INTRODUCTION

For good or ill, and despite appearances, this is a book on Pauline theology. Not the whole of that theology, nor even its chief element, but an aspect of the experienced faith of Paul and his churches that stood much closer to the center of things for him—and for them—than seems to be true for us. For Paul the Spirit, as an experienced and living reality, was the absolutely crucial matter for Christian life, from beginning to end. That, at least, is the contention of this book. For the contemporary church it seems much less so, both in the academy, in its understanding of Pauline theology, and in the actual life of the church. I do not mean that the Holy Spirit is not present; he is indeed, or we are not of Christ at all. Nonetheless, despite the affirmations in our creeds and hymns and the lip service paid to the Spirit in our occasional conversations, the Spirit is largely marginalized in our actual life together as a community of faith. At least that seems to be true of my own experience of the church; it also


2 This is evidenced in any number of ways, including the lack of a comprehensive study of Pauline pneumatology such as this book offers. Note, e.g., how little space is given to the Spirit in the otherwise quite helpful little book on Pauline Christianity by John Ziesler (Oxford: University, 1983: about 2 pages out of 144!); cf. the magisterial Paul: An Outline of His Theology by Herman Ridderbos (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), where the Spirit fares only a little better proportionately (e.g., there are five times as many pages devoted to "sin" as to the Spirit). See also the two papers (by J. D. G. Dunn and B. Roberts Gaventa) on the theology of Galatians in the Pauline Theology Seminar at the Society of Biblical Literature in which neither, as presented at the seminar, mentioned the Spirit even once (see The Society of Biblical Literature 1988 Seminar Papers [ed. D. J. Lull; Atlanta: Scholars, 1988] 1–16, 17–28). And this in papers in which the question of "identity markers" was clearly recognized.
seems to be reflected in the thousands of ways individual believers have longed for a greater sense of God's presence in their lives.

A “Theology” of the Spirit?

For some a book on the Spirit as “theology” is the kiss of death; and in many ways I am in that camp. But we lack a better word; and in the final analysis, the health of the contemporary church necessitates that its theology of the Spirit and its experience of the Spirit correspond more closely. Ordinarily “theology” has to do with reflective understanding of things divine. That is scarcely what we find in Paul regarding the Holy Spirit, any more than we find him “reflecting” on the significance of the Lord’s Table or on the relationships within the Godhead which he presupposes and which tantalizingly “pop out” here and there.

Yet theology is what Paul is doing all the time. But it is seldom the reflective theology of the academy, dealing with how the various matters we believe about God and God’s ways can be put into some kind of coherent whole. Rather, it is what has been called “task theology,” the theologizing that takes place in the marketplace, where belief and the experience of God run head-on into the thought systems, religions, and everyday life of people in the Greco-Roman world at the beginning of the second half of the first century CE. Such “task theology” is the more complex because it takes place in an extremely heterogeneous environment. In part, therefore, the issues raised for Paul have to do with what the God of the Jews (the one and only God) was doing in history through Christ and the Spirit, for him within a primarily Gentile context.

Into this kind of setting Paul came preaching, experiencing, rethinking, and re-articulating old and new truths, as he wrestled with what it meant for Jew and Gentile together to be the one people of God at the turning of the ages ushered in by Christ’s resurrection and the gift of the Spirit. In the process he was constantly “doing theology,” grappling with how the gospel works—and works out—in this new context that was so radically different from that in which it first appeared in history.

Our present concern is with what Paul says about the Spirit, since it is through what he says that we basically have entrée into his understanding. But our theological concern lies deeper than merely collating all the passages and running them through some kind of theological grid, for in the case of the Spirit we are dealing with the essential matter of early Christian experience. Here was how the early church came to appropriate the salvation that Christ had brought; and here was how believers came to understand their own existence as essentially eschatological, with the Spirit as both the evidence that God’s great future for the people of God had already made its way into the present and the guarantee that God would conclude what he had begun in Christ. Thus the Spirit is absolutely presuppositional to their entire experience and
understanding of their present life in Christ; and as often happens with such presuppositional matters, one rarely looks at them reflectively. They are simply part of the “stuff” of ongoing life; and what one says about such matters is often off-handed, matter-of-fact, and without considered articulation. As a result, trying to write a “theology of the Spirit” in Paul can be a somewhat tenuous affair. In any case, we must try to wrestle not only with what Paul says explicitly, but with some of the experiential undercurrents that are reflected in some of the things he articulates.

At the same time, since the Spirit is only part of the larger picture of Pauline theology, two other matters of Paul’s theologizing must always be kept before us as we theologically think through his experience and understanding as these are reflected in his letters.

First, there is the issue of continuity and discontinuity between the old covenant and the new, between God’s word to Israel, articulated by prophet and poet, and God’s new word through Christ Jesus, articulated by apostles and others. What carries over as theological presupposition? Wherein does continuity lie? And how is the new related to the old? Does it supersede, as a truly new covenant? Does it fulfill, and in so doing carry with it much of what was there before?

Second, and related, is the issue which Christiaan Beker has taught us to consider, of coherence and contingency, of the (basically) “unchanging core” in Paul’s theological understanding and the contingent recategorization of that “core” as it impacts, and is impacted by, contingencies and conflicts in the Pauline churches. Do we try to do theology by finding and articulating what is “coherent” in Pauline theology? Or do we do our theologizing by looking at the disparate elements that come to us in somewhat random fashion in his highly “contingent” letters? Or do we assume that there is coherence, and then work at articulating how the “coherent” and “contingent” interface in the Pauline letters?

So what do we mean by offering a book on the theology of the Spirit as that emerges in the letters of Paul? Let me begin with three basic convictions about the matters just articulated.

First, I am convinced that the only worthwhile theology is that which is translated into life; and here is where this book has theological concern at its very heart. Paul’s “understanding” of the Spirit—language that will recur throughout this book, as I understand Paul’s understanding—is ultimately a matter of what Jeremias in another context called gelebte Glaube, “lived-out faith.” Thus in Paul we find moments of theological reflection; but mostly we find occasional words that give us all kinds of insight into his understanding of the role/experience of the Spirit in the new age that has come present with Christ and the Spirit. My concern is with our coming

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to terms both with the experienced realities themselves and with Paul's understanding of them, as much as we can do that fairly and with integrity.

Furthermore, since I believe that these texts are at the same time God's word, which function as Scripture for the church, I understand my task as theologian to be both descriptive and normative. That is, the first task is the exegetical one, to describe as carefully as possible, Paul's own understanding of life in the Spirit; but I am convinced that such description, if properly and carefully done, should lead to obedience, to our own coming to terms with the role of the Spirit in the ongoing life of the church. The interplay between the descriptive task and the normative carries on throughout the book. I am convinced that those who take Scripture seriously as God's word to themselves and to the church need especially to come to terms with the implications of Paul's experience and understanding of the Spirit for our own day.

Second, I am convinced that in order to understand Paul aright we must take both continuity and discontinuity with equal seriousness. Paul not only stands in the direct line with the people of God in the Old Testament, but despite his deep convictions about the radical implications of the coming of Christ and the Spirit, he regularly reaffirms that continuity. He includes a primarily Gentile church in the events of the Exodus: “all our forefathers were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Cor 10:1–2). To Gentiles who were in danger of succumbing to circumcision he not only appeals to Abraham and the promises of the old covenant, but he asks frankly, “Tell me, you who wish to be under the Law, do you not hear the Law?” and then expounds the “true meaning” of Sarah and Hagar, Isaac and Ishmael, in light of Christ and the Spirit (Gal 4:21–31). Paul never speaks of a “new Israel” or “new people of God”; his language is “God’s Israel” (Gal 6:16), an Israel composed of Jew and Gentile alike as one people of God. But just as clearly, the people of God have now been newly constituted. Christ is the “goal of the Law” (Rom 10:4), and the Spirit is “the promised Holy Spirit” (Gal 3:14). Christ’s death and resurrection have brought an end to Torah observance; the Spirit has replaced Torah as God’s way of “fulfilling” Torah.

Thus any “theologizing” of Paul must continually wrestle with the relationship of the old and the new, of the nature of the continuity and discontinuity. The Christian Bible, composed of both testaments, two discrete collections of documents held together in a common volume, is an expression of that continuity and discontinuity. I do not pretend to address this issue directly in this volume; but the very nature of the texts and their “theology” forces us to deal with that question again and again.

Third, I am also convinced—despite frequent demurrers to the contrary—that there is a substantial amount of “coherence” in Paul’s understanding of Christ and the Spirit, much of which is presuppositional for him, based on his sense of continuity with the old; but much of which is to be found in what he simply calls “the gospel.” It seems to me to be an
inadequate reading of Paul which does not recognize that for him there was content to the gospel—content held in common with all other early Christians. The “contingencies” in Paul, as I understand them, have to do with his working through the implications of that common content for the Gentile mission, to which he devoted the last two decades of his life.

Thus this book attempts to analyze and synthesize what Paul says about the Spirit, both as person and as experienced reality within the life of the believer and the believing community. It will be clear to those who read further that I believe the Spirit to lie near the center of things for Paul, as part of the fundamental core of his understanding of the gospel. The reason for that in part stems from the eschatological framework of his Jewish roots, with its eager awaiting of the Spirit as part of the realization of the messianic age. Essential to Paul’s becoming a follower of Christ was his conviction that this hope had already been realized by the advent of the Spirit in the present; hence the significance of the Spirit for both continuity and discontinuity in Paul’s understanding of the gospel, as well as the reason for Paul’s seeing the Spirit as a fundamental component of reality.

This book is theological in another sense as well, in the sense of theology proper. For when we deal with Paul’s understanding of the Spirit, even though the emphasis will ultimately be where Paul’s tends to be—in soteriology—nonetheless we are dealing with the basic presupposition to everything: the reality (I started to write “doctrine”) of God.

In the course of working through the pertinent texts I became profoundly aware of how crucial God is to the whole of Paul’s urgencies; and how much his understanding of God has been affected by OT realities—God as creator and redeemer, full of love and grace—and that these realities have been fleshed out in our human history through the work of Christ; and finally how all of this continues in the present through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. It is not that I did not know, or believe, this before. But the close work on these texts has had a profound impact on my own life as a Christian believer, both in my thinking and (especially) in my praying. And it is this personal dimension, my own encounter with God the Holy Spirit, that led to the title and therefore the urgencies of this book.

**God’s Empowering Presence**

Each word of this title expresses one of my urgencies, because I became convinced they were Paul’s own urgencies, either articulated as such or inherent to his understanding of the gospel. Thus: the Holy Spirit as person, the person of God himself; the Holy Spirit as God’s personal presence; and the Holy Spirit as God’s empowering presence.

*The Holy Spirit as Person.* For most of us our understanding of the Spirit falls considerably short of personhood. We have a certain immediate empathy with the student who once told a colleague of mine: “God
the Father makes perfectly good sense to me; and God the Son I can quite understand; but the Holy Spirit is a gray, oblong blur.”

This was illustrated vividly for me on Pentecost Sunday during the final writing of this book. It was during the children’s time in the small island church where Maudine and I spent our sabbatical. Our good friend MaryRuth Wilkinson was trying to illustrate the reality of “Spirit” by blowing on a piece of paper and letting it “fly” away. The Spirit is like that. she was saying to the children; it is like the “wind,” very real in its effects, even though invisible to us. At which point a six-year old boy blurted out. “But I want the wind to be un-invisible!” I whispered to Maudine: “Of course; what a profound theological moment!” How often we all feel this way about God as Spirit, as Holy Spirit. “I want the Holy Spirit to be un-invisible!” And because he is not, we tend to think of him in nonpersonal terms. At which point our images take over; we think of the Spirit as wind, fire, water, oil—impersonal images all—and refer to the Spirit as “it.” No wonder many regard the Spirit as a gray, oblong blur.

It is otherwise with God and Christ. Even though we start with the primary biblical understanding of God, that he cannot be imaged by what is created, we nonetheless have had much less difficulty in identifying with God, because in the Old Testament the images and anthropomorphisms at least let us catch a glimpse of true personality. And with the coming of Christ, all of that has been given a moment of historical focus. Our understanding of God is forever marked by the fact that he has been “fleshed out” at one point in our human history. Even if God seems distant, transcendent, “from eternity to eternity,” we are not in the dark about God and his character. As Paul put it, the glory of God has been imaged for us in the one true human who bears the divine image, Christ himself; and by beholding his “face” we see the glory of the eternal God (2 Cor 3:18; 4:4, 6).

The burden of this book is that we must recognize the same to be true about the Spirit, not simply theoretically, but really and experientially. The Spirit is not lightly called the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Christ has put a human face on the Spirit as well. If we are truly to understand Paul, and to capture the crucial role of the Spirit in his theology, we must begin with his thoroughly Trinitarian presuppositions. Not only has the coming of Christ changed everything for Paul, so too has the coming of the Spirit. In dealing with the Spirit, we are dealing with none other than the personal presence of God himself.

*The Holy Spirit as God’s Presence.* Absolutely central to Paul’s theology of the Spirit is that the Spirit is the fulfillment of the promises found in Jeremiah and Ezekiel: that God himself would breathe on us and we would live; that he would write his law in our hearts; and especially that he would give his Spirit “unto us,” so that we are indwelt by him. What is crucial for Paul is that we are thus indwelt by the eternal God. The gathered
church and the individual believer are the new locus of God’s own presence with his people; and the Spirit is the way God is now present.

One of the key images, therefore, that Paul associates with the indwelling Spirit is that of “temple,” part of the significance of which is that it functions for Paul for the corporate, gathered community as well as for the individual believer. With this imagery in particular Paul picks up the Old Testament motif of God’s “presence” with the people of God. This theme is one of the keys to the structure of the book of Exodus, where Israel comes to the holy mount, the place of God’s “dwelling,” the place where they are forbidden to go on the threat of death. Only Moses is allowed into God’s presence. But God plans to “move” from the mount and dwell among his people by means of a “tabernacle.” So after the giving of the Book of the Covenant (chs. 20–24). Moses receives the precise instructions for constructing the tabernacle (chs. 25–31). But this is followed by the debacle in the desert (ch. 32), followed by God’s announcing that “my presence will not go with you”; an angel will go instead (ch. 33). Moses recognizes the inadequacy of this solution and intercedes: “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?” (33:15–16 NIV). God’s Presence with Israel is what distinguishes them, not the Law or other “identity markers.” This in turn is followed by the further revelation of God’s character (34:4–7) and the actual construction of the tabernacle (chs. 35–39), all of which concludes with the descent of God’s glory which “filled the tabernacle” (40:35). With that, they journey to the place which “the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name” (Deut 12:11 and passim). At a later point in time the motif of the divine presence, as outlined here, was actually equated with “the Holy Spirit of the Lord” (Isa 63:9–14).

In a canonical reading of the Old Testament the Deuteronomy promise is finally fulfilled in the construction of Solomon’s temple, where the same glory as in Exodus 40 descended and “filled his temple” (1 Kgs 8:11). But Israel’s failure caused it to forfeit God’s presence. This is the tragedy. The temple in Jerusalem, the place where God has chosen to dwell, is finally destroyed; and the people are not only carried away captive, but the captives and those who remained were no longer a people distinguished by the presence of the living God in their midst—although it is promised again in Ezekiel’s grand vision (40–48). The second temple itself evinces mixed feelings among the people. In light of Solomon’s temple and the promised future temple of Ezekiel. Haggai complains, “Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?” (2:3).

It is this complex of ideas and images that Paul picks up in 1 Cor 3:16–17 and 6:19. His introductory, “do you not know that . . . ” followed
by “you are the temple of God [in Corinth],” strongly suggests that this is the rich history that Paul here has in mind. The church, corporately and individually, is the place of God’s own personal presence, by the Spirit. This is what marks God’s new people off from “all the other people on the face of the earth.” Hence Paul’s consternation with the Corinthians’ present behavior which has the effect of banishing the Spirit, the living presence of God that makes them his temple.

This is the context of continuity in which we should read scores of Spirit texts in the apostle. This is how we know God’s love for us in Christ (Rom 5:5); this is what makes us certain that we are God’s very children (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15–16); this is why holiness is not optional (1 Thes 4:7–8), why we must not grieve the Holy Spirit of God (Eph 4:30), why Timothy must not flag in the context of external pressures (2 Tim 1:6–7)—because we are indwelt by God himself. The Spirit is the fulfillment of God’s promise to dwell in and among his people: the Spirit is God present among us.

*The Holy Spirit as God’s Empowering Presence.* In keeping with Paul’s Old Testament roots, the presence of God by the Spirit also meant for Paul the powerful and empowering presence of God. We are not left on our own as far as our relationship with God is concerned; neither are we left on our own to “slug it out in the trenches,” as it were, with regard to the Christian life. Life in the present is empowered by the God who dwells among us and in us. As the personal presence of God, the Spirit is not merely some “force” or “influence.” The living God is a God of power; and by the Spirit the power of the living God is present with and for us.

But in Paul, power is not to be thought of merely in terms of the miraculous, the extraordinary. Rather, because of his basic eschatological framework (see ch. 12) Paul understood the Spirit’s power in the broadest possible way. On the one hand, the future had broken in so powerfully that signs and wonders and miracles are simply matter-of-fact (1 Cor 12:8–11; Gal 3:5); on the other hand, the Spirit also empowers for endurance in the midst of adversity (Col 1:11; 2 Cor 12:9–10)—and for everything else as we endure, awaiting the final glory, of which the Spirit is the guarantee.

Person, Presence, power: these three realities are what the Holy Spirit meant for the apostle Paul. Because this was so, he “theologizes” about Christian life in a way that makes him neither triumphalist nor defeatist, but realist. To recapture the Pauline experience and understanding is the key to our finding our way into the “radical middle,” where we expect neither too much nor too little. Here we will know life and vitality, attractive life and vitality, in our personal lives and in the community of faith. Here we will constantly have the veil removed so that we might behold God’s own glory in the face of Christ, so that we are constantly being renewed into his likeness. Here we will regularly expect, and see, both the working of miracles and the fellowship of his sufferings, without sensing frustration in either direction. If we do not
have the Spirit. Paul says, we do not belong to God at all; my concern is that in our having his Spirit, we not settle for a watered down understanding that gives more glory to Western rationalism and spiritual anemia than to the living God.

In the final analysis I am perhaps trying to do far more than I can hope to deliver. On the one hand, I want to speak to the academy, to urge that Paul’s theology without a greater sense of Pauline pneumatology is to sell short Paul’s own understanding of the gospel. On the other hand, I want to speak to all who belong to Christ, to call us to a greater awareness—an experienced awareness if you will, more along Pauline lines—of the Spirit in our lives and in the life of the church. Whether both of these can happen in a single volume remains to be seen. But to these ends, at least, I have written.

ABOUT THE BOOK ITSELF

I obviously did not need a book of almost a thousand pages to make the preceding points. The length of the book came about in the interest of thoroughness and because of my conviction that careful exegesis of all the texts should precede an attempt to theologize on any of them. The net result is that I have looked carefully at every text that even remotely whispered of the Spirit’s presence; indeed, I am sure that reviewers will accuse me of finding the Spirit under every rock. To be sure, after going over all these texts with some care, I am convinced the Spirit really is there under most of these rocks—and probably under a good many more as well. But perhaps a few further words are in order as to the occasion and purpose of the present study.

This book offers the exegetical basis for, and a considerable elaboration of, my contribution entitled “Pauline Literature” (with emphasis on the Holy Spirit) in the Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements. While working on that article, I became aware of a singular lacuna in this area. There are books devoted to the Spirit in the New Testament, that include Pauline sections; and there are books on Pauline or New Testament theology, that include sections on Paul’s pneumatology. But in English only an obscure work by R. B. Hoyle, now

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considerably out of date, deals exclusively with the subject of the Spirit in Paul’s letters and theology. With this book I hope to fill that lacuna.

As with my commentary on 1 Corinthians, it seemed fitting that one such book at least be written by a New Testament scholar who is also a Pentecostal both by confession and by experience. In his watershed exegetical study of “The Baptism in the Holy Spirit,” J. D. G. Dunn observed that for traditional Pentecostalism, which bases its theology primarily on Acts, “Paul need not have written anything. Indeed Paul seems to be more of an embarrassment than an asset.” Conversely, it might be observed that most non-Pentecostals, of both the sacramental and nonsacramental variety, find Paul to be most convenient to their theologies, while Acts is determined to be decidedly nontheological. Therefore, in evaluating the role of the Spirit in the life of the believer (especially on the matter of “conversion-initiation,” to borrow Dunn’s term), both groups tend to find a canon within the canon.

The same holds true for their respective emphases on the ongoing life in the Spirit. But here there is a “canon within the Pauline canon.” Pentecostals, on the one hand, at times could be rightly accused of neglecting most of Paul for 1 Corinthians 12 to 14. Here they find biblical justification for the ongoing exercise of the spiritual gifts in their midst, especially the more extraordinary gifts. Non-Pentecostals, on the other hand, tend to regard 1 Corinthians as an embarrassment, both to Paul and to the later church (or else they use it as a negative paradigm). Their “canon within the canon” is Galatians 5 and Romans 7–8; for them the key to Pauline Spirit language resides in ethical life (the fruit of the Spirit). I find both forms of truncated canon less than satisfactory, hence part of the reason for this study.

The concern of the present book is mirrored in part in its format. Historically, there are two ways of going about this task. The first is to arrange all of the material in a logical, thematic fashion and to exegete the texts as they appear in that logical scheme. Although this might be


8I have made no attempt to trace the history of scholarship on the subject; brief overviews may be found in the unpublished dissertation by Lemmer (see bibliog. on ch. 9) and R. P. Menzies, The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology, with special reference to Luke–Acts (JSNTSup 54: Sheffield: JSOT, 1991) 18–46.

9In the NICNT.


11As in my dictionary article; cf. Ewert, et al.
useful, it has the distinct disadvantage of requiring an index to locate a discussion of the texts themselves, and if the exegetical discussion is lengthy, as at times it must be, then the flow of the presentation tends to get lost in the exegetical detail. Not only so, but all too often the exegetical discussions are not lengthy, and one is often left wondering how the conclusions were reached. The second approach is to analyze all the texts in their canonical order and simply let them speak for themselves, as much as that is exegetically possible. H. B. Swete followed this approach; but this leaves the reader with simply a presentation of textual data with scarcely any significant conclusions as to how the pieces fit together in Paul’s thinking.

This book combines these two approaches. Part I (Analysis) offers a systematic, detailed exegesis of the relevant passages in their assumed chronological order. But this is not a full-scale commentary. As with all proper exegesis, the first concern has to do with what the text meant in its original historical-literary context. But in each case the emphasis is especially on the significance of the Spirit-language or phenomena in these texts. Part II (Synthesis) offers a theological and practical elaboration of the aforementioned article, now radically rewritten, and with the opportunity to refer directly to the exegetical bases of the conclusions as they are argued in Part I. Hence another reason for the book: The New Testament scholar in me experienced no little frustration in offering conclusions, demanded by the dictionary format, without being able adequately to justify—or explain—their exegetical basis.

The reader should consider Part I as the exegetical basis for Part II: at all times the conclusions in Part II are what (the terribly long) Part I is aiming at. I have no illusions that anyone will read the book through in its entirety. Hopefully, however, the reader will want to read in and around Part I, since the texts themselves form the basis for everything, and there is occasional theologizing going on there as well.

**Finding the Elusive “Center”**

Before turning to the texts, one further introductory word about Pauline theology is necessary. There has been a long debate in scholarship as to what constitutes the “heart” of Pauline theology. The traditional view, fostered by the Reformers and perpetuated by generations of Protestants, is that “justification by faith” is the key to Paul’s theology. This view emphasizes Christ’s historical act of redemption and its appropriation by the believer through faith. The inadequacy of such a view should be apparent to anyone carefully reading Paul’s letters. Not only

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12For a helpful overview of this debate, especially in its more recent expressions, see J. Plevnik, “The Center of Pauline Theology,” *CBQ* 61 (1989) 461–78.
does it focus on one metaphor of salvation to the exclusion of others, but such a focus fails to throw the net broadly enough to capture all of Paul’s theological concerns.

In response to this, others have sought this center in Paul’s “mystical experience of being in Christ.” This view shifts the focus from Christ’s historical work and its appropriation by the believer to the believer’s (especially Paul’s) ongoing experience of Christ. While in some ways this serves as a corrective to the traditional view, most contemporary Pauline scholars have recognized the inadequacy of both of these somewhat limiting approaches.

It is my conviction that the reason the center is so “elusive” is that Paul’s theology covers too much ground for one to simplify it into a single phrase. It would seem far better for us to isolate the essential elements of his theology that lie at the very heart of matters for Paul and around which all other concerns cluster. In such a view, at least four items must be included:

- The *church* as an eschatological community, which comprises the new covenant people of God;
- The *eschatological framework* of God’s people’s existence and thinking;
- Their being constituted by God’s eschatological *salvation* effected through the *death and resurrection of Christ*;
- Their focus on *Jesus* as Messiah, Lord, and Son of God.

To put this another way:

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

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14Cf. Plevnik, “Center,” 477–78; but without mention of the Spirit!
Summary. Through the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus, our Lord, a gracious and loving God has effected eschatological salvation for his new covenant people, the church, who now, as they await Christ’s coming, live the life of the future by the power of the Spirit.

If this is a correct assessment of things Pauline (and the rest of the New Testament, for that matter), then one might distill all of this still further. On the one hand, it seems impossible to understand Paul without beginning with *eschatology* as the essential framework of all his theological reflection; on the other hand, *salvation in Christ* is the essential concern within that framework. Salvation is "eschatological" in the sense that final salvation, which still awaits the believer, is already a present reality through Christ and the Spirit. It is "in Christ" in the sense that what originated in God was effected historically by the death and resurrection of Christ, and is appropriated experientially by God’s people through the work of the Holy Spirit—who is also the key to Christian life “between the times,” until the final consummation at Christ’s *parousia*. All of this to say, then, that any understanding of Paul that does not recognize the crucial role of the Spirit in his theology quite misses Paul’s own concerns and emphases.

Thus in the theological chapters in Part II, we will devote separate chapters to the Spirit’s role in Paul’s eschatology, his theology proper, his soteriology, and his ecclesiology—the theological words for his understanding of history and time. God, salvation, and church. And all the time, we will keep an eye open toward the issues of continuity and discontinuity, since it is not possible to understand the Spirit in Pauline theology without recognizing that for Paul the coming of the Spirit was God’s fulfillment of the promised new covenant.

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