

Evangelical Review of Theology

EDITOR: DAVID PARKER

Volume 32 · Number 4 · October 2008

Articles and book reviews reflecting global evangelical
theology for the purpose of discerning the obedience of faith

Published by



for
WORLD EVANGELICAL
ALLIANCE
Theological Commission

The Holy Spirit and Justification: A Pneumatological and Trinitarian Approach to Forensic Justification

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KEYWORDS: *Justification, Holy Spirit, forensic, YHWH dābār, Trinitarian.*

IN AN ARTICLE entitled 'Justification Through New Creation'¹ Frank Macchia raises some provocative and thought-provoking questions about the subject of justification. He begins by presenting the Protestant (i.e., Luther's) understanding of forensic justification. Yet it is clear that he is unsatisfied with such an understanding when he describes it as 'the shallow well of the forensic model',² and 'the pneumatologically barren notion

of forensic justification',³ or when he asserts that 'Justification is thus both declarative and transformative'.⁴ Macchia states the crux of the matter (apparently with some frustration) when he writes, 'Protestant theology has tended...to confine justification to the cross as the event in which God's justice and wrath were satisfied and the basis of justification of the sinner *objectively* established. Where is the Holy Spirit in this understanding of Christ's redemptive work for our justification?'⁵

Although our conclusions are different, it does seem that he has raised an important question: What is the role of

1 Frank D. Macchia, 'Justification Through New Creation, The Holy Spirit and the Doctrine by which the Church Stands or Falls', *Theology Today*, Vol. 58, no. 2 (July 2001), p. 216.

2 Macchia, 'Justification Through New Creation', p. 205.

3 Macchia, 'Justification Through New Creation', p. 207.

4 Macchia, 'Justification Through New Creation', p. 208, emphasis added.

5 Macchia, 'Justification Through New Creation', p. 209, emphasis in original.

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the Holy Spirit in justification (if any)? Put differently, if every act of God is truly a Trinitarian act, then what role does the Holy Spirit play in the drama of justification? It is relatively easy to see the roles that the Father and the Son play, but what about the Spirit? *That* is the question this essay will address.

I will begin by examining the Holy Spirit as the eschatological Spirit—the Spirit of the Kingdom. From this I plan to look at the union between Christ and the Spirit and what this may contribute to our understanding of redemption. The next step will be to examine Trinitarian salvation under three headings: First, the classical *ordo salutis* and what that may be able to contribute to our discussion; second, to examine the role of the Holy Spirit in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and to explore the significance of such a connection; and third, to look at the speech of God in the Hebrew Bible, and see what insight it may offer us for the doctrine of justification. The final section will pull all of the strands of the above together by suggesting a pneumatologically informed understanding of justification, one that fully honours the Reformation understanding of forensic justification, yet is Trinitarian at its core.

I The New Age of the Eschatological Spirit

When the New Testament opens we are met with the enigmatic figure of John the baptizer. In all four Gospel accounts John predicts the coming of the one who would baptize in/with the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:33). The baptism predicted

in these passages, and later fulfilled at Pentecost, was an eschatological outpouring of the Spirit. That is, it inaugurated a new age—the age of the Spirit. Macchia is correct when he says in another place,

The neglect (of Spirit baptism in traditions other than Pentecostal/Charismatic) is puzzling in the light of the fact that all four gospels introduce the ministry of the Messiah with the Spirit baptism metaphor in a way that does not merely predict the effects of Christian baptism but, more broadly, explains what will usher in the kingdom of God (e.g., Matt. 3: 2-12; cf. Acts 1:2-8).⁶

Gregory of Nyssa, the fourth century Eastern Church father, wrote, ‘The Spirit is a living and a substantial and distinctly subsisting kingdom with which the only begotten Christ is anointed and is king of all that is.’⁷ Macchia cites this passage and summarizes Gregory’s statement as, ‘Christ is the King and the Spirit the kingdom... Spirit baptism brings the reign of the Father, the reign of the crucified and risen Christ, and the reign of divine life to all of creation through the indwelling of the Spirit.’⁸

‘The Kingdom’ is at the centre of Jesus’ message and ministry. Ladd

⁶ Frank Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), p. 61.

⁷ Gregory, *On the Lord’s Prayer* 3; cited in Kilian McDonnell, *The Other Hand of God: The Holy Spirit as the Universal Touch and Goal* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2003), p. 226; Macchia, p. 89.

⁸ Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, p. 89.

says of the Kingdom,

...the Kingdom is present in the person and activity of Jesus. What was present was divine power, the activity of the Spirit of God, the working of God himself. Men were being delivered from the powers of evil; demons were being cast out by a greater power. Jesus asserted that this meant that the Kingdom of God itself was present.⁹

Jesus draws a connection between 'the Kingdom' and 'the Spirit' when he says, '...if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you' (Mt. 12:28, NRSV¹⁰). The Kingdom's power is the Spirit's power. The in-breaking of the Kingdom is the Spirit's 'dynamic reign invading the present age without transforming it into the age to come'.¹¹ To be in the Kingdom means to be 'in the new order of the messianic salvation';¹² that is, to be 'in Christ' by the Spirit. It is the presence of the King in the here-and-now; however it is not the full realization of that Kingdom yet. Kuhn states, 'The Then of the coming of the kingdom of God cannot be separated from the Now of the battle against the kingdom of Satan. Inasmuch as Jesus breaks the power of Satan with his word and with his deeds the kingdom of God is actually made

manifest...'¹³ In his earliest work Ladd argues that, 'The kingdom has come in that the *powers* of the future kingdom have already come into history and into human experience through the supernatural ministry of the Messiah which has effected the defeat of Satan. Men may now experience the reality of the reign of God.'¹⁴

In short, it is the 'already, but not yet' tension of the kingdom age of the Spirit. The presence of the Kingdom, then, is the very presence of the Spirit; it is, in brief, the presence of the new covenant, ratified by the blood of Christ.

The people of the Old Testament looked forward to a 'new covenant' age when the work of the Holy Spirit would be much more powerful and widespread (Num. 11:29; Jer. 31: 31-33; etc.). With the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost a new epoch began. 'Pentecost publicly marks the transition from the old to the new covenant, and signifies the commencement of the 'now' of the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2).'¹⁵ Wayne Grudem captures this sense of transition when he writes,

But we must realize that the day of Pentecost is much more than an individual event in the lives of Jesus' disciples and those with them. The day of Pentecost was the

9 George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 144.

10 *The New Revised Standard Version*. This will be the version used in all cases unless otherwise stated.

11 Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, p. 149.

12 Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, p. 202.

13 K.G. Kuhn, *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, K. Stendahl, ed. (London: SCM, 1958), p. 111; as quoted by Ladd, p. 155.

14 George Eldon Ladd, *Crucial Questions About The Kingdom Of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), p. 91.

15 Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit: Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), p. 57.

point of transition between the old covenant work and the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the new covenant work and ministry of the Holy Spirit. Of course the Holy Spirit was at work throughout the Old Testament...But during that time the work of the Holy Spirit in individual lives, was in general, a work of lesser power.¹⁶

In other words, Pentecost was not simply empowerment for the individual disciples; rather it signified the beginning of God's new covenant work. It was not just another act in the drama of Christ's work, it was 'precisely the sum of all that is communicated to us in his incarnation and words and deeds'.¹⁷ Sinclair Ferguson in his helpful book states, 'In Luke-Acts...Pentecost is portrayed as a redemptive-historical event. It is not primarily to be interpreted existentially and pneumatologically, but eschatologically and Christologically.'¹⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, shares a similar eschatological understanding when he states,

In the whole of the New Testament the Spirit is understood eschatologically. He is the power of the new creation. He is the power of the resurrection. He is the earnest and pledge of glory. His present efficacy is the rebirth of men and women. His activity is experience inwardly,

in the heart; but it points ahead into what is outward and public.¹⁹

If, as Ferguson suggests, the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost is to be understood 'eschatologically and Christologically', what, then, is the relationship between Christ and the Spirit? It is to this question we now turn.

II Jesus and the Spirit

Jesus was the bearer of the Spirit; he was (and is) the giver of the Spirit. His entire ministry was conducted in the power of the Spirit. Luke states, 'Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan.... Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee,... "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me"... Then he said to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"' (Lk. 4:1, 14, 18, 21). G. R. Beasley-Murray sees this close interactive relationship between Jesus and the Spirit when he says, 'The manifestation of the kingdom in him was possible because of his unique relation to the Spirit of the Kingdom...It was as Bearer of the Spirit that Jesus was the instrument of the divine sovereignty—or, as we may equally say, the Bearer of the Kingdom.'²⁰

Moreover, the Spirit's presence in Christ was not limited to his miracles. One can see that the Spirit was present with him even at his death. Hebrews

16 Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), p. 825.

17 D. Lyle Dabney, *Starting with the Spirit*, eds. Stephen Pickard & Gordon Preece (Hindmarsh: Australian Theological Forum Inc., 2001), pp. 70-71

18 Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 82.

19 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 89.

20 As quoted by Dabney, *Starting with the Spirit*, p. 49.

9:14 states that Christ offered himself to God 'through the eternal Spirit'. A strong case can be made for understanding the *pneuma* in which Jesus offered himself as referring to the divine Spirit. Calvin says in this regard, 'He now clearly shows how Christ's death is to be estimated, not by the external act, but by the power of the Spirit. For Christ suffered as man; but that death becomes saving to us through the efficacious power of the Spirit.'²¹

So complete was this union between the Spirit and Christ that not even in his passion was it fractured. Dabney remarks, 'The story of the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, as related in the New Testament gospels, is thus the story of suffering and sacrifice *of* and *by virtue of* the Holy Spirit, for their witness to Jesus of Nazareth is a witness to Jesus Christ, to the one defined by the Spirit of God on his way to the cross.'²² Similarly, commenting on Hebrews 9:14, Moltmann writes, 'The surrender through the Father and the offering of the Son take place "through the Spirit". The Holy Spirit is therefore the link in the separation. He is the link joining the bond between the Father and the Son, with their separation.'²³

This may be a novel suggestion to some however. The question may be asked: Does not Jesus' cry of dereliction—

'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'—preclude the idea that the Spirit was present with the Son at his passion? After all, at his death Jesus spoke not of intimate sonship but of loss, of estrangement from his Father; of abandonment by the one whom he loved most. William Lane draws our attention to this when he comments, 'The sinless Son of God died the sinner's death and experienced the bitterness of desolation.'²⁴

Nevertheless Moltmann seems correct when he stresses the necessity of viewing God's actions, even the crucifixion, in Trinitarian terms. He cites the cry of dereliction and then states,

In these words, the basic categories of the Trinitarian event of the cross are laid out, and with them the identities of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit: The Father sacrifices or gives up the Son to the cross, the Son suffers abandonment by the Father, and what proceeds from this event between Father and Son is the Spirit.²⁵

In other words, even though the bond between the Father and Son was broken as Christ took the Father's cup of the wrath against sin, the Spirit was still present with Christ—even in death. This 'cup' did not pass from him; he 'drank' it on the cross. But he drank it through the Spirit.

Dabney states the same when he writes,

The death of Jesus Christ on the

21 John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, complete from the *Calvin Translation Society* edition, http://www.ccel.org/c/calvin/comment3/comm_vol44/hm/xv.iii.htm accessed September 15, 2006.

22 Dabney, *Starting with the Spirit*, p. 45.

23 Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, p. 82.

24 William Lane, *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 573.

25 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), p. 244.

cross represents, therefore, something other for the Spirit than for the Father or the Son. For the Father and the Son the cross means absence: the Father's loss of his beloved Son, the Son's experience of abandonment by the one whom he had addressed as 'Abba Father'. But the Spirit suffers neither such a 'loss' nor such an 'abandonment'. Rather, what the Spirit experiences is a function not of *absence*, but of *presence*. For the Spirit of the Cross is the presence of God with the Son in the absence of the Father. Thus, whereas the cry of Jesus reveals the yawning chasm of loss and desolation that opens to separate Father and Son, no such chasm exists between the Crucified One and the *Spiritus Crucis*, the one who suffered death on the cross and the *Spiritus Vivificans*.²⁶

This bond between the Son and the Spirit was never broken—it couldn't be. Even in death the union remained. To be sure, Jesus' human nature died on that cross, but the doctrine of Christ is that he was both God and Man—fully God, fully man. As such, when his human nature died, his divine nature lived on in union with the Spirit. Even in his ascension the Spirit was present with him. 'Christ on his ascension came into such complete possession of the Spirit who had sustained him throughout his ministry that economically the resurrected Christ and the Spirit are one to us.'²⁷

It was as a result of his death and resurrection that salvation was secured. But as the New Testament connects the resurrection of Christ to the subject of justification we will now attempt a Trinitarian understanding of redemption.

III Trinitarian salvation

1 *Ordo Salutis*

The expression '*ordo salutis*' simply means 'the order of salvation'. The idea of an *ordo salutis* came about by trying to answer the question: How does the Holy Spirit apply the work of Christ to the individual?²⁸ Perhaps the most famous *ordo* came from the English Puritan, William Perkins (1558-1602), when he offered 'the golden chain of salvation'.²⁹ In this 'golden chain' Perkins used Romans 8: 29-30 as a template for what he understood to be the order of the application of redemption. The passage says,

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and

²⁸ The Latin expression '*Ordo salutis*' has been traced back to F. Buddeus, *Institutiones Theologiae Dogmaticae* (1724), and J. Karpov, *Theologia Revelata Dogmatica* (1739); 'indicating the emergence of the terminology, but not necessarily the idea itself, in the so-called scholastic Protestant orthodoxy of the seventeenth century' (Ferguson, p. 260, f. n. 3).

²⁹ William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1612-19), vol. 1: pp. 11-117.

²⁶ Dabney, *Starting with the Spirit*, pp. 56-7.

²⁷ Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 54.

those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

In short, Perkins pointed out that whoever 'those' are in verse 29 ('those' that God foreknew), they are the very same 'those' who were predestined. 'These,' in turn, are the same ones who are (effectively) called; and 'they' are the same ones that are justified, and glorified—hence, the idea of a 'chain'. The purpose of an *ordo*, however, went beyond the chronological order of redemption; the goal was to demonstrate a logical order.³⁰ Additionally, the objective was to show the relationship between the various facets.

A (very) brief case-study may be useful. What, for example, is the relationship between faith and justification? Wayne Grudem provides a helpful explanation when he writes,

Paul quite clearly teaches that this justification comes *after* our faith and *as God's response* to our faith. He says that God 'justifies him who *has faith* in Jesus' (Rom. 3:26), and that 'a man is justified *by faith* apart from the works of law' (Rom. 3:28). He says 'Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom. 5:1). Moreover, 'a man is not justified by works of the law but *through faith* in Jesus' (Gal. 2:16).³¹

Put simply, faith precedes justifica-

tion. Before God justifies a person they place their faith in Christ. Again, it is clear that this is a *logical* ordering of events; the realities themselves take place at the same instant in time. As a result, the moment a person places their faith in Christ they are justified.

More recently, however, the very legitimacy of the *ordo* has been brought into question. Herman Ridderbos states,

In Paul's preaching there is no such thing as a systematic development of the *ordo salutis*, a detailed doctrine of the anthropological application of salvation. The cause for this is not only that the character of Paul's doctrine is not 'systematic' in the scientific sense of the word, but above all that his viewpoint is a different one.³²

This is not to suggest that the various features of redemption are randomly related. Surely, no one would hold such a view. Rather, the answer is to be found in the ministry of the Spirit. The question, then, becomes: On what 'principle' or 'model' is the order of the Spirit's work to be understood? The answer to this is the union with Christ that the Spirit brings about.

The central role of the Spirit is to reveal Christ and to unite us to him. The implication is that the model we employ for structuring the Spirit's ministry should be that of union with Christ. Every facet of the application of Christ's work ought to be related to the way in which the Spirit unites us to

³⁰ There is a book-length exposition of the *ordo salutis* in John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 79-181.

³¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 777-778; emphasis in original.

³² Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of his Theology*, tr. J. R. de Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 206.

Christ himself, and viewed as directly issuing from personal fellowship with him. The dominant motif and architectonic principle of the order of salvation should therefore be union with Christ in the Spirit.³³

This is not to suggest that justification, adoption, sanctification, regeneration, *et al*, are not distinct categories of redemption. They are; and they should not be confused. But they are not separate events. Rather, 'they are aspects or facets of the one event of our union with Christ in his risen glory, effected by the power of the Spirit and worked out progressively through the Spirit's ongoing ministry'.³⁴ In brief, the Spirit unites us to Christ wherein he applies all of the benefits that are ours in Christ.

Although the above accounts for and clarifies certain aspects of redemption, the purport of this essay is to demonstrate the role of the Holy Spirit specifically in justification. Yet it is important to make clear the mission and role of the Spirit of God in working out our salvation; in particular, the connection of Christ's resurrection to the Spirit, and of the resurrection to justification. It is to this we now turn our attention.

2 The Spirit Who Raised Him From the Dead

It may seem superfluous to even ask the question: Who raised Christ from the dead? The question can, however, be answered in more than one way. On one hand, we are told that the Father

raised the Son from the dead: 'Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father' (Rom. 6:4); 'God the Father, who raised him from the dead' (Gal. 1:1); etc. On the other hand we are told that the Son raised himself from the dead: 'Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ...he was speaking of the temple of his body' (Jn. 2:19, 21); '...lay down my life in order to take it up again...I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again' (10: 17-18).

However, that is not the end of the matter. There are passages that indicate that the Holy Spirit raised Christ from the dead as well. For example, 1 Peter 3:18 says, 'He was put to death in the body but *made alive by the Spirit*'. Additionally, Romans states that it was 'through the Spirit of holiness' that Jesus was 'declared with power to be the Son of God, *by his resurrection from the dead*' (Rom. 1:4). The Greek in this passage can be translated in more than one way. However, whatever way one chooses, it is clear that the Holy Spirit was directly connected to the resurrection of Christ. The point is that the resurrection of Christ from the dead was a Trinitarian act; all three persons of the Godhead were involved.

The question may rightfully be asked: So what? What is at stake in demonstrating that all three members of the Trinity were involved in the resurrection of Christ? The significance of this is that Paul makes a clear connection between the resurrection of Christ and our justification. '[Jesus] was handed over to death for our trespasses and *was raised for our justification*' (Rom. 4: 25). James Dunn comments that this passage serves to

33 Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 100.

34 Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 106.

'underscore the soteriological significance of Jesus' resurrection...'³⁵ Similarly, evangelical scholar, Douglass Moo, notes the implications:

Particularly striking, because unusual, is the connection made between Christ's resurrection and our justification....we must still insist that Paul is affirming here a theological connection between Jesus' resurrection and our justification (cf. 5:10). As Jesus' death provides the necessary grounds on which God's justifying action can proceed, so his resurrection, by vindicating Christ and freeing him forever from the influence of sin (cf. 6:10), provides for the ongoing power over sins experienced by the believer in union with Christ.³⁶

To say that Jesus was raised *for* our justification is to say that his resurrection authenticates and confirms that our justification has been secured.³⁷ The grammar of the text, on the surface, seems simple enough,³⁸ yet the

implications are that our justification (whatever that term may mean) is inextricably connected with Christ's resurrection. In short, you do not understand Easter if you do not understand justification. Our justification and his resurrection are bound up in such a way that Paul can meaningfully draw a causal relationship.

Additionally, there are places in the New Testament where it describes Christ's resurrection as *his* justification. For example, 1 Timothy 3: 16 states that Jesus was 'revealed in flesh, justified by the Spirit, seen by angels'. This type of statement can be confusing. From what did Christ need to be justified? Additionally, *prime facie* this passage does not appear to connect the work of the Spirit to the resurrection. However, Dabney's comments on this passage are helpful: "Christ", it is said, "was justified by the Spirit". What can this statement possibly mean? In general, commentators agree that *this is a reference to the resurrection*.³⁹ That is, the Spirit was involved in some way with Christ's resurrection. Sinclair Ferguson writing in a similar vein says,

Paul views the resurrection of Christ from the dead as his 'redemption'. His death is everything that death truly is. In his capacity as the second man, the last Adam, he experienced death as the wages of sin, separation from life, judgment under the wrath of God and alienation from the face of the Father (Rom. 6:10; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13). He died to the sin under whose power he came (Rom. 6:10:

35 James Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (Word Biblical Commentary, 38a, Dallas: Word, 1988), p. 225.

36 Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 289-90.

37 Schlatter takes this too far, however, when he asserts that our justification preceded Jesus' resurrection. Adolf Schlatter, *Romans: The Righteousness of God*, trans. by S. S. Schatzmann (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), p. 118.

38 For a detailed discussion of the grammar see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 244; also, Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 3: *Syntax* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963), p. 268.

39 Dabney, *Starting with the Spirit*, p. 59.

'the death he died, he died *to sin*'). But from death thus conceived Christ was raised, delivered, vindicated or 'saved' through the resurrection (1 Tim. 3:15). In his resurrection he was 'redeemed' and delivered from death by the power of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁰

And Richard Gaffin, Jr. reinforces this when he writes,

It is, then, not only meaningful but necessary to speak of the resurrection as the redemption of Christ. The resurrection is nothing if not his deliverance from the power and curse of death which was in force until the moment of being raised...The resurrection is the salvation of Jesus as the last Adam; it and no other event in his experience is the point of his transition from wrath to grace.⁴¹

In all this, his justification was his resurrection, and his resurrection secures our justification. As a result, when he transitioned 'from wrath to grace' (to use Gaffin's expression) Christ had fulfilled his messianic obligation of drinking the cup of God's wrath *for us*. In the poetic words of Richard Allen Body, 'Christ drained the cup of God's wrath bone dry, leaving not a drop for us to drink'.⁴² The consequence of this is that the grace of God that justifies us is tied up with the

life-giving Spirit.⁴³ And yet this Spirit defies simplistic categorizations.

3 The Speech of God—The Holy Spirit of God

In examining the role of the Holy Spirit in justification, one is struck by the need to move beyond simplistic categories that have sometimes been used to describe our theological understanding. Think again of the Holy Spirit as the bond between the Father and Son in Christ's passion,⁴⁴ or one of the analogies that Augustine used to describe the Trinity. He likened the Godhead to a lover and the beloved. There is one who loves, and the one who receives the love. But, it may be asked: Where is the Trinity in that analogy? Isn't that a bi-unity rather than a tri-unity? Augustine's answered, however, that the Father is the 'lover,' the Son is the 'beloved,' and the Holy Spirit is 'the bond of love' between them.⁴⁵

Even though Augustine was a western father, he was not a twenty-first century westerner. As a result, he didn't necessarily use the same categories we use; he had others at his disposal.

43 See Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, p. 241.

44 See above, section II, 'Jesus and the Spirit'.

45 Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 14 vols. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004 reprint), vol. 3. Augustine uses more analogies than this, but all of them are more complex than the popular ones heard today. When, for example, he uses the mind of humanity as an illustration of the Trinity he utilizes a human's memory, their understanding, and their will, and the way in which each of these interacts with the other, pp.134-143.

40 Ferguson, 104. Ferguson develops this idea further on pages 103-107.

41 Richard Gaffin, Jr., *The Centrality of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), p. 116.

42 Richard Allen Body, *The Voice From the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2000), p. 62.

It is in trying to think creatively about the Spirit that we discover just how correct Spurgeon was when he said, 'The most excellent study for expanding the soul is...the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity.'⁴⁶ In this section I want to suggest a possible option in the way in which we perceive the Holy Spirit.

Benjamin Warfield once wrote,

The Old Testament may be likened to a chamber richly furnished but dimly lighted; the introduction of light brings into it nothing which was not in it before; but it brings out into clearer view much of what is in it but was only dimly or even not at all perceived before. The mystery of the Trinity is not revealed in the Old Testament; but the mystery of the Trinity underlies the Old Testament revelation, and here and there almost comes into view. Thus the Old Testament revelation of God is not corrected by the fuller revelation which follows it, but only perfected, extended and enlarged.⁴⁷

Never was an analogy more true than when we come to the Holy Spirit in the very beginning of the book of Genesis.

The Hebrew Bible begins with the Spirit of God moving over the face of the deep (Gen. 1:2). Then in verse three we are told that God spoke, and suddenly light burst into existence.

Over the rest of the chapter an account is given of a cycle where God speaks and creation appears; God says... and the cosmos comes into being. One thing becomes clear from this: God's speech is no ordinary speech. In fact, God's word is uniquely creative. Although space does not permit its full development here, it will suffice to say that, according to Whitaker, God's word (*dābār*⁴⁸) signifies,

'That which lies behind'...In accordance with a common feature of Heb. psychology a man's *dābār* is regarded as in some sense *an extension of his personality and further as possessing a substantive existence of its own...*[In] the Pentateuch...the Word possesses a like power to the God who speaks it (cf. Is. 55:11) and effects his will without hindrance. Hence the term may refer to the creative word of God.⁴⁹

In the same vein, Harris, Archer, and Waltke warn against thinking that it is simply that 'the word had a power independent of God. Rather, *it is God the Creator who does what he will*. This will of God is expressed in words of command and they are effective because he makes them so.'⁵⁰ In other words, the *dābār* of God is an extension of himself. Put succinctly, the 'word of

⁴⁶ As quoted in J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973), p. 5.

⁴⁷ Benjamin Warfield, *Biblical Doctrines* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1988), pp. 141-142

⁴⁸ Richard Whitaker, *Whitaker's Revised BDB Hebrew-English Lexicon* (Norfolk: Bible-Works, 1995), p. 55; emphasis mine.

⁴⁹ *The New Bible Dictionary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1962), n. p.; emphasis mine.

⁵⁰ R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., & Bruce K. Waltke, *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), n. p.

God' is the Holy Spirit. Hence, the phrases 'God spoke...' and 'the Holy Spirit created' are virtually synonymous.⁵¹ If the above is true, then the role of the Holy Spirit in justification becomes much more apparent.

IV The Spirit and Justification

The term 'justification' has a long history of controversy. However, since the time of the Protestant Reformation the term has generally come to be understood as a legal (forensic) act whereby God declares us righteous. A. A. Hodge states the matter clearly enough when he writes:

Justification is a judicial act of God, whereby he declares us to be conformed to the demands of the law as the condition of our life; it is not an act of gracious power, making us holy or conformed to the law as a standard of moral character.⁵²

The Protestant Reformers were correct when they argued that the term cannot mean 'to make righteous'.⁵³ For example, Luk. 7:29 says, 'When they heard this all the people and the tax collectors *justified God*, having been baptized with the baptism of John.' The people 'justified God'? Obviously, the people didn't 'make' God righteous.

Rather, the ESV captures the right sense when it translates the passage, 'they declared God just...' This is the sense of the term: 'To declare as righteous'.

This is also the sense of the term in passages where the New Testament talks about us being declared righteous by God: 'The judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification' (Rom. 5:16);⁵⁴ 'it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus' (Rom. 3:26); 'we know that a person is *reckoned as righteous*⁵⁵ not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ' (Galatians 2:16).

Additionally,

The idea that justification is a legal declaration is quite evident also when justification is contrasted with condemnation.⁵⁶ Paul says, 'Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn?' (Romans 8:33-34). To 'condemn' someone is to declare that person guilty. The opposite of condemnation is justification, which, in this context, must mean 'to declare someone not guilty'.⁵⁷

In his typical forthright way, John Murray states, 'Justification is a judicial or forensic term and refers to a

⁵¹ I am indebted to several discussions with Steve Service for this insight. At the time of this writing, Steve was completing his dissertation on the *YHWH dābār* at Regent University School of Divinity.

⁵² A. Hodge, *Commentary on the Westminster Confession* (Escondido: Ephesians Four Group, 1999), n. p.

⁵³ As the Roman Catholic Church maintained.

⁵⁴ Note the contrast between 'condemnation' and 'justification.' See Grudem's comment on footnote 57.

⁵⁵ The actual term is 'justified', however the NRSV offers this as a viable translation.

⁵⁶ Note the example above in Romans 5:16.

⁵⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology* p. 778.

judgment conceived, recognized, and declared with respect to judicial status. It does not mean to make righteous or upright or holy in the subjectively factitive and operative sense but to pronounce or declare to be righteous.⁵⁸ In other words, justification is something that God *says* about us. He *speaks*, he *declares* us righteous. In this *statement* he imputes to our account the positive righteousness that Christ earned. This is, quite obviously, nothing more than the Reformation view of forensic imputation.

The term imputation simply means 'to attribute to'. 'In the juridical and theological sense of the word, to impute is to attribute anything to a person or persons, upon adequate grounds, as the judicial or meritorious reason of reward or punishment.'⁵⁹ It is precisely here that the Holy Spirit is present in justification. *He* is the speech of God; *he* is the declaration; *he* is the pronouncement of righteousness. Just as the Spirit was the *dāḥār* of God in creating the cosmos in Genesis, he is also the Father's declaration of our legal standing. One would be hard pressed to conceive of a more pneumatologically rich understanding of justification.

The advantage of this understanding is that it preserves what the Reformers regained. Namely, 'How much more surely will those who

receive the abundance of grace and the free *gift of righteousness* exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ...so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification' (Rom. 5: 17-18). One does not need to eschew forensic justification in order to have a pneumatologically robust view of justification. Luther cautioned,

[Justification is] the chief article of Christian doctrine...For if we know this article, we are in the clearest light; if we do not know it, we dwell in the densest darkness. Therefore if you see this article impugned or imperiled, do not hesitate to resist Peter or an angel from heaven; for it cannot be sufficiently extolled.⁶⁰

D. Lyle Dabney is certainly right when he says, '...we must bring together what that interpretation has torn apart: a supposedly "objective" work of Christ and a supposedly "subjective" work of the Spirit, God's "forensic" act in the death of the Son of God's "charismatic" act in the outpouring of the Spirit. And to do that, I suggest, we must develop a broader understanding of not only the means but the substance of redemption through Christ and in the Spirit.'⁶¹ This, it seems to me, is done by seeing the Holy Spirit as the creative agent of God's speech. The Father's declaration that we are righteous is spoken by means of the Spirit and was secured by the res-

58 John Murray, *Systematic Theology*, volume 2 of *The Collected Writings of John Murray* (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth, 1982), vol. 2: p. 204.

59 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), vol. 2: p. 194.

60 Martin Luther, from his exposition of Galatians 2:11 in *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, 2 vols. Ewald M. Plass, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), vol. 2: p. 705. When Luther spoke of 'justification' he clearly had in mind forensic justification.

61 Dabney, *Starting with the Spirit*, p. 81.

urrection of Christ from the dead. This, then, is Trinitarian justification.

Conclusion

I began this paper by citing Macchia's concern that the typical reformed understanding of justification was 'pneumatologically barren'. He says, 'Luther's understanding of justification begs for greater exploration into its accomplishment ultimately through the Spirit's final work in new creation on a broad cosmic scale.'⁶² Without

reservation I applaud Macchia's assertion that the doctrine of forensic justification 'begs for greater exploration',⁶³ but that exploration does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that justification must necessarily be equated with the renewal of all things. It is possible to preserve Luther's doctrine of forensic justification in a pneumatologically informed way. This, it is hoped, will carry the theological discussion an additional step so that we will see anew 'the unsearchable riches of Christ' (Phip. 3:8, NIV).

⁶² Macchia, 'Justification Through New Creation', p. 205.

⁶³ In fact, it was in reading Dr. Macchia's essay that I first began to think through the very ideas expressed in this essay.

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