

this in explicitly trinitarian language. Paul's formulations, which include the work of the Spirit, form part of that basis.

### Salvation in Christ as the Work of the Trinity

That the work of the Trinity in salvation is foundational to Paul's understanding of the gospel is further evidenced by the many texts that formulate salvation in less explicit, but fully presuppositionally trinitarian terms. This is especially true of passages such as Romans 5:1-8; 2 Corinthians 3:1-4:6; Galatians 4:4-6; or Ephesians 1:3-14 (cf. Titus 3:4-7).

As an example, we may take Romans 5:1-8. As everywhere, the Spirit plays a vital role in Paul's and his churches' experience of God's saving grace. For Paul the "love of God" was no mere

abstraction. God's love, the most essential reality about his character and the absolute predicate of our existence, has been demonstrated historically in its most lavish and expansive expression through Christ's death for his enemies (vv. 6-8, thus the basis for "peace with God" and "access" to

his gracious presence). But such love is not merely an objective historical event. By the presence of the Spirit, God's love, played out to the full in Christ, is an experienced reality in the heart of the believer. *This is what the Spirit has so richly "shed abroad in our hearts."*

If we are not thus overtaken by God himself at this crucial point, then all else is lost, and we are without peace, groveling before God, living with little real hope, and experiencing present sufferings as a cause for complaint and despair rather than for "boasting." What rectifies all of this for us is not simply the fact of God's love—although in some ways that would surely be enough—but that God's love has been effectively realized in the experience of the believer. God's love for us has been "poured out" as a prodigal, experienced reality by the presence of the Holy Spirit, whom God has also lavishly poured out into our hearts.<sup>9</sup>

But besides these grand, well-known moments in Paul, this trinitarian understanding of salvation is also evident in many other texts that portray salvation as the threefold work of the triune God, as encapsulated in 2 Corinthians 13:14:<sup>10</sup>

— First Thessalonians 1:4-5, where the love of God has made election effective through the gospel (the message about Christ) empowered by the Holy Spirit.

— Second Thessalonians 2:13, where God's people are "beloved by the Lord (through his death)," because God elected them for salvation through the sanctifying work of the Spirit.

— First Corinthians 1:4-7, where God's grace has been given in Christ Jesus, who in turn has enriched the church with every kind of Spirit gifting.

— First Corinthians 2:4-5, where Paul's preaching of Christ crucified (v. 2) is accompanied by the Spirit's power so that the Corinthians' faith might rest in God.

— First Corinthians 2:12, where "we have received the Spirit that comes from God," so that we might know the things given to us ("in the cross" is implied in context) by God.

— First Corinthians 6:11, where God is the implied subject of the "divine passives" (you were washed, justified, sanctified), accomplished in the name of Christ and by the Spirit.

— First Corinthians 6:19-20, where the believer has been purchased (by Christ, cf. 7:22-23) so as to become a temple for God's presence by the Spirit.

— Second Corinthians 1:21-22, where God is the one who has "confirmed" believers in a salvation accomplished by Christ, God's "Yes" (vv. 19-20), proved by his giving the Spirit as "down payment."

— Galatians 3:1-5, where Christ crucified (v. 1, picking up on 2:16-21) is conveyed to believers by the Spirit, whom God yet "supplies" among them (v. 5).

— Romans 8:3-4, where God sent his Son to do what the law could not do in terms of securing salvation, and the Spirit does what the law could not do in terms of accomplishing

righteous behavior in the believer's life ("walking" = living in the ways of God).

- Romans 8:15–17, where the God-given Spirit serves as evidence of "adoption" as children, and thus "joint heirs" with Christ, who made it all possible.
- Colossians 3:16, where in worship it is all played in reverse: as the message of Christ "dwells richly among them," they worship the God from whom salvation has come, by means of Spirit-inspired songs.
- Ephesians 1:17, where the God of our Lord Jesus Christ gives the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that they may understand the full measure of the work of Christ in their behalf.
- Ephesians 2:18, where "through [the death of] Christ" (vv. 14–16) Jew and Gentile together have access to God by the one Spirit, whom both alike have received.
- Ephesians 2:20–22, where Christ is the "cornerstone" for the new temple, the place of God's dwelling by his Spirit.
- Philippians 3:3, where believers serve ("God" is implied) by the Spirit of God and thus boast in the effective work of Christ Jesus.

The point of all this is that salvation in Christ is not simply a theological truth, predicated on God's prior action and the historical work of Christ. Salvation is an experienced reality, made so by the person of the Spirit coming into our lives. One simply cannot be a Christian in any Pauline sense without the effective work of the Trinity. We will pursue this truth in greater detail in chapter 8 below. For now we offer a few concluding words about the Trinity and its further implications for our present life in Christ.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The upshot of all this is twofold. First, to return to the preceding chapter for a moment, Paul would not recognize the language or the theological assertions of those who consider him to

have identified the Spirit with the risen Christ. His assumptions lay elsewhere, with the one God, now bringing salvation through the cooperative work of the three divine Persons: Father, Son, and Spirit. At points where the work of any or all overlaps, Paul's language tends to be flexible—precisely because salvation for him is the activity of the one God.

*Second, one may grant that Paul's*

*trinitarian assumptions and descriptions, which form the basis of the later formulas, never move toward calling the Spirit "God" and never wrestle with the philosophical and theological implications of those assumptions and descriptions. But neither is there evidence that he lacked clarity as to the distinctions between, and the specific roles of, the three divine Persons who accomplished so great salvation for us all.*

*Moreover, that the Spirit alone knows the mind of God, "the deep things of God," as Paul puts it, and that God knows the mind of the Spirit indicate not only functional trinitarianism, but something close to ontological trinitarianism (having to do with God's very being). So also with the clear evidence of the Spirit's unity with Christ—in receiving a fresh supply of the Spirit, it is the Spirit of Jesus Christ whom Paul receives—yet the clear distinctions between Christ and the Spirit.*

*But what does such trinitarianism mean for us? Several things. First, it means that the Spirit must be reinstated into the Trinity, where he has never been excluded in our creeds and liturgies, but has been practically excluded from the experienced life of the church. To be a Pauline Christian means to take the Spirit with full seriousness as the way the eternal God is ever present with his people.*

*Second, God as Trinity, including the Holy Spirit, is the ground of both our unity and our diversity within the believing community. Although we will pursue this point further in chapter 6, suffice it here to say that the Trinity is the ground for the church's much-needed unity. God himself—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—*

*Salvation is an experienced reality, made so by the person of the Spirit coming into our lives.*