

enterprise;⁴ and crucial to the Spirit's central role is the thoroughly eschatological framework within which Paul both experienced and understood the Spirit. The gift of the out-poured Spirit, who had played a fundamental role in his- and others'-eschatological expectations, came to serve for Paul, along with the resurrection of Christ, as the primary cause of his radically altered eschatological perspective. On the one hand, the coming of the Spirit fulfilled the Old Testament eschatological promises, the *sure evidence* that the future had *already* been set in motion; on the other hand, since the final expression of the Eschaton had *not yet* taken place, the

Spirit also served as the *sure guarantee* of the final glory. It is quite impossible to understand Paul's emphasis on the experienced life of the Spirit apart from this thorough-going eschatological perspective that dominated his thinking.

It is within this context that one is to understand the inherent ambivalence one finds in Paul's letters between the themes of "power" and "weakness." Indeed, "power" is something of an elusive term in Paul's writings. On the one hand, it often refers to clearly visible manifestations that evidence the Spirit's presence (e.g., 1 Cor 2:4-5; Gal 3:5; Rom 15:19). The evidence from 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Romans 12:6; and especially Galatians 3:2-5 with its matter-of-fact appeal to the continuing presence of miracles in the churches, makes it certain that the Pauline churches were "charismatic" in the sense that a dynamic presence of the Spirit was manifested in their gatherings.⁵ And even where "power" means that believers apprehend and live out the love of Christ in a greater way (Eph 3:16-20), Paul recognizes here a

miraculous work of the Spirit that will be *evidenced* by the way renewed people behave toward one another. Whatever else, the Spirit was *experienced* in the Pauline churches; he was not simply a matter of creedal assent.

On the other hand, Paul also assumes the closest correlation between the Spirit's power and present weaknesses. Such passages as Romans 8:17-27; 2 Corinthians 12:9; and Colossians 1:9-11⁶ indicate that the Spirit is

seen as the source of empowering in the midst of affliction or weakness. In Paul's view, "knowing Christ" means to know "both the power of his resurrection *and* the fellowship of his sufferings" in which life in the "already" means to be "conformed to his death" as we press toward the "not yet"-the final prize (Phil 3:9-13). This, after all, is almost certainly how we are to understand the double *kai* ("and") that follows "to know him" in this passage.

There are not three things that Paul longs to know; rather it is one thing: to know Christ. But in context that means to know him

simultaneously in two ways, in both the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings.⁷ Suffering means to be as one's Lord, following his example and thus "filling up what was lacking in his sufferings" (Col 1:24).

Even so, Paul also expects God's more visible demonstrations of power through the Spirit to be manifested in the midst of weakness, as God's "proof" that his power resides in the message of a crucified Messiah. In 1 Corinthians 2:3-5, therefore, Paul can appeal simultaneously to the reality of his own weaknesses and the Spirit's manifest power in his preaching and the Corinthians' conversion; and in 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6 he reminds these new believers

that they became so by the power of the Spirit, but in the midst of suffering that was also accompanied by the joy of the Holy Spirit.

All of this reflects Paul's basic eschatological understanding of Christian existence as "already/not yet," a tension that Paul was able to keep together in ways that many later Christians have not. For him it was not simply a tension in which the present was all weakness and the (near) future all glory. The

*it is the
church's*

*subsequent
failure to embrace
both power and
weakness,
simultaneously
and vigorously,
that has led to so
much of the ebb
and flow of Spirit
life in the church
over the
centuries.*
