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The Spirit and Biblical Interpretation: Spirit Hermeneutics

by Craig S. Keener

Introduction

In this article, originally written for a presentation at Oral Roberts College of Theology and Ministry, I am condensing material from my book *Spirit Hermeneutics* and some subsequent discussions. (Further documentation will be found there.)[1] I am leaving out some other discussions treated in the book, such as biblical epistemology,[2] so as to focus here on two commonly discussed sides of Spirit hermeneutics.[3] At the risk of suspense, I will preface my remarks by noting that I am a charismatic biblical scholar who fully affirms both sides of what I am addressing here.

My forty-hour course on biblical interpretation for seminarians starts with the literary context of the immediate passage and the entire book in which it appears, moves to the context of the inspired author's style and word usage elsewhere, the biblical-theological context of how a passage draws on earlier biblical revelation, the linguistic context of how the words were used in the author's setting, and the cultural-historical context that the author was addressing. As my background commentary exemplifies, my personal scholarly focus has been providing the ancient Jewish, Greek and Roman background for the New

[1] *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016); and my "Pentecostal Biblical Interpretation/Spirit Hermeneutics," pages 270-83 in *Scripture and Its Interpretation: A Global, Ecumenical Introduction to the Bible* (edited by Michael J. Gorman; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017); as well as a forthcoming reply to responses to *Spirit Hermeneutics* at the Society for Pentecostal Studies, being published in the *Journal for Pentecostal Theology*. See also my "Refining Spirit Hermeneutics," *Pneuma* 39 (2017): 198-240.

[2] Treated in *Spirit Hermeneutics*, 153-204.

[3] The two hermeneutical camps are helpfully identified by L. William Oliverio, Jr., *Theological Hermeneutics in the Classical Pentecostal Tradition: A Typological Account* (Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies 12; Leiden: Brill, 2012).

Testament to which most Bible readers otherwise lack access.[4] After introducing these elementary principles I turn to special hermeneutics—that is, attention to the particular genres in the Bible.[5]

More concisely here, I shall simply rehearse at the outset my reasons for emphasizing ancient meaning, that is, for trying to hear the message as it is apparently designed to communicate between the ancient author and audience. I will return to this subject at the end when addressing the dangers of neglecting "original" meaning. Between these discussions, however, I will emphasize at fuller length an aspect of interpretation that typically receives much less emphasis in academic settings.

We should consider not only the ancient context of the original message, but also "hear what the Spirit says to the churches" today. I shall not make an argument here for Scripture's inspiration, a sometimes controversial point on which I might elaborate in the future; for the sake of time constraints I shall simply accept that belief, shared by most Christians through history, as an axiom that most of us here also share.

Reading in Light of the Ancient Contexts

I do concede that God, being sovereign, may speak through Scripture out of context—but I also would contend that this is not the canonical meaning that we have the right to teach others on the *authority* of Scripture. God can speak through anything noncanonical he cares to, even Balaam's donkey or preachers like me. When I was a new Christian convert eager to abandon my homework, which was translating Caesar's *Gallic War*, in favor of exclusively reading my Bible, I flipped open the Bible and stuck my finger down. I expected it to declare, "Forsake all and follow me." Instead, to my grave disappointment, it urged, "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's" (Luke 20:25). I acquiesced and did my homework. But what if I had gone around to churches proclaiming, "God *showed* me in the Bible that you are all supposed to translate Caesar?" That is simply not the contextual, canonical meaning of the text, the universal basis for all our other appeals to how its authority applies to our diverse situations.

Because God knows the future, Scripture may indeed contain revelation the full import of which[6] is not always evident to interpreters until after the fact—such as pre-Christian readers envisioning Christ

[4]My *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (2nd ed.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014); see also *The NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* (ed. John H. Walton and Craig S. Keener; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

[5]On a popular level, I treat some of this material in *The Bible in its Context*, available free in several languages at http://www.craigkeener.com/free-resources/.

[6]What has traditionally been called *sensus plenior*.

coming twice. Yet it would be precarious to make that expectation for a fuller meaning a normative principle for interpretation, especially when we have not already witnessed a fulfillment. If the explanation of not-yet-fulfilled dimensions is in the hands of simply anyone who claims to speak for the Spirit, we return to subjective claims without a canon to anchor us. God can outline new insights related to older promises (e.g., Dan 9:2, 21-27), but they should be consistent with his message, come from trustworthy agents, and should pan out. Most modern "prophecy teachers" have a very poor track record of their interpretations panning out, and they have to recycle interpretations of passages as news headlines change.[7]

When our reuse of biblical language is not consistent with its original point, we owe our hearers the courtesy of letting them know that we are speaking on, at best, the authority of our own experience of the Spirit, not on the authority of Scripture itself. In so doing, we acknowledge that our own finite hearing remains subject to correction if it diverges from the already-tested canon of Scripture. The very point of having a canon warns that we dare not place personal revelation about Scripture, or even a particular group's claim to revelation about Scripture, *above* Scripture itself. To do so no longer allows the revelation that we all share to arbitrate other claims to revelation, and leads to the interpretive and consequently theological chaos that characterizes much of popular Christianity today. We need to be ready to speak correctively to such abuses, to the extent that God gives us a hearing among those willing to listen.

Apart from extraordinary revelations, a full-orbed hermeneutic invites us to take into account the ancient as well as modern contexts. Trying our best to hear the original meaning may be out of fashion in some contemporary hermeneutics, but I believe that it still matters, since that is what we as Christians with a shared canon can be *absolutely confident* that the Holy Spirit originally inspired. It is important to have that canonical authority over us, especially as we dialogue, about what is true, with members of other interpretive communities, whether Christian or (as in the case of Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons) marginal ones.

Certainly not everyone is called to research the ancient milieu firsthand; specialists can provide this background and other teachers can draw from it as needed. Yet readers who have it available should take account of it when needed, and I believe that sometimes, as when even many scholars oppose women in ministry, they often do not know the background well enough to recognize their need for it.

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[7]See e.g., Dwight Wilson's *Armageddon Now! The Premillenarian Response to Russia and Israel Since 1917* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977); Richard Kyle's *The Last Days Are Here Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

That the Bible comes to us in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek and much of it, such as its history and many letters, recounts or addresses particular historical situations, shows that God is practical, caring about real people in concrete situations. That God gave us the Bible in this form means that we need to attend to the particular shape in which God inspired these documents, shaped to address those concrete realities. The Spirit who speaks to us in Scripture will speak a message consistent with the message that the Spirit originally inspired.

Scripture is *more* than text, but God *did* provide it in textual form, which invites us to engage it in part textually. It is *more* than its constituent genres, but inspired ancient biographies and ancient letters, for example, are *still* ancient biographies and ancient letters. That is why Paul first names himself and then his audience, in contrast to modern letters. Scripture's message is eternal, but it was communicated in ancient languages, written in ancient alphabets, uses ancient literary forms and often refers to ancient events. The Holy Spirit *inspired* it *in* these forms.

Understanding these forms helps prevent them from being *obstacles* to us hearing these texts afresh; their very concreteness in one setting invites us to respond to them in concrete ways in other settings.

Just as we translate the language, we take into account the background it takes for granted. Just as the Word became flesh with a particular ethnicity in a particular time and place, identifying with all of us because we too are shaped in historical particularities, so the books of Scripture came to us shaped by their historical particularities so we will take seriously our own historical particularities. Thus we should value hearing the settings that shaped Scripture with its particularities as well as the multiplicity of settings in which we hear it afresh today.

Such study requires engaging the texts intellectually; Proverbs urges us to seek wisdom and knowledge, so long as they are founded on the fear of the Lord. Contrary to some church traditions and my own resistance as a young Christian, the Spirit is not limited to engaging the affective aspect of our personalities; God is at work in our intellects when we seek to *understand* a text. Scripture teaches that the Spirit works with and renews our minds (Rom 8:5-7; 12:2; 1 Cor 2:16; 14:15) as well as our spirits (Rom 8:16; 1 Cor 14:14).[8]

[8]See my fuller discussion in *The Mind of the Spirit: Paul's Approach to Transformed Thinking* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016).

Granted, we do not have access to the ancient human authors' minds.[9] But the text, together with some knowledge of the cultural setting, often allows us to infer to some degree the sorts of issues the text was designed to address. I could use a hammer as a weapon—if I were not pretty much a pacifist—but the shape of my hammer suggests that it was *especially* designed for pounding (and removing) nails. If I take a biblical warning meant to scare sinners into repentance, and use it to squeeze tithes out of impoverished seminarians, I may not be employing a passage in the sense for which it was designed. If I take Paul's praise of love outlasting tongues to mean that tongues passed away when the Apostle John died, I am not using the text in the sense for which it was designed.

Further granted, our reconstructions of background vary in degrees of probability and still leave lacunae in our knowledge. The point is not that our background knowledge will be perfect but that we should do the best we can, which is usually considerably better than what we do if we do not try. The text itself, in its literary context, gives us much of what we need, with available backgrounds supplementing and often confirming.

My point is that literary and historical context can help us understand why the text is shaped the particular way that it is, and thus draw from it the sort of inferences consistent with, rather than inconsistent with, its original design. Certainly I do agree that we recontextualize its message as we hear Scripture afresh in a range of contexts; I initiated and coedited a book of global readings.[10] Still, the original context is the foundational context that shaped the texts whose message we seek to recontextualize.

Hearing it helps protect us from the dangers of overcontextualized interpretations. All the slaveholder theologians I have read proof-texted the Bible on slavery without regard for literary and historical context[11]—in contrast to all the abolitionist theologians I have read, who took these

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[9]Cf. e.g., Christopher Spinks, *The Bible and the Crisis of Meaning: Debates on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Bloomsbury, 2007), 44, 82, 92, 122; John Farrell, *The Varieties of Authorial Intention*: *Literary Theory Beyond the Intentional Fallacy* (Springer, 2017), 43.

[10]Craig S. Keener and Daniel Carroll Rodas, *Global Voices: Readings from the Majority World* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2013).

[11]See e.g., George S. Sawyer, *Southern Institutes; or, An Inquiry into the Origin and Early Prevalence of Slavery and the Slave-Trade* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1858); Fred A. Ross, *Slavery Ordained of God* (n.p.: J. B. Lippincott, 1857). Cf. discussion in Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 152-80; Katie Geneva Cannon, "Slave Ideology and Biblical Interpretation," 119-28 in *The Recovery of Black Presence: An Interdisciplinary Exploration. Essays in Honor of Dr. Charles B. Copher* (ed. Randall C. Bailey and Jacquelyn Grant; Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 119-28.

things into account.[12] (I treat this material more extensively elsewhere.)[13] More deliberate was the Aryan contextualization supported by Nazi-aligned churches, which tried to supplant the Jewishness of the Jesus who came in the flesh in a very real and different historical context.[14]

Normal textual principles for interpretation remain relevant to Scripture because God inspired the Bible *textually*, in *literary* form. All these principles are relevant for texts in general, and most of the genres in the Bible are genres that also existed, in at least a fairly close form, in the biblical world outside the Bible. And I personally regularly find that the Spirit helps me in using such context. I do not find spiritual life in ancient background, but I often find the Spirit using that background in helping me hear the text more clearly.

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[12]See e.g., La Roy Sunderland, *Anti Slavery Manual, Containing a Collection of Facts and Arguments on American Slavery* (New York: S. W. Benedict, 1837); Theodore Dwight Weld, *The Bible Against Slavery* (New York: The American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838); essays in *Autographs for Freedom*, vol.2 (Auburn: Alden, Beardsley & Co., 1854), including Rev. Dr. Willis, "The Bible vs. Slavery," 151-55 and Lewis Tappan, "Disfellowshipping the Slaveholder," 163-64 (cf. also there Antoinette L. Brown, "The Size of Souls," 41-43; Rev. Dr. Wm. Marsh, "The Law of Liberty," 61-62; and Rev. Wm. Brock, "Slaveholding not a Misfortune but a Crime," 158); the long collection in Leonard Bacon, *Slavery Discussed in Occasional Essays, From 1833 to 1846* (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1846); cf. John Woolman, *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes 1754*; *Considerations on Keeping Negroes 1762* (Philadelphia: James Chattin, 1754; reprinted by New York: Viking, 1976); Samuel Hopkins, *Timely Articles on Slavery* (reprinted from 1854 ed. by Miami: Mnemosyne, 1969); George B. Cheever, *God Against Slavery: and the Freedom and Duty of the Pulpit to Rebuke It As a Sin Against God* (New York: Joseph H. Ladd, 1857); also the debate between Rev. W. G. Brownlow and the abolitionist Congregational minister Rev. A. Pryne, *Ought American Slavery to be Perpetuated?* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1858). Cf. further Monroe Fordham, *Major Themes in Northern Black Religious Thought, 1800-1860* (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1975), 111-37; Milton C. Sernett, *Black Religion and American Evangelicalism: White Protestants, Plantation Missions, and the Flowering of Negro Christianity, 1787-1865* (ATLAM 7; Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, and The American Theological Library Association, 1975), 59-81; Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 156-58; slave James Curry in John W. Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University, 1977), 130-31.

[13]Note my summaries and the notes in Glenn Usry and Craig S. Keener, *Black Man's Religion: Can Christianity be Afrocentric?* Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996, 98-109, 184-90; Craig S. Keener and Glenn Usry, *Defending Black Faith: Answers to Tough Questions About African-American Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 33-40, 174-78; cf. Keener, *Paul, Women, & Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992), 184-224; idem, "Subversive Conservative," *Christian History* 14 (3, Aug. 1995): 35-37.

[14]See esp. Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

Some today criticize any appeal to ancient context as "modernist"—despite many thinkers through most of history, including Chrysostom and many Reformers, deeming it merely common sense. I see it as common courtesy: normally we try to understand what someone is trying to communicate to us.[15] If understanding it is *crucial* to us, we will even learn the language and context of the communicator, or will depend on resources (such as translation and background information) that help us.

Taking seriously the fact that God repeatedly chose to inspire human authors requires us to take seriously the human dimensions of the text—the linguistic and cultural matrices in which the text is encoded. Such authors sought to communicate, and if we are truly interested in God's word the way he gave it through these authors, we will seek to hear what they sought to communicate. Even deconstructionists apparently want readers to understand something of their point, and the ancient authors were hardly deconstructionists.

Hearing the Other Author

As Christians, however, we also believe in another level of authorship, through the inspiration of the Spirit (2 Tim 3:16). Knowing *this* Author's context also matters, inviting us to consider the wider canonical, theological context, and what we know of the Author through our personal and corporate relationship with him. Academics typically screen out this level when discussing texts in an academic forum that lacks consensus about divine activity. But as I have unfortunately learned from experience, methodological naturalism, if not kept in its place, can reshape our own personal approach to the biblical text, with disastrous spiritual consequences.

But when we listen and speak among ourselves as Christians, the divine context is the most important context of all! Without sufficient attention to literary and historical context, we run the risk of distorting what we think the Bible cumulatively teaches theologically. Without sufficient attention to the *divine* authorial context, however, we risk neglecting the very response that the biblical message invites from us.

One reason that I agreed to write this article was to *affirm* personal hearing of the Spirit in the biblical text, because some leading colleagues in promoting Bible background have argued *against* this, and I wanted to be clear that the ancient meaning is not the *only* thing the Spirit is speaking. At the same time, the Bible is not only about us: it is about

[15]Note that I am speaking here of historical *context*, not historical criticism, which I explicitly distinguish in *Spirit Hermeneutics*, 84, 124, 125, 132, 146, 347n55. I use the latter for academic historical discussion, but it is historical context for which I advocate for textual understanding.

God's purposes in history. All the Bible is relevant for something; we need to study it in context so we can understand what is relevant for what purpose.

Even though God inspired the Bible in textual form, it is not just *any* text. For us as Christians, it is *God's* Word, and it not only spoke in the past but continues to communicate to us God's message. When I read a work by a friend or mentor I know, such as Gordon Fee, E. P. Sanders or Michael Brown, I hear it in their voice. For example, as I read Gordon's commentaries, I know when his voice would be rising because Gordon is preaching this point with conviction. I know when Ed Sanders pauses for his audience to chuckle. I know when Michael Brown is underlining a point rhetorically yet irenically.

When we read the Bible, there is a sense in which we can get to know many of its authors, such as Paul or John. But because the Bible is inspired by God, there is a sense in which we can, most importantly, learn to hear the Author who speaks through these various human authors in various ways. As we grow to know God's voice better in Scripture, we recognize his voice and understand better what he is saying, and the heart with which he is saying it—because we know that God is consistent with his character revealed throughout Scripture. This also keeps us on track in recognizing the voice of God as he speaks in our lives in other ways.

A Spirit hermeneutic is a thus relational hermeneutic: we know the God of the Bible and therefore read the Bible from a vantage point of trust in him. This should not be confused with the way readers sometimes approach the Bible on a popular level in the name of being spontaneous. If I hear my wife speaking, I can admire her wisdom and sensitivity even when she is speaking with someone else. But I would not ignore the context of her speaking. If a dog is chasing her and she says, "Go away!" I do not take that as a message to myself; that would be an utter distortion of relationship and trust. In the same way, a genuine Spirit hermeneutic will be sensitive to the original context in which God inspired his message in the biblical text.

The Spirit comforts and instructs us through Scripture, as taught in Romans 15:4 and 1 Corinthians 10:11. This applies not only to when we are reading Scripture but also to when the Spirit recalls Scripture to us regularly in our daily lives. Hearing the Spirit through prayer[16] and hearing in Scripture are complementary and often overlapping, but I do insist that before we tell others that the Bible says something, thus

[16]Which I do strongly affirm; see e.g., Craig S. Keener, "Studies in the Knowledge of God in the Fourth Gospel in Light of its Historical Context" (MDiv thesis, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 1987); idem, *Gift & Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 17-50.

speaking on its *canonical* authority, it needs to be consonant with the overall message that the Spirit already inspired there. God's Word is not *limited* to Scripture, but most Christians recognize that Scripture as tested canon retains a special role as God's Word for evaluating all other revelation.

Reading with Faith

We read from diverse cultural starting points, but one special vantage point is uniquely Christian: the vantage point of faith in the living God. Reading the biblical narrative with faith means reading its message as true. The God of the Bible is our God; the Jesus of the Gospels is our risen Lord; the sorts of angels and demons that inhabit the New Testament exist in our world (even if western interpreters do not recognize it);[17] and the Bible's verdict on human moral failure is what we see reflected around us continually.

Many ordinary readers of the Bible, recognizing it as God's Word, intuitively expect to hear God's voice there. Such expectancy is a sign of faith. Often readers do not know how to approach the text as a text, but God meets them in their study because they have faith. Sometimes they go amiss, because faith is effective only when it has the right object—in this case, what God has actually said. But as academicians we sometimes go to the other extreme. Influenced by the Enlightenment, sometimes our institutions may teach interpretive techniques mechanistically, as if an academic reading were enough. Even after we have finished our contextual study, however, we still need to approach the text in faith, embracing its message for us today.

Chrysostom, Luther and Calvin all approached the text grammatically and historically, but they also all emphasized our need for faith and the Spirit's illumination. While taking seriously the human authors of Scripture, Luther insisted that God's Spirit is present and active in a special way there. "Experience is necessary," Luther insisted, "for the understanding of the Word," which must "be believed and felt."[18] Fifth-century Benedictines developed the meditative approach

[17]Cf. my *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 2:788-856, and sources cited there.

[18] Luther WA 5:108, as quoted in Bartholomew, *Hermeneutics*, 198; Luther insisted that he had learned to abandon his own wisdom and depend on the Spirit to hear Scripture (WA 4:519.3-4, as quoted in Bartholomew, *Hermeneutics*, 199). Luther notes Paul's appeal to his audience's experience in Gal 3:5 (*First Lectures on Galatians*, on 3:5, in Bray, *Galatians, Ephesians*, 93).

lectio divina.[19] From church fathers to Pietists, from Reformed to Holiness and Pentecostal Christians, listening to the Spirit's voice in the text has long been part of devotional practice. It is certainly not a new discovery.

Reading from a standpoint of spiritual experience also helps us hear Scripture; it provides a sort of spiritual context similar to canonical theological context and often ultimately more important for hearing the message than is even the ancient cultural context. Because I have prophesied, I can resonate with the prophets to some degree; because I pray in tongues, passages about that experience are not foreign to me. Then again, I have to grapple harder to resonate with some other passages that describe experiences that I have not shared, such as visions or encounters with visible angels.

Imbibing the Spirit of Scripture also stirs spiritual experience. For example, Psalms inspire in us a spirit of prayer,[20] and reading the prophets the spirit of prophecy.[21] I suspect that those who do not envision much judgment for today's world could profit from spending a bit more time in the prophets.

Letter and Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3

We pay attention to grammar because it helps us to understand the message, but if we care only for textual grammar, we will miss the heart of God that the text is designed to communicate.

Jesus warned the religious elite of his day that they were meticulous about tithing yet neglected weightier matters such as justice; this was like straining a gnat from one's drink while swallowing a camel, though the latter was more levitically impure (Matt 23:23-24).[22]

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul shows that his new covenant ministry is greater and more life-giving than the death-bringing old covenant

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[19]Cf. e.g., Mariano Magrassi, *Praying the Bible: An Introduction to Lectio Divina* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998); Christine Valters Paintner and Lucy Wynkoop, *Lectio Divina: Contemplative Awakening and Awareness* (Paulist Press, 2008); Duncan Robertson, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011); Marilyn Chandler McEntyre, *What's in a Phrase? Pausing Where Scripture Gives You Pause* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), x.

[20]See Lee Roy Martin, "Psalm 63 and Pentecostal Spirituality: An Exercise in Affective Hermeneutics," 263-84 in *Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Reader* (ed. Lee Roy Martin; Leiden: Brill, 2013); Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1986); Bruce K. Waltke, James M. Houston and Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Lament: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

[21]Cf. e.g., Hannah R. K. Mather, "Welcoming *Spirit Hermeneutics*: A Response to Craig S. Keener," *Pneuma* 39 (2017): 153-61.

[22]*The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 551-52.

ministry of Moses. The world might deem it less glorious, but that is because new covenant ministry involves especially inner transformation.[23]

In Jeremiah 31, the promised new covenant will be written on the heart rather than on tablets of stone (Jer 31:31-34). In Ezekiel 36, the Spirit will enable God's people to keep his laws, and give them hearts of flesh to replace their hearts of stone (36:26-27). In 2 Corinthians 3:3, Paul directly alludes to these two passages, even using an expression that in the Greek translation of the Old Testament appears only in this prophecy of Ezekiel. As Deuteronomy makes clear, God had always wanted his people to have a heart to keep his law (Deut 5:29), with circumcised hearts (10:16; 30:6).

As ministers of the new covenant, Paul explains, he and his colleagues are empowered not as ministers of the "letter" but as ministers of the Spirit, and therefore of life (2 Cor 3:6). The "letter" probably refers to "the mere written details of the law"; Jewish teachers played even with matters of spelling. In antiquity, legal interpreters often distinguished between what we would call the "letter" (the codified written form) of the law and its intention. Paul, however, contrasts the letter not with mere intention, but with God's own Spirit who inspired the law.

Paul says that just as his people could not withstand the law-connected glory on Moses' face (2 Cor 3:13-14), their hearts remain veiled when the law continues to be read (3:14-15). Moses had to veil the glory when addressing Israel, but he took the veil away when he was before the Lord (3:16; Exod 34:33-35); he witnessed some of the Lord's glory in Exodus 33-34. In 2 Corinthians 3:17, Paul compares the "Lord" who revealed himself to Moses in Exodus to the Spirit who reveals himself to Paul and his colleagues. The apostolic message of the new covenant is a message written on the hearts by the Spirit (3:3, 6).

What does this imply for our reading of Scripture? Paul goes on to say that the gospel remains veiled to those who are perishing (4:3), but that God has shone his glory in our hearts in Christ, who is God's very image (4:4-6). As Moses was temporarily transformed by God's glory in the context of God giving the law, so are we more permanently transformed by the greater glory of the new covenant, which works within. As Paul declares in 3:18, enjoying God's image in Christ transforms our hearts to the same image, from one level of glory to another.

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[23]For discussion of my approach, see in greater detail my *Mind of the Spirit: Paul's Approach to Transformed Thinking*, 206-15; with less application to hermeneutics, cf. earlier idem, *1-2 Corinthians* (The New Cambridge Bible Commentary Series; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 168-71.

For us, no less than for Moses, the veil has been removed (2 Cor 3:14-18). When we read Scripture, we read to learn about the Lord and be transformed by him (2 Cor 3:18). We get to know Christ's image and character in the Gospels and throughout Scripture.

For example, when Moses beheld part of God's glory when God was giving his Word at Sinai, God made his goodness pass before Moses (Exod 33:19). God revealed to Moses his character as the God of grace and truth (Exod 34:6). Analogously, the Apostle John later writes about God's Word becoming flesh, and that John and the other disciples saw Jesus' glory (John 1:14). This glory, like that at Sinai, was full of grace and truth, but whereas Moses saw only part of God's glory, in Jesus we see God's heart revealed fully (John 1:18). And we see this glory most fully in the ultimate expression of Jesus sharing our fleshly mortality (12:23-24); when Jesus died on the Cross, God both executed his just wrath on our sin and gave the ultimate, sacrificial act of love. Here we see his heart, and seeing his heart makes us more like him.[24]

Implications for Hermeneutics

The Spirit points to Christ and to God's character as we read Scripture (see 2 Cor 3:15-18). The Spirit may draw from texts wider analogies, beyond the direct communication to the first audience, that are nevertheless consistent with the text and with the larger framework of the Spirit's message in biblical theology. While background studies, grammar and the like provide essential context for understanding Scripture, the Spirit provides us with the needed spiritual context for appropriating it as God's word to us (1 Cor 2:11-13).[25]

Grammar matters, but our ultimate interest is the Spirit's message spoken through that grammar. Exegesis is essential as the foundation for correctly hearing the text's message, but we dare not *stop* with exegetical observations. When we truly hear the Spirit's message in the text, we commit to it. Exegesis in the usual sense focuses on the text's original horizon; today some postmodern approaches focus only on the present horizons. Exclusive attention to a present horizon without attention to the original one leads to overwriting the original inspired meaning with an unrelated one from our own imagination,[26] risking being like Jeremiah's false prophets who speak visions from their own

[24]Discussion in Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:405-26.

[25]Discussion in *Mind of the Spirit*, 179-99.

[26]Cf. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), xx, 318-19; Jacqueline Grey, *Three's a Crowd: Pentecostalism, Hermeneutics, and the Old Testament* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2011), 120-21, 145.

unregenerate hearts (Jer 23:16). Yet it is by hearing the Spirit's inspired message in the text that we can communicate its points most accurately for hearers today.

Connecting the traditional two horizons, without obliterating either of them, is often considered the role of hermeneutics. The Spirit can guide us in exploring and researching both horizons, but we often recognize the Spirit's activity especially in bridging the gap between them, in applying the principles of the text to our lives and communities.

A Spirit-led hermeneutic is not just making exegetical discoveries in our study and then going on our way, like someone who forgets their own image in a mirror (Jas 1:23-24). We do not just *read* Scripture to be transformed: we *live our whole lives* in light of Scripture, and in light of what Scripture teaches us, so that we live our lives in light of the cross, in light of our Lord's resurrection and exaltation over all creation, and in light of God's presence with us by the Spirit.

Spirit and Letter in Romans 7:5-6

Paul depicts the immoral pagan mind in Romans 1, but in Romans 7:7-25 shows that even the law-informed mind fails God.[27] Paul contrasts "the oldness of the letter" in 7:5 with new life in the Spirit in 7:6. The old way provided enough knowledge of right and wrong to limit sin; but in Christ, we have the Spirit who empowers us to live out the gift of righteousness God gives us in Christ. The Spirit is never mentioned in 7:7-25, but is mentioned in Romans 8 more than anywhere else in the Bible.

Paul is not rejecting the inspiration of the Old Testament or the nature of Scripture as something written. God once used a civil law to restrain sin in Israel; it is from God (Rom 7:14; 8:4), and we still may learn lessons from it (as Paul does; 1 Cor 9:9; 14:21). But righteousness comes from Christ, and his Spirit inscribes the heart of the law within us, so that we fulfill the real principles that the law was ultimately meant to point toward anyway (Rom 8:2-4; 13:8-10).

Paul is here correcting a way of approaching Scripture that, in light of Christ, can never again be thought adequate. Thus he says in 3:27 that boasting is excluded, not by the law as approached by works, but by the law as approached by faith. In 8:2 he announces that the law of the Spirit that brings life in Christ has freed us from the law that judges sin with death. In 9:32, Paul warns that Israel failed to achieve the law's righteousness because they pursued it by works instead of by faith. In 10:5-10, Paul contrasts righteousness based on law with righteousness

[27]Discussion in *Mind of the Spirit*, 55-112; briefly, my *Romans* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), 85-97.

based on faith, showing from Deuteronomy 30 that the latter was always God's intention for salvation.

Approaching Scripture for works involves priding ourselves on our rules, doctrines or perhaps ethnicity; but in God's presence no one has the right to boast. Approaching Scripture for faith means that reading Scripture always renews our trust in and dependence on God. Accordingly, as we approach Scripture, it is appropriate for us to pray for understanding, humble and obedient hearts (see e.g., Ps 119:18, 27, 34, 73, 125, 144, 169).

In Luke 24:45, it was the Lord himself who opened the mind of his disciples to understand the Scriptures; in 24:32 believers' hearts burned in them as he explained Scripture. Let us pray for this!

A Spirit hermeneutic means that we embrace the message of the text and live it out, not just satisfy our intellectual curiosity or, still less, to boast about our knowledge (Rom 2:23). To those insistent on righteousness by keeping the law, Paul responds in Galatians 5:14 with Christ's law of love. Using language evoking Old Testament passages that literally speak of "walking" or "going" in God's commandments, Paul speaks in Galatians 5:16 of "walking" by the Spirit. Such walking is not aimless, for Paul equates it with being "led" by the Spirit in 5:18. In 5:25, he uses similar wording that probably means that we know where to walk by placing our feet where we find the footsteps of the Spirit. In 5:22-23, he insists that there is no law that prohibits the fruit of the Spirit; in 6:2, as we serve one another, we fulfill the law of Christ.

Thus, our understanding of the law is transformed. It may provide moral guidance, but it also reminds us of God's activity in our own lives. We hide his word not merely on paper but in our hearts; it is God himself working within us who has not only accepted us in Christ but who also produces the moral fruit of his presence.

The Word of God for the People of God

Exegesis rightly and necessarily concerns what the biblical writers were saying first of all to their ancient audiences. But once we understand the texts in their context, we also read them to believe and embrace their message with our whole hearts, and to live accordingly.

Believers may start from various cultural assumptions, but we all can read Scripture as the people of God living in the promised messianic era. We live in the same sphere of spiritual and theological reality as the people in the Bible. We read the Bible as God's people, addressed in Scripture because God gave it for us:

- Romans 15:4: "For whatever was written beforehand was written to teach us, so that through the endurance and the exhortation/encouragement provided by the Scriptures we should have hope";
- 1 Corinthians 10:11: "These things happened to them to serve as examples, and they were written down to warn/instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come."

Yes, "these things happened to them"—they are historical events. But they were *recorded* so that subsequent generations could *learn* from what happened to them, and especially for us as Christ's followers, "on whom the ends of the ages have come."

End-Time Readers

That is why we read:

- Hebrews 1:2: "in *these* last days, God has spoken to us by His Son";
- Acts 2:17, on the day of Pentecost: "In the last days, says God, I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh."

If it was already the last days on the day of Pentecost, it can hardly be before-the-last-days now.

Peter's announcement is consistent with the rest of the New Testament, where believers who share in the Holy Spirit have tasted the powers of the coming age (Heb 6:4-5). In Christ, Paul says, we already have the "firstfruits" (*aparchê*) of the Spirit (Rom 8:23), using a term that designated the actual beginning of the harvest.[28] He also announces that we have the down payment (*arrhabôn*) of our future inheritance (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:13-14), using a term often used in ancient business documents for the first installment of a promised payment.[29] Human sight and hearing cannot anticipate what awaits us, he says, but God has revealed this to us by the Spirit (1 Cor 2:9-10).

We also read of hard times, mockers, and apostasy in "the last days" in 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:1; and 2 Peter 3:3. The context of each of

[28]Cf. Oscar Cullmann, *The Early Church* (ed. A. J. B. Higgins; London: SCM, 1956), 117; Neill Q. Hamilton, *The Holy Spirit and Eschatology in Paul* (Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Papers 6; Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1957), 19; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 370.

[29]E.g., Gen 38:17-18, 20 LXX; New Docs 1, §33, p. 83; Cullmann, *Early Church*, 117; George Eldon Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 91.

these passages refers to the time in which people were then living. 1 John 2:18 warns, "You have heard that an antichrist is coming; even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know that it is an eschatological hour."

A Spirit-led reading of Scripture will thus read Scripture from the vantage point of God's eschatological activity already among us, "on whom," Paul says, "the ends of the ages have come." We thus live in the time of fulfillment, the time between the first and second coming of Christ. Jesus is already the firstfruits of the promised resurrection (1 Cor 15:20, 23); the coming king has already come the first time, so the kingdom has come like a mustard seed yet will flourish like a great tree (Mark 4:31-32).

That both Christians in New Testament times and Christians today live in the last days means that we, like they, are the eschatological people of God. We do not read the New Testament as belonging only to them, to a foreign dispensation, but as God's Word for us today. This is what makes a specifically Christian, Spirit-sensitive reading, different from merely a historic reading.

A Continuationist Reading

Acts 2:17-18 treats the Spirit's prophetic empowerment of the church as a sign that "the last days" have arrived. God poured out the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and did not pour the Spirit back afterward! Joel's prophecy about all God's people being prophetically endowed belongs to today, to the same era as Joel's prophecy about calling on the Lord to be saved or Ezekiel's prophecy about God's Spirit transforming our hearts.

My wife is from Congo in Africa; there three people who did not know each other prophesied to her at different times that she was someday going to marry a white man with a big ministry. When we got engaged but had not yet told others an acquaintance came to me and said, "I feel that God is saying that you have found the right person, and not to worry that you are from different cultures and continents."

On the other hand, people often prophesy nonsense! That is why both prophecy (1 Cor 14:29; 1 Thess 5:19-22) and teaching must be tested; Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 13:9 that in this age we both know and prophesy only in part.

Scripture itself does not distinguish between so-called supernatural and so-called natural gifts given by the Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul emphasizes that we need all the gifts to function fully as one body, whether, for example, prophecy or teaching. Ideally, we want our bodies to be whole.

Some churches amputate particular kinds of members, and some other churches want just to collect and connect amputated members. It would be better for us to value and learn from all of one another's gifts.

Paul's praise of love in 1 Corinthians 13 corrects errors in the Corinthian church; Paul's particular language about love not boasting or being arrogant addresses the very errors of Corinthian boasting and arrogance Paul reproves earlier in the letter. But the passage remains relevant today: boasting and arrogance still must be addressed today, whether in spiritual gifts, as in chapters 12-14, or in knowledge, as in 1 Corinthians 8.

Similarly, we continue to need partial gifts mentioned in the passage, such as prophecy, tongues, and knowledge (probably meaning teaching). Such gifts explicitly continue until we see Christ face to face and know as we are known, and therefore no longer need such partial gifts (1 Cor 13:8-12). In context, as most scholars today recognize, this completed time is when we see Christ face to face at his return. And so I believe that we should continue to obey Paul's concluding exhortations to the section: "be eager to prophesy, and do not prohibit speaking in tongues; but let everything be done in the right way and in order" (14:39-40), probably speaking of the order he has prescribed for these gifts earlier in the chapter.

Continuing prophecy does not contradict or supplement the authority of Scripture. Although Scripture contains many prophecies, it never equates all prophecies with Scripture. The Old Testament historical books mention scores of prophets whose prophecies are not recorded in Scripture, and the New Testament presumes tens of thousands of prophecies in first-century church gatherings that are not recorded in Scripture. (If we estimate just two or three prophecies per week in just a hundred house churches by the time that John wrote the book of Revelation, there would have been roughly 850,000 of them.) Nor is prophecy the genre of all Scripture, nor were all biblical authors said to be prophets or apostles.

God spoke through prophecy all through biblical history, so it would seem odd to expect the gift to stop, suddenly and without major, explicit biblical warning. In 1 Corinthians 14:3, genuine prophecy is meant to encourage or exhort in new situations, not to provide new doctrine; continuing prophecy no more adds to Scripture than does continuing teaching. Interestingly, it is the idea that prophecy ceases before Jesus' return, which is nowhere clearly taught in Scripture, that is a *postbiblical teaching*![30]

[30]Cf. Jon Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic on Post-Biblical Miracles* (2nd ed.; Word & Spirit Press, 2011).

By very definition, the canon by which we evaluate all other claims is closed; no one is writing Scripture now. We do not live in the generation or two right after Jesus, so none of us witnessed Jesus' ministry or directly heard such witnesses, a criterion ancient Christians used for canonicity. We do not have to believe that apostles and prophets have ceased to believe that *first-century* apostles and prophets, or the immediate circle who knew Jesus in the flesh, have ceased.

Yet virtually *all* believers must agree that the Spirit continues to speak to us in some ways; in Romans 8:16, for example, God's Spirit still bears witness with our spirits that we are God's children. Theological continuationists are more consistent than cessationists, allowing for God's more vocal ways of speaking to continue. And continuationists who embrace spiritual gifts and experiences with the Spirit in practice are more consistent than those who are merely continuationist in theory.

Patterns in Scripture

In 1 Corinthians 10:11, already noted, Paul cites the examples of the Old Testament; *all* Scripture is profitable for teaching (2 Tim 3:16). Paul uses Abram's faith (Gen 15:6) as a model for believers (Rom 4:1-25). James uses the experiences of the prophets and Job as models for endurance (Jas 5:10-11). Ancient historians and biographers often plainly and explicitly tell us that they expected their readers to learn moral and ideological lessons from their true accounts.

Human examples in biblical narratives are often negative, but we can learn about God from all of Scripture. How we see God acting in the world of the Bible can shape our understanding of how God works. We should learn not only from what we consider key verses of Scripture but also from *patterns* of how God works with his people in Scripture. Being people of the Bible means that we embrace the biblical worldview, a worldview in which God remains active in this world. Expecting God to continue to act today in ways consistent with how he acted in the Bible is closely related to what the Bible calls "faith." This does *not* mean that we can always predict what he will do, but we can always be confident that he is working. We can even expect him to surprise us, as God often surprised his people in the Bible.

As people of the end-time and people of the Bible, we should live by faith in the recognition that what God did in the Bible he can do, and in various times and places still does, today.

Reading with the Humble

Awakenings often start among the humble;[31] the spiritual dimension of Spirit hermeneutics thus cannot be the prerogative of the highly educated. Scripture often indicates that God is near the broken but far from the proud (Ps 138:6; Pro 3:34; Matt 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14; Jas 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5). If God normally reveals himself especially to the broken, why should he reveal himself differently (only to elites) among those who read (or hear) the Bible?

Unfortunately, we scholars are sometimes proud of our knowledge; knowledge does, as Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 8:1, tend to lead us to overestimate our status. With few and usually private exceptions, it was not the intellectual elite of Jesus' day, but the lowly, who followed him. "I praise you, Father," Jesus prayed, "for you hid these matters from the wise and intellectual and revealed them to little children" (Matt 11:25//Luke 10:21). Only those who welcome the kingdom like a child will enter it (Mark 10:15).

The humble read Scripture not simply to reinforce their knowledge, but with faith—and often in a situation of desperation—to hear God there. They read with dependence on God, trusting the Holy Spirit to lead them. We who are scholars and leaders have much to offer them; but we should also consider what their faith has to teach us.

God's People as a Community of Interpretation?

In line with the frequent scholarly emphasis today on communities of interpretation,[32] some emphasize the consensus of the Spirit-filled community. This is certainly *part* of the biblical safety net; in 1 Corinthians 14:29, after some prophesy, the other prophets are to evaluate the prophecies. Awareness of interpretive communities also helps us guard against prejudices that reflect a single interpretive location's biases.

When I was moved by the Spirit to prophesy out loud to the entire cafeteria at my undergraduate Christian institution, I was very happy that afterwards someone came up to me and told me that God had told them to do the same thing, but they hesitated and then I did it. I would hate for that to have been just my imagination!

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[31]Cf. e.g., Mark Shaw, *Global Awakening: How 20th-Century Revivals Triggered a Christian Revolution* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2010).

[32]I did my PhD at Duke in the heyday of Stanley Fish's influence, so interpretive communities (see e.g., Stanley E. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980]) were regular subjects of discussion with friends in the English department, religion department and divinity school.

At the same time, I should also highlight some difficulties with the community criterion if used in isolation. If the community adopts an interpretation that diverges significantly from the message that God originally inspired, it lacks divine authority. Jeremiah had to stand virtually alone among the prophets of his day; most of the other prophets were prophesying peace when there was no peace (Jer 5:13, 31; 6:13; 14:13-15). Jeremiah had to call the community of his day back to God's message (Jer 6:19; 9:13; 16:11; 26:4; 32:23; 44:10, 23); the community was wrong about the word of the Lord.

Happily, God ensured that, over the course of generations, the long-range communion of saints got it right: Jeremiah's word came to pass, so it was his tested message, rather than the failed prophecies of his majority detractors, that made it into the Bible (2 Chr 36:12, 21-22; Ezra 1:1; Dan 9:2). Yet this observation suggests that the wisdom of the people of God is not always the best criterion for discernment in a given generation that might need it most. I mistrust the political proclivities of most born-again Christians in the United States right now, partly based on some dreams I have had; the hindsight of the next generation will likely be able to arbitrate the wisdom of competing political strategies more confidently than is possible at the moment.

While I certainly deem Spirit-led consensus valuable, as in Acts 15:28,[33] consensus is often more elusive than we would prefer. Those who claim charismatic experience range from the Way International, which denies Jesus' deity, to Oneness Pentecostals, for whom Jesus is the Father, Son and Spirit.

Among Trinitarians, they range from conservative U.S. evangelicals such as J. P. Moreland and Wayne Grudem, to British Anglicans such as Michael Green and N. T. Wright,[34] to Lutherans such as Mark Allan Powell, Methodists such as Richard Hays and Ben Witherington, and Catholics such as Teresa Berger and Luke Timothy Johnson.

While we share a common respect for Scripture, we represent a range of interpretive methods and theological details. On most of the most important points, we Trinitarians all agree, but appeal to consensus, whether of Christians in general or those generally designated as renewalists, cannot resolve all questions. Simply designating one subgroup of Christians as the reliable community of interpretation without argument begs the question of how such a group should be

[33]Discussed more fully in Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012-2015), 3:2289-92.

[34]See N. T. Wright, "The Word and the Wind: A Response," pages 141-78 in *Pentecostal Theology and the Theological Vision of N. T. Wright: A Conversation* (ed. Janet Meyer Everts and Jeffrey S. Lamp; Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2015), 143.

identified, unless we tautologically pre-identify them as "the best interpreters."

Dangers of Neglecting the Human Dimension of Scripture

I have tried to take seriously here both human and divine dimensions of Scripture and of reading it. Some scholars have recently criticized my emphasis on the importance of the ancient element in interpretation and my concerns about undue subjectivism in approaches that neglect it.

Here, then, I will elaborate and especially illustrate those concerns further. Obviously, one does not even need to be able to read to communicate the gospel (some argue that many or most of the first apostles, such as Peter, could not read, although they could dictate). For evangelism the basic gospel is sufficient, and apostolic servants of the gospel with signs and wonders are advancing it throughout the world today.

But as some of those very apostolic servants have expressed to me (and as the letters of the first apostles indicate they would have agreed), believers being conformed to Christ's image eventually need more of the gospel's implications that depend on the distinct gift of teaching Scripture. My annoyance is not with those who cannot read, but with those who have resources available yet neglect them (cf. Isaiah 29:11-12). Most importantly, I believe that if we as *scholars* fail to challenge some popular errors that harm Christ's body, we abdicate our responsibility as those called to be teachers.

Whatever else God might say, it will naturally not contradict what he has already spoken in Scripture; if believers are not equipped to evaluate other teachings from Scripture, what is the future of the churches? Theological liberalism as promulgated in secular universities where many of our young people study? Fundamentalist legalism for local traditions? Or the pop religion circulating in many Christian bookstores and on the internet? Or even the fusion of faith and partisan politics dominant in much Christian social media?

A popular approach in the West today is celebrating "whatever Scripture means to me," if we appeal to Scripture at all. Such an approach usually cites a very selective repertoire of texts and usually without much regard for safeguards such as literary context, background, wider biblical theology, or even the wider Christian community.

Counter biblical teachings are of course not limited to charismatic circles: witness, for example, prayed-a-prayer-always-saved teaching or

widespread neglect of Jesus' teachings about caring for the needy.[35] (At least prosperity preachers have enough of a conscience to try to justify *their* materialism!) Similarly, John MacArthur's followers embrace antipsychology, dispensational eschatology, and cessationism. Less vocal but also spiritually lethal, some pastors of whatever stripe, perhaps reacting against some more traditional legalism, will not preach against sexual immorality for fear of offending someone, no matter how often it comes up in Paul's letters.

But in circles primed to blame biases more directly on the Holy Spirit, fresh errors seem to surface more quickly and ad hoc, since they require less historic precedent. Because I am charismatic and am addressing "Spirit hermeneutics," I note here especially cases where promoters of particular ideas claim the Spirit's authority yet diverge significantly from Spirit-inspired Scripture. In many charismatic circles, many winds of teaching (Eph 4:14) have buffeted believers:

- Some Branhamists still await William Branham's return
- Some still accept Pigs in the Parlor demonology originally allegedly acquired from interviewing demons;[36]
- Hobart Freeman, a former professor, rejected medical treatment, reportedly leading to his own death and that of

[35]See the classic critique of the latter in Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving from Affluence to Generosity* (sixth ed.; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015).

[36]Frank and Ida Mae Hammond, *Pigs in the Parlor: A Practical Guide to Deliverance* (Impact Christian Books, 1973); see criticisms in James M. Collins, *Exorcism and Deliverance Ministry in the Twentieth Century: An Analysis of the Practice and Theology of Exorcism in Modern Western Christianity* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2009), 64-69. As of March 23, 2018, with more than a million copies in print, *Pigs in the Parlor*'s Amazon ranking was 4786, and it ranked #7 in the "Pentecostal & Charismatic" category. By way of contrast, John Christopher Thomas's well-researched and genuinely helpful *The Devil, Disease, and Deliverance: Origins of Illness in New Testament Thought* (JPTSup 13; Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Academic, 1998) is ranked 1,420,094. Everett Ferguson's well-researched *Demonology of the Early Christian World* (New York: Mellen, 1984), ranks 3,236,946. As a charismatic scholar, I find such comparisons extremely frustrating.

many of his parishioners. This rejection appears not only in Dowie[37] but even in some early Pentecostal theology;[38]

- One may note also the excesses of the shepherding movement;
- The more extreme forms of positive confession and prosperity teaching;[39]
- Some extreme faith and Manifested Sons teaching that believers will become Christ or gods;[40]
- Allowing only positive, comforting prophecies, which if taken to extremes may lead to crying, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace (cf. Jer 6:14; 8:11).

Many of these errors reflect independent churches without larger spheres of accountability. But in 1989 Margaret Poloma showed that, although the Assemblies of God and nearly all its scholars and teachers officially rejected the teaching that sufficient faith *always* cures, more than a third of adherents in A/G churches accepted it.[41]

I have recently conferred with some significant renewal leaders who are deeply concerned with unhealthy teachings circulating among their own followers, even including salvific universalism.[42] Most of these erroneous teachings reflect readings of texts that are unfaithful to the original contexts. Some leaders in Pentecostal biblical training in Brazil and Nigeria have noted to me that many Pentecostals are now returning to mainline denominations because of inadequate or erroneous teaching

[37]Jonathan R. Baer, "Perfectly Empowered Bodies: Divine Healing in Modernizing America" (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 2002), 150-51, 249; James Opp, *The Lord for the Body: Religion, Medicine, and Protestant Faith Healing in Canada, 1880–1930* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 103–11, 115.

[38]Allan Anderson, "Signs and Blunders: Pentecostal Mission Issues at 'Home and Abroad' in the Twentieth Century," *JAM* 2 (2, Sept. 2000): 193–210, here 207; Neil Hudson, "Early British Pentecostals and Their Relationship to Health, Healing, and Medicine," *AJPS* 6 (2, July 2003): 283–301, here 294-97; Opp, *Lord for Body*, 32; Erlinda T. Reyes, "A Theological Framework on Non-Healing in the Pentecostal Perspective" (ThM thesis, Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, 2007), 76, 87; Heather D. Curtis, *Faith in the Great Physician: Suffering and Divine Healing in American Culture, 1860–1900* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 197–99; William K. Kay, *Pentecostalism* (SCM Core Text; London: SCM, 2009), 47.

[39]For discussion, see *Spirit Hermeneutics*, 272-73. Kenneth E. Hagin, *The Midas Touch: A Balanced Approach to Biblical Prosperity* (Tulsa: Faith Library Publications, 2000), challenged some of the excesses. Jim Bakker with Ken Abraham, *I Was Wrong* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), retracted his earlier views.

[40]For brief discussion, see *Spirit Hermeneutics*, 380n41, 382n11.

[41]Margaret M. Poloma, *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads: Charisma and Institutional Dilemmas* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 62.

[42]For perhaps the most thorough critique of universalism, see Michael J. McClymond (a renewalist scholar), *The Devil's Redemption: A New History and Interpretation of Christian Universalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018).

in many Pentecostal circles. Although I believe that God often uses such an exodus to bring renewal to other denominations, it is not a state of affairs that any of us relishes.

Michael Brown's new book *Playing with Holy Fire* addresses a number of in-house charismatic errors.[43] Many errors that he critiques are widespread in Christian media, promoted by major figures who claim special revelation impervious to the insights of mere academicians who merely devote our much less important lives to studying Scripture. Both they and we claim the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Second Timothy 3:16-4:3 shows that God gave us Scripture as an arbiter to decide claims to revelation and to correct error. Both they and we claim dependence on the Spirit, but whose teachings in given cases conform to Scripture as it was inspired in its original setting? First John 4:1-3 invites us not to believe every spirit, but to test the spirits according to *the Jesus who came in the flesh*, the Jesus consistent with the apostolic message John had taught.

From such observations I would conclude that, at least so far, the "community of interpretation" approach, while helpful in part, has not proved sufficient by *itself* in guarding sound teaching. One might of course appeal to Spirit-filled *scholars* as a more authoritative community of interpretation with better knowledge of sound teaching. But Hobart Freeman and one of the leaders in the shepherding movement, Derek Prince, *were* scholars. The community still needs to be anchored in the original message of Scripture.

Conclusions: Spirit Hermeneutics

Responsible exegesis still requires us to explore the meaning of the biblical texts in their original contexts. But sometimes even non-Christian scholars do that. Where we go beyond non-Christian scholars is that we *believe* these texts as *Scripture*.

Careful study of Scripture is essential to counter the unbridled subjectivism of popular charismatic excesses, for example, teachings about God making us rich. At the same time, study that does not lead to living out biblical experience in the era of the Spirit misses the point of the biblical texts. All Christian experience in this era must be shaped by the experience of the day of Pentecost. The last days are here, and the Lord has poured out his Spirit on his church.

[43]Michael L. Brown, *Playing with Holy Fire: A Wake-Up Call to the Pentecostal-Charismatic Church* (Charisma House, 2018).