


PREFACE

This book has had a checkered history. It is the book I had hoped to write some years ago at the invitation of Hendrickson Publishers, when they approached me to “expand slightly” the article on the Holy Spirit in the Pauline letters that appeared in the *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988). To my great surprise I discovered while writing this article that there was no book available on this subject. So I set out to write a book that would fill this gap.

But I was also anxious to support the conclusions set forth in the dictionary article. So I decided that I needed to give full and careful exegesis to every Pauline text that mentioned the Spirit or the Spirit’s activity. The result, *God’s Empowering Presence* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994; henceforth *GEP*), was a massive tome, full of (necessary) detail and careful argumentation.

Thus the first go around resulted in a book targeted primarily for scholars and pastors, and attempted to bring some balance in our presentations of Pauline theology. Even though broad lip service has been paid to the Spirit’s rather significant role in Pauline life and thought, New Testament scholarship in general and Pauline scholars in particular have greatly marginalized that role. I wrote *GEP* in part to address that situation.

What led to this presentation of the material has been my fear that Paul’s own urgencies—as I perceive them—might have been buried under either the sheer weight of the first book or the catalogue-like presentation of the theology in the final four chapters.

This book attempts to make that material more accessible to a wider audience. It is not simply the “big book” reprinted without

the over seven hundred pages of exegesis. Rather, even though most of the content that appears here is from *GEP*, I have largely rewritten and reordered it so that my own urgencies are more clearly in focus. For the exegetical basis of much that appears here, the reader is regularly referred to the appropriate pages of *GEP*.

All of this has been helped along the way by three people. First, Patrick Alexander of Hendrickson Publishers, who edited the first book, has persistently encouraged me to take the time to write this one. Second, Chris Armstrong was asked by Hendrickson to do an initial rewrite of chapters 1 and 12–16 of *GEP* in order to make the material more reader friendly. His suggestive rewriting has served as the basis for much of this book. Third, Wendy Zoba of *Christianity Today* pursued the possibility of my condensing the conclusions of *GEP* into a magazine-length article. In attempting to do so, I finally came to terms with my urgencies and priorities for the present volume.

To give the reader an idea as to what drives this book, I here spell out those urgencies (slightly modified from the form I first presented to Wendy):

- a. The bottom line is something that is probably picked up only at the end of *GEP*, namely, the generally ineffective witness and perceived irrelevancy of the church in Western culture. Here, it seems to me, is where the real difference between Paul and us emerges, where in a culture similar to ours the early believers seem to have been more effective than we are. I am convinced this is due in large part to their experience of the reality of the Spirit's presence.
- b. This is the concern, then, that makes me uncomfortable with the sometimes either/or approach to the Spirit (between "gifts" and "fruit") that appears to mark much of contemporary Christianity. The Spirit was an empowering presence for the early church, and power had to do with fruit, witness, and gifts.
- c. Crucial to this experience was the early church's understanding of the Spirit as the fulfillment of Jewish hopes of the return of the divine presence (hence the utter importance of the temple imagery in Paul). What this meant for early Christians was that the Spirit was not only the personal presence of God in and among them (both individually and corporately) but that their understanding of God had to be broadened so as to become trinitarian. Although he did not use this kind of

language, Paul's new understanding of existence (as being in Christ) was thus fully trinitarian at its core.

d. Equally crucial to the experience of the Spirit was the early church's self-understanding as "thoroughly eschatological," in the "already/not yet" sense. The first believers really believed that the future had begun, being attested by the gift of the outpoured Spirit, who also served as the guarantee of the future consummation.

e. At the heart of this new understanding was their perception of themselves as the newly constituted people of God. The goal of salvation in Christ, the core of Pauline theology, was that God should create "a people for his name." And the gift of the eschatological Spirit (the Spirit who served as the evidence that the future had come and the guarantee of its consummation) lies at the heart of such salvation. Central to their new understanding was that one now entered the people of God individually—through faith in Christ and especially through the experienced reality of the Spirit.

f. Although persons individually became members of the people of God, the goal was not simply to fit individuals for heaven but to create a people who by the power of the Spirit lived out the life of the future (the life of God himself) in the present age. The "fruit of the Spirit," therefore, while effected through individual participation, has primarily to do with the life of the community—as does Paul's ethics in general.

g. The "doxological Spirit," who is now the key player in the worship of the newly constituted people of God, also gifts the people so that both in their gifting as such and in the diversity of that gifting, the whole body will be built up to live its new eschatological existence while believers await the final coming of God.

This personal, powerful, experience of the eschatological Spirit not only transformed them individually but made them effective in their being the people of the good news in pagan Greco-Roman culture. And this is why I think they had the better of it, and why we would do well to recapture something of that reality.

This earlier communication of my concerns has served as the basic outline for what follows.

I need to thank four others who read the entire manuscript and offered many helpful suggestions to improve the content and to make it more reader friendly: my present teaching assistant, Dean Pinter, who also created the Scripture index; my daughter—and present student at Regent College—Cherith

Nordling; my son Mark, who read it through the eyes of a pastor for the sake of his people; and especially my wife, Maudine, who patiently worked through the whole to remove some of the “fat” and the “professorial talk,” and whose own turns of phrase I borrowed from time to time. I gladly dedicate it to her, my wonderful friend and companion, in this our fortieth anniversary year.

A few further notations about unusual usages, derived from my work on *GEP*, should also help the reader.

First, despite some (expected) objections, I continue to base my theology of Paul on all thirteen of the canonical letters attributed to him. Those who have objected have yet to do so in a way that convinces me to do otherwise.

Second, most lists of references follow what I perceive as the chronological order of these letters: 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 Timothy, Titus, 2 Timothy.

Third, translations that are not noted (NIV, NRSV, etc.) are my own, although at times I have only slightly altered existing translations.

Fourth, in chapter 2 of *GEP* I offered a somewhat technical overview of all uses of *pneuma* (“Spirit/spirit”) and *pneumatikos* (“spiritual”) in the Pauline corpus. Two conclusions that affect translation and usage are noted here for the sake of the present reader.

a. In some places it is extremely difficult to distinguish between Paul’s own “spirit” and the role of the Holy Spirit. For example, when he says in 1 Corinthians 14:15, “my *pneuma* prays,” the context makes it certain that Paul intends something like, “the Holy Spirit prays through my own spirit.” I have translated such usages with the inelegant “S/spirit,” in order to preserve the ambiguity as well as to point to the role of the Spirit in such passages.

b. The evidence is overwhelming that Paul, quite in keeping with first-century usage, never intended *pneumatikos* to refer either to the human spirit or to some vague idea like “spiritual,” which in English serves as an adjective meaning “religious,” “nonmaterial,” “spooky,” “nonsecular,” or “godly.” In every instance in Paul its primary referent is to the Holy Spirit, even when contrasted with

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“material blessings” in 1 Corinthians 9:11. Thus I regularly capitalize this adjective (Spiritual; cf. Spirituality) when I use it in the Pauline way; “spiritual” occurs when it is used in a more contemporary way.

Fifth, one of the shortcomings of this book is that I have not tried to compare Paul with the other writers of the New Testament. My aim has been to hear Paul on his own terms. Hopefully, it will stand alongside other books of its kind: by Gary Burge (for John); James Shelton (for Luke–Acts); and Gerald Hawthorne (for Jesus).

Finally, the writing of *GEP* has transformed my own life. I have been gratified—and humbled—to learn from a goodly number of others, by letter, phone, or personal conversation, that reading the exegetical portions of that book has enriched them. I offer the present version of this material with the fervent prayer that it may have a similar effect on many who read it.

Epiphany 1996