Batteau *et al.*; Kampen: Kok, 1994) 39–48.

Such statements could be multiplied (e.g. Rom 4:25; 10:9; 2 Cor 5:15). And in contrast it is noteworthy, unless I have missed something, that there are in Paul no like categorical, programmatic assertions having another focus. Christ’s death and resurrection or, more broadly, messianic suffering and glory (e.g. Phil 2:6–11; 1 Tim 3:16) comprise the center of Paul’s theology.⁶

What must also be recalled here—by now, after nearly a century, a virtual consensus across the broad front of NT scholarship—is the eschatological dimension or context of this Christocentric focus. Paul (and the other NT writers), faithful to the kingdom proclamation of Jesus, have a broadened, already/not-yet understanding of eschatology. For them eschatology is defined in terms of his first as well as his second coming. Specifically Christ’s resurrection is an innately eschatological event—in fact, the key inaugurating event of eschatology. His resurrection is not an isolated event in the past but, in having occurred in the past, belongs to the future consummation and from that future has entered history.

That is perhaps clearest in 1 Cor 15:20, 23, in context: Christ’s resurrection is the “firstfruits.” In his resurrection the resurrection harvest that belongs to the end of history is already visible. His resurrection is the guarantee of the future bodily resurrection of believers not simply as a bare sign but as “the actual beginning of th[e] general epochal event.”⁷ Pressed—if present, say, at a modern-day prophecy conference—as to when the event of bodily resurrection for believers will take place, the first thing the apostle would likely want to say is that it has already begun.

We should anticipate, then, given the overall coherence of his teaching, that Paul’s understanding of the Spirit will prove to be “eschatological in nature and Christocentric in quality.”⁸ Without denying the presence of other determining factors, Christology and eschatology especially shape the matrix of his pneumatology. The death and resurrection of Christ in their eschatological significance control Paul’s teaching on the work of the Spirit.

The preceding comments provide a framework for focusing on the final clause of 1 Cor 15:45: “The last Adam became life-giving Spirit.” I do so primarily for two reasons. (1) In all of Paul, as far as I can see, there is no assertion about the Spirit’s activity as pivotal, even momentous, as this. (2) On the other hand it does not appear to me to have received the attention it deserves, especially among interpreters with an evangelical commitment.

A couple of more general observations about the immediate context (vv. 42–49) are in order. First, just one remarkable feature of this passage is what at first glance can appear to be a kind of theological or didactic overkill. Asked an apparently limited question about the believer’s resurrection body (v. 35), Paul’s reply opens up a perspective that, as far as I can see, is without parallel in his writings in terms of its cosmic and history-encompassing

⁶ That most of the passages cited in this and the preceding paragraphs may be or may rest upon pre-Pauline confessional or hymn fragments, as current NT scholarship widely maintains, hardly disqualifies them as expressing concerns central to Paul himself.

⁷ Vos, *Pauline Eschatology* 45.

⁸ M. M. B. Turner, “The Significance of Spirit Endowment in Paul,” *Vox Evangelica* 9 (1975) 56.

scope. In vv. 44b–49, in the light of the account of Adam’s creation in Gen 2:7,⁹ Paul contrasts Adam before the fall—that is, by virtue of creation—with Christ. Moreover it is quite plain that they are both in view not as random individuals but as representatives not only of contrasting bodies, the presurrection and the resurrected (they are certainly at least that). Along with those they represent they stand for antithetical orders of existence or, we might even say, contrasting environments. The shift in vv. 47–49 to explicitly cosmological language and the contrast between “earth” and “heaven” dispose us to put it that way.

The controlling dimensions of Paul’s outlook here are noteworthy: The order of Adam is “first” (πρῶτος, vv. 45, 47)—there is no one before him. That order, along with those he represents (as Rom 5:12 ff. particularly makes clear), has become subject to corruption and death through sin. The order of Christ, the last Adam, is both “second” (δεύτερος, v. 47)—there is no one between Adam and Christ—and “last” (ἔσχατος, v. 45)—there is no one after Christ. He is literally the eschatological man, and in his own resurrection (“the firstfruits,” vv. 20, 23) he has inaugurated the consummation order of incorruption and life. In view, then, are two orders that are consecutive, taken together comprehensive and, due to human sin, antithetical: creation and its consummation, the creation and the new creation, this age and the age to come, each beginning with an Adam of its own. The statement at the end of v. 45, then, is embedded within this all-encompassing outlook. It takes on its meaning within this totality vision.

Second, it seems to me that particularly in this century interpretation of this passage has often been inhibited and gotten sidetracked by undue preoccupation with background matters, two in particular: (1) the origin and nature of the viewpoint Paul is opposing throughout 1 Corinthians 15, and (2) the sources that underlie his contrast between Adam and Christ. Pursuing such questions surely promotes sound exegesis, but it has to be said that, after all the ink spilt in recent decades, no consensus has obtained on the issue of sources.¹⁰ On the question of the opponents, Paul is likely confronting the one-sided, overly-realized eschatology of a gnosticizing or at least Hellenizing tendency depreciating the body and in tension with the gospel.¹¹ At any rate, I proceed here on the conviction that this passage is clear in its central thrust and most of its details, without having reached settled conclusions on the background matters noted.

⁹ I will have to pass over here the details of the striking and somewhat elusive handling of this Scripture in v. 45; see esp. the suggestive and penetrating comments of Vos, *Pauline Eschatology* 169–170 n. 19; cf. R. B. Gaffin, Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987 [1978]) 81–82.

¹⁰ I make no effort here to document this debate in any sort of full way. In addition to the commentaries and the literature cited there see C. K. Barrett, “The significance of the Adam-Christ typology for the Resurrection of the dead: 1 Co 15, 20–22. 45–49,” with various respondents, in *Résurrection du Christ et des chrétiens (1 Co 15)* (ed. L. De Lorenzi; Rome: Abbaye de S. Paul, 1985) 99–126.

¹¹ Cf. e.g. G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 715–717 (note the literature cited in n. 6), 740–741.

Posing two questions will expedite our discussion of the last clause in v. 45: (1) What is the reference of the noun “spirit” (πνεῦμα)? (2) Since life-giving πνεῦμα is what (Christ as) the last Adam “became,” what is the time point of that becoming?

A couple of interlocking, mutually reinforcing considerations show, decisively it seems to me, that “spirit” in v. 45 refers to the person of the Holy Spirit. (1) Πνεῦμα in v. 45 and πνευματικόν, twice in v. 44 and once in v. 46, are linked semantically. As cognate noun and adjective they qualify and explain each other (as do the noun ψυχήν and the adjective ψυχικόν on the other side of the contrast). Further, in vv. 44 and 46 the adjectives πνευματικόν and ψυχικόν are paired antithetically. That contrast occurs in only one other place in Paul (or, for that matter, the NT): in 2:14–15. There, as most interpreters recognize, the activity of the Holy Spirit is plainly in view: his sovereign, exclusive work in mediating God’s revealed wisdom. On the one side of the antithesis, in 2:15, “the spiritual person” (ὁ πνευματικός) is the believer (cf. vv. 4–5) specifically as enlightened and transformed by the Spirit.¹²

Since nothing even suggests anything to the contrary later in chap. 15, there too πνευματικόν, on the one side of the contrast, refers to the activity of the Spirit—a conclusion also consistent with Paul’s use of that adjective elsewhere (e.g. Rom 1:11; Eph 1:3; Col 1:9).¹³ To amplify this point just a bit: The resurrection body of 1 Cor 15:44 is “spiritual” not in the sense of being adapted to the human πνεῦμα or because of its (immaterial) composition/substance, to mention persisting misconceptions, but because it embodies the fullest outworking, the ultimate outcome, of the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer, along with the renewal to be experienced by the entire creation.¹⁴ That eschatological body is the believer’s hope of total, (psycho-) physical transformation, and in that sense our bodies too, enlivened and renovated by the Spirit. We conclude: As the adjective πνευματικόν in vv. 44 and 46 plainly refers to the activity of the Holy Spirit, so its correlative noun πνεῦμα in v. 45 refers to the person of the Holy Spirit.

(2) This conclusion is reinforced by the participial modifier Paul uses. The last Adam did not simply become πνεῦμα but “life-giving” πνεῦμα (πνεῦμα ζωοποιούν). The “spirit” in view is not merely an existing entity but an acting subject.¹⁵ Paul’s use of this verb elsewhere proves decisive here, especially

¹² I take it that the long-standing effort to enlist this passage in support of an anthropological trichotomy (with πνευματικός here referring to the human πνεῦμα come to its revived ascendancy) is not successful and ought to be abandoned; see e.g. J. Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977) 2.23–29.

¹³ Ephesians 6:12 appears to be the only exception.

¹⁴ The neuter singular substantives in v. 46 (τὸ ψυχικόν, τὸ πνευματικόν) are most likely generalizing expressions (referring to environments or orders of existence), after which it would be a mistake, missing the broadening already given to the contrast in v. 45, to read an implied σῶμα (see Gaffin, *Resurrection* 83). As already noted above, in the immediately following verses (vv. 47–49) the basic contrast of the passage is continued in explicitly cosmological terms (“heaven”/“earth”). Elsewhere in Paul, Rom 8:20–22 especially intimates this cosmic dimension of future eschatological renewal.

¹⁵ That is an important difference between this description of Christ and the generalization of John 3:6a: “What is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

his sweeping assertion about the new covenant in 2 Cor 3:6: “The Spirit gives life.” In the contrasting parallelism that stamps this passage too, few if any will dispute that “the Spirit” (τὸ πνεῦμα) in v. 6 is “the Spirit of the living God” just mentioned in v. 3—in other words, the Holy Spirit. Again, Rom 8:11 attributes the “life-giving” activity of resurrection to the Spirit (cf. John 6:63).

For these reasons, πνεῦμα in 1 Cor 15:45 is definite¹⁶ and refers to the person of the Holy Spirit.

“The life-giving Spirit” is not a timeless description of Christ. Rather, he “became” such (ἐγένετο). There is little room for doubt about the time point of this becoming. It is his resurrection or—more broadly, together with the ascension—his exaltation. The flow of reasoning in chap. 15 makes that virtually certain. For one thing it would make no sense for Paul to argue for the resurrection of believers as he does if Christ were “life-giving” by virtue, say, of his preexistence or incarnation—or any consideration other than his resurrection. This is not to suggest that his preexistence and incarnation are unimportant or nonessential for Paul, but they lie outside his purview here. Expressed epigrammatically in the terms of the chapter itself: As “first-fruits” of the resurrection harvest (vv. 20, 23) Christ is “life-giving Spirit” (v. 45); as the life-giving Spirit he is “the firstfruits.”

According to v. 47 the last Adam as “the second man” is now, by virtue of ascension, “from heaven.”¹⁷ He is “the heavenly one” (v. 48) whose image, by virtue of his own resurrection, believers will bear fully at the time of their bodily resurrection (v. 49; cf. Phil 3:20–21). All told, then, the last Adam, as he has become “the life-giving Spirit,” is specifically the exalted Christ.

Certainly in the immediate context this life-giving contemplates Christ’s future action when he will resurrect the mortal bodies of believers (cf. 1 Cor 15:22). It seems difficult to deny, however, that his present activity is implicitly in view as well. That the resurrected Christ, as life-giver, currently exists in a suspended state of inactivity would be a strange notion indeed to attribute to Paul. And in fact, as he explicitly teaches elsewhere, believers

¹⁶ The absence of the article before πνεῦμα has little weight as a counterargument (*contra* G. D. Fee, “Christology and Pneumatology in Romans 8:9–11—and Elsewhere: Some Reflections on Paul as a Trinitarian,” *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ* [ed. J. B. Green and M. Turner; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994] 321 n. 38)—if for no other reason in view of the koine tendency to omit the article before nouns designating persons when, as here, in construction with a preposition; see BDF 133–134. Elsewhere (*God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994] 24) Fee himself concludes that his own (extensive) analysis “should help to put an end to speculation about the presence or absence of the article as determining whether Paul meant to refer to the Holy Spirit or not. The evidence confirms that Paul knows no such thing as ‘a spirit’ or ‘a holy spirit’ when using πνεῦμα to refer to divine activity. He only and always means the Spirit of the living God, the Holy Spirit himself” (though his conclusion, earlier in his analysis [16 n. 13], that πνεῦμα in 1 Cor 15:45 “does not easily fit any category” and “does not refer to the Holy Spirit” seems to be at odds with or at least weaken the overall conclusion just cited). I will return to Fee’s view of v. 45b below.

¹⁷ In view of the immediate context, this prepositional phrase is almost certainly an exaltation predicate (“heaven” is where Christ now belongs, his home, Phil 3:20), not a description of origin, say, out of preexistence at the incarnation.

have already been raised with Christ. The resurrection life of the believer in union with Christ is not only future but present (e.g. Rom 6:2–6; Gal 2:20; Eph 2:5–6; Col 3:1–4). Christ, as resurrected and ascended, is already active in the Church in the life-giving, resurrection power of the Spirit. And that activity is rooted in whom he has become and now is: “the life-giving Spirit.”

Paul’s inherently eschatological conception of the Spirit’s activity is on the face of this passage. The sustained link here between the Spirit and resurrection, the primal eschatological event, is hardly merely incidental. The eschatological aeon, the resurrection order, is by way of eminence “spiritual.” That is the virtual sense in v. 46 of the generalizing expression “the spiritual.”¹⁸ Elsewhere the instrumentality of the Spirit in the resurrection is explicit in Rom 8:11 (cf. 1:4) and implied in 1 Cor 6:14 (“through his [God’s] power”); Rom 6:4 (“through the Father’s glory”).

That this eschatological aspect is inalienable, not waiting to be assumed by the Spirit only in the future at Christ’s return, is clear from the well-known metaphors Paul uses to describe the present work of the Spirit in the Church and within believers. He is “the firstfruits” of their full adoption to be realized in “the redemption (= the resurrection) of the body” (Rom 8:23). Similarly he is “the deposit” toward the resurrection body (2 Cor 5:5). Again, in his sealing activity as “the Spirit of promise” he is the “deposit” on the Church’s “inheritance” (Eph 1:14), an unambiguously eschatological reality (cf. 4:30). Note how effectively both metaphors capture the already/not-yet structure of Paul’s eschatology, the partial yet nonetheless consummate quality of the Spirit’s work in the believer. That present experience is of a piece with the full experience of the Spirit’s activity at Christ’s return and so anticipates that future activity.

Turning now to the modern and contemporary understanding of v. 45b, a curiously mixed state of affairs presents itself. On the one hand, it seems fair to say, across a broad front a substantial majority of commentators and other interpreters who address the issue recognize a reference to the Holy Spirit in v. 45.¹⁹ That may be seen, for instance, in various articles in the recently published *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*.²⁰ At the same time, however, giving rise to a certain overall dissonance or at least ambiguity, virtually all the standard English translations, for whatever reasons, continue to render “spirit” in v. 45 with a small “s.” The most notable exceptions

¹⁸ See n. 14 *supra*. Vos observes: “Coming back to Paul we may adopt for guidance the two-fold aspect in which the eschatological function of the Spirit appears in his teaching. On the one hand the Spirit is the resurrection-source, on the other He appears as the substratum of the resurrection-life, the element, as it were, in which, as in its circumambient atmosphere the life of the coming aeon shall be lived. He produces the event and in continuance underlies the state which is the result of it. He is the Creator and sustainer at once, the *Creator Spiritus* and the Sustainer of the supernatural state of the future life in one” (*Pauline Eschatology* 163; cf. 59, 165, 169).

¹⁹ Often, though, in preoccupation with the Adam-Christ contrast the issue is not even raised.

²⁰ (ed. G. F. Hawthorne and R. P. Martin; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993); cf. e.g. 12a, 263b (L. J. Kreitzer); 107b, 108a, 112a (B. Witherington); 349a (R. B. Gaffin); 407b (T. Paige); 435a (G. M. Burge); 554 (J. J. Scott).

are the Living Bible (and now the New Living Translation) and Today's English Version. They—correctly, I believe—capitalize “Spirit.”²¹

From the viewpoint of contemporary evangelical and historic Christian orthodoxy, the apparent objection to this translation and the supporting exegetical sketch given above is as obvious as it is serious. To find here a reference to the person of the Holy Spirit seems clearly to put Paul at odds, even in conflict, with later Church Trinitarian and Christological doctrine. It apparently makes him, as the historical-critical tradition has long and typically argued, an advocate of a so-called functional Christology that has no place for a personal distinction in deity between Christ and the Spirit.

This objection needs to be confronted. But then, we must ask, what exegetical arguments are there against a reference to the Holy Spirit in v. 45? I cite two here, the principal objections raised by Gordon Fee in his recent valuable critiques of the functional Spirit-Christology that James Dunn and others find in Paul.²² (1) Paul's interest in the context is soteriological (Christ's own resurrection as the basis of our future, bodily resurrection), not Christological and/or pneumatological. (2) The expression “life-giving πνεῦμα” was coined by Paul in his effort to find an appropriate contrasting parallel to the description of Adam as “living ψυχή” in Gen 2:7, which he has just cited. Paul is likely alluding to the “breath [*rûah*] of life” just mentioned in the same Genesis text and so intends a looser, less exact expression.

Assuming that these arguments have been fairly represented here, at least in their basic contours, are they satisfying exegetically? I respond to them briefly in reverse order. To deny a reference to the Holy Spirit in v. 45 at the very least undercuts a reference to his activity in the cognate adjective “spiritual” in v. 44 and ends up giving it a more indefinite sense of something like “supernatural.”²³ That easily tends toward the persisting misconception that it describes the (immaterial) composition of the resurrection body (though that is not Fee's own view). Along the same line, it has to be asked: Within the first-century Mediterranean thought world of Paul and his readers, what is a “life-giving spirit” with a small “s”? What would that likely communicate, at least without further qualification such as is lacking here, other than the notion of an angel or some other essentially immaterial being or apparition? But πνεῦμα in that sense is exactly what Jesus, as resurrected, denies himself to be in Luke 24:37–39.

Furthermore to say that in this passage Paul “is intent on one thing” and that his “whole point is soteriological-eschatological”²⁴ surely overstates (or understates). Paul's main point (the believer's hope of bodily resurrection) is certainly soteriological and eschatological. But that does not exclude, just in the interests of making that point, that 1 Cor 15:45 also says something about Christ and, as I have tried to show, the Holy Spirit. Present in

²¹ Although the translation of ἐγένετο by “is” (TEV) or “was” (Living Bible) misses or perhaps even distorts the timed, dynamic reference in view.

²² See Fee, “Christology” 319–322; *Empowering Presence* 264–267, 831 ff.

²³ As does Fee, “Christology” 320 n. 34; *Empowering Presence* 263.

²⁴ Fee, “Christology” 320; cf. the somewhat more qualified statement in *Empowering Presence* 264.

this passage as well are Christological and pneumatological dimensions, profoundly so.

Are we left, then, with the conclusion that v. 45 teaches something like Dunn’s functional Spirit-Christology? To avoid any misunderstanding, let me affirm emphatically my own rejection of such a Christology in Paul. It seems to me, however, that both Dunn and many who oppose his view share a mistaken assumption—namely, that to admit a reference to the Holy Spirit in v. 45 necessitates the functional Christology argued by him and others.

The way out of this impasse is to recognize Paul’s clearly Trinitarian understanding of God. And here we are indebted to no one more than Fee himself for so admirably demonstrating that understanding.²⁵ As far as I can see, this treatment is without a peer in recent literature on Paul’s theology and ought to settle the matter for anyone with doubts. At any rate, I assume its basic conclusions here. Paul’s Trinitarian conception of God is not at issue but is properly made a presupposition in the interpretation of 1 Cor 15:45.

It is completely gratuitous, then, to find here a functional Christology that denies the personal difference between Christ and the Spirit and so would be irreconcilable with later Church formulation of Trinitarian doctrine. The scope of Paul’s argument, in particular its limits and its salvation-historical focus, need to be kept in view. Essential-eternal, ontological-Trinitarian relationships are simply outside his purview here. As we have already noted, he is concerned not with who Christ is timelessly, eternally, in his preexistence, but with what he “became,” with what has happened to him in history, specifically in his resurrection.

Moreover his interest in Christ here is not in terms of his true deity but his genuine humanity. Paul could hardly have been more emphatic on that. Christ is in view specifically in his identity as “the last Adam,” “the second man” (v. 47). When Dunn, for one, largely on the basis of this passage concludes epigrammatically that “*as the Spirit was the ‘divinity’ of Jesus . . . , so Jesus became the personality of the Spirit,*” the apostle’s focus is blurred and the limits it entails are totally missed.²⁶

It is one thing to show that v. 45 is not a source of Trinitarian confusion but another to honor the terms in which Paul expresses himself here. In view is the momentous, epochal significance of the resurrection/exaltation for Christ personally. Paul means to affirm what has not always been adequately recognized in the Church’s Christology. In his resurrection something really happened to Jesus. By that experience he was and remains a changed man in the truest and deepest—in fact, eschatological—sense. As Paul puts it elsewhere, by the declarative energy of the Holy Spirit in his

²⁵ Fee, *Empowering Presence* 839–842. The personal, parallel distinction between God (the Father), Christ as Lord, and the (Holy) Spirit—underlying subsequent doctrinal formulation—is clear enough in e.g. 1 Cor 12:4–6; 2 Cor 13:13; Eph 4:4–6.

²⁶ J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 325 (italics his). Subsequently Dunn has qualified the reasoning that led to this sort of formulation and has modified his views on Spirit Christology; see e.g. “Rediscovering the Spirit (2),” *ExpTim* 94 (1982) 9–18. I thank D. Y. Park for calling this development to my attention.

resurrection God's Son became what he was not before: "the Son of God with power" (Rom 1:4).²⁷ Relatively speaking, according to 2 Cor 13:4, while Christ was crucified in (a state of) "weakness" he now "lives by God's power." His is now, by virtue of the resurrection and ascension, what he did not previously possess: a glorified humanity.

Here moreover the focus, more pointedly than anywhere else in Paul, is the meaning of his resurrection (and ascension) for the relationship between Christ and the Spirit. In context two closely related aspects are in view: (1) Christ's own climactic transformation by the Spirit (he is the first to receive a "spiritual body"), and (2) along with that transformation his unique and unprecedented reception of the Spirit. The result is an intimacy, a bond between them that surpasses what previously existed. The result in fact is a new and permanent equation or oneness that is appropriately captured by saying that Christ has become the Spirit.

It should be noted further that here the relationship between Christ and the Spirit before the resurrection is likewise outside of Paul's purview. Certainly elsewhere he does not deny such a relationship, and 1 Cor 10:3–4, however we settle its further exegesis, appears to have in view the conjoint activity of the Spirit and the preincarnate Christ already under the old covenant.²⁸ Paul's point, rather, is that now, based on Jesus' death and dating from his resurrection and ascension, that joint action is given its stable and consummate basis in the history of redemption. Now at last such action is the crowning consequence of the work of the incarnate Christ actually accomplished once for all in history.

From the viewpoint of an overall theology of the NT, 1 Cor 15:45b is fairly and helpfully seen as a one-sentence commentary on the significance of Pentecost, along with the resurrection and ascension. Paul here telescopes what Peter delineates in his Pentecost sermon in Acts 2:32–33 ("God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted therefore to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear"). As "the life-giving Spirit," (the resurrected and ascended) Christ is the one who baptizes with the Spirit.

It bears emphasizing again that this oneness or unity, though certainly sweeping, is at the same time circumscribed in a specific respect. It concerns the conjoint activity of Christ and the Spirit in giving life, resurrection (= eschatological) life. In this sense, then, the equation in view may be dubbed "functional" or perhaps "eschatological" or, to use an older theological category, "economic" (rather than "ontological"), without in any way obliterating the distinction between the second and third persons of the triune God.

Subsequently Paul also writes to the Corinthians: "The Lord is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:17). Currently, something of a consensus seems to be emerging that

²⁷ Most likely ἐν δυνάμει should be construed adjectivally with υἱοῦ θεοῦ; see Gaffin, *Resurrection* 110 n. 100.

²⁸ Note, outside Paul, 1 Pet 1:10: The Spirit comprehensively at work in the OT prophets is specifically "the Spirit of Christ."

here “the Lord” (ὁ κύριος) is not, contrary to the majority view throughout most of this century,²⁹ a reference to Christ but applies Exod 34:34, just cited in v. 16, to the Spirit.³⁰

This view has exegetical weight and may well prove to be correct, although the Christological view is not so implausible or so easily dismissed as those who argue for a reference to the Spirit seem to think.³¹ What is particularly doubtful, however, at least in some if I read them correctly, is the tendency, perhaps as overreaction against the Christological understanding, virtually to evacuate the subsequent occurrences of κύριος in vv. 17–18, as well as the verses as a whole, of anything more than the most tenuous and indirect reference to Christ.³² To say that this is “a pneumatological passage, not a christological one”³³ poses a risky disjunction indeed for any passage in Paul, where as here the Spirit’s activity subsequent to Christ’s resurrection is in view.

Verse 17b (“the Spirit of the Lord”) already distinguishes between “the Spirit” and “the Lord” so that the latter likely refers to Christ in the light of what immediately follows in v. 18. There “the glory of the Lord” is surely not the glory of the Spirit in distinction from Christ but the glory of Christ. In beholding/reflecting that glory, Paul continues, believers are being transformed into “the same image,” and that image can only be the glory image of the exalted Christ. In the verses that follow, 4:4 (“the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God”) especially points to that conclusion (note as well Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49). The only transforming glory believers behold “with unveiled faces” that Paul knows of is “the glory of God in the [gospel-]face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:6), mediated, to be sure, to and within them by the Spirit.³⁴

In Paul, whether in this passage or elsewhere, Christ never retreats into the background before the Spirit, nor does the Spirit in any way supplant Christ. Paul remains faithful to the outlook of Jesus expressed in John 14–16: The Spirit is the “vicar” of Christ, not the reverse. As “the Spirit of truth” he has no agenda of his own. His role in the Church is basically self-effacing and Christ-enhancing (John 16:13–14 especially points to that). So much is that so that his presence in the Church is vicariously the presence

²⁹ See the literature cited in J. D. G. Dunn, “2 Corinthians III. 17—‘The Lord Is the Spirit,’” *JTS* 31/2 (1970) 309 n. 1.

³⁰ In addition to those cited in n. 32 *infra* cf. Dunn, “2 Corinthians” 309–320; R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University, 1989) 143–144.

³¹ See the comment of M. Silva in *WTJ* 59/1 (1997) 124–125 in review of S. J. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel* (J. C. B. Mohr: Tübingen, 1995).

³² E.g. L. L. Belleville, *Reflections of Glory* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991) 256 ff.; *2 Corinthians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996) 109–110; N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991) 183–184; to a lesser degree Fee, “Christology” 319–320; *Empowering Presence* 311–314; Hafemann, *Paul* 396–400.

³³ As does Fee, “Christology” 319; cf. *Empowering Presence* 312.

³⁴ Wright’s (as he recognizes, innovative) proposal that in v. 18 the “mirror” that believers behold is “*one another*” (italics his) and correlatively that “the same image” is “the same image as each other” as believers reflect the glory of the Spirit (*Climax* 185, 188) seems a particularly strained and unlikely elimination of any Christological reference from v. 18.

of the ascended Jesus. For the Spirit to come is for Christ to make good on his promise to the Church: "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (14:18). 1 Corinthians 15:45b, for one, enunciates and elaborates the fulfillment of this promise.

It is difficult to imagine, then, that Paul would not expect 2 Cor 3:17–18 to be read in the light of 1 Cor 15:45. The transforming reality in view in 2 Corinthians 3 roots in the truth of 1 Corinthians 15. However we settle the exegesis of 2 Cor 3:17a ("the Lord is the Spirit"), the "is" ($\epsilon\sigma\tau\iota\nu$) there is based on the "became" of 1 Cor 15:45b.

In 2 Cor 3:17a too, we should be clear, essential Trinitarian identities and relationships are not being denied or blurred but are quite outside Paul's purview. His focus is the conjoint activity of the Spirit and Christ as glorified. The exaltation experienced by the incarnate Christ results in a (working) relationship with the Holy Spirit of new and unprecedented intimacy. They are one here, specifically, in giving (eschatological) "freedom" (3:17b), the close correlative of the resurrection life in view in 1 Corinthians 15. That correlation is particularly unmistakable in the phrasing of Rom 8:2: "The Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free."

The truth of 1 Cor 15:45 is not only central to Paul's Christology and pneumatology and his most pivotal pronouncement on the relationship between the exalted Christ and the Spirit. As such it is as well the cornerstone of his entire teaching on the Holy Spirit and the Christian life. Life in the Spirit has its specific eschatological quality because it is the shared life of the resurrected Christ in union with him. There is no activity of the Spirit within the believer that is not also the activity of Christ. Christ at work in the Church is the Spirit at work.

Romans 8:9–10 is particularly instructive here. There, in short compass, "you . . . in the Spirit" (v. 9a), "the Spirit . . . in you" (v. 9b), "belonging to Christ" (v. 9d, equivalent, I would judge, to the frequent "in Christ"), and "Christ in you" (v. 10a) are virtually interchangeable. These four phrases hardly describe different experiences distinct from each other, but the same reality in its full, rich dimensions. The presence of the Spirit is the presence of Christ. There is no relationship with Christ that is not also fellowship with the Spirit. To belong to Christ is to be possessed by the Spirit. Elsewhere, within the comprehensive sweep of the prayer at the close of Ephesians 3, for "you to be strengthened by [the] Spirit inwardly" is nothing other than for "Christ to dwell in your hearts through faith" (vv. 16–17). This truth about the believer's experience, it bears stressing, is true not because of some more or less arbitrary divine arrangement but preeminently because of what is true prior to our experience, in the experience of Christ, because of, in virtue of his death and resurrection, who the Spirit now is, "the Spirit of Christ" (Rom 8:9c), and who Christ has become, "the life-giving Spirit."

In these passages as well Paul is not denying the eternal, hypostatic distinction between the Son of God and the Spirit of God. Nor does he intend, not even in view of the preceding paragraph, an absolute identity between the activity of Christ and the Spirit, not even after the resurrection. That is

clear for instance later on in Romans 8: The intercession of the ascended Christ there at God’s right hand (v. 34) is distinguished from the Spirit’s complementary interceding here within the believer (vv. 26–27). But, in the light of vv. 9–10, in that inner prayer of the Spirit Christ also is present. There he, too, is involved.

If we move on now to relate the preceding reflections on Paul’s theology to the life of the Church today, this state of affairs confronts us: The Holy Spirit and eschatology, simply inseparable for Paul and at the very heart of his gospel, remain virtually unrelated in traditional Christian doctrine and evangelical piety. What has sometimes been captured fleetingly, say, in the hymnody of the Church has been too often lacking in its teaching and practical outlook. There has been an undeniable and persistent tendency to isolate the work of the Spirit and eschatological realities from each other. This has happened as part of a larger tendency to divorce the present life of the Church from its future. Typically the work of the Spirit has been viewed individualistically as a matter of what God is doing in “my” life, in the inner life of the believer, without any particular reference or connection to God’s eschatological purposes.

We have only to ask: How many believers today recognize that the present work of the Spirit within the Church and in their lives is of one piece with God’s great work of restoring the entire creation, begun in sending his Son “in the fullness of time” (Gal 4:4) and to be consummated at his return? How many Christians grasp that in union with Christ, the life-giving Spirit, the Christian life in its entirety is essentially and necessarily resurrection life? How many comprehend that in terms of Paul’s fundamental anthropological distinction between “the inner” and “outer man” (2 Cor 4:16), between “heart” and “body,” believers at the core of their being will never be any more resurrected than they already are? Such probing questions open up a broad horizon of issues and concerns as to the dimensions more precisely of this present resurrection experience, as to the magnitude more concretely of the Spirit’s eschatological activity in the Church. Here I am able to touch only briefly on two matters—as timely as any, it seems to me.

First, an observation on the resurgent pentecostal spirituality of recent decades, one that I offer in the hope that charismatics and noncharismatics alike could agree without having to settle their remaining differences. It is widely maintained that pentecostal denominations and the broader charismatic movement evidence, as it has been claimed, “the specifically eschatological dimension of the doctrines of pneumatology and the kingdom of God.”³⁵ The perception is commonplace that spiritual gifts, especially miraculous gifts like prophecy, tongues and healing, belong to realized eschatology.³⁶

Paul’s teaching, however, moves in a different, even opposite, direction. For instance, a concern of 1 Cor 13:8–13 is to point out that prophecy and tongues are temporary in the life of the Church. (Note, by the way, that here I am not raising the much debated issue of how long Paul says they are

³⁵ J. Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata* (Sheffield; Academic, 1993) 196; cf. 115–123.

to continue.) Whether or not before the *parousia*, Paul is clear that they will cease. And that, in effect, is to say they have a less than eschatological significance. No, the response will come, that conclusion misses the point. By the language of cessation Paul intends to show that these gifts belong to the “already” of eschatology but not to the “not yet.”³⁷

But does that rejoinder really suffice? It has to be asked whether realities of realized eschatology can really be said, as Paul does, to “cease” and “pass away” (v. 8). Can that possibly be said of what is eschatological? Such realities, by their very nature, endure. In terms of Paul’s metaphors for the Spirit, the arrival of the rest of the harvest does not involve the removal of the “firstfruits.” The payment of the balance hardly results in subtracting the “down payment” or “deposit.” Or, going to what is surely the heart of the Spirit’s activity, the resurrection of the body at Christ’s return will certainly not mean the undoing of the resurrection, already experienced, of the inner man.

Contemporary discussion of this passage (on all sides, I would observe) too frequently obscures or even misses Paul’s primary concern: For the present, until Jesus returns, it is not our knowledge (along with the prophetic gifts that may contribute to that knowledge) but our faith, hope and love that have abiding—that is, eschatological—significance. In contrast to the partial, obscured, dimly-mirrored quality of the believer’s present knowledge brought by such gifts, faith in its modes of hope and especially love has what we might call an eschatological “reach” or “grasp” (vv. 12–13).

I suggest that this reading of the passage helps with the perennial problem exegesis has wrestled with in v. 13: How can faith and hope be said to continue after the *parousia* in the light, say, of 2 Cor 5:7 (for the present, in contrast to our resurrection future, “we walk by faith, not by sight”) and Rom 8:24 (“Hope that is seen is not hope”)? That question misses the point. The “abiding” in view does not take place beyond the *parousia* but concerns the present, eschatological worth of faith and hope (as well as love) in the midst of the nonenduring, subeschatological quality of our present knowledge, including whatever word gifts bring that knowledge. Phenomena like prophecy and tongues, where they occur, are but provisional, less-than-eschatological epiphenomena.

All told, Paul would not have us miss the categorical distinction between the gift (singular) and the gifts (plural) of the Spirit, between the eschatological gift, Christ, the indwelling, life-giving Spirit himself in which all believers share, and those subeschatological giftings, none of which, by divine design, is intended for or received by every believer (1 Cor 12:28–30, for one, makes that clear enough).

³⁶ E.g. D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 151 (expressed more cautiously than some others); J. Deere, *Surprised By the Power of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993) 225–226, 285 n. 6; Fee, *Empowering Presence* 893; W. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 1019, 1063–1064; M. Turner, “Spiritual Gifts Then and Now,” *Vox Evangelica* 15 (1985) 61–62 n. 175.

³⁷ E.g. Fee and Grudem as cited in n. 36 *supra*.

The truly enduring work of the Spirit is the resurrection renewal already experienced by every believer. And that renewal manifests itself in what Paul calls “fruit”—like faith, hope and love, joy and peace (to mention just some, Gal 5:22–23), with, I would stress, the virtually unlimited potential for their concrete expression both in the corporate witness as well as the personal lives of the people of God. This fruit—preeminently love, not the gifts—embodies the eschatological “firstfruits” and “deposit” of the Spirit. However imperfectly displayed for the present, such fruit is eschatological at its core. Not in particular gifts, however important such gifts undoubtedly are for the health of the Church, but in these fruits we experience the eschatological touch of the Spirit in our lives today. Is this not a point on which charismatics and noncharismatics alike ought to agree?

Finally, out of all else that still remains to be said about our overwhelmingly rich topic, I wish to add my own voice to those who have drawn attention, paradoxical as it may at first seem, to the singular role of Christian suffering in defining the present eschatological activity of the Spirit.³⁸ A perennial danger for the Church is distorted perceptions of the resurrection quality of the Christian life. False optimism and trivializing “possibility thinking” are by no means an imaginary danger, as our own times make all too clear. In fact in a number of places Paul heads off any easy triumphalism and every form of “prosperity theology.” Most striking are those passages that, though strictly speaking autobiographical, surely intend the suffering he experienced as a paradigm for all believers.

Philippians 3:10 is a particularly compelling instance. As part of his aspiration to “gain Christ and be found in him” (vv. 8–9) Paul expresses the desire “to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering, being conformed to his death.” In this declaration, I take it, the two occurrences of *καί* are not coordinating but explanatory. Paul is not saying that knowing Christ, the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his suffering are sequential or alternating in the believer’s experience, as if memorable and exhilarating times of resurrection power are offset by down days of suffering. Rather, he is intent on articulating the single, much more than merely cognitive experience of knowing Christ—what he has just called “the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (v. 8). To know Christ, then, is to know his resurrection power as a sharing in his sufferings, an experience, all told, that is glossed as “being conformed to his death.” The imprint left in our lives by Christ’s resurrection power, in a word, is the cross. This cross conformity, as much as any, is the signature of inaugurated eschatology.

Similarly 2 Cor 4:10–11 speaks of “always carrying around in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our body,” and of “always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.” Here the two counterposed notions of the active dying of Jesus and of his resurrection life do not describe

³⁸ See among others the instructive treatment of Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* 326–338.

somehow separate sectors of experience. Rather, the life of Jesus, Paul is saying, is revealed in our mortal flesh and nowhere else. The (mortal) body is the locus of the life of the exalted Jesus. Christian suffering, described as “the dying of Jesus,” molds the manifestation of his resurrection life in believers.

So elsewhere, in 2 Corinthians 12, the apostle, who is able to boast about “visions and revelations from the Lord” (v. 1), would rather boast about and delight in his weaknesses and in the hardships and persecutions endured for Christ (vv. 9–10). For there—preeminently, he has come to understand—the power of the exalted Christ is displayed. Just there in that suffering “[Christ’s] power is perfected in weakness,” and the proven truth is that “when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Believers suffer on earth, Paul learned from experience, not in spite of or even alongside of their presently sharing in Christ’s resurrection but just because they are raised and seated with him in heaven (Eph 2:5–6). The choice Paul places before the Church for all time until Jesus comes is not for a theology of the cross instead of a theology of resurrection but for his resurrection theology as theology of the cross.

But what does it mean to suffer with Christ? That question needs careful and probing reflection, especially for the Church in North America with its relative freedom and affluence, where suffering can seem remote and confined to the Church elsewhere but where we are surely naïve not to be preparing for the day when that distance may disappear, perhaps much sooner than we think.

Here I can only point out that in Rom 8:18 ff. Paul opens a much broader understanding of Christian suffering than we usually have. There, likely with an eye to the Genesis 3 narrative and the curse on human sin, he reflects on what he calls categorically “the sufferings of the present time” (v. 18)—that is, the time for now until the bodily resurrection of the believer (v. 23). From that sweeping angle of vision, suffering is everything about our lives as they remain subjected fundamentally and unremittingly to the enervating “futility” (v. 20) and “bondage to decay” (v. 21), which until Jesus comes permeate the entire creation. Christian suffering, then, is everything in our lives in this present order, borne for Christ and done in his service. Suffering with Christ includes not only monumental and traumatic crises, martyrdom and overt persecution. It is also to be a daily affair (cf. Luke 9:23: “Take up his cross daily”)—the mundane frustrations and unspectacular difficulties of our everyday lives when they are endured for his sake.

I end with what I take to be a perennial word to the Church in Phil 1:29: “For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him.” Here the apostle speaks of the “givenness” of Christian suffering for the Church as Church. Probably we are not over-translating here to speak of the gracious givenness of suffering, that suffering is given to the Church as a gift.³⁹ At any rate, Paul is clear, the Christian

³⁹ Thus M. Silva, *Philippians* (Chicago: Moody, 1988) 96–97, including his paraphrase “since your suffering no less than your faith is God’s gracious gift to you on behalf of Christ.”

life is a “not only . . . but also” proposition, not only a matter of believing but also of suffering. Suffering is not simply for some believers but for all. We may be sure of this, then: Where the Church embraces this indissoluble correlative of faith and suffering, there it will have come a long way toward genuinely comprehending the heart of Paul’s pneumatology, and with that comprehension we will more and more experience the eschatological quality of life in Christ, the life-giving Spirit.