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## Inspired Ministry: Themes from the Letters of Paul

Kindalee Pfremer DeLong  
kdelong@pepperdine.edu

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# Inspired Ministry: Themes from the Letters of Paul

KINDALEE PFREMMER DE LONG

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O God, you are my God,  
I seek you, my soul thirsts for you;  
my flesh faints for you,  
as in a dry and weary land  
where there is no water. (Ps 63:1)

**B**ecause I have lived most of my life in the semi-arid climate of southern California, the metaphor of the desert, used by the poet in Psalm 63, is not difficult for me to imagine. I envision deeply shadowed mountains rising up out of rolling hills dotted with the muted greens and browns of resilient desert plants, sometimes framing brilliant desert sunsets. For me, the image of the desert is one of great beauty. But in Psalm 63, the desert metaphor pictures not a place but a person: a dry and weary soul fainting out of desperate thirst for the water of God. This snapshot of the thirsting soul is itself a powerful image and one I would like to suggest that we keep before us as we explore the theme of the Holy Spirit in the letters of Paul.

The Spirit plays a central role in Paul's thought.<sup>1</sup> Using the word "spirit" 146 times, Paul describes the Spirit as an immediate and particularly active presence in the lives of believers. He writes, for example, that the Spirit dwells in us, knows divine wisdom and teaches it, gives life, guides, cries out from within our hearts, transforms, intercedes, and bears godly fruit in our lives. Given Paul's great emphasis on the Spirit, a short essay such as this can only hope to offer a taste of how he describes the Spirit in his letters.<sup>2</sup> We will first sample how Paul uses the word "spirit" (*pneuma*), drawing out some of the ways that his choice of language challenges interpreters. Next, we will explore passages in four of Paul's letters that contain the highest concentration of Spirit language in Paul's writing, taking a look at how Paul writes when he decides to turn the spotlight on the Spirit, so to speak. Finally, we will ask, "How might Paul's picture of the Spirit inform more authentic ministry today?"

## **PAUL'S VOCABULARY OF THE SPIRIT**

When he writes about the Holy Spirit, Paul uses the noun "spirit" (*pneuma*) or its related adjective and adverb.<sup>3</sup> However, the word "spirit" has a number of meanings. Thus, before looking at how Paul writes about the "Holy Spirit," it will be useful to survey quickly how he uses the word *pneuma* more generally. The word itself carries five basic meanings: wind; breath; an immaterial, independent being; an inner part of the human person; or a unique element or power of God.<sup>4</sup> All five meanings appear in the New Testament and in Paul's letters, but Paul uses the last two meanings almost exclusively. Usually, when he writes "spirit," he means either a human spirit or God's Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

When Paul uses "spirit" in the human sense, *pneuma* means "that aspect of a human being which is the knowing and willing self."<sup>6</sup> This meaning seems fairly certain when Paul qualifies the word *pneuma* with a first- or second-person possessive pronoun, writing, for example, "my spirit" or "your spirit."<sup>7</sup> This is true,

too, when he writes of Timothy's spirit (2 Cor 7:13) and the spirits of prophets (1 Cor 14:32), referring in both cases to the interiors of individuals. Paul also suggests the anthropological sense of *pneuma* when he qualifies the word "spirit" with a noun. For example, he writes of "a spirit of slavery" (Rom 8:15), a "spirit of gentleness" (Gal 6:1), or a "spirit of wisdom" (Eph 1:17), signifying the inner disposition or character of a person or people, usually his audience.<sup>8</sup>

More often, however, when Paul writes "spirit," he means the divine Spirit. Bible translators distinguish between *pneuma* as human spirit and *pneuma* as divine Spirit by means of capitalization, but readers should be aware that upper and lower case letters always represent an interpretive decision on the part of the translators. In general, what does Paul mean by the divine Spirit? One dictionary defines the divine spirit as "an element or power of God." Gordon Fee, however, suggests that such a definition proves inadequate when we come to Paul's writings, for the Spirit in Paul, according to Fee, is more *personal* than the phrase "element or power" connotes. "For Paul the Spirit is not thought of as an 'it,' but as 'person.'" Keeping this suggestion in mind, we turn to several specific ways in which Paul describes the divine Spirit.

### *The Spirit of God*

One way in which Paul signifies the meaning "spirit as divine" is by associating the word *pneuma* with God. Eleven times, he uses the phrase "Spirit of God" (*pneuma theou*) or its equivalent.<sup>9</sup> He also writes of "the Spirit that is from God" (1 Cor 2:12), the "Spirit of the living God" (2 Cor 3:3), and "the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead" (Rom 8:11). And in 2 Cor 3:14-18, Paul uses the phrases "Spirit of the Lord," "the Lord is the Spirit, and "the Lord, the Spirit."<sup>10</sup>

### *The Holy Spirit*

Fifteen times, Paul signifies the divine sense of the word "spirit" by qualifying it with the adjective "holy" (*hagios*), a word generally associated with God. Four times, he uses a definite article, and 11 times, he does not.<sup>11</sup> All four cases in which he uses a definite article are best understood in context to mean the "spirit as divine" or the Holy Spirit.<sup>12</sup> When he chooses not to use a definite article, however, interpretation becomes slightly more complex.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, in at least eight of 11 cases, the meaning of Holy Spirit seems clear enough. Thus, when we find Paul writing of a spirit that is holy (regardless of the precise wording) he seems most often to mean "the Holy Spirit."

### *The Spirit (Human or Divine?)*

By far, Paul's preferred way to speak about "spirit" is to use *pneuma* alone, without qualification, which he does at least 45 times. It is striking that in one letter, Galatians, he writes often of the Spirit but never once qualifies the word "spirit" by connecting it with the words God, Christ, or holy.<sup>14</sup> By using the word "spirit" alone, Paul creates difficulties for interpreters. His style of writing forces us to ask, when we come to an unqualified use of the word *pneuma*, does Paul have in mind the human spirit or the divine Spirit? Sometimes, the context of the passage assists interpreters, such as when Paul speaks of the "Holy Spirit" in one verse and then "the Spirit" in the next (1 Cor 12:3-7) or when he writes that his audience has "received the Spirit" (Gal 3:2).

But in other cases, even careful attention to context does not prove completely decisive. Thus, for example, in Rom 12:11, in a list describing the virtues of believers, the RSV translates "aglow with the Spirit," but the NRSV translates "ardent in spirit." Elsewhere, Paul writes that the Colossians' love for him was declared "in the Spirit" (Col 1:8). Most translations capitalize "the Spirit" here, but could Paul instead mean that the Colossians loved him in their spirit (Col 1:8)? Conversely, Paul twice writes to the effect that he is absent from his audience in body but present in the spirit (1 Cor 5:3-4; Col 2:5). Most translators use the lower case "spirit" in these verses, but is it not possible that Paul asserts that he is present to his audience by means of the one Spirit who binds them all together in unity?

One last example well illustrates the problem of the shifting meanings of the word “spirit.” In 2 Cor 3:6, Paul describes God as the one who has made him competent to be a minister of the new covenant, which is “not of letter but of spirit (*pneuma*); for the letter kills, but the Spirit (*pneuma*) gives life.” The word *pneuma* occurs twice here, and has been translated as follows: spirit—spirit (KJV), Spirit—Spirit (RSV), and spirit—Spirit (NRSV). In this case, we see the translators struggling to understand Paul’s unqualified use of “spirit” in light of other parts of his writings. In other letters, the letter-spirit contrast suggests an anthropological meaning (small case), since the new covenant is located inside a human being.<sup>15</sup> However, one expects life-giving power to come not from the inner person but from the Spirit of God.<sup>16</sup>

#### *The Spirit of Christ (Human and Divine)*

Paul also describes the Spirit as the “Spirit of Christ.” In three of four passages, one might simply substitute the Spirit of God for the Spirit of Christ.<sup>17</sup> At first, this appears also to be the case in Gal 4:6, where Paul writes that God has “sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying ‘Abba, Father!’” (Gal 4:6). The sending and indwelling activities in this last passage incline toward the divine meaning (“Holy Spirit”). However, if we read this verse together with an almost parallel passage, we are directed more toward the anthropological meaning.<sup>18</sup> In Romans 8:15, Paul states that believers have received “a spirit of adoption, when we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” By “spirit” here, he seems to have in mind something like “an attitude that results from adoption.” However, this verse is surrounded by references to the Spirit of God. So, once again, we find uncertainty in the word *pneuma*.

Or rather—recalling that the human and divine come together perfectly in Jesus Christ—we might instead say that the word “spirit” serves a dual role in Gal 4:6 and Rom 8:15. Christ’s spirit (the Spirit of God’s Son) empowers our spirit of adoption, and we become the Father’s children, who are then indwelt with and led by the Holy Spirit. The shifting meanings of *pneuma* may derive from Paul’s view that in Christ, the divine Spirit has engaged with the human spirit, a reality that in turn brings the spirit of the one who turns toward Christ into contact with the Spirit of God.

#### *The One Spirit (Uniting Human and Divine)*

This interconnectedness between human spirit and divine Spirit is also conveyed by Paul’s use of the word “one” to qualify the word “spirit.” The “one Spirit” knits together the divine and human, creating an inseparable unity among God and God’s children. Paul writes that the Corinthians have become “one spirit” by being united with the Lord, so that their earthly actions affect God (1 Cor 6:17). Similarly, divine and human come together in gifts from the one Spirit that are united in a divinely inspired “body” made of human parts (1 Cor 12:3-13).

The theme of corporate unity also appears in Ephesians, where the one Spirit is depicted as having made peace between Jew and Gentile by offering both the right to speak to the Father (2:11-18) and where believers are urged to maintain this “unity of the Spirit” in a bond of peace, for “there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all (4:3-6).<sup>19</sup> The Spirit is One who connects. Through Christ, the Spirit indwells the inner person, unites believers with God, and binds them together in one body with an accord of peace.

#### *Father, Son, and Spirit (The Trinity)*

Before moving on to look at how Paul uses the theme of the Spirit in specific letters, we should pause a moment to discuss the trinitarian understanding of one God in three persons. Paul, of course, does not set forth a developed trinitarian view. However, as one explores Paul’s discussion of the Spirit, it becomes evident that Paul describes the Father, Son, and Spirit in intimate association and engaging in divine activity. Three important passages in this regard are 2 Cor 13:14, 1 Cor 12:4-6, and Eph 4:4-6.<sup>20</sup> Paul’s writings

have thus served as a significant source of inspiration for the more precise statements of trinitarian theology developed by successive generations of Christians.

### THE SPIRIT AND THE COMMUNITY OF CHRIST

For Paul, the Holy Spirit plays a highly significant, indeed central, role in the lives of believers and the community of Christ. As we have seen above, Paul describes, in varying language, the one Holy Spirit who, in close relationship with Christ and with God, gives life, dwells in the interior of believers, and unites a diverse community.<sup>21</sup> The second section of the essay will explore briefly four Pauline letters (1 & 2 Corinthians, Romans, and Galatians), examining in them how Paul describes further the work of the Spirit, who grows believers toward maturity, transforms them, and frees them to live spiritual, productive lives.

#### *Growing Up in the Spirit (1 Corinthians)*

As the letter of First Corinthians opens, Paul describes significant disunity with the community. In response, he says, "Grow up!" Paul does not mean by this command that his audience should simply "act their age." Rather, he wants them to grow from an infantile to a mature experience of the Spirit.

The divisions in Corinth seem to have developed, at least in part, from the community's strong desire to experience manifestations of spiritual power and knowledge. Accordingly, Paul's response begins with a description of their orientation toward the Spirit, which he not only accepts but applauds (1:7; 2:4-5). On the heels of this praise, however, Paul immediately begins to redirect their spirituality toward the goal of maturity. First, he reminds them that the power and wisdom of God cannot simply be equated with the world's view of strength and knowledge (1:17-31). If so, then surely knowledgeable and powerful earthly leaders would have recognized Christ. But in fact, God's power and wisdom have been hidden in the cross, masquerading as mere foolishness and scandal to those without discernment.

Next, he turns his attention to the role of the Spirit as revealer of God's wisdom. The Corinthians' goal should never be mere power or knowledge but rather true discernment. In 1 Cor 2:10-17, he argues that such ability comes only through the power of the Spirit.<sup>22</sup>

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The Spirit reveals God's wisdom, he writes, because "the Spirit searches deeply into everything" (2:10).<sup>23</sup>

Drawing an analogy with the human spirit, he continues by saying that just as the "human spirit that is within" has insight into "what is truly human," so the Spirit of God "comprehends what is truly God's" (2:11). In fact, only with the discern-

ment provided by the Spirit can believers understand "the gifts bestowed (*charizomai*) on us by God" (2:12). In other words, the manifestations (gifts) of the Spirit should go hand in hand with the understanding that the Spirit also provides. Paul continues by drawing an additional conclusion: the spiritual person (*pneumatikos*), having received the Spirit of God, can discern all the things related to God's Spirit (2:14-15).

Earlier in the letter, Paul has described his audience as having spiritual gifts (*charisma*) in abundance (1:7).<sup>24</sup> If they have such gifts, it would be reasonable to deduce that they also understand their gifts. They should comprehend "what is truly God's" and should be the "spiritual people" Paul describes.<sup>25</sup> However, Paul concludes just the reverse. He declares that he *cannot* teach them as he would spiritual people. Instead, he must address them as fleshly people (*sarkinos*), for their immaturity as infants in Christ makes it impossible for him to offer them the mature teaching of "solid food" (3:2).

If the capacity for discernment comes from the Spirit, and the Corinthians have the Spirit, it follows that Paul *should* be able to address them as spiritual people. Why can he not? He calls them fleshly people because of their divisions (1 Cor 3:3). Schisms reveal the presence of a gulf between their receipt of the Spirit and their ability to spiritually discern. This fleshly behavior shows that their *actual* level of under-

standing does not match their Spirit-empowered *capacity* for understanding. Indeed, the Spirit dwells in them (as Paul makes clear in 1 Cor 6:19) but their infighting evidences a lack of discernment that should come from the Spirit. Thus, Paul describes them as stuck in a limbo state of spiritual infancy, unable to receive additional instruction in God's wisdom.

Later in the letter, Paul returns to the theme of Spirit-empowered understanding and unity, this time in the context of his discussion of the gifts of the Spirit (12:1-14:1). As before, Paul encourages the Corinthians to seek gifts empowered and distributed by the Spirit for the common good (12:1, 14:1). The gifts he has in mind are diverse and include both manifestations of power and understanding.<sup>26</sup> Despite their variety, they all come from one source, the one Spirit (12:1-13). This single source creates unity among the gifts, a point he illustrates with the well-known metaphor of the community as a human body. In "one Spirit," all believers have been baptized into one body (regardless of ethnicity or social status) and all "drink of one Spirit" (12:13).<sup>27</sup> In this one body, both societal diversity and diversity of gifts exist without discord because all members have "the same care for one another" (12:12-27).

In the context of the unified body, Paul emphasizes those gifts that lead to understanding, interpretation, and conviction (14:1-12). Because prophecy is understandable, he writes, it builds up the community (14:2-5), and the goal of edification should direct the Corinthians' desire for "spirits" toward those that produce intelligible words (revelation, knowledge, prophecy, and teaching) (14:6-12). Relying again on an analogy with the human spirit, he writes that just as the worship of an individual human being should engage both spirit and mind, so too should the worship of the congregational body (14:13-19). It seems best to understand Paul's argument here as advocating balance (mind and spirit) rather than asserting that gifts of understanding trump those of power.<sup>28</sup> He concludes by returning to his point about maturity: "do not be children in your thinking; rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults" (14:20).

#### *Transformation by the Spirit (2 Corinthians)*

In 2 Corinthians, Paul connects the activity of the Spirit with a new ability for sight and with transformation into the image of God. He describes the Corinthians as a letter on his behalf, "written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (3:1-3). This writing of the Spirit on their hearts evidences the new covenant, one "not of letter but of spirit," for the Spirit gives life (3:4-6). This "ministry of the Spirit" (which he also calls the "ministry of justification") comes in glory (3:7-11) and frees the minds of believers, lifting a veil so that they can truly see "the glory of the Lord," albeit as if reflected in a mirror (3:12-17). Those newly endowed with this Spirit-empowered sight are in turn "being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (3:18).

And the source of all this, Paul writes, is "the Lord, the Spirit." The sight given by the Spirit in this passage is much like the insight bestowed by the Spirit in 1 Corinthians. And here, as in 1 Corinthians, new vision results in a changed life, although this passage describes change in more general terms as metamorphosis into the image of God. This interest in inner transformation appears throughout Paul's letters. Believers are transformed and renewed in their mind (Rom 12:2, Eph 4:23) or inner nature (2 Cor 4:16). The indwelling Spirit changes our lives from the inside out.

#### *Walking in the Spirit (Galatians)*

In Galatians, Paul emphasizes "walking" in the Spirit—or in other words, living a life defined by the Spirit. In the letter as a whole, he argues against reliance on circumcision to be right with God and reminds the Galatians that they have received the power of the Spirit as a result not of their actions but of their faith (3:2-5). After urging them to continue to define themselves by their faith, he concludes with a section on how to live (ethics). Because they have received the Spirit through faith, he charges them, "Walk in the Spirit" (5:18). This "walk" is characterized by a particular kind of freedom that loves—rather than devours—other people (5:13-15).

In our present lives, following the Spirit as a guide (5:25), we experience an organic blossoming of ethical behavior. Life in the Spirit quite naturally produces spiritual fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (5:22-23). And for the future, our “sowing” to the Spirit will reap eternal life (6:8).

### *Set Free by the Spirit (Romans)*

Paul writes about the Spirit throughout Romans, but Chapter 8 is an especially rich source for understanding the Spirit in Paul. Much of what he says in the chapter echoes his discussion of the Spirit in Galatians, for he emphasizes both freedom and ethics. In Galatians, Paul mentions freedom and focuses on ethics. However, in Romans 8, he mentions ethics and focuses on freedom.<sup>29</sup> He begins this chapter by declaring: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death” (8:1-2).

As in Galatians, this freedom produces fruit in life of the community; it causes “the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled” in believers who “walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (8:4). He describes the Spirit as bringing “life and peace” by ending the hostility of the flesh toward God (8:5-7). Thus, the indwelling Spirit is the source for a spiritual life now and eventual resurrection of the body in the future (8:8-11). The only possible effect of this Spirit-powered life is the death of “the deeds of the body” (8:12-13). And the indwelling Spirit of God testifies to the human spirits inside those “led by the Spirit” that they are the children of God (8:14-17).

It also produces “first fruits” in the time between the receipt of the Spirit and the hoped-for redemption of the body (8:22-23). Similarly, it intercedes in the prayers of believers “with sighs too deep for words,” revealing the inner mind of saints to God.

### **THE SPIRIT IN PAUL AND IN MINISTRY TODAY**

Gordon Fee makes the point that in many churches, the Spirit has been “largely marginalized.”<sup>30</sup> Communities of faith pay lip service to the Spirit, reciting trinitarian statements such as “in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” but for the most part do not *experience* the Spirit in the way that Paul describes. As Fee puts it, “We must candidly admit that the experience and life of the Spirit were more radically central for Paul and his churches than seems to be true for us.”<sup>31</sup> Yet Paul’s picture of the radical centrality of the Spirit, as inspired scripture, serves as a rich resource for those believers who wish to open themselves more fully to the Spirit. To conclude this article, I will reflect on five themes that I believe can inspire us to serve as ministers from Paul’s Spirit-led perspective.

#### *Openness*

My first point is simple but worth making. Paul and his audiences appear to be quite open to experiencing the Holy Spirit in their lives. Paul’s openness is evident in the casual way in which the subject of the Spirit appears repeatedly in his letters, whether in passing references, in blessings, or in focused treatments of the Spirit as the divine source of power, understanding, and ethics in the Christian life. He just assumes the importance of the Holy Spirit as “an empowering, experienced reality in the life of the church and of the believer.”<sup>32</sup> A small step toward such openness today would be simply to begin to talk more about the Spirit with each other. Paul’s example challenges us to keep the Holy Spirit ever-present in our conversations, Bible studies, classes, worship, sermons, and written works.

#### *Indwelling*

In Paul’s view, the Spirit both initiates faith and—by faith—dwells in us individually and as a community. Thus, if we seek to redirect ourselves toward increased openness to the Spirit, we should remember that we are not aiming to “restore” the Spirit to the church. Clearly, the Spirit is already present within every

believer and every community of Christ. Just as the Corinthians blocked their access to spiritual discernment by disunity, so we too, might be blocking our interaction with the Spirit. But this only means that we need to *grow up* in the Spirit, not that we need to find or regain the Spirit. As we seek spiritual renewal, we can be encouraged by Paul's perspective that renewal grows out of the power of the Holy Spirit that is *already* within us.

### *Power and Understanding*

The Holy Spirit within believers empowers the life of the church, bestowing spiritual gifts of various kinds for the building up of the church. Paul indicates that ministry should always rely on the Spirit for its understanding and power. Our culture of educated specialists tempts us to equate discernment with learning or study, even of scripture, but they are not the same. Paul's writings should encourage us constantly to seek the wisdom of God by means of the Spirit and allow it to knock down or reshape our own knowledge when necessary.

Recalling that God's power hides in the cross, we should also be wary of relying on worldly strength in our ministry, whether in the form of a charismatic personality, a forceful member of the congregation, or the latest product or method designed to grow a church. Instead, the power that comes from God through the Spirit should be the driving force in our ministry.

### *Worship*

One way that the Holy Spirit's power reveals itself is in the form of gifts, and these gifts appear in Paul's thought in the context of worship. He writes also that the Spirit engages with us in our worship, interceding in prayer, energizing our songs, and inspiring our words. Speaking personally, I can affirm that I have experienced Spirit-filled worship, but I cannot describe precisely what it looks like.

On the one hand, the presence of the Spirit has nothing whatsoever to do with outer form, whether traditional or contemporary, reverent or celebratory, "charismatic" or liturgical. And yet, on the other, it does, for the Spirit is outwardly visible in the expression, voices, and body language of worshippers. Somehow, it becomes evident that a community has united in authentic praise of God. As we plan worship, select and prepare worship leaders, and enter in to worship, Paul invites us to seek inspiration at every stage.

### *Transformation*

The Spirit changes us from within, transforming our lives so we bear godly fruit, become the image of God, fulfill the righteous requirement of the law, and unite as one people. In biology, the word "metamorphosis" describes complete transformation, such as when a tadpole becomes a frog. In this process, the tadpole's entire self transforms. It grows legs, loses gills, crawls out of the water, and breathes air through lungs. The ancient Greeks used the word *metamorphosis* to describe this same kind of process (usually of their gods). Paul selects this word to describe how the Spirit transforms us: through the Spirit's power, we "metamorphosize." With this image of radical change before us, how can we possibly conceive of the Christian life merely as involvement in a social club, as membership in an institution, or as assent to a set of principles?

Inspired ministry will highlight the radical nature of the Spirit's transforming work in our lives. It will model and teach us how to open up to this process. It will recognize Spirit-driven change and praise God for it. And it will exalt in the fact that transformed, righteous living brings not restriction but abundant life. Moreover, as the Holy Spirit changes believers—as our prejudices and pettiness and power-mongering melt away—we will see the church transform too, in an equally radical way.

The poet of Psalm 63 longs for God as a parched land longs for water. We too long for the Spirit of God, and when we drink deeply of the Spirit, our lives will begin to blossom like "trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither" (Ps 1:3). When we look at the



Holy Spirit in Paul's letters, we find a powerful message of life. Having moved out from under the slavery to sin and death and into Christ, we are indwelt with the Spirit, experiencing true power, understanding, and transformation.

We thrive, bursting into a lushness of life watered by relationship with God. And this fruitfulness is just a glimpse of things to come, for as a guarantee within, the Spirit assures us of an even greater future glory. Jesus Christ offers this same powerful hope of God's renewal through the Spirit to all parched souls who are dying of thirst in a "dry and weary land." Having been filled ourselves, we have the privilege of offering others a cup of cold water in our savior's name.

#### KINDALEE PFREMMER DE LONG

Ms. Pfremmer De Long received her Master of Divinity from Pepperdine University and is currently completing a doctorate in New Testament at Notre Dame University.

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 The letters credited to Paul in the New Testament are: Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. For the purposes of this essay, it seems appropriate to treat these letters as a group of writings that share in common the attribution of Paul as author.
- 2 The noun "spirit" (*pneuma*) appears in the letters 146 times. For a more in-depth treatment, I recommend the recent book by Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994). A New Testament scholar who is also Pentecostal, Fee seeks in the book first to exegete carefully Paul's letters before drawing conclusions. His results challenge certain practices and views of both Pentecostal and non-charismatic churches.
- 3 In addition to the noun spirit (*pneuma*), Paul uses the adjective spiritual (*pneumatikos*) and the adverb spiritually (*pneumatikōs*). The Gospel of John uses both the word *pneuma* and the word "advocate" or "helper" (*paraklētos*) to describe the Holy Spirit (see John 14:16, 26; 15:26; and 16:7).
- 4 The Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker lexicon provides more help in describing the semantic range of this word than does the Liddell-Scott-Jones lexicon (*BAGD* 674). The Hebrew word for spirit (*rūah*), carries these same meanings with the possible exception of the fourth meaning offered above (*BDB* §9234). It has often been pointed out that meanings one, two, and five are closely interrelated.
- 5 Once, in 2 Thess 2:8, *pneuma* means breath or wind, in an apparent quotation of Job 4:9. Another time, in 1 Tim 4:1, it refers to immaterial, independent beings ("deceitful spirits") in conjunction with the phrase "teachings of demons."
- 6 Joseph Fitzmyer, *Romans* (Anchor Bible Commentary; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 127. Fitzmyer also comments briefly on the connection between the human *pneuma* and the *pneuma* of God, writing that the human spirit in Paul's letters "expresses what is especially apt to receive the Spirit of God."
- 7 Paul refers to his own spirit in Rom. 1:9; 1 Co. 14:14; 2 Co. 2:13. In Rom 8:16, he writes about "our spirit" (that of his own and his audience's together). Four times, he closes his letters with some variation of the blessing, "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit" (Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23; Phlm 1:25; and 2 Tim. 4:22). A longer closing blessing appears in 1 Thess 5:23, also using the phrase "your spirit." In all these verses, the word "your" is plural ("you all") whereas the word "spirit" is *singular*, which corresponds with his point made elsewhere that as a group, he and his audience (the church) possess *one* spirit. Paul's emphasis on unity will be explored further below.
- 8 In addition to those cited in the text above, he writes of a spirit of holiness (Rom 1:4), a spirit of sluggishness/bewilderment (Rom 11:8), and a spirit of cowardice contrasted with a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline (2 Tim 1:7).
- 9 See Rom 8:9, 14; 15:19; 1 Cor 2:11, 14; 3:16; 6:11; 7:40; 12:3; and Phil. 3:3. In Eph 3:16, he writes simply "his Spirit," in reference to God.
- 10 Although "the Lord" is sometimes taken to mean "Christ" in this passage, Fee makes a strong argument that "the Lord" here refers to God. The context is Paul's reflection on the story of Moses interacting with the Lord on Sinai, to make the point that believers are now being transformed into the image of the Lord. Thus, the context suggests that Paul uses the word "Lord" (*kyrios*) in keeping with the practice of Greek-speaking Jews, who used the word *kyrios* to translate the proper name for God from Hebrew (written *yhwh* but read as *ʾdōnāi*, "the Lord").
- 11 Twice, he writes to *hagios pneuma* (1 Cor 6:19, 13:13). Twice, he uses the similar phrase *to pneuma to agios* (1 Thess 4:8, Eph 4:30). Eleven times he writes simply "holy spirit" (*pneuma hagios*): Rom. 5:5, 9:1, 14:17, 15:13, 15:16; 1 Co. 12:3; 2 Co. 6:6; 1 Thess. 1:5, 1:6; 2 Tim. 1:14; and Tit. 3:5.
- 12 (1) Using the phrase *to hagios pneuma*, he writes that the "Holy Spirit" resides in the congregation (1 Cor 6:19), and he closes the same letter by offering a Trinity-like blessing, praying that the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the grace of Jesus Christ, and the love of God might be with his audience (1 Cor 13:13). The first of these verses further qualifies *to hagios pneuma* by identifying it with God. See the section on the "Spirit of God," above. (2) Using the phrase *to pneuma to agios*, he describes God as one who "gives his Holy Spirit to you" (1 Thess 4:8), and he urges his audience not to "grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (Eph 4:30).

- 13 One time, the phrase *pneuma hagios* appears in a clear parallel with the "Spirit of God" (1 Cor 12:3). Seven times, the phrase is associated with the activity of God or of the Holy Spirit as described elsewhere in Paul's letters: it comes from God (Rom 5:5, 15:13), has power (1 Thess 1:5-6), accomplishes sanctification (Rom 15:16) and renewal (Tit 3:5), and indwells (2 Tim 1:14). Twice, it could mean either the Holy Spirit or a human spirit of holiness (Rom 9:1, 14:17). And in a final case, which has troubled translators, it seems fairly clearly to refer to a human characteristic (2 Cor 6:6). Paul here describes the Corinthians as having "purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, *pneuma hagios*, genuine love ..." To see translators struggling with how to understand this anomalous use of the phrase *pneuma hagios* within a list of virtues, compare the KJV and RSV ("Holy Spirit") with the NRSV ("holiness of spirit").
- 14 Nor does he qualify the word "spirit" anthropologically, except in the letter's formulaic closing: "may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters" (Gal 6:18).
- 15 The letter-spirit contrast appears in Rom 2:29 and 7:6.
- 16 The Spirit is described as giving life in Rom 8:2, 6, 10, 11; 1 Cor 15:45; and Gal 6:8.
- 17 In Rom 8:9, he essentially equates the "Spirit of Christ" with the "Spirit of God" by placing them in parallel with each other. He also anticipates that the Spirit of Jesus Christ will accomplish his salvation, a power generally understood to be divine (Phil 1:19), and he calls Jesus Christ (described as the "second Adam") a life-giving Spirit, an activity also connected with God's Spirit (1 Cor 15:45).
- 18 Reading Romans and Galatians together, we find Paul saying that just as Jesus prayed to the Father with an inner sense of familial relationship, in the same way can believers, who have been adopted as children, approach their Father.
- 19 At the conclusion of Philippians, he also urges them to stand "firm in one spirit," without expanding much upon this theme (Phil 1:27).
- 20 These passages are explored elsewhere in this essay. For further study on Trinitarian antecedents in Paul, I would recommend Gordon Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 36-48. In addition to the three passages cited here, Fee identifies 16 other places where Paul encapsulates salvation in "Trinitarian terms, sometimes in creedal fashion, but always in nonreflective, presuppositional ways" (40).
- 21 Paul describes the Spirit as "in" or "dwelling in" either individual believers or the community of God in the following passages: 1 Cor 3:16, 6:19, 14:24-25; 2 Cor 1:22, 3:3, 6:16; Gal 4:6; Rom 2:29, 5:5, 8:9-11; 1 Thess 4:8, Eph 2:22, and 5:18.
- 22 This passage offers one of the densest concentrations of spirit language in all of Paul's letters. *Pneuma* or a cognate appears 13 times in eight verses. The focus on discernment is also striking. In this short passage, Paul uses eight different words to make the point that understanding comes by way of the Spirit: *oida* (2:11, 12), *sophia* (2:13), *ginōskō* (2:11, 14, 16), *eraunaō* (2:10), *sygkrinō* (2:13), *anakrinō* (2:14, 15), *syμβιβάζω* (2:16), and *nous* (2:16).
- 23 The verb for giving revelation here is *apokalyptō*, meaning to unveil something previously hidden.
- 24 Paul refers to spiritual gifts in the letter primarily as (1) *pneumatikon* (a neuter adjective without antecedent) or (2) the noun *charisma*. The first term, which literally means "spiritual things," occurs in 1 Cor 12:1 and 14:1. The second, more frequent term means "gracious gifts," and it occurs in 1 Cor 1:7; 7:7; 12:4, 9, 28, 30, and 31. (Paul also writes of "the things graciously given" in 1 Cor 2:12, using the verb *charizomai*.) The NRSV, reflecting the interchangeable usage of these words in 1 Corinthians, translates the first term as "spiritual gifts" and the second as "spiritual gift(s)," "a particular gift," or simply "gift(s)." Paul also refers to gifts as "manifestations of the Spirit" (1 Cor 12:7).
- 25 Later in the letter, Paul makes clear that the Spirit dwells in them (3:16, 6:19); that their washing, sanctification, and justification has occurred "in the Spirit of our God" (6:11); and that they have become one spirit by being united with the Lord (6:17). He also notes that everyone who confesses Jesus as Lord is "in the Holy Spirit" (12:3).
- 26 Paul lists the gifts of the Spirit as a word of wisdom, a word of knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues.
- 27 The reader might be interested in comparing Rom 12:3-8, where Paul relates the same theme, though in somewhat different language.
- 28 Although it also seems clear that in a context of congregational worship, he finds gifts of understanding to be most useful (1 Cor 14:18-19).
- 29 He will offer a more detailed treatment of ethics later in the letter.
- 30 Fee, Paul, *The Spirit*, xiv.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 179.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 181.

