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The Indwelling Spirit as the Promised Breath of Life: Regeneration in Pauline Theology

The indwelling of the Spirit is such a familiar concept within systematic theology that our rather sterile conversations about it often do not acknowledge its roots in the biblical image of the breath of life. This paper will attempt to clarify the connection between the Spirit's indwelling and the divine bestowal of life while considering some implications for systematic theology.

The Breath of Life

When the man was made out of the dust of the ground, he was lifeless flesh until God breathed into him the "breath of life" (μΥΥΙη' τm' vηI [Gen. 2:7]). This animating breath of God may have been denoted just as well by the term *ruach* (j' ' Wϱ), as in Genesis 6:17 and 7:15, where animals as well as people are sustained in life by the divine breath. Psalm 104:29,30 demonstrates the concept quite clearly.

Thou dost hide Thy face, they are dismayed;
Thou dost take away their spirit (μh ; Wϱ)¹, they expire,
And return to their dust.
Thou dost send forth Thy Spirit (Ūj } Wϱ), they are created;
And Thou dost renew the face of the ground.

Every creature that breathes does so by the presence of the life-giving breath of God. When God chooses to withdraw his breath, we die. Job utilizes the same concept when he speaks of his own mortality. Job 27:3,4 reads,

For as long as breath (yτ im ; v] ni) is in me
And the breath of God (H' / la ' j' ' Wϱ)² is in my nostrils,
My lips certainly will not speak unjustly,
Nor will my tongue mutter deceit.

We see here a potential source of difficulty with the term *ruach* (j' ' Wϱ), which is frequently treated as a reference to the Holy Spirit (as in Num. 11:26-29) but may also be used to denote the wind (as in Exod. 10:13), one's breath (as, apparently, in Job 15:30), or the human spirit (as in Gen. 41:8).³ Scholars often try to distinguish between these uses of the term,

¹A Qumran manuscript reads hκ jwϱ here, a variant which fits the parallelism of the psalm more precisely (*BHS*, 1184). μh ; Wϱ is the more difficult reading for this reason, and should be preferred, but there may be little real difference between the two alternatives.

²It is common for Job to substitute H' / la for μyhiløa (*TDOT*, s.v. "μyhiløa," by Helmer Ringgren, 1:272).

³Cf. *BDB*, s.v. "j' ' Wϱ," 924-25.

sometimes moving from one category to another within given texts,⁴ but such efforts risk obscuring a natural association between wind, breath, and spirit in God's creative work. Eichrodt provides an appropriate summary of their interrelationship.

Ruah has retained at all times – and in this it is akin to the Greek *pneu'ma* – the meaning 'wind', denoting the movement of air both outside Man in Nature, and inside him, his own breath. Just as, in ancient popular belief, the wind was regarded as something mysterious, the bringer of life and fertility, so at an early stage primitive Man observed that breath also was an indispensable bearer of life, the origin of which he could not explain. No wonder, then, that in the blowing of the wind and the rhythm of human respiration ancient Man detected a divine mystery, and saw in this element in Nature, at once so near to him and yet so incomprehensible, a symbol of the mysterious nearness and activity of the divine. As the bearer of life, therefore, the wind tends to become in the theistic religions the breath of life, proceeding from God, and both animating Nature and bestowing life on Man. The living breath in each human being may, then, be regarded as an effect of the divine breath of life, as, for example, in Egypt, where exactly as in Israel the deity breathes the life-breath into Man, and thus calls him into living existence. . . . Just as Man only comes to life in the first place because God breathes into him his own breath of life, so in order for him to succeed during life the *ruah* must not be impaired or dwindle away, or, if it does vanish, it must return to him. Moreover, even the animal kingdom is called into existence by the same vital principle. Hence every living thing in the world is dependent on God's constantly letting his breath of life go forth to renew the created order; and when its vital spirit from God is withdrawn every creature must sink down in death.⁵

Job continues to demonstrate this concept in other passages:

But it is a spirit (j 'Wr) in man,
And the breath of the Almighty (yDæv ' tm ' v]nI) gives them understanding (32:8).

The Spirit of God (laeAj 'Wr) has made me,
And the breath of the Almighty (yDæv ' tm ' v]nI) gives me life (33:4).

If He should determine to do so,
If He should gather to Himself His spirit and His breath (/ tm ; v]nIw ' ' /hWr),
All flesh would perish together,
And man would return to dust (34:14, 15).

The parallelism employed here makes it seem artificial to distinguish between God's animating breath and the Holy Spirit. In fact, a later, more fully trinitarian pneumatology may

⁴For example, see John Woodhouse, "The 'Spirit' in the Book of Ezekiel," in *Spirit of the Living God (Part One)*, edited by B. G. Webb (Homebush West, NSW: Lancer Books, 1991), 1-22.

⁵Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, The Old Testament Library, trans. John A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 2: 46-47. Cf. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. "Spirit," by M.E. Osterhaven, 1041, and s.v. "Holy Spirit," by T.S. Caulley, 521; David Ewert, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1983), 23; Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Doctrine of the Spirit and the Task of a Theology of Nature," *Theology* 75 (1972): 8-9; Paul van Imschoot, "L'esprit de Jahvé, source de vie dans l'ancien testament," *Revue Biblique* 44 (1935): 482-90; *TDNT*, s.v. "pneu'ma," by Friedrich Baumgärtel, 6: 361-63; Marie E. Isaacs, *The Concept of Spirit: A Study of Pneuma in Hellenistic Judaism and its Bearing on the New Testament* (London: Heythrop Monographs, 1976), 36.

well be built upon this concept of the life-giving breath of God. This sheds light on the creative presence of the Spirit (μυήι λῶα ἵπνωρ) in Genesis 1:2 and the nature of God's judgment in Genesis 6:3. God states in the latter verse, "My Spirit shall not abide in mankind forever, because he also is flesh."⁶ This passage demonstrates, as Eichrodt rightly observes, that our "breath" is "a gift of grace, which can at any time be revoked, from the one who is the living Lord over the spirit of life."⁷ When God chooses to withdraw His animating Spirit, all flesh must die. Grelot rightly states, "Since life is a gift of God, it is the Spirit of God the Creator that maintains man in existence by giving him breath. The existence is precarious, however, for man who has come from dust will ultimately return to it."⁸

The universal presence of the Holy Spirit as the life-giver in all creatures does not preclude His unique indwelling in certain individuals for particular purposes, nor does it provide a substitute for the spirit as an aspect of humanity. The personalized human spirit is attested in the Old Testament as early as Genesis.⁹ However, the interrelationship of wind, breath, spirit, and Holy Spirit means that one may not always make clear distinctions between these concepts, and it may be that the individualized experience of the Spirit in both testaments should be regarded as an extra-endowment of life in fellowship with God. David's fear in Psalm 51 may thus be the loss of both his kingdom and his life through God's withdrawal of the Spirit (Ps. 51:11).

The Promise of the Spirit as the Promise of Life

The association of wind, breath, Spirit, and life may be seen most vividly in Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones. In Ezekiel 36:26, the Lord promises Israel that He would give them a "new heart" and put a "new spirit" (הַנְּדִיּוֹת הַנְּיִרִיּוֹת) within them. He describes that spirit in verse 27 as "My Spirit" (יְיָ הַיִּרִיּוֹת), who would cause the people to walk in His statutes. Following a pattern seen in other new covenant texts (most notably Jer. 31:33), the nation would be fully restored to the life God had intended for them – they would obey his law from the heart, they would live in the land of promise, they would be His people, and He would be their God (v. 28). They would finally enjoy all of the blessings promised to them under the Mosaic covenant (vv. 29, 30).

⁶The MT of Genesis 6:3 reads, יְיָ הַיִּרִיּוֹת אֵלֶיךָ אֵלֶיךָ אֵלֶיךָ. The quotation above favors the LXX version, which evidently substitutes ἵπνωρ or ἵπνωρ (meaning "abide," or "remain") for ἵπνωρ: (meaning "judge," *BDB*, s.v. "ἵπνωρ," 192). Ross correctly observes that this translation better fits the context (*Creation and Blessing*, 183), and it is favored by Kidner (Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967], 84) and Cassuto, who writes, "The whole passage is then easily explained. The Lord said: My Spirit, the spirit of life that I breathed into man's nostrils, shall not abide in man forever, that is, the children born from the union of the sons of God with the daughters of men, since they are human on their mothers' side, shall not be immortal like their fathers, but shall die when their time comes like all members of the human race" (Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Part 1) *From Adam to Noah*, trans. Israel Abrahams [Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1978], 296).

⁷Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2:49.

⁸Pierre Grelot, "The Resurrection of Jesus: Its Biblical and Jewish Background," in *The Resurrection and Modern Biblical Thought*, ed. Paul de Sury (New York: Corpus Instrumentorum, 1970), 8.

⁹E.g. Gen. 26:35; 41:8. Cf. *TDNT*, s.v. "πνεῦμα," by Friedrich Baumgärtel, 6:361; W. David Stacey, *The Pauline View of Man: In Relation to its Judaic and Hellenistic Background* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1956), 89-90.

This restoration is vividly portrayed in chapter 37 as the resurrection of Israel. Ezekiel was shown a valley full of dry bones, the fallen army of his people, to which the Lord added flesh through the inspired command of the prophet. There remained no breath in the reconstituted bodies until the Lord told Ezekiel, "Prophesy to the breath (j' ' Wrh;), prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Come from the four winds (t / jWr [B ' r ' ' a ' me;), O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life'" (v. 9). When the prophet did as he was commanded, God's animating breath (j' ' Wrh;) came into the dead bodies and they came to life (v. 10) – a re-creation following the pattern of Genesis 2:7.¹⁰ They stood to their feet, just as the prophet himself had done when filled with the breath in 2:2. In verses 11-14, God applies the vision to the nation's restoration, promising that He will bring them up out of the graves of their exile and restore them to life in the land through His life-giving Spirit.

The resurrection of the nation described in verses 11-14 is not literal, but metaphorical. Israel was "dead" in sin and in exile, and she needed to be "resurrected" by being restored to life in the land of promise. This is not just physical existence, but life in all its fullness, with all of the blessings promised to the nation in a covenant relationship to God. The life-giving Spirit acts as the agent of this restoration, acting as a sign of the new covenant's permanence.¹¹ "And I will not hide My face from them any longer, for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel," declares the Lord God" (Ezek. 39:29).

Other passages from the prophets also associate the outpouring of the Spirit with Israel's restoration to a life of blessing. For example, Isaiah 44:3,4 describes the promise of the Spirit as the pouring out of life-giving water on dry ground:

For I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring,
And My blessing on your descendants;
And they will spring up among the grass
Like poplars by streams of water.

Similarly, Isaiah 32:15-18 reads,

Until the Spirit is poured out upon us from on high,
And the wilderness becomes a fertile field
And the fertile field is considered as a forest.
Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,
And righteousness will abide in the fertile field.
And the work of righteousness will be peace,
And the service of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever.
Then my people will live in a peaceful habitation,
And in secure dwellings and in undisturbed resting places.

¹⁰For further discussion of j' ' Wr; here as the animating spirit of Genesis 2:7, see Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, 508-9 and Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2*, 261. The same connection was made by the rabbis, as Schneider demonstrates (Bernardin Schneider, "The Corporate Meaning and Background of 1 Cor 15,45b," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 29 [1967]: 157).

¹¹Daniel I. Block, "Gog and the Pouring Out of the Spirit: Reflections on Ezekiel xxxix 21-9," *Vetus Testamentum* 37 (1987): 267-70.

Here, as in Ezekiel, the presence of the Spirit helps guarantee an eternal covenant relationship with God. The same may be said of Isaiah 59:21,¹² where the Lord states,

“And as for Me, this is My covenant with them,” says the LORD: “My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring's offspring,” says the LORD,” from now and forever.”

Of course, this passage also maintains the strong association between the Spirit's presence and prophecy, as does Joel 2:28, 29. The expectation is that all believers will share in the Spirit when He brings restoration to the nation (cf. Num. 11:29). Eichrodt associates this promise with the Spirit's recognized work of empowering the leaders of the nation. He writes,

But if there is to be a real renewal, then not only the one who leads the people to salvation, but also those who are led, must receive a share in God's spirit. With increasing certainty the promise of an inner relationship with the spirit of God is extended to the citizens of the messianic kingdom, whether it is to be poured out upon them, or whether God will set it in men's inward parts, and so change their stony heart into a heart of flesh.¹³

This individualization of Israel's corporate hope helps establish an important link between the the prophetic expectation and New Testament fulfillment.¹⁴ The restoration will come as the Spirit of God delivers the nation from captivity, reestablishes their covenant with God together with its blessings, and manifests His presence collectively in the nation.¹⁵ This is life in all its fullness, the nation's deliverance from death.¹⁶

The Old Testament regards the Holy Spirit as the agent of God's animating power. Life comes through the Spirit's presence, and death comes through the Spirit's withdrawal. This is true of physical life and of “spiritual” life, as may be seen in the example of the nation Israel. Though they possessed God's animating breath in the sense that they retained physical life, the exiled nation was dead in sin and did not possess the Spirit in that relational sense through which they would enjoy the blessings of the covenant. Just as physical resurrection would require the return of God's animating Spirit, so did the promised “resurrection” of Israel entail

¹²Cf. Walter C. Wright, Jr., “The Source of Paul's Concept of Pneuma,” *The Covenant Quarterly* 41 (1983): 22.

¹³Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2:59.

¹⁴David L. Miller offers an explanation for this individualization. “The pre-exilic prophets changed the national theology drastically. The belief in an indestructible state was changed into a destructible state but with a hope for its renewal in the future. Membership in the new community no longer depended only on being a descendant of Abraham; now one had to be a righteous descendant of Abraham. The rewards and punishments for righteousness and offenses, respectively, were taken from the corporate level and placed on an individual level. Thus, the national theology was given a foundation on which to exist after the destruction of the state” (“The Development of the Concept of Immortality in the Old Testament,” Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1977).

¹⁵It should be noted here that the Spirit was active in the judgment of the nation as well (cf. *TDNT*, s.v. “pneu ' ma,” by Friedrich Baumgärtel, 6:365).

¹⁶Pinnock makes a similar point when he writes, “We encounter Spirit in the life of creation itself, in the vitality, the joy, the radiance, the music, the honey, the flowers, the embrace” (Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996], 50).

the restoration of the Spirit to the nation. He would once again mediate the blessings of covenant life to Israel, but the hope of the future was that each believer would share directly in this relationship.

The Coming of the Spirit as the Gift of Life

The variety of the Spirit's ministries in the New Testament have been well documented elsewhere, and there is not sufficient space to describe them here in detail.¹⁷ With regard to our particular focus, however, Peter's peshet-style citation of Joel following the Spirit's coming with the rush of wind in Acts 2 points to at least an inaugurated fulfillment of the promise, as do his references to the Spirit in verses 33 and 38.

Paul also describes the Holy Spirit as the eschatological gift of God whose coming fulfills in some sense the prophecies of the Old Testament. He is "the Holy Spirit who was promised" (Eph. 1:13)¹⁸ whose coming brings the Abrahamic blessing to believing Gentiles (Gal. 3:14).¹⁹

The Spirit satisfies Old Testament promises not only through His indwelling presence, but also through His ministry of ethical transformation. Ezekiel 36:26, 27 had promised that the Spirit's indwelling would cause the people to walk in obedience, and Paul's description of progressive transformation through the Spirit reflects that expectation (2 Cor. 3:18;²⁰ Rom. 8:13).

The Spirit's coming was anticipated as part of God's ultimate restoration of Israel in the future. By contending that He had already come as the pledge of still more blessings to come later (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13; 4:30), Paul treats the Spirit as "essentially an eschatological gift; the power of the future operative in the present."²¹ Dunn rightly speaks of the Spirit as "the eschatological gift *par excellence*,"²² and it is this connection between the present and the future that makes it so, as Turner notes.

¹⁷Cf. Henry B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament: A Study of Primitive Christian Teaching* (London: MacMillan and Company, 1909); Ewert, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament*; Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975); *TDNT*, s.v. "pneu 'ma," by E. Schweizer, 6:396-455.

¹⁸As in Abbott, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 22. The genitive may be subjective, indicating that the Spirit offers promises, but the objective genitive (indicating that the Spirit is the one promised) is to be preferred in the light of the many Old Testament promises of the Spirit's coming. Cf. John 14:16,26; 15:26; Acts 1:4, 8; 2:33; *TDNT*, s.v. "pneu 'ma," by Eduard Schweizer, 6:410.

¹⁹Perhaps Paul's association of the Abrahamic blessing and the promise of the Spirit is based on Isaiah 44:3, where God promises to Jacob, "I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring, and My blessing on your descendants." Hays comments, "Is. 44:3 might well have been grouped with these other passages [Gen. 12:15 and 2 Sam. 7:12-14] as a testimonium concerning the messianic *spevrma*; if so, it would provide the basis for Paul's inference that the Spirit now given to Christians constituted a fulfillment of the promised blessing" (Richard B. Hays, "The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Paul's Theology in Galatians 3:1 - 4:11" [Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1981], 381). Many of the same terms are used in Is. 44:3 as in the promise to Abraham, and Paul uses the same language in Gal. 3: "blessing," "your seed" (as recipients of the blessing), and the direct address to Jacob are all found in the last statement of the Abrahamic promise to the patriarchs in Gen. 28:13-15. Isaiah 44:3 serves as a helpful link between this promise and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

²⁰The contrast between the tablets of stone and the tablets of human hearts in verses 2 and 3 is probably not related to Ezekiel 36, but to the tablets of the Mosaic law.

²¹Isaacs, *The Concept of Spirit*, 86.

²²*NIDNTT*, s.v. "Spirit," by James D. G. Dunn, 3:699.

The apostle uses Spirit terminology in close connection with activities which have already commenced in believers but which will be heightened at the consummation of all things. It is the inner connection between what Paul claims to be an activity of the Spirit now and what the same Spirit will do at the end that makes his pneumatology 'eschatological' in character: for an event or activity may usefully be designated 'eschatological' if it is closely related in inner quality (but not necessarily in time) to the decisive End-events.²³

Similarly, Bruce writes, "The bestowal of the Spirit of God, or the Holy Spirit, in the New Testament is primarily an eschatological phenomenon in the sense that it is presented as the fulfillment of Old Testament promises associating this bestowal with the age of renewal."²⁴

The Spirit is the tie between the present and the future. What He does now in the lives of believers will one day be completed. Dunn's summary is helpful: "The Spirit was the presentness of future blessing. The Spirit was that power of the resurrection age already experienced and active to make its recipients fit for that age yet to come."²⁵

One of the central works of the Spirit which straddles the present and the future is that of resurrection. The Spirit played an instrumental role in the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:4; 1 Tim. 3:16), and, as in Ezekiel's vision, will be the one bringing resurrection life to believers. Romans 8:11 reads, "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you."

This life-giving work seems related to the believer's present experience of eternal life (Rom. 6:4, 11, 13; 2 Cor. 4:12; Eph. 2:5, 6; Col. 2:13), which Galatians 5:25 and 6:8 attribute to the Spirit. Titus 3:5, 6 also associates the Spirit's outpouring with the believer's regeneration at conversion. Paul writes, "... He saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior."²⁶ In the same way, those who are "born again" are "born of the Spirit," whose presence is likened to the wind (Jn. 3:3-8). As in Psalm 104:30, God's work of (re)generation and renewal comes by His animating breath.

The life-giving Spirit will resurrect the bodies of believers in the future, but that eschatological work has already begun in the present as the Spirit brings life in regeneration. Since the Spirit is the common agent of each stage of the resurrection process, His presence now

²³M. M. B. Turner, "The Significance of Spirit-Endowment for Paul," *Vox Evangelica* 9 (1975): 57.

²⁴F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1977; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977), 140. Cf. Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Princeton, NJ: by the author, 1930), 158-66.

²⁵Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 311.

²⁶Regeneration here consists of the bestowal of new life upon those who had been spiritually dead (Cf. *TDNT*, "paliggenesiva," by Friedrich Büchsel, 1:686-89; Michael Neary, "Creation and Pauline Soteriology," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 50 [1983,4]: 24) but the precise relationship between that experience and the outpouring of the Spirit is difficult to describe with certainty through the chain of genitive phrases, which may be related in a variety of ways (e[swsen hJma'`` dia; loutrou' paliggenesiva'' kai; ajnakainwvsew'' pnevmato'' aJgivou). However, the fact that the Spirit is so consistently portrayed elsewhere as the source of life strongly suggests that pnevmato'' aJgivou is either a genitive of source or agency. On the genitive of agency cf. Rom. 1:6,7; 1 Cor. 2:13.

provides a link between this age and the next, a down-payment of things to come (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 4:30).²⁷

According to John, the Holy Spirit was sent as a consequence of Jesus' "going away," i.e. His death, resurrection, and exaltation (Jn. 7:39; 16:7). The post-resurrection pledge (or bestowal) of the Spirit in John 20:22 is undoubtedly related to this promise as Jesus repeats the pattern of Genesis 2:7 and Ezekiel 37 while treating the Spirit as the animating breath of the new creation. The Spirit assumes Jesus' role as Paraclete and is, as Raymond Brown notes, "the presence of the absent Jesus."²⁸ It is in the Spirit that Jesus and the Father make their abode with believers (John 14:23).

This perspective provides some insight into the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit in Paul's letters. Since the Spirit's coming is predicated on Jesus' death and resurrection (Tit. 3:5, 6; Gal. 3:2, 5,13,14), the resurrected Lord is regarded as the source of eternal life (Rom. 5:17,18, 21; 6:4,11,13; Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13,14; 3:4).²⁹ He indwells believers, but Romans 8:9-11 strongly suggest that He does so through the Holy Spirit, who mediates the presence of Christ. Paul refers to the Spirit in Romans 8:9 as "the Spirit of God" and "the Spirit of Christ," who indwells believers. In the next verse, it is "Christ" who is "in you," while verse 11 says that it is "the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead." Paul does not appear to make a sharp distinction between Christ and the Spirit in this passage, nor does he truly confuse the two. Cranfield rightly observes, "Paul's thought is rather that through the indwelling of the Spirit Christ Himself is present to us, the indwelling of the Spirit being 'the manner of Christ's dwelling in us.'"³⁰ This functional, not ontological, equation of the Lord and the Spirit may also be seen in 1 Corinthians 15:45, where it is said of the resurrected Jesus that he "became a life-giving Spirit."

²⁷Cf. Paul W. Meyer, "The Holy Spirit in the Pauline Letters: A Contextual Exploration," *Interpretation* 33 (1979): 166; Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, 222-23; John T. Koenig, "The Motif of Transformation in the Pauline Epistles: A History-of-Religions/Exegetical Study" (Th.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York, 1971), 46; Marie de Merode, "L'aspect eschatologique de la vie et de l'esprit dans les épîtres pauliniennes," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 51 (1975): 104-7.

²⁸Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, The Anchor Bible 29A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1970), 710.

²⁹Hamilton recognizes this same principle, but perhaps states it too neatly when he writes, "The pattern of redemptive action in the case of 'life' is from Christ, through the Spirit, to the believer. The Spirit is the channel of the 'life' which is stored in Christ" (Neill Q. Hamilton, *The Holy Spirit and Eschatology in Paul* [Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1957], 7). Cf. Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology*, 151. Because Paul regards both the Spirit and Christ as sources of life, two of the many syntactical options in Romans 8:2 are equally possible from a theological perspective. When Paul says, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death" Paul may be describing the Spirit as "the Spirit of life," or he may be referring to the law of the Spirit, which is life in Christ Jesus. (The former is preferable based on Paul's pattern elsewhere of pneu ' ma followed by a genitive [cf. Rom. 8:15; Eph. 1:13,17] but either option is theologically viable.)

³⁰Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1:389. Hamilton comments similarly: "It states that the Spirit is the connecting link between Christ and the believer in every respect. It implies that Christ has no access to men outside of His Spirit. The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ because He relates men to Christ" (*The Holy Spirit and Eschatology in Paul*, 11). Cf. Turner, "The Significance of Spirit Endowment for Paul," 64; Harold Hunter, "Spirit Christology: Dilemma and Promise," *Heythrop Journal* 24 (1983): 127-40; TDNT, s.v. "pneu ' ma," by Eduard Schweizer, 6:433.

Thus, as a consequence of the death, resurrection and exaltation of Christ, the promised Spirit is poured out upon all who believe, bringing eternal life by his presence (Acts 2:32-33).

I have attempted to demonstrate that the Old Testament's understanding of the Spirit as the source of life is vital to the New Testament concept of regeneration. As Pannenberg states,

. . . although the emphasis of the New Testament writings concerning the spirit is on the new life of faith communicated by the spirit and on his charismatic presence, the deep meaning of those affirmations and their particular logic and rationality is only accessible if one takes into account the basic convictions of the Jewish tradition concerning the spirit as the creative origin of all life.³¹

Issues and Implications

The Spirit's life-giving work in believers has begun now in regeneration and will be consummated in resurrection. By treating this as the fulfillment of Old Testament promises while using the language of the Spirit's universal animating work, the New Testament doctrine of indwelling and regeneration raises important questions for systematic theology.

1. Is regeneration a distinctively New Testament work of the Spirit?

It has been argued above that the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within those who place their faith in Christ, bringing spiritual life in a restored relationship to God and the promise of physical life in resurrection. The Spirit's presence seals the believer forever, serving as a guarantee of the life to come. This experience of "regeneration" seems best understood as a distinctively New Testament work of the Spirit, based on His role as life-giver, promised in the prophets and the gospels, then fulfilled at Pentecost and thereafter in the church.

The fact that "regeneration" (as the impartation of eternal life in relationship with God through the presence of the Spirit) is at the core of our salvation experience makes it difficult to see it as a distinctively New Testament work. How could anyone have been saved in the Old Testament if they were not regenerated?

It might be helpful to recognize that we are using "regeneration" in two different senses here. Toon states the distinction clearly.

The answer to our question as to whether the faithful believers of old Israel were regenerate, is, then, both yes and no. If by "regenerate" is meant that they had a right relationship with God and enjoyed communion with him, then certainly they were regenerate. They were assisted by the Holy Spirit in their relationship with the covenant God. However, if by "regenerate" is meant that the Holy Spirit was permanently present in their souls, then the answer is that they were not regenerate, for they could not have enjoyed the benefits of the new covenant before it had been inaugurated.³²

There is a sense in which Israel was "alive," but the language wasn't used of individual Israelites as it is of New Testament believers. We have already described the individualization of

³¹Wolfgang Pannenberg, "The Doctrine of the Spirit and the Task of a Theology of Nature," *Theology* 75 (1972): 10.

³²Peter Toon, *Born Again: A Biblical and Theological Study of Regeneration* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 61.

Israel's religious experience through the exile. God dwelled in the nation, among His people, and the nation experienced "life." With the withdrawal of His presence, they experienced "death" in exile. We see in the prophets a promise of His renewed presence through the Spirit in a righteous remnant, and that individualization (focusing on persons rather than the nation as a whole) continues in the New Testament, where the glory of God rests upon individuals (Acts 2) and believers are reminded that their bodies are temples of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 6:19). For us to apply the language of this New Testament experience to individuals who did not experience it in the same way does not seem appropriate.

However, I believe that election has never been "corporate" to the exclusion of being also "individual," and I would affirm that eternal salvation has always been experienced at an individual level. A "circumcised heart" (Deut. 10:16) has always been the work of the sovereign God, never simply the result of human choices (Rom. 2:28-29).³³ A personal salvation experience, however, was not the primary focus of the Old Testament revelation, and that has left us without adequate vocabulary to describe the work of God in the heart of an individual Israelite before the coming of Christ. I believe that calling this experience "regeneration" tends to remove the drama of that term's development in biblical theology, so I would prefer to find a substitute expression, though I'm not prepared to suggest one.

Many have argued that John 3:3 evidences a pre-Pentecost understanding and experience of regeneration. Lewis, for example, argues that Jesus was not saying "Wait, Nicodemus; only a few months (or years) remain until the Spirit will be given and *then* you may be born again."³⁴ However, it is not unusual to find commands in John's gospel that were not fully applicable until after Jesus' death. He speaks in 6:53-56 about the necessity of eating his body and drinking his blood, then again in 7:37-39 about drinking of the Spirit who was yet to come. It would not be out of place to find a similar statement in chapter 3.

This leads to the more substantive question of how the Christian's experience of the Spirit differs from that of believers before the time of Christ. Davies attempts to explain it as a "redemptive-historical difference" in which "OT saints experienced the Spirit of promise" while "NT saints experience the Spirit of fulfillment."³⁵ The experience itself is essentially the same. Davies's concern, like that of Warfield and others before him, is to preserve the integrity of God's salvation throughout biblical history. But if overstating the discontinuity causes some to forget the Old Testament saints, overstating the continuity causes others to forget Pentecost. We will not be able to resolve this debate here, but the description of the Spirit's life-giving work in this paper demonstrates a progression toward spiritualization, individualization and permanence in the new covenant that is less clearly seen (if present at all) in the old.

2. How does the relationship between regeneration and the Spirit's indwelling relate to the timing of regeneration and faith?

If regeneration comes by the presence of the Spirit, we should note that Paul views the Spirit's presence as a consequence of faith. Galatians 3:2 states that point fairly explicitly, as does Romans 8:10-11. The New American Standard translation of verse 10 reads, in part, "the spirit is alive because of righteousness." The Revised Standard Version interprets it more personally: "your spirits are alive because of righteousness." This translation implies that the human spirits

³³Cf. Glenn N. Davies, "The Spirit of Regeneration in the Old Testament," in *Spirit of the Living God (Part One)*, edited by B. G. Webb (Homebush West, NSW: Lancer Books, 1991), 23-43.

³⁴Arthur H. Lewis, "The New Birth under the Old Covenant," *Evangelical Quarterly* 56 (1984): 41.

³⁵Davies, 37.

of believers are in some sense regenerated. However, Paul does not say that the spirit (*pneu'ma*) is "alive" (*zh/'*), but that the spirit is "life" (*zwh;i*).³⁶ The idea seems to be that the spirit is not made alive from the outside, but that it is associated with life itself, perhaps as its source. This fact, together with the repeated use of *pneu'ma* in this context as a reference to the Holy Spirit and the identification of the Spirit in the following verse as a life-giver, strongly suggests that *pneu'ma* should be understood here as the Spirit of God, not the human spirit.³⁷

Paul is saying that the indwelling Spirit of God will be the source of the believer's resurrection life. The tradition of the Spirit as God's life-giving breath enables Paul to speak of Him here as the source of life.³⁸ Again, the Holy Spirit is the animating breath of both the original creation and its eschatological counterpart. As Fortna explains, "Paul ends up, then, with a view of the Spirit very close to its original, literal meaning: the breath of life. Our life, the body and the breath in it, is of itself dead. But God gives us his very life, breathes his Spirit into us (the parallel with Gen. 2 is not accidental)."³⁹

Paul does not provide a detailed description of the life brought by the Spirit, but he does indicate that it is limited to believers, for the Spirit acts "because of righteousness." The sin that brought death was the sin of the individual,⁴⁰ and the righteousness that causes the Spirit to impart life should probably be understood in the same way. Paul makes it clear that none are righteous on their own, but that one may be declared so on the basis of Christ's death (Rom. 3:10-22). For this reason, Cranfield is probably correct in saying that it is the imputed righteousness of justification that Paul is speaking of in Romans 8:10. He summarizes, "The significance of *dia dikaiosunhn* [because of righteousness] is that, just as their having to die is due to the fact of their sin, so their being indwelt by the life-giving Spirit . . . is due to the fact of their justification."⁴¹ So then, believers are made alive by the Spirit who indwells them as a consequence of their justification by faith.

For this reason, it seems appropriate to view regeneration as a consequence of faith. God must still take the initiative and enable the elect to rightly respond to the gospel, but that work is better termed effectual calling than regeneration.⁴²

3. What are the implications of the Spirit's animating presence among unbelievers?

³⁶It may be objected that this interpretation disrupts the contrasts of the verse. The word *nekro;n* does not mean "death," but "dead," and the apparent contrastive parallelism between "dead" and "alive" is no longer present if the latter is better translated, "life." This must be conceded, for the neat parallelism assumed by many translations is simply not present. Paul does not say "dead" and "alive," nor does he say "death" and "life." The words he uses are "dead" and "life," and these are not precisely parallel.

³⁷Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1:390.

³⁸"Granted, the Bible says less about creative functions of the Spirit than it does about redemptive functions surrounding the new creation. But the creative functions are presupposed in what is said about the redemptive functions. Emphasis on the Spirit's work in salvation should not be read as a denial of the creative work on which it is based" (Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 50-51).

³⁹Robert T. Fortna, "Romans 8:10 and Paul's Doctrine of the Spirit," *Anglican Theological Review* 41 (1959): 83.

⁴⁰This is true whether it is a result of personal responsibility or imputed guilt. The fact of sin remains in each unbeliever's account (Rom. 3:23; 5:12).

⁴¹Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1:390.

⁴²Cf. Robert A. Pyne, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Conversion," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (1993): 203-18.

If God's Spirit animates all persons, we must admit that even unbelievers are, in some sense, indwelt by the Spirit. Calvin acknowledged this and regarded it as a different ministry of the same Spirit.

Nor is there reason for anyone to ask, What have the impious, who are utterly estranged from God, to do with his Spirit? We ought to understand the statement that the Spirit of God dwells only in believers [Rom. 8:9] as referring to the Spirit of sanctification through whom we are consecrated as temples to God [1 Cor. 3:16]. Nonetheless he fills, moves, and quickens all things by the power of the same Spirit, and does so according to the character that he bestowed upon each kind by the law of creation.⁴³

Clark Pinnock acknowledges the universality of the Spirit's work in the following paragraph.

Theology has the unfortunate habit of drawing a line between creation and redemption, distinguishing them too sharply. This loses sight of the truth that redemption is a restoration of creation, not its denial. The cosmic functions keep before us the unity of God's work in creation and redemption. Spirit is the power of redemption only because he is first the power of creation. Only the Spirit of creation is strong enough to be the Spirit of resurrection. The role in creation is primary and undergirds the other work. The whole creation is a field of the Spirit's operations and thus sacramental of God's presence.⁴⁴

I appreciate Pinnock's recognition of the Spirit's universal presence, but I would differ with his application of that concept in a "wider hope" soteriology. First, even those who are animated by the breath of God may well be "dead" in sin (Eph. 2:1), "alienated from the life of God" (Eph. 4:18) and "devoid of the Spirit" (Jude 19). This suggests a biblical distinction between creation and redemption in which the latter is narrower than the former. Second, the Spirit's animating work serves biblically as a demonstration of the utter sovereignty of God, who alone brings both life and death. It seems inappropriate to use that doctrine to support a more open-ended model in which the Spirit grieves and suffers with creation while keeping hope alive pending further exercise of human freedom.

Summary

This paper has argued that the New Testament doctrine of regeneration, particularly in Pauline theology, is directly dependent upon the Old Testament perception of the Spirit as the divine breath of life. As the indwelling breath of life, the Spirit brings new life in fellowship with God to those who were "dead," satisfying the expectation of the prophets. With the prospect of resurrection through the presence of the same Spirit, the promise of life in its fulness becomes complete. This concept has many implications for systematic theology, as we have seen, but the most basic is that we are utterly dependent upon the Spirit of God for our very lives, for in him we live and move and have our being.

⁴³John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II: 2, 16. Cf. I.13.14.

⁴⁴Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 62-63.