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# Personal Ethics of the New Covenant: How Does the Spirit Change Us?

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In his first epistle the apostle John makes a profound claim for a received love to reproduce after its kind in the disciple's ethical life: 'We love because he first loved us' (1 John 4:19). The apostle Paul sounds a similar note in his own testimony to the Philippian church – it was his capture by a new love that compelled him to radically re-evaluate his life mission and the cost he was willing to pay for its prosecution (Phil. 3:8–12).<sup>1</sup> The Spirit's role in this new love for both men (Rom. 5:5; John 16:13–14; cf. 14:23) provides an opening into a question that has oddly received little attention in pneumatology, namely, how exactly does the Spirit change us? What are the psychological processes the Spirit engages to effect our ethical change? For some, disinterest in the question stems from the Church's traditional failures to sharply distinguish the Holy Spirit from the human spirit.<sup>2</sup> However, a long-held consensus in NT studies of the so-called 'material Spirit' that changes the believer sacramentally/ontically also circumvents any serious interrelationality between the Holy Spirit and the human spirit.<sup>3</sup> A recent work

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- 1 Raymond Brown argues that it was not possession of new doctrine or ecstatic mystical experiences that account for Paul the man. Phil. 3, Gal. 2:20 and 2 Cor. 5:14 show Brown that Paul's heart was moved by love he found in Jesus Christ that he had not found in Judaism. See Raymond E. Brown, 'An Appreciation of Paul,' in his *An Introduction to the New Testament*, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 446–55.
  - 2 For examples, see George S. Hendry, *The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), 96–117. From Augustine, Catholic theology tended to relegate the human spirit to our desire for the infinite, which the Holy Spirit engages in the Church. Under the *sola gratia* doctrine of the Reformers the human spirit becomes a mere point of contact for the Spirit of the Word.
  - 3 Two mutually informing assertions have dominated the scholarly landscape since the early 20th century. Both have roots in the Comparative Religions School, where the ablest articulation of pneumatology was that of H. Leisegang (*Der Heilige Geist*, 1919). The first of these assertions is that Paul considered the Spirit to be a mighty heavenly substance that entered the believer through the sacraments of baptism and Lord's Supper. Derivative of this, the second assertion is that when a believer drinks (sacramentally) of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13) the heavenly substance of πνεῦμα is incorporated in the believer and becomes a new basis of existence. Ethical transformation follows as the substantive πνεῦμα exercises power at the very root of the believer's being. Because the Holy Spirit is a physical substance, it transforms 'substance-ontologically.' The most recent iterations of this view are those of Troels

by Volker Rabens effectively engages the NT side of the deficit while at the same time offers a compelling understanding of Paul's autobiography.<sup>4</sup> The new love Paul felt speaks to the thesis Rabens argues: 'it is primarily through deeper knowledge of, and an intimate relationship with, God, Jesus Christ and the community of faith that people are transformed and empowered by the Spirit for religious-ethical life.'<sup>5</sup> In making the case for his thesis, Rabens makes concrete allusions to wider pathways throughout the canon for this relational transformational work of the Spirit. This essay aims to engage those wider pathways, specifically in the anthropology of the prophetic new covenant.

## I. New covenant anthropology and ethical change

The new covenant is the place to begin as it commands the high ground as the unitive center of the entire second testament. I. Howard Marshall's observation in his *New Testament Theology* that, 'the old covenant-new covenant distinction... seems to underlie Christian thinking on the understanding of the progress of salvation history' is both instructive and ironic on this point.<sup>6</sup> Ironic, in that Marshall articulates this foundation to early Christian thinking only in a footnote,<sup>7</sup> but instructive as he clearly taps into the meaning Jesus gave to his

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Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul: The Material Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Reviews by John Barclay and John Levison together with a reply from Engberg-Pedersen may be found in *JSNT* 33 (2011), 406–43; John M. B. Barclay, 'Stoic Physics and the Christ Event', 406–14, and John R. Levison, 'Paul in the Stoa *Poecile*,' 415–32, followed by Troels Engberg-Pedersen, 'Paul's Body: A Response to Barclay and Levison', 433–43.

4 Volker Rabens, *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul: Transformation and Empowering for Religious-Ethical Life*, WUNT 2.283 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

5 Rabens, *Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 21.

6 I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses One Gospel* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 719 n10.

7 The irony of Marshall's case is not rare. Other NT theologies having little or no significant treatment of the new covenant include those by Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, edited by Jürgen Roloff, translated by John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981); George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, edited by Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993 2nd ed); Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1986); Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1981); Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005). Although the moniker ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη for the NT corpus was originally related to the progress of redemptive history it soon 'lost its dynamic weight and became nothing more than just a title' under the weight of Origen's allegorization project (W. C. van Unnik 'Ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη – A Problem in the Early History of the Canon', in *Sparsa Collecta: The Collected Essays of W. C. Van Unnik*, NovTSup 30 [Leiden: Brill, 1980], 171; reprinted from *Studia Patristica 1* [Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1961]). Under a 'new Israel' hermeneutic, the prophetic new covenant was eviscerated of all but atonement categories. See further, Mark

own death (Matt. 26:28; cf. Luke 22:20, Mark 14:24) and Paul's service as a 'minister of the new covenant' (2 Cor. 3:6). What the prophets had foretold for Israel, and indeed the world through Israel, set the stage for *all* that was to come in the person of Jesus Christ.

On the question of a relational transformative process in personal ethics as Rabens has argued for Paul, the prophesied new covenant also commends itself to further reflection. To begin, the new covenant continues God's practice of defining his *relationship* to human beings through covenants.<sup>8</sup> The new covenant of course comes in contrast to an *old* covenant (Jer. 31:31–32). And the old covenant, which Israel broke, is itself a manifestation of the fundamental relationship between God and all of the families of the earth expressed in the covenant cut with Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3).<sup>9</sup> Covenants between God and human beings did not begin with Abraham, however, as early narratives in Genesis note Noah also as head to God's covenant with humanity (Gen. 6:18). Indeed, the pattern of God using covenants to define his relationship with humanity since Noah has caused many to see reason to assert the covenant program beginning with Adam.<sup>10</sup>

Further, all covenants share a common refrain in the so-called 'covenant formula' of God having a people and he being their God. The new covenant also

Saucy, 'Canon as Tradition: The New Covenant and the Hermeneutical Question', *Them* 36.2 (2011), 216–37.

- 8 Most recently on the meaning of covenant in biblical theology, see now Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 129–46, and Scott J. Hafemann, 'The Covenant Relationship', in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology*, edited by Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 20–65; and Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT 23 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007). See also the sources cited by Petrus J. Gräbe, *New Covenant New Community: The Significance of Biblical and Patristic Covenant Theology for Contemporary Understanding* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2006), 1–3, 14–57, who notes the particular significance of Rolf Rendtorff's work, *Die 'Bundesformel': eine exegetisch-theologische Untersuchung*, SBS 160 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1995) for advancing the centrality of the covenant theme to the OT through his study of the interrelationship of the covenant and other significant OT motifs.
- 9 The Abrahamic root of the old and new covenants is set forth by Hafemann, 'The Covenant Relationship', in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology*, 28–34. Walter Kaiser has connected the promise and the covenant program especially in his work *Toward and Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 55–69. See also Thomas Edward McComiskey, *The Covenants of Promise* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 15–58; and Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 77–81. Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2 vols (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 2:59.
- 10 Jeffrey J. Niehaus, 'Covenant: An Idea in the Mind of God', *JETS* 52 (2009), 231–33; Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1984); William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1984), 26–27; and Eugene Merrill, 'A Theology of the Pentateuch', *Biblical Theology of the OT* (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 23.

reiterates this divine desire (e.g., Jer. 31:33), but different from the older covenant the nature of the relationship between God and his people is also changed. Whereas in the older covenant the relationship between God and his people was mediated with a Temple system guarded by the purity code, in the new age that system is withdrawn and access for relationship with God becomes *unmediated*.<sup>11</sup> The prophets' words, 'And they shall not teach again each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me', as Dumbrell notes, are the harbinger of the day when those whose task it was to call Israel to know the Lord – i.e., the priesthood – would be no more. Indeed as this was also the prophets' role to the nation, Jeremiah is announcing the obsolescence of his own office in the coming new covenant age!<sup>12</sup> Thus, when the final expression of the 'covenant formulary' arrives in the new creation of Rev. 21:3, the unmediated relationship of God and humanity that is the *summum bonum* of the biblical narrative is a new covenant reality.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, while covenants in themselves are inherently relational artifacts and the new covenant foresaw the end of *mediated relationality*, in its own advance over the older covenant, the new covenant specifically offers the means to effect ethical change in its members. A *new enablement* is indeed where most place the locus of the new covenant's *novum*.<sup>14</sup> This enablement may be detected in both polarities of the indicative/imperative axis. From the divine side – the indicative – the new covenant routinely records God's own initiative to guarantee our adherence to the covenant's stipulations. Unlike the covenant that Israel broke

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11 'The Temple supplied to purity its importance of purity in the religious life. As the Temple signified divine favor, and as the cult supplied the nexus between Israel and God, so purity, associated so closely to both, could readily serve as an image of either divine favor or man's loyalty to God. From that fact followed the assignment of impurity to all that stood against the Temple, the cult, and God: idolatry first of all... All rites of purification aimed at one goal: to permit participation in the cult' (J. Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism* [Leiden: Brill, 1973], 15, 118).

12 William J. Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning: Revelation 21–22 and the Old Testament* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001; reprint of 1985 ed.), 92–93.

13 On the relationality inherent to the covenant formulary, see Rentdorff, *Die Bundesformel*. John Coe explores the biblical basis for our intrinsic relationality and for union with God as the *telos* of human life through the Spirit's work (John H. Coe, 'The Person as Spirit: Beyond Relationality to Union', in John H. Coe and Todd W. Hall, *Psychology in the Spirit: Contours of a Transformational Psychology* [Downers Grove: IVP, 2010], chapter 13). See also John Coe, 'Beyond Relationality to Union: Musings Toward a Pneumadynamic Approach to the Personality and Psychopathology', *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 18 (1999), 114–17. The presence of God with his people is a motif effectively explored by Samuel Terrier, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a new Biblical Theology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2000; reprint of 1978 ed.).

14 See Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, AB 21B (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 470, and sources cited there. Israel's failure to keep the Law is Paul's chief criticism of the old era and suggests that a new enablement is the provision of the messianic age. See Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 527 and sources cited there.

(Jer. 31:32), in the new covenant, God himself asserts, 'I will *cause you to walk* in My statutes' (Ezek. 36:27). But not only is the divine initiative readily visible here, but most significantly, the preceding clause to this assertion provides the divine means to this obedience on our part: 'I will put My Spirit within you' (36:27).

As the 'central miracle of the coming age,' as Eichrodt describes it, the coming of the Spirit naturally engages the question of the divine action in our ethics.<sup>15</sup> This is the *what* of personal ethics in the new covenant age, and there is much agreement by the NT authors for the Spirit's role in both our definitive and progressive sanctification (2 Thess. 2:13; Gal. 5:22, 23; Rom. 5:5; 8:4; etc.). The *how* of the Spirit's work, which is more to the point of this essay, and where the imperative pole of the sanctification axis engages, begins in the new covenant's promise of a specific work on the human heart. The divine promise 'I will give you a *new heart*' (Ezek. 36:26); or '*My law...* on their heart I will write it' (Jer. 31:33); or that 'I will put the *fear of Me* in their hearts' says God (Jer. 32:40); and finally, that members of the new covenant will have 'a heart to *know Me*' (Jer. 24:7), all connect the Spirit's work in the human heart with the magisterial themes of Israel's wisdom and prophets for relationship with Yahweh. Yet knowing the Lord, fearing the Lord and living in the Lord's *torah* way are incumbent upon us in Scripture: these are the sum of the wisdom that we bind on our heart (Prov. 6:21); they are knowledge that we direct our heart to (Prov. 23:19); and they are the love that we are told to live from our heart (Deut. 6:5). All of this was told to Israel, and indeed, Israel's religion was to be a heart-relationship with Yahweh,<sup>16</sup> but without divine enablement the results were limited results in personal, and by extension national, ethics. Nevertheless, as we leave the OT, the script has been written for what we are about to meet in the New. The Spirit will be the immediate cause of a new obedience *from the heart*. This obedience will issue from the context of (new) covenant relationality. But what does this all look like in the pages of the NT? What are the psychological processes that the Spirit funds in our heart to effect our working out of the indicative of our salvation? This is the subject for our further consideration.

## II. The Spirit and the heart's love

Paul's words to the Corinthians in chapter two of the first epistle provide the paradigm for unpacking the Spirit's psychological work in a relational-transformation project: 'Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us (χαρισθέντα) by God' (2:12). Defending the authority and content of his preaching, Paul offers a foundational description of the Spirit's work with the human spirit.<sup>17</sup> As we will

15 Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2:59.

16 Dumbrell, *End of the Beginning*, 91–92, and Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 468, discuss the religion of the heart as the ideal that Israel had always been called to realize.

17 One need not limit the reference of the verse only to the Spirit's inspiration of an apostle who is bringing *revelation*. The Spirit's illumination of all believers is certainly

see, the Spirit's plying grace (χάρις) to our heart appears to be the mechanism of the relational-transformation project. But before we take up these matters, some other background issues will be necessary in this section. They are taken up in the next point.

### *1. The intrinsic relationality of the human heart and the divine spirit*

The fundamental relationality of covenants is an important context for a relational transformation ethic in the new covenant, but the intrinsic relational nature of the Spirit and human beings is what really commends the relational paradigm as the biblical means to ethical transformation. That we are made for relationship suggests that it is by relationships that we are changed.

The case for an intrinsic human relationality begins in our creation as the image of God. The complex unity that is the image of God according Gen. 1:27 ('in the image of God he created them: male and female he created them') along with the capacity to receive the divine address seen in verse 28 ('and God *said to them*') show the two primary dimensions of human relationality.<sup>18</sup> Towards one another and God, human beings are unique in their ability for relationship through the capacity for self-determination (freedom) and self-consciousness.<sup>19</sup> In the image of God we discover that we are a 'radical *Mitsein*' (a being-with) created for face-to-face relationship and that as such we have a relational end

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in view as Paul appeals to this work of the Spirit to confirm him and his message to his hearers (Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994], 102–03; and Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 262–63). Although Rabens makes little use of the passage in his work on Pauline ethics, James Loder in his relational theology considered 1 Cor. 2 the *locus classicus* of the inter-relationality of the Spirit to the human spirit. Loder, nevertheless develops his understanding in the Spirit's searching activity of verse 11 (James Loder and W. Jim Niedhardt, *The Knight's Move: The Relational Logic of the Spirit in Science and Theology* [Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1992], 46–49). Badcock and Welker likewise regard 1 Cor. 2 as the central text for theologically understanding any experience of the Spirit (Gary D. Badcock, *Light of Truth & Fire of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997]; cited by Kenneth E. Kovacs, *The Relational Theology of James Loder* [New York: Peter Lang, 2011], 104 n283; Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, translated by John F. Hoffmeyer [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994], 331).

18 Karl Barth's discussion of the image of God as face-to-face relationality is still classic (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3.1 [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958], 183–206, 211). See also Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis*, translated by David G. Preston (Leicester: IVP, 1984), 95–97, for discussion of human relationality in the image. The two dimensions of human *Mitsein* are also reflected in Jesus's summary of God's *torah* instruction for our life: 'You shall love the Lord your God, and your neighbor as yourself' (Matt. 22:37–39).

19 See the discussion by Coe of the meaning of the image of God for human relationality, 'The Person as Spirit: Personal Identity, Natures, Freedom and Relationality', in *Psychology in the Spirit*, 212–33.

goal in union with God.<sup>20</sup>

The *imago Dei* parallels another radical uniqueness of human beings: the function of the heart. As the central biblical concept for the inner psychological life – more than one thousand occurrences – ‘heart’, just as the image of God, is never used of other animal life. Probably best seen as a reference to the organ of life or the location where ‘I’ am, the heart is both the treasure house and processing center of all thinking, willing and feeling.<sup>21</sup> It is the truest expression of our personal identity, reflecting us as water reflects face (Prov. 27:19). From the heart ‘flow the issues of life’ (Prov. 4:23). Although our thinking is the primary referent in Scripture, the heart is more than our thinking. It knows, remembers, and directs our life at deeper levels than cognition. Thus, it is not ultimately semantic, and as Scripture would say it is deep to us and not easily engaged or known (Ps. 64:6; Prov. 14:10, 13). Psychologists refer to this deeper level experience as ‘gut-level’ knowledge and ‘implicit memory’ that processes and records all of our encounters with others.<sup>22</sup> *Attachment filters* that we develop in infancy are sub-semantic patterns in our heart that determine how we experience relationships. They govern a ‘deeper form of emotional communication’ at the center of our connection to God and others.<sup>23</sup>

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20 Coe, *Psychology in the Spirit*, 232, 261–70; Hall, *ibid.*, 234–35; so also Coe, ‘Beyond Relationality to Union,’ 109–28. Dunn’s summary of Paul’s theology as *relational* – ‘with humankind in relation to God, with men and women in their relationships with each other, and subsequently with Christ as God’s response to the human plight’ – matches the tenor of all of Scripture (James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 53).

21 The heart stands as the center of the Bible’s anthropological and ethical concepts (Hans Walter Wolf, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, translated by Margaret Kohl [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1974], 40; John Laidlaw, *The Bible Doctrine of Man* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1879], 90–93; Franz Delitzsch, *A System of Biblical Psychology* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977; reprint of 1899 T & T Clark ed.], 292–97; and now Robert Saucy, *Minding the Heart: The Way of Spiritual Formation* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013], 30–46). Scripture does not constitute human beings a ‘heart’ like they are ‘flesh,’ ‘spirit,’ or ‘soul’.

22 Todd Hall, *Psychology in the Spirit*, 246–50. The relatively new discipline of neurocardiology provides physiological grounds for the heart’s connection to our processing of implicit knowledge. J. Andrew Armour’s seminal work documents the complex neuronal processing and memory capabilities of the intrinsic cardiac nervous system, indicating that the heart/brain can process information and make decisions about its control independent of the central nervous system. See J. Andrew Armour and Jeffrey L. Ardell, *Neurocardiology: Anatomical and Functional Principles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3–19; and *The Nervous System and the Heart*, edited by Gert J. Ter Horst (New York: Humana, 2010). According to Delitzsch, the findings of modern neurocardiology were being addressed nearly 200 years ago also on the grounds of the heart’s nervous system. See the fascinating discussion in the section ‘Heart and Head’ (Delitzsch, *System of Biblical Psychology*, 292–313).

23 Todd Hall, *Psychology in the Spirit*, 243. Hall explains the process for the formation and function of attachment filters in our relationships: ‘As our brain processes our relational experiences and encodes these in gut-level memory, it searches for

The image of God that establishes the relationality of the human heart also speaks to the relationality of its archetype – God, particularly God in the person of the Holy Spirit. With the beginning of the Church's systematic reflection on the Spirit in the fourth century, the Spirit's identity as the 'go-between-God' has defined his relationality within the godhead and toward the creation. As the Trinitarian person who proceeds in a unique way from the Father and who 'searches the very mind of God' (John 15:26; 1 Cor. 2:10), the Spirit is God who forms the relationship between the Father and the Son, revealing each to the other.<sup>24</sup> In this way the Spirit uniquely executes the fundamental being-in-relationship center of God's nature advanced by Athanasius and the Cappadocian theologians. In this theological synthesis, being personal is not a quality to be added on to the nature of God, but living in relationship is the very center of God's essence.<sup>25</sup> The Spirit's own relationality thus appears to provide the means for the other Trinitarian persons to apply their relationality to each another and the creation itself.<sup>26</sup>

## 2. *Grace and the heart's love*

The intrinsic relationality of both the human and the divine persons sets the stage now for exploring the nature of their inter-relationality according to the

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patterns or themes so that we don't have to start from scratch to make sense of familiar situations each time we encounter them. Our brain is an "anticipating machine". Over time, experiences in our attachment relationship that are similar in terms of their subjective sense of meaning, get chunked together and function as *attachment filters* – expectancy models that infants develop by the end of the first year. As the brain continues to look for patterns in our experiences, the meaning it tags to our experience get run through these attachment filters. In other words our attachment filters bias how we experience relationships automatically and without our even knowing it' (Hall, *Psychology in the Spirit*, 239, citing Daniel J. Siegel, *The Developing Mind* [New York: Guilford, 1999]). Attachment filters form the basis for Robert Hinde's conclusions that 'what we are is determined at least in part by the relationships we have had' (Robert A. Hinde, *Towards Understanding Relationships*, European Monographs in Social Psychology 18 [New York: Academic, 1979], 14, 273; cited by Rabens, *Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 130–31).

24 Useful assessments of the church's reflection on the Spirit can be found in Loder and Niedhardt, *Knight's Move*, 20–27; T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 191–251, and Bernd Oberdorfer, 'The Holy Spirit – A Person? Reflection on the Spirit's Trinitarian Identity', in *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism*, edited by Michael Welker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 27–46.

25 Paul Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation: The Christian Idea of Atonement* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 163; cited by Kovacs, *Relational Theology of James Loder*, 106. Moltmann states: '[The Spirit's] personhood becomes comprehensible only from that which the Spirit is in relation to the Father and the Son. For personhood is always being-in-relationship' (Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992], 11).

26 Toward the creation the Spirit is the Applicator of the will of the Father expressed in the Son, the manifestation of the presence of God (Wilf Hildebrandt, *An Old Testament Theology of the Spirit of God* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994], 33).

central text of 1 Cor. 2:12. Paul, we recall, describes the mission of the Spirit as one giving us apprehension of ‘things freely given to us by God’ (NASB, Gk. χαρισθέντα), or as we might say, ‘things of grace’.<sup>27</sup> The sum of the Spirit’s task toward the human spirit then is to enable us to know the gracious posture of God. An interesting sidebar that corroborates this mission is the observance by Pauline scholars that for Paul “grace” is a term almost synonymous with “Spirit”.<sup>28</sup> But what is this grace the Spirit plies to our heart? Again, from Paul grace does not seem to be merely *any* blessing or benefit bestowed by God, but χάρις is always rooted in the work of Christ, specifically, the work of Christ on the cross. It is ‘grace as event’ as we have for example in Gal. 2:21. In this verse ‘the grace of God’ (χάριυν τοῦ θεοῦ) functions in parallel to ‘Christ died’: ‘For I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.’<sup>29</sup>

This work of the Spirit to bring us the cruciform work of Christ as the χάρις of God corresponds to other well-known elements of the Spirit’s new covenant function. In John’s Gospel, the fundamental mission of the Spirit as the *remembrancer* of Christ (John 14:26) not only points to the utterly unoriginal nature of his work, as Hendry says,<sup>30</sup> but also the substance of his teaching and reminding the believer. As the presence of the Spirit was to be the presence of Christ himself, the Spirit who brings apprehension of the grace of God (Christ) to the believer’s heart is a personal, relational work.<sup>31</sup> To bring us grace is to bring us relationship with the person of Christ. Similarly, when Paul speaks of the content of the mystery he proclaims as ‘Christ in you the hope of glory’ (Col. 1:27), the refrains of the new covenant hope for the heart, specifically for the Law written on the heart, should not be missed. W. D. Davies makes the point that, ‘the inwardness of the new covenant of Jeremiah’s hope is achieved for Paul through the indwelling Christ, the new Torah “written in the heart.” The Law within him is Christ in him; the indwelling Christ has replaced the old Torah written on tablets of stone and has become a Torah written within.’<sup>32</sup> Thus the nexus of the new covenant, the human heart and the Spirit’s work bringing us the grace of Christ’s cross to the believer comes full circle.

But how does this nexus engage the human heart in a *relational* transformation? Part of the answer is found the way the NT writers summarize the new cov-

27 ‘The verb (χαρίζομαι) may deliberately allude to the “grace” (χάρις) of God, or the “gift” (χάρισμα) of salvation (as Rom. 6:23); its neuter plural form (“what things have been freely bestowed”) reflects the neuter plurals of v. 9’ (Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 103).

28 James Dunn, ‘Towards the Spirit of Christ,’ in *The Work of the Spirit*, Welker (ed.), 19.

29 Other passages here would be 2 Cor. 8:9; Rom. 5:15; Eph. 1:6–7. See the section ‘13.2 Grace as event’ in James Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 319–23.

30 Unoriginal in the sense that the Spirit re-presents the truth that is in Christ, who is the truth (John 16:13; cf. Hendry, *Holy Spirit in Christian Theology*, 23–24).

31 Hendry, *Holy Spirit in Christian Theology*, 22.

32 W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980 4th ed.), 226.

enant's nexus as 'the love of God poured into our hearts' by the Spirit. In Romans chapter five, the key elements of the new covenant's Spirit/heart/grace nexus are specifically associated with God's love and grace. Namely, the *love* of the Father is demonstrated in the cross of Christ (5:8) and the new covenant Spirit brings that gracious posture to our apprehension, pouring it into our hearts (5:5).<sup>33</sup> Concomitant to the positive apprehension of divine love in this text is also the Spirit's granting a deep apprehension of our stark need of God's love. Understanding that one is 'helpless' (6), 'ungodly' (6), a 'sinner' (8), and an 'enemy of God' (10) is also part of the Spirit's work revealing grace.<sup>34</sup> In total then, Paul's reveling in the love of Christ, who gave himself up for him (Gal. 2:20) and which he can never lose (Rom. 8:35ff.) was evidence of the new covenant's work poured into his heart.

The other side of the equation we are not to miss here is that while the new covenant provides the means of delivering God's love to us in the Spirit, the human heart itself is created and naturally tuned to respond to grace. Jesus's words about the heart's love show this to be true. It is the natural condition of the heart to love what loves it – 'sinners' themselves are proof of this (Luke 6:32; cf. Matt. 5:46). The heart is 'strengthened by grace', not performance of law-keeping, the writer of the Hebrews adds (13:9).<sup>35</sup> In like manner, Paul's assertion that we always do what we think is good for us because we finally, deep down, love ourselves (Eph. 5:29 – 'no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it') is a statement about the heart's inherent openness to what it perceives as good for it.<sup>36</sup> Of course, the unregenerated heart's fundamental love is turned in

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33 In accord with Learning Theory, Gerd Thiessen considers love as a new 'reinforcement system' in Paul's theology that 'completely overcomes the reinforcement system based upon domination. Only love has emancipated itself from all external authorities, consequences and models, from all the extrinsic reinforcements whose functioning is inconceivable without power' (Gerd Thiessen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology*, translated by John P. Galvin [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987], 373). A key component for the Infusion-Transformation view of the material Spirit is misreading language like 'pouring' as literal rather than metaphorical. Rabens's analysis of metaphorical language in the OT and Judaism in relation to the Spirit shows such a view methodologically untenable because it draws conclusions from texts about areas those texts were not addressing (Rabens, *Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 43–54).

34 Coe discusses the psychopathology of our natural heart condition apart from God in Christ, which the Spirit also reveals to us (Coe, 'Beyond Relationality', 117–23).

35 See Ellingworth, who notes that the proximity of verse 8 suggests 'the grace of Christ, or the grace of God in Christ (cf. 13:25)' in contrast 'with a cultus in which salvation, or at least "strengthening" is offered through ritual meals' (Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 707). Hughes's comment is also poignant to anthropology: 'Food goes into the stomach for the strengthening of the body; but only *grace* strengthens *the heart*, that is the vital center of man's being and personality and the source of his conduct and character' (Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977], 574; italics original).

36 That perception, of course, can be deceived and twisted so that self-destruction is

upon itself – deceived to believing that the love of God in Christ is of no benefit, but the Spirit's work in the new covenant changes this perception.<sup>37</sup> Apprehending God's gracious posture in Christ, the born-again heart takes in to itself its Lover and now has a new dominating master or treasure. The result is new ethical behavior.

John takes up this theme in the first epistle. Loving behavior comes from experiencing the love of God: 'And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us' (1 John 4:16a). As Marshall notes, this is not merely speaking 'of the love for us shown by God in the cross but also of the personal experience of his love in our hearts.'<sup>38</sup> Thus, John writes that the one who is born of God knows God's love and simply *loves* (1 John 4:7, cf. 19 – we love because [God] first loved us). The new heart of the new covenant *behaves* differently because it has understood by the Spirit that God loves it. Unlike Israel whose relationship with God was dominated by holiness enforced by the mediating Temple cult, and where love was configured more to the national identity, the Spirit in the new covenant pours the love of God to deepest level of the *individual's heart*.<sup>39</sup> There is now love for God (1 John 5:1), love for the brethren (1 John 3:14; 4:7), love for Christ (1 John 5:1), and love of practicing righteousness (1 John 2:29; 3:9). In short, because the heart has taken into itself, and has residing in it, a new love relationship, it then loves.<sup>40</sup>

somehow seen as the 'good.' Even suicide has this motive. It should also be noted that the heart's inherent self-love – at least in Eph. 5:29 – is not necessarily sinful and needing to be transcended. In this passage it is of a kin with Christ's love for his own body, the Church (Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4–6*, AB 34A [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960], 706–07).

- 37 In reference to 1 Cor. 2:6–16, Thiessen speaks of the Holy Spirit in this role as a 'consciousness-forming power' that for the believer means an expanded perception of the past ('the depth of our origin') and the future ('a new world') (Thiessen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology*, 365).
- 38 I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 221; and Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, WBC 51 (Waco: Word, 1984), 255; cited by Saucy, *Minding the Heart*, 199.
- 39 'The whole spirit of Old Testament religion was determined by the thought of God's holiness. The constant emphasis was that man, because of his weakness as a creature and his defilement as a sinful creature, must learn to humble himself and be reverent before God. Religion was "the fear of the Lord" – a matter of knowing your own littleness, of confessing your faults and abasing yourself in God's presence, of sheltering thankfully under his promises of mercy, and of taking care above all to avoid presumptuous sins. Again and again it was stressed that man must keep his place, and his distance, in the presence of a holy God. This emphasis overshadowed everything else' (J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* [Downers Grove: IVP, 1973], 183). The national character of Israel's experience of Yaweh's love is noted by Jacobs: 'There is a tension between his holiness in the OT... God's love has a different tone in the OT than the NT because it is addressed in a general way to the people as a nation' (E. Jacobs, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 110–12; cited by Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* [Downers Grove: IVP, 1981], 77 n5).
- 40 The concept of the heart's dominant love as the engine of our behavior finds support

### 3. *The Spirit's application of grace to the heart*

As we have already seen above, the role of the Spirit to bring God's gracious posture to our heart's apprehension means showing us the person and work of Christ. In John's corpus, the Spirit comes as Jesus's *alter ego*, or 'public person' as Welker says, continuing his work and still available to his disciples.<sup>41</sup> That the disciple is not orphaned (John 4:18), but still in close personal relationship with Jesus is the substance of what the Spirit's teaching and *remembrancing* consists (John 14:26).

The same relational closeness continues in Paul, as Volker Rabens has clearly set forth in his detailed treatment of two principal passages: Rom. 8:12–17 and 2 Cor. 3–4.<sup>42</sup> In Romans, the ethical imperative of putting to death the deeds of the body in verse 13 is a direct result of being led or directed by the Spirit in verse 14.<sup>43</sup> The familial and Spirit-induced cry of 'Abba' in verse 15 conveys intimacy and respect for the Father, and in verse 16 the Spirit testifies *to our spirit* – if Wallace's reading of the dative is correct<sup>44</sup> – of the believer's new relationship and identity.<sup>45</sup> This Spirit-inspired dynamic, Rabens says, presents three empowering factors which Paul presents as the *how* of ethical transformation. First, 'Spirit of sonship' (15) indicates that awareness of one's identity changing from slave to son is a means of internalizing the new values of son. Second, personal experience of the intimate Father-child relationship – being guided (14) and crying out (15) – completes the knowledge-experience tandem of ethical transformation. Third, the Church's collective experience of the Spirit comes to the fore in the language of co-heirs (17), children (16), and brothers (12), as an important means the Spirit uses to empower transformation.<sup>46</sup> All three factors confirm that the means to the believer's ethical transformation is that he 'has been brought into the sphere of Jesus's own intimate and obedient relationship to God'.<sup>47</sup>

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in the thought of Augustine: 'A body by its weight tends to move towards its proper place... My weight is my love. Wherever I am carried, my love is carrying me' (Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by Henry Chadwick [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992], XII, xi [10]; cited in Saucy, *Minding the Heart*, 68).

41 Welker, *God the Spirit*, 279–341.

42 Rabens, *Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, chapter 6.

43 Rabens, *Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 215.

44 Wallace argues effectively that τῷ πνεύματι ἡμῶν is a dative indirect object ('the Spirit himself testifies *to our spirit*') instead of an associative dative ('the Spirit himself testifies *with our spirit*'). See Daniel B. Wallace, 'The Witness of the Spirit in Romans 8:16: Interpretation and Implications', in *Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit*, edited by Daniel B. Wallace and M. James Sawyer (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2005), 37–51. However, many including Rabens, see the associative meaning.

45 Rabens, *Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 225–36. See also here Robert Jewett, *Romans, Hermeneia* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 497–501.

46 The corporate experience and sharing of the filial relationship with God as a means of the Spirit is also noted by Rabens from Gal. 4:6 in the movement from 'you are sons' to 'the Spirit... into *our hearts*, crying, "Abba"...' (Rabens, *Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 235–36).

47 Rabens, *Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 234. Dunn explains that the Spirit is always

In 2 Cor. 3:18ff,<sup>48</sup> a cognitive/experiential paradigm for ethical transformation appears as the new covenant Spirit brings both proper understanding of the Gospel – ‘unveiling the face’,<sup>49</sup> and personal encounter with God (‘beholding the glory of the Lord’) – to the human heart.<sup>50</sup> Paul’s use of the Moses narrative from the Old Testament earlier in the chapter yields the conclusion that ‘Moses is transformed upon speaking with God and encountering his glory.’<sup>51</sup> Likewise for the believer, the result of the Spirit’s enabling of the encounter with God means metamorphosis (μεταμορφόω, 3:18) – ‘to take on those attitudes and actions which correspond to the way in which Christ himself lived as the “second Adam”’,<sup>52</sup> 2 Cor. 4:6 and other Pauline texts (e.g., Gal. 4:19) similarly demonstrate ethical transformation is the end in view for the one encountering God through Jesus Christ.<sup>53</sup>

The focus of the Spirit teaching and reminding the believer about a new relationship with God through Christ as the means to ethical transformation in the new covenant naturally engages two final biblical motifs. These would be the new covenant community and the divine word the Spirit uses to transform the heart. To the latter, that of the divine word, we have already noted how the Spirit brings the presence of the incarnate Christ to our hearts. To this Paul adds in Rom. 6:17 that new ethical behavior comes from a heart that is obedient *to the form of teaching* to which (the Romans) were committed (εἰς ὃν παρεδόθητε τύπον διδασκαλίας). In Israel’s wisdom, knowledge of God was ‘obedience to his will which has a content’, as Childs notes.<sup>54</sup> In concert with Romans chapter six would be Eph. 1:17–18 where the Spirit opens the heart to greater knowl-

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experienced in a ‘Christ-shaped way’, which includes Christ’s experience of sonship (James Dunn, *Pneumatology vol. 2: The Christ and the Spirit* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 78).

- 48 The key verse is 3:18: ‘But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit’ (NASB).
- 49 Rabens, *Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 177. Thiessen puts the mechanism for transformation in Freudian and Jungian terms: ‘The veil symbolizes a boundary between consciousness and the unconscious. It is eliminated in Christ. When Christ opens access to the unconscious, the aggressive power of the historical norm [i.e. the Letter of the Law] comes (negatively) to light, but (positively) Christ as the image of God develops an “archetypal” power that transforms us.’ In Jung’s system, archetypes are genetically preprogrammed dispositions that are shaped or engaged by cultural or other learned influences (Thiessen, *Psychological Aspects*, 12–17; citation from 143).
- 50 Rabens, *Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 183. The centrality of the human heart to the narrative in 2 Cor. 3:2, 3, 15, and 4:6, is noted by Thiessen (*Psychological Aspects*, 143).
- 51 Rabens, *Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 186.
- 52 Scott Hafemann, *Paul, Moses and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3*, WUNT 81 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1995), 422; cited by Rabens, *Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 196.
- 53 Rabens, *Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 186.
- 54 Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 51.

edge and understanding of the revelation of God's word, and thus to himself.<sup>55</sup> God's word is powerful (Heb. 1:3), living and active (Heb. 4:12), and dynamic (Jer. 23:29; cf. 5:14). Thus it is always effective (Isa. 55:11). To engage the God-breathed word (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20–21) is to learn Christ (Eph. 4:20–21). So also as the seven churches of Rev. 2 and 3 are addressed by the living Word, each letter also concludes with the statement, 'He who has an ear to hear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches' (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). The inspired apostolic tradition of the life, ministry and passion of Jesus Christ is the instrument the Spirit uses to impact the heart.

The second instrument wielded by the Spirit in our transformation is the 'family of the new covenant' – the church.<sup>56</sup> Noted above in the familial terminology of Rom. 8, the Spirit's work to renew the individual heart and unite it to Christ also unites it to the hearts of those in Christ's body (1 Cor. 12:13). In the Spirit, we become members of one another (Rom. 12:5; Phil. 2:1) so that in the faces of our brothers and sisters our hearts also come face to face with power of the new covenant's grace of God in Christ (Eph. 4:10–16; Gal. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:8).<sup>57</sup> Paul notes that Christian brothers and sisters can be in one another's *heart* (e.g., 2 Cor. 3:2; 7:2) the same way that Christ is (Eph. 3:17). He also effectively marshals the temple metaphor to speak of the presence of God in the church (1 Cor. 6:19–20; 2 Cor. 2:14–4:6; 6:16), which also naturally entails the potential for transformation through relationship with one another. With all believers enjoying the same potential fellowship with God that Moses did, there is no barrier to a mutual relational impact and transformation.<sup>58</sup>

### III. Conclusion

The new covenant's hope for a new heart deeply impressed with the awareness of God's favor and love by the Spirit provides insight into the psychological processes that direct the disciple's transformation into the image of Christ.

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55 Lincoln notes the universal work of the Spirit in the petition of Ephesians 1: 'It is interesting that the writer does not view revelation as restricted solely to the apostles and prophets, although the revelation that came to them appears to have foundational priority and authority (cf. 2:20; 3:5). Instead, revelation continues to be given by God through the Spirit to all believers to enable them to understand the disclosure of God's secret and to show them how to live in the light of it' (Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 [Dallas: Word, 1990], 57).

56 Hafemann, 'Covenant Relationship', 59–62.

57 Rabens aptly sees spiritual gifts as the center of the community's love ethic and thus the means by which the Spirit strengthens people through intracommunal interactions (Rabens, *Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 239).

58 Commenting on 2 Cor. 3, Martin says: 'Moses' veil acted as a barrier to Israel, but the veil is removed in Christ (v. 14) and to that extent "every Christian has become a Moses"' (R. P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, WBC 20 [Dallas: Word, 1986], 71). Hafemann, notes Paul's intentional conflation of covenant formulae in Lev. 26:11–12 and Ezek. 37:27 to make the point to the Corinthians that they are 'the temple of God's Spirit' in 2 Cor. 6:16 (Hafemann, 'Covenant Relationship', 60–61).

The NT writers' reflection on this process demonstrate a consistent legacy of Israel's prophetic hope that stretches into the personal and corporate experience of Jesus's disciples today. This is because the relational transformational paradigm is rooted in the human heart's creation in the image of the tri-personal God as intrinsically relational and responsive to grace. Engaged by the personal Spirit who brings the grace of God in the face of Jesus to us, our heart answers by taking in and conforming itself to the one who loves it. The result is a process whereby believers themselves can join to work out their salvation (Phil. 2:12) as they consciously place the reality of Christ before their hearts.<sup>59</sup> The dialogic nature of our relationship with God provided in the new covenant moves in an ever-deepening spiral of knowledge that both shapes and moves our hearts. Indeed, Rabens appears to be speaking for the whole of Scripture when he writes of Paul's work and experience: 'As believers let them themselves be drawn by the Spirit into the transforming and empowering relationship with God and the community of faith and then live according to the values set forth by Paul's gospel, the depth of their relationship to God and one another will increase.'<sup>60</sup>

### Abstract

This essay explores recent discussion – primarily with Volker Rabens's *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul* – of how exactly the Holy Spirit effects ethical transformation in the new covenant's members. The essay is broken into three parts. Part one will briefly establish the prophesied new covenant *centre* of the NT. From this part two will consider the biblical anthropological matrix for ethical transformation in the domain of the believer's *heart*. Finally, part three will take up the NT writers' account of the Spirit poured into the believer's heart with an eye to the specific means the Spirit uses on the heart to effect ethical transformation. The Spirit as the minister of the grace of God *in new relationship*, as opposed to a sacramentally infused *substance*, will confirm Rabens's thesis as a good expression of Paul's teaching, and also the teaching of the greater corpus of Scripture.

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59 Although it is beyond the scope of this essay, meditation on the Word, prayer, fellowship and service to the world and one another in community would be the principal means taught in Scripture for placing the reality and person of Christ before our heart. Lois Dodds describes the synergism of the human and divine Spirit in terms of our 'Questing', 'Choosing', and 'Bonding' toward God as a key 'arch-themes' in those considered as Spirit-empowered Christians. Significantly, the major outcome of the Spirit's work in the empowered is the Primacy of Personhood theme, which Dodds describes as knowing God as a person as the basis for valuing one's own personhood and the personhood of others (Lois Dodds, 'The Role of the Holy Spirit in Personality Growth and Change', *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 18 [1999]: 129–39).

60 Rabens, *Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 252.