

The "Temple of the Spirit" as the Inaugural Fulfillment of the New Covenant
within the Corinthian Correspondence¹

One can hardly imagine a more diverse collage of concerns than those contained in the short span of 1 and 2 Corinthians. The topics range:

from the problems of factionalism, incest, prostitution and idol meat, to celibacy, tongues, and veils

from baptism, the cross, final judgment, and the resurrection, to the appropriateness of using rhetorical flair in preaching and the question of payment for pastors

from suffering to love

from Paul's visions in the third heaven and the signs and wonders of a true apostle to an unrelieved anxiety that forced him to turn back from an open door for ministry

from Paul's divine comfort in the face of death to his comfort in meeting Titus

from the grief that leads to repentance to the grief that leads to punishment

from boasting in the Lord to boasting as a fool

from the gift of a second chance to the threat of the last chance

and from the change in Paul's travel plans for the sake of the Corinthians to the change in plans for the collection for the sake of others.

But as we will see in our lecture, despite all of this diversity, Paul's overarching concern within 1 & 2 Corinthians is to keep the Corinthians from destroying the church and from being destroyed by God as a result. For in Paul's view, because *the Spirit dwells within/among her*, the Church is God's temple (cf. 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; 11:27–32; 2 Cor 5:10; 13:2–5). Hence, in 1 Corinthians, Paul is preoccupied with the threat to the church posed by the sinful character of the Corinthians' interrelationships. Their spiritual experiences have led to a pseudo-spiritual one-upmanship, their knowledge to an arrogance and lack of regard for those who are still "weak in faith," and their newfound

¹ From Scott J. Hafemann, "The 'Temple of the Spirit' as the Inaugural Fulfillment of the New Covenant within the Corinthian Correspondence," *ExAud* 12 (1996) 29–42.

freedom in Christ to an over-realized eschatology that expressed itself in ethical laxity on the one hand (cf. 1 Cor 5–6) and in an undue asceticism on the other (cf. 1 Cor 7). In response, the purpose of the letter we call "1 Corinthians" is first and foremost instructional. In addressing the various factions and subgroups that constitute the church, Paul counts on the fact that his apostolic authority is still accepted by the Corinthians (cf. e.g., the anticipated answers to his rhetorical questions and their support in 1 Cor 9:1f.). After all, the letter has its origin to a large degree not only in the recent factions in the church (cf. 1:10—4:21), but also because the Corinthians have written Paul to ask his advice and to clear up misunderstandings from his previous instructions (1 Cor 5:9–13; 7:1, 25; 8:1; 11:2ff.; 12:1ff.; 15:1ff.). Thus, Paul's apostolic standing as their spiritual "father" provides the presupposition for Paul's arguments (1 Cor 4:6f., 14–21). But by the time of the writing of 2 Corinthians, things have changed dramatically. The arrival in Corinth of Paul's opponents had fueled the flames of discontent into a direct assault on Paul's legitimacy as an apostle. To stem the tide, Paul had already made a "painful visit" (2 Cor 2:1) and wrote a "tearful letter" (2 Cor 2:4) in an attempt to win back his church. Though the result was largely successful (cf. 2 Cor 2:5–11; 7:5–16), a hardened minority still rejected him and his gospel (cf. 2 Cor 10–13). Hence, rather than *didactic*, the purpose of the letter we call "2 Corinthians" is *apologetic*. Paul must now address those who have reaffirmed their allegiance to him as their apostle in order to support them in their decision both theologically and pastorally (2 Cor 1–9), while attempting for the last time to win back those who are still in rebellion against his authority (2 Cor 10–13; cf. esp. 13:1–10).

In the midst of the diversity of themes, occasion, and purposes that consequently make up the Corinthian correspondence, the unity of theological rationale that pervades these letters is therefore surprising. Instead of offering *ad hoc* responses to the issues before him, Paul replies to the concerns in Corinth out of an integrated perspective built upon his theology proper, his christology, his understanding of redemptive history as revealed in the Scriptures, and his view of the work and significance of the Spirit. Moreover, although Paul's dominant recourse thematically is to his theology and christology, whenever he turns his attention to ecclesiology directly (see below), it is Paul's understanding of the significance of the Spirit's presence in the Church that plays the strategic role.² Thus, in view of Paul's overriding ecclesiological concerns in the Corinthian correspondence, Paul's conception of the Spirit becomes decisive for understanding the force of his arguments in these letters.³ Furthermore, the centrality of the Spirit in Paul's ecclesiology does not derive from his christology, as if the Spirit were viewed simply as another manifestation of the presence of Christ among his people. In this common view, Paul's references to the Spirit are treated as if they were references to the person and work of Christ incognito. However, rather than being interchangeable, it is the person and "work" of Christ that makes the new covenant presence of the Spirit

² In 1 Cor–2 Cor Paul refers to the Spirit or spiritual matters using the term πνεῦμα/πνευματικός seventy-three times in sixty-nine assertions spread over fifty-seven verses. This is slightly over forty percent of the 142 total verses in which they occur in the Pauline corpus. By way of comparison, in 1 Cor–2 Cor Paul refers to "God" (θεός) in 156 verses and Jesus Christ in 155 verses. Of these, Paul uses the title "Christ" in ninety-nine verses (with and without a reference to Jesus and/or the Lord) and "Jesus" as the "Lord" (κύριος) in nine verses. Paul refers to the "Lord" without further definition sixty-two times, forty-four of which by context most likely refer to Jesus, rather than to YHWH, though this involves several judgment calls. Interestingly, Paul refers to Jesus without a messianic title only three times in this literature, twice in 2 Cor 4:10–11 and once in 2 Cor 11:4. In the former text, Paul is referring to his death and resurrection, and in the latter to what the false teachers preach—i.e., "a different Jesus."

³ For a full-length treatment of the role of the Spirit in Paul's writings, see the major work of Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* (967 pages!).

possible. When Paul talks about the Spirit he is not simply substituting one reality for another. Instead, Paul's understanding of the Spirit and its implications for the life of the congregation are predicated on his conviction that the prophetic promise of the new covenant from Jer 31 has been fulfilled in Christ.

Before we look at Paul's new covenant understanding, it will therefore be helpful to review the main points of Jer 31 itself.

The Meaning of the "New Covenant" in Jeremiah 31:31–34⁴

The argument of Jer 31:31–34, separated into its constituent propositions, runs as follows:

- 31:31 "Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.
- 32a *Specifically*, I will not make it like the covenant that I made with their fathers . . .
- 32b *since* they broke this covenant of mine
- 32c *even though* I was a husband to them," declares the Lord.
- 33a "The reason the new covenant will be different in this regard (כִּי) is that this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the Lord, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their heart
- 33b *The result of this new covenant will be that* I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
- 34a *The ultimate consequence of this new covenant relationship in which I am their God and they are my people is that* they shall not teach again each man his neighbor and each man his brother saying, 'Know the Lord,'
- 34b *because* (כִּי) they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the Lord.

⁴ For the detailed presentation and support of these points and those that follow, see my *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 92–186. My modest purpose in this essay is to digest and highlight some of the relevance of this previous work for the present topic.

34c "The basis for all of this (כִּנּוּ) is that I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

The significance of this text may be outlined in four main points. First, the "new covenant" in Jer 31:31–34 is the divinely promised answer to the perennial problem of Israel's hard-hearted rebellion against YHWH, which according to Jeremiah has always and still continues to characterize the people.⁵ What is needed is nothing less than a new beginning, a "new covenant," in which Israel's relationship with God will be decisively changed. But as the wider context confirms, the adjective "new" in Jer 31:31 points to an eschatological reality yet to be fulfilled, which Jeremiah holds forth as Israel's only ultimate hope after the destruction of the exile (cf. 31:1–30, 35–40). Thus, with Jer 31:31–34 as its climax, Jeremiah's own prophetic call in 1:10 "to break down and destroy" as well as "to plant and build up" is being fulfilled in his preaching of destruction in the present and in his promise of God's restoration in the future, a restoration that centers on the establishment of a "new covenant" between God and his people (cf. Jer 1:10 with its promised fulfillment in Jer 31:28).

Second, the nature of this "new covenant" is described in Jer 31:32–33 by *contrasting* it to the Mosaic/Sinai covenant (cf. Jer 11:1–11; 22:9f.), a covenant that both the fathers "in the day that I brought them up from the land of Egypt" (11:7) and the Israel and Judah of Jeremiah's own day (11:9f.; cf. 22:9f.) have broken "in the stubbornness of their evil heart" (11:8). Hence, according to v. 32, the essential difference between the Sinai covenant and the new covenant is that the latter will not be broken

⁵ For the motif of the "stubbornness" of Israel's evil heart and her hardened condition in relationship to the perpetual disobedience of the people within Jeremiah, see Jer 2:21f.; 3:17; 5:20–25; 7:24–26; 8:7; 9:12–16; 11:14; 13:10, 23; 14:11, 22; 15:1; 16:12; 17:1, 23; 18:12–15a; 19:15; 23:17, etc. For the corresponding point that the covenant people and their leaders have continued to break the covenant, see Jer 2:8; 5:31; 6:13, 17; 10:21; 14:18; 23:13f.; 27:16; 28:2, etc.

(though of course under the Sinai covenant God had already remained faithful to *his* covenant commitments; the problem was with the people, not God; cf. Jer 2:5–8). The new covenant is an "everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten" (Jer 50:5). Verse 33 then gives the reason for this confidence (note the כִּי [NOTE: Hebr 25] ["because"] in v. 33a; ὅτι in 38:33aLXX). Unlike the Sinai covenant, in this new covenant God will place his law (the preferred LXX manuscript tradition reads the plural "laws") "within them" or "in their mind" and "write it on their heart." In so doing, God will bring about an eschatological reversal of the present situation in which, instead of the law, the *sin* of Judah is being "written down with an iron stylus; with a diamond point it is engraved upon the tablet of their heart" (Jer 17:1). In view of Jeremiah's emphasis on Israel's stubborn rebellion from the exodus onward, this implies in all probability that in the new covenant Israel's rebellious nature will be fundamentally *transformed* so that her hardened disobedience is replaced by an open compliance with God's covenant stipulations in his law. When read against the backdrop of Jeremiah as a whole, this is the point of God's declaration in v. 33 that he will "put (his) law within them" and its synonymous expression in v. 33 that he will "write it on their heart."

The promise of the new covenant in Jer 31:31–34 is therefore to be seen as God's response to Israel's inability to heed the call in Jer 4:4 that they "circumcise (themselves) to the Lord and remove the foreskins of (their) heart." Apart from this divine work, Israel will suffer God's punishment against "all those who are circumcised and yet uncircumcised," since "all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart" (Jer 9:25f.; cf. 4:4b; Deut 10:16). For in describing the law as being "within" and "written on the heart," Jeremiah is picturing a people who accept God's law as their own and obey it willingly,

rather than merely obeying it grudgingly or spurning it altogether (cf. Deut 6:4f.; 10:16; 11:18; Ps 40:8; Isa 51:7). As a result of this divinely enabled acceptance of God's law as his covenant stipulations, the covenant relationship of faithfulness to YHWH will be maintained, rather than continually broken. In the words of the typical covenant formula, YHWH "will be their God, and they will be (his) people" (31:33c).

Third, the movement of thought from Jer 31:32 to 33 makes clear that the covenantal relationship between God and his people is maintained by keeping the law in *response* to God's prior act of redemption (cf. Jer 31:1ff.). This is no less true of the new covenant than it was of the Sinai covenant before it (cf. Deut 6:20–25). Rather than suggesting that the law is somehow negated in the new covenant, Jer 31:31–33 emphasizes that it is the *ability* to keep the law as a result of having a transformed nature, not its removal, that distinguishes the new covenant from the covenant at Sinai. Nor is there any indication in this text, or in Jeremiah as a whole, that the future eschatological restoration will entail the giving of a new law, or that the "law" of the new covenant will be merely an abstract revelation of the general will of God quite apart from the specifics of the Mosaic code. (The LXX manuscript tradition that reads the plural "laws" for the singular "torah" in Jer 38:33LXX [MT 31:33] underscores this latter point.) For Jeremiah, the "law written on the heart" is the Sinai law itself as the embodiment of God's will. The contrast between the two covenants remains a contrast between the two different *conditions of the people* who are brought into these covenants and their correspondingly different responses to the *same law*. The former broke the Sinai covenant, being unable to keep it due to their stubborn, evil hearts; the latter will keep the new covenant as a result of their transformed nature.

Fourth, verse 34 depicts the result of this new covenant transformation of God's people and its ultimate ground. As a result of having God's law written on their hearts, the people of the new covenant will not need to be taught to "know" the Lord, since they will *all* know him directly. The new heart that is promised as essential to the new covenant thus provides the conceptual transition from v. 33 to v. 34, since in OT anthropology the "heart" is not only the seat of volition and desire, but also the organ most often associated with the function of understanding and intellectual knowledge (cf. e.g., Deut 29:3; Ps 90:12). To have the law "within one's heart" is to "know" the law as the expression of the One who gave it. Against the backdrop of the Sinai covenant, which we have seen forms the point of comparison, v. 34 points to a time when the role of Moses as the mediator of the will, knowledge, and presence of God is no longer necessary. In the new covenant, God will renew the people's ability to know God directly, whereas under the Sinai covenant, beginning with the sin of the golden calf, the glory and presence of God had to be kept veiled and separated from the people in order to protect them from destruction due to their sinful, "stiff-necked" state (cf. Jer 7:26; 19:15 with Exod 32–34, especially 33:3, 5; Deut 9:6, 13 on the one hand, and the many parallels between Deut 32 and Jeremiah on the other). It also indicates that under the new covenant there will no longer be any distinction between those within the community who have a transformed heart and those who do not. *By definition*, all those who belong to the new covenant community do so *by virtue* of their transformed nature. Unlike the role played by the prophets and remnant within Israel, in the new covenant community there will be no need to admonish others within the community to "know the Lord." This is why the foundation of the new covenant is the fact that, despite Israel's past rebellion, God will

"remember their sin no more" (v. 34). Both the changed condition of God's people and their resultant obedience to the covenant, together with their renewed access to the knowledge of God, are based upon the divine forgiveness that makes the new covenant possible.

In short, Jer 31:31–34 looks forward to what we now call a "believer's church." The people of the new covenant are an extension of the faithful remnant within Israel who knew the Lord, not a continuation of the "mixed multitude" that constituted Israel's life as a nation and ethnic people (cf. Rom 11:1–24). As a consequence, this transformation under the new covenant will mean the overturning of the lack of trust and deceit that characterized Israel's past relationships, in which they did not teach the truth but spoke lies to one another, and through their deceit "refused to know" the Lord (Jer 9:4–6). In Paul's words, under the new covenant "to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor 12:7). This may be why in 1 Cor 6:1–8 Paul condemns lawsuits and fraud between believers and calls for the necessity of judging those within the church, whereas God judges outsiders (1 Cor 5:12f.). Furthermore, Paul's reference to the manifestation of the grace of God in the spiritual gift of knowledge, with which *all* the Corinthians have been enriched by God (cf. 1 Cor 1:4–7), and his corresponding emphasis on the Spirit as the one who reveals to believers the things and thoughts of God (1 Cor 2:9–11), take on particular significance as fulfillments of this new covenant promise and as evidence of its reality.

The New Covenant Context of 1 and 2 Corinthians

In 1 Cor 11:25 and 2 Cor 3:6 Paul refers to the "new covenant" in relationship to the two fundamental aspects of his theology: the death of Christ as the salvific foundation of the Church, expressed in the tradition of the Lord's Supper; and the relationship between Israel and the Church (or within the Reformation tradition, between the law and the gospel), expressed in the letter/Spirit contrast. As is well-known, Jer 31:31 is the only explicit reference to the terminology "new covenant" in the OT. The obvious suggestion that Paul is therefore alluding to this passage in 1 Cor 11:23 and 2 Cor 3:6 is certainly not new and, though disputed by some, is accepted by most. But few interpreters of Paul have attempted to take this covenant framework seriously as the key to understanding the structure of Paul's thought, especially the content of his view of the Spirit.⁶ However, the framework for understanding Paul's admonitions to the Corinthians concerning their life as members of the Church of Jesus Christ is precisely his conviction that they constitute the community of the new covenant (cf. 1 Cor 11:25). Likewise, Paul's apologetic for his own legitimacy as an apostle is based on his persuasion that to be an apostle of the gospel is to be a "servant" of that same covenant (cf. 2 Cor 3:6). Although there are only two explicit references to the "new covenant" in the Corinthian correspondence, they are therefore not ornamental, but fundamental to Paul's thinking; nor are they merely the unreflected adaptation of an early Church tradition in the first case or the product of polemics in the second. Rather, they indicate that the Church's identity as manifested in their celebration of the Lord's Supper and Paul's identity as focused on his call to be an

⁶ For a very insightful exception to this rule, see the programmatic work of Dumbrell, *End of the Beginning*, 79–96, on the meaning of the new covenant in Jer 31:31ff. (including its relationship to Ezek 36:25f.), and 107–12 on its application to 2 Cor 3. Although arrived at independently of Dumbrell, many of the following conclusions concerning Jer 31:31–34 are corroborated by his work.

apostle both derive from the establishment of the new covenant through the substitutionary atonement of Christ's death on the cross for both Jews and Gentiles. This corresponds to the point made in Jer 31:31–34 itself, in which the basis of the promised knowledge of God is the anticipated forgiveness of sins.

In addition, two texts show clearly that Paul understood the dawning of the new covenant as deriving from Jesus himself. The mention of the "new covenant" in 1 Cor 11:25 is part of the tradition from Jesus that Paul faithfully handed down. In 2 Cor 3:4–6 he refers to his own call by Christ to be an apostle as the means by which God had made him sufficient to be a servant of this new covenant. Moreover, Paul's reference to the tradition of the Church in 1 Cor 11:23; 15:1–3, together with his introduction of the "new covenant" in 2 Cor 3:6 without explanation, demonstrates that through their own celebrations of the Lord's Supper and catechesis the Corinthians were well aware of the significance of the "new covenant." They knew Jesus's death had brought about this "new covenant" and that they had their own identity as members of it (cf. 1 Cor 1:2, 17f., 23f., 26–31; 2:2; 3:16; 6:19; 7:23; 12:13, 27; 2 Cor 6:14—7:1, etc.). As William Lane observed, "Paul's pastoral response to the disruptive situation at Corinth" entailed "an appeal to the new covenant and the administration of its provisions," so that, like the OT prophet who was called to be a "messenger of the covenant lawsuit of God," Paul was called to proclaim the "divine complaint against the rebellious Corinthians and to call them back to the stipulations of the covenant."⁷ Lane points out that this is confirmed by Paul's portrayal of his ministry in 2 Cor 10:8 and 13:10 (cf. Gal 2:18) in terms of the

⁷ Lane, "Covenant," 6, 10. The covenant lawsuit against the Corinthians therefore provides a necessary key for understanding the character, content, and unity of 2 Cor, especially in view of the link between the new covenant and second exodus motifs in 2 Cor 2:14—7:1 now established by Webb, *Returning Home*.

covenantal tasks of "building up" and "tearing down" that derive from Jer 1:10 and recur in the preamble to the new covenant in Jer 31:28.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that the use of the word "covenant" (διαθήκη) to translate 1 Cor 11:25 and 2 Cor 3:6 does not imply any sort of "agreement" or "treaty" (συνθήκη) that is mutually initiated, arranged, or disposed. Paul's emphasis on the priority and centrality of the cross in salvation and on the work of the Spirit in sanctification makes it evident that the initiative, inauguration, and sustenance of the new covenant, like God's covenant with Israel at Sinai, is due solely to the unilateral and gracious work of God on behalf of his people (cf. again 1 Cor 1:17–31; 2:1–5; 15:3f.; 2 Cor 1:19f.; 3:5f.; 4:1–3; 5:18f., etc.). Nevertheless, in *response* to God's gracious act of redemption, both parties are obligated within the new covenant to remain faithful to their covenant partner. For his part, God will remain faithful to the covenant by meeting the needs of his people according to his wisdom so that they might be able to endure in the midst of adversity and persevere in faith (1 Cor 1:8f.; 10:13; 2 Cor 1:7; cf. 1 Thess 5:9; Phil 1:6). For their part, the Corinthians must keep the covenant stipulations as evidence of their genuine dependence upon God (cf. e.g., 1 Cor 3:1–3; 6:9–11; 2 Cor 5:10; 13:5). In the new covenant, like the old, what "counts" is not ethnic identity (physical circumcision), but "keeping the commandments of God" as a result of knowing him (i.e., "spiritual circumcision of the heart"; 1 Cor 7:19; cf. Jer 9:23–26; Lev 26:41). And at the heart of this covenant structure stands the Spirit. For, from Paul's perspective, given God's justifying and sanctifying work in the lives of his people *as guaranteed and brought about by the presence and power of the Spirit*, there is no excuse for the continuing, habitual disobedience that results from failing to trust God's gracious

provisions and promises in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 1:20; 5:7; 6:11, 19f.; 10:13; 13:1–3 [love as the work of the Spirit]; 2 Cor 1:22). It is the Spirit who brings one to Christ for the forgiveness of sins that makes the new life or "new creation" possible (cf. 1 Cor 2:6–16 in light of the wisdom of God in the cross; 1 Cor 12:13 for the baptism into the body of Christ by the Spirit; and 1 Cor 15:17 in light of the Spirit's testimony to the lordship of Christ). One can swear allegiance to Christ and remain faithful to him only by the power of this same Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 2:9–13; 6:11; 12:3, 13; 2 Cor 3:3, 17f.; 4:13f.).

In the new covenant, as in the Sinai covenant before it, obedience to God's will is the inextricable manifestation of trusting in God's promises.⁸ Conversely, Paul's warnings make it clear that if the Corinthians are not faithful, God's discipline will be poured out on them, with a corresponding threat of ultimate judgment for those who, together with the rest of the unrighteous, habitually dishonor God by failing to trust in his promises so that they remain unable to obey his commandments (besides 1 Cor 11:32, cf. 1 Cor 4:19–21; 5:9–13; 6:9–11; 11:27, 30; 15:1f.; 16:22; 2 Cor 5:10f.; 6:1–3; 12:19–21; 13:2–10). Thus, Paul's ethical admonitions are grounded *both* in the past indicative of justification *and* in the future indicative of eschatological judgment, which, rather than being in conflict, flow inextricably from one another. Note, for example, how both of these indicatives can be brought together to support Paul's imperatives in 1 Cor 6:9–11 and 2 Cor 5:11–16. *And the evidential basis of both justification and judgment is the Spirit:* "Do

⁸ For the crucial theological and anthropological link between faith, hope, and obedience, see Fuller, *Gospel and Law*, 105–17. As Fuller insightfully argues, for Paul "sanctification, like justification, is by faith alone," since "according to Paul, a faith which banks its hope on the promises of God can never be devoid of the works of love, and therefore faith is all that is needed for carrying on the Christian life" (cf. Gal 5:6) (115). Conversely, "any teaching that implies that good works are done alongside of and coordinately with faith, instead of as the result of faith, is Galatianism" (115). This perspective has now been fleshed out in Fuller's important work, *Unity*.

you not know that you (plural) are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are" (1 Cor 3:16f.).

The Corinthian correspondence thereby makes it clear that even Paul's warnings of judgment are part of God's gracious "new covenant" provision, since among those who are truly God's people they bring about the fear of judgment that keeps one from sinning on the one hand (1 Cor 10:6–13), or the "godly grief" that brings one to repentance after having sinned on the other (1 Cor 6:9–20; 2 Cor 7:9–13; 13:5). Here too, Paul's confidence in the transforming impact of the prophetic call to repentance under the new covenant *derives from the Spirit*. The church in Corinth was well aware that the inextricable link in Paul's thinking between the redemptive work of Christ on the cross and the corresponding ethical admonitions of the gospel is based on the conviction that those who possess the Spirit of God as their "seal" and "guarantee" of salvation (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; cf. Rom 8:23) will grow in faith from being "babes in Christ" to becoming "spiritual people" (πνευματικοί; 1 Cor 3:1; cf. 6:20; 9:24; 10:7–10, 14; 15:58; 16:13f.; 2 Cor 7:1; 8:7f.; 9:13, etc.). In Paul's words: "We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord *who is the Spirit*" (2 Cor 3:18).

For Paul, to speak about the saving power of the new covenant is to speak about the Spirit. The new covenant context of the Corinthian correspondence is the context of the Spirit.

The New Covenant and the Spirit: 2 Corinthians 3:3, 6

No sooner is such a conclusion reached, however, than the objection is immediately raised that Jer 31 makes no mention of the Spirit. Surely, then, it is argued, Paul's theology, with its focus on the presence of the Spirit, cannot derive from an understanding of the new covenant as now fulfilled "in Christ." But in describing the nature of his apostolic ministry in 2 Cor 3:3b, Paul establishes a contrast between God's work in the past, in which he engraved his covenant document on stone tablets (cf. the LXX of Exod 24:12; 31:18; 32:15; 34:1; Deut 9:10), and his present work in which he "engraves" his "letter of Christ" on the "tablets of human hearts" by means of the Spirit. The motif of the new "fleshly heart" and the reference to the Spirit both derive from Ezek 11:19 and 36:26f. Against this backdrop, and in view of the development of the motif of the stone tablets in postbiblical Judaism (see below), the significance of the contrast between the tablets of stone and the tablets of fleshly hearts in 3:3b is twofold. First, read as a fulfillment of the promises from Ezekiel concerning the future restoration of God's people, the contrast between the stone tablets of the law and the heart of flesh is not a contrast between the nature of the law and the heart themselves. Nor is it a contrast between the law and the Spirit, which in turn creates a contrast between two conflicting qualities or ways of salvation. Paul's concern in 3:3 was not with two distinct messages, but with the two "materials" of God's activity as "writer."⁹ As such, 2 Cor 3:3b establishes a "contrast between the two spheres of God's revelatory-salvific activity—that is, the "law" and the "heart" . . . as a contrast between the two basic ages in the history of

⁹ For these and the following points, together with their support and a critique of opposing positions, see in addition to my more recent work (note [X-ref]) [**As of 28 Apr, this is note number 118, starting with "For the detailed presentation . . . "**], my earlier work *Suffering and the Spirit*, 199–218.

salvation. . . . While in the "old age" the locus of God's activity and revelation was the law, in the "new age," according to Ezekiel, God will be at work in the heart."¹⁰

Second, rather than introducing a negative assessment of the nature or content of the law itself, the reference in 3:3 to the law under the rubric of the "tablets of stone" is part of a long tradition in which this designation is at the least a normal, neutral way of referring to the law, and more probably functions to emphasize its permanence, divine authority, honor, and glory (cf. 2 Cor 3:7, 9, 11!).¹¹ Read against the backdrop of Ezek 11:19 and 36:26f. and in anticipation of the reference to the new covenant from Jer 31 referred to in 3:6, there is no indication in the context of 3:3 that Paul is intending to qualify this common ground assumption negatively. Instead, "if anything is to be assumed as implicit in Paul's contrast in regard to the law, it is that the law is now being kept by those who have received the Spirit, as Ezekiel prophesied!"¹² In 2 Cor 3:3,

Paul affirms that the age characterized by the law as the locus of God's revelatory activity is over. Thus, the Corinthians owe their relationship to Christ not to the revelation of God in the law, but to God's work in changing their hearts through his

¹⁰ Hafemann, *Suffering and the Spirit*, 214.

¹¹ Besides the references from the OT which support the point argued here (cf. Exod 24:12 with 31:18 and the reference to the tablets as the "work of God" in Exod 32:16LXX, written with the finger of God [Exod 31:18; Deut 9:10]), see the development of the stone tablet motif in *Jub.* 1:1, 26f.; 2:1; 3:10, 31; 6:22; 16:30; 32:10f., etc.; *1 En.* 81:1f.; 103:2–4; *T. Levi* 5:4; 7:5; *2 Bar.* 6:7–9; *Liv. Pro.*, 2:14; 4Q180; *Tg. Ps.-J.* on Exod 31:18; *Exod. Rab.* 41:6; 46:2; *Lev. Rab.* 32:2; 35:5; *Num. Rab.* 9:48; *b. Ned.* 38a; *Pirqe R. El.* 45; Eupolemus, fragment 4 (= Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 9.39.5); and 2 Macc 2:1–10, where we read of Jeremiah preserving the tablets after the destruction of Jerusalem, which in view of Paul's reference to Jer 31 may be of special significance as underscoring the abiding validity of the law in the new covenant. Finally, see Philo, *QE*, where Philo gives his answer to why the commandments were written on tablets of stone—i.e., to signify their permanence and ensure the fixed nature of the commandments by providing a material that would make it possible for them to be spread abroad without corruption.

¹² Hafemann, *Suffering and the Spirit*, 214.

Spirit. Conversely, the conversion and new life of the Corinthians are evidence that the new age has arrived; that is, the age of the "fleshly heart" prophesied by Ezekiel.¹³

The flow of Paul's argument from 2 Cor 3:3 to 3:6 demonstrates, therefore, that Paul understood the promise of the new covenant from Jeremiah to be equated with the coming of the Spirit as promised by Ezekiel.¹⁴ Paul's allusion to Ezekiel in 3:3b, in which the main point in Ezek 36:27 is that God will pour out the Spirit on those whose hearts were previously made of stone *so that he might cause them to observe his statutes and ordinances*, calls attention to the corresponding point of the new covenant from Jer 31:31–34 in 2 Cor 3:6a. The "law written on the heart" from Jer 31:33 is equivalent to the new obedience to God's statutes that Ezekiel says the Spirit will bring about at the time of the eschatological restoration of God's people. Moreover, as was true for Jeremiah, for Ezekiel too, this eschatological promise of a new heart and a Spirit-caused obedience to the law is a reversal of the hard-heartedness that has characterized Israel since the exodus (cf. the "stone heart" imagery in Ezek 11:19b; 36:26b with Ezek 2:1–8; 20:1–31). Ezekiel also parallels Jeremiah in emphasizing that this new heart and relationship to God's law will be made possible only by a divine act of redemption and forgiveness, which for Ezekiel is pictured in the priestly terms of God's cleansing the people from their uncleanness and idolatry (Ezek 36:25, 29).

¹³ Ibid., 215.

¹⁴ For the conceptual relationship between Ezek 36:27–28 and Jer 31:33 within the OT texts themselves, see Daniel I. Block's very helpful survey, "Prophet of the Spirit," 38f. Block argues convincingly for taking the reference to the "spirit" in 36:26f. in both cases to be the divine Spirit.

In bringing these two texts together, the framework that emerges for understanding Paul's thought is that, as a servant of the new covenant, Paul's role involves mediating the work of the Spirit, which in turn brings about the transformation of the heart that makes obedience to the law possible. The passages from Ezekiel supply Paul's references to the work of the Spirit in 3:3b, while Jer 31:31–34 provides the focus on the new obedience to the law in 3:6. In 3:6a Paul makes it explicit that his *apostolic ministry of the Spirit* in fulfillment of Ezek 11:19; 36:26f. is conceptually equivalent with his role as a *servant of the new covenant* in fulfillment of Jer 31:31–34. Paul's new covenant ministry (3:6 based upon Jer 31:31–34) is a ministry of the Spirit (3:3b based upon Ezek 36:26f.) and vice versa. In his role as an intermediary agent of the Spirit (3:3b), Paul "serves" or "delivers" the "letter of Christ" (i.e., the conversion of the Corinthians) as a "servant" of the new covenant. The validity of Paul's ministry of the Spirit is therefore testified to by the very existence of the Corinthians as Christians. In turn, Paul's "confidence" and "sufficiency" are both defined by and based upon this work of the Spirit in and through his ministry (3:4–5). Hence, in typical Pauline style, the relative pronoun clause that begins 3:6 ("who made us sufficient as servants of the new covenant") functions to *ground* Paul's prior assertion in 3:5b that his sufficiency is from God by pointing to the reality of what is being fulfilled through his apostleship and its consequences in the lives of the Corinthians. It is *God's* work of *pouring out his Spirit* that is the basis of Paul's sufficiency as an apostle of the new covenant. Moreover, if Ezek 36:25f. and Jer 31:31–34 are taken as the initial keys to Paul's thinking in 3:6bc, then the enigmatic meaning of the letter/Spirit contrast itself becomes more readily apparent. In accordance with these OT passages, Paul is careful in 3:6 *not* to establish a

contrast between the law itself and the Spirit. This is reflected in the fact that Paul does not refer to the law *as such* in introducing this contrast, a fact that must be taken seriously. Nor is the Spirit to be read as a codeword for the gospel, so that the letter/Spirit contrast is transformed into a contrast between the law and the gospel. The problem with the Sinai covenant is not with the law itself, but, as Ezekiel and Jeremiah testify, with the people whose hearts remained hardened under it. The law remains for Paul, as it did for the Jewish traditions of his day, the holy, just, and good expression of God's covenantal will (Rom 7:12). The law itself is characterized as "spiritual" (Rom 7:14). Viewed from this perspective, the letter/Spirit contrast is not a contrast between the law and the gospel as two distinct ways of relating to God. Nor is it a contrast between two distinct ways of God relating to us (i.e., externally in the old covenant and internally in the new), since what distinguishes the ministry of the new covenant in Jer 31:31–34 is that the law itself is now kept as a result of a transformed heart. As the expression of the abiding will of God, it is not the law *per se* that kills, but the law without the Spirit—that is, the law as "letter." Paul's choice of the "letter" (γράμμα) terminology to characterize the previous covenant is his attempt to encapsulate in a word the distinction between the *role* of the law within the Sinai covenant and its new role within the new covenant in Christ. By choosing this designation Paul brings out the nuance of the law under the old covenant (cf. 3:14) as that which remained *merely* expressed in writing, rather than being incorporated into one's heart by the Spirit. The pouring out of the Spirit concomitant with the establishment of the new covenant becomes the reversal of this state of affairs. The letter/Spirit contrast is a contrast *between the law itself without the Spirit*, as it was and still is experienced by the majority of Israelites under the Sinai covenant (cf. 3:14f.), and

the law with the Spirit, as it is now being experienced by those under the new covenant in Christ. *At the center of this contrast is once again the determinative role played by the Spirit as the mark of the new covenant reality.* Accordingly, Paul's assertion in 3:6b that God has made him sufficient to be a servant of the Spirit, in contrast to serving the "letter," points to his underlying assumption that just as Moses was called to be the mediator between God and Israel, Paul has been called to be an apostle of Christ to the Church. But the *function* of their ministries is radically different. Moses was called to mediate the law to a stiff-necked people who could not obey it. As a result of the cross of Christ, Paul is called to mediate the Spirit in order to create a people whose hearts are being transformed to accept and obey the covenant stipulations of the law as appropriated under the new covenant.

This means that fundamental to Paul's self-understanding is his conviction that he is participating with those "upon whom the end of the ages has come" (1 Cor 10:11). As the context of 1 Cor 10 demonstrates, this conviction determines Paul's understanding of the applicability of the Scriptures to the Church, as well as his ethical expectations for the Church, which now finds her identity in Christ as the eschatological people of God gathered from among both Israel and the Gentiles (1 Cor 10:32; cf. Gal 6:15f.). Paul is therefore convinced that those who have been justified and set apart in the name of Christ and are living *in the Spirit* are *already* participating in the present reality of the kingdom of God, while the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom when it is established in all its fullness (1 Cor 6:7–11; cf. Gal 1:4; 5:21). For Paul, the Spirit is the present guarantee of our future redemption (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5). It is this eschatological expectation that fuels Paul's immediacy and indignation concerning the continuing lack of spiritual growth and

flagrant, habitual disobedience within the Christian community (cf. e.g., 1 Cor 3:1–4, 16f.; 5:1–13; 6:1–8, 15–20; 10:14–22; 11:17–22; 2 Cor 2:4; 6:14–7:1; 12:19–13:10). Since such a lifestyle of sin is a fundamental rejection of the Spirit's presence, Paul insists that those who refuse to repent be cast out from the people of God, for by definition they cannot be considered part of them (1 Cor 5:2, 9–13; 6:9f.; 2 Cor 12:21; 13:2, 10). As a result, inasmuch as the people of the new covenant are *defined* by their reception of the Spirit who transforms, in good conscience Paul could not address the Corinthians as "spiritual people" (πνευματικοί) in 1 Cor 3:1–3 because they still exhibited so much jealousy and strife. Instead, they remained "fleshly" (σαρκικοί).

The People of the New Covenant as the Temple of God's Presence in the Spirit

Paul's understanding of the presence of the Spirit within and among the Corinthians as a fulfillment of the promises of the new covenant led him to the conclusion that those truly in Christ will be able to know God directly and respond to him positively with both the desire and ability to keep his covenant stipulations. That is to say, in the words once again of 1 Cor 3:16–17 and 6:19, those in Christ are "the temple of God." As such, they are not "their own," but are "holy." Here too, Paul's move from the idea of the presence of the Spirit under the new covenant to the concept of the Church as the temple of God corresponds to the expectations of the "new covenant" of Jer 31:31–34. As we have seen, because it will not be broken, the new covenant of Jer 31 is described as an "everlasting covenant" in Jer 32:40. In turn, Jer 32:40 is conceptually related to the statement concerning the "everlasting covenant" in Ezek 37:24b–28, where we read as a summary of the prior passage of restoration in Ezek 36:25f.:

And they will walk in my ordinances, and keep my statutes, and observe them
 And I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forever. (NASB)

Hence, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel have at the center of their expectations concerning the future "everlasting covenant" a relationship between God and his people that is expressed in the covenant formula, "I will be their God and they shall be my people" (Jer 31:33; cf. 31:1; 32:38; Ezek 37:27). For both prophets this entails God's dwelling in the midst of his people (Jer 31:34; Ezek 37:26f.). Moreover, as Block has emphasized, Ezek 39:29 makes it clear that the promise of the Spirit in Ezek 36, "poured out upon his people, served as the permanent witness and seal of the *bryt slwm* ["covenant of peace"] and the *bryt wlm* ["eternal covenant"]. . . . When we think in terms of the OT understanding of the *rwh* of Yahweh, of which *to pneuma to hagion* is the counterpart, we should think first and foremost of the divine presence on earth."¹⁵ In this light, Paul's reference in 2 Cor 1:22 and 5:5 to the Corinthians' being sealed in the Holy Spirit can be seen to be a divine confirmation of the covenant relationship in which they now stand.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid., 48. Block points to Joel 3:1; Zech 12:10; Isa 32:15; 44:1–4 in addition to Ezek 39:29 as texts that indicate that the pouring out of the Spirit "signified the ratification and sealing of the covenant relationship" (47). Block notes the implications of this for Acts 2 and for the subsequent pouring out of the Spirit in Acts 8:14–17; 10:44–48; and 19:6.

¹⁶ Following Block, "Prophet of the Spirit," 48, who also refers to Eph 1:13 and 4:30 for this same concept.

It is this eschatological perspective, in which the inaugural fulfillment of the age to come is understood to be taking place already in the present experience of the Spirit, that provides the primary presupposition for the structure of Paul's thought. In Christ, the people of the new covenant have already become the eschatological temple of God's presence by virtue of the presence of the Spirit. For according to 2 Cor 3:18, the glory experienced as the result of the transforming work of the Spirit is the revelation of the glory of God himself, now seen on the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6). The wonder of the gospel is that all those in Christ, like Moses before them in the tent of meeting, may enter into the very presence of God "with unveiled faces" without the fear of destruction. This is the "freedom" that exists wherever the Spirit resides (2 Cor 3:17). As the gift of the new covenant, it is *the Spirit* who frees us from the hard-heartedness that necessitated the veiling of God's glory from his people in the past. Thus, Paul's "message and (his) preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that (our) faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (1 Cor 2:4f.). In other words, as an apostle of Christ, Paul was called to exercise the new covenant "ministry of the Spirit" that abounded in glory for the people of God (2 Cor 3:8–11). And it is this same ministry to which preachers of the gospel are called today.