

Allēlōn Reciprocal Commands and Christian Development¹

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Abstract: The “one another” (allelōn) imperatives found in the New Testament provide a way for Christians to more accurately explain and understand how “the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Eph 4:16). The reciprocal nature and outcome of the interactions between and among members of the Body of Christ parallels the way in which developmentalists describe the reciprocal development that occurs when developing persons interact with one another across a variety of social encounters. The article will explore how developmental interactionists describe developmental reciprocity, how the New Testament “one another” imperatives mirror this reciprocity in the Body of Christ, and how knowledge of such reciprocal interactions helps us better understand the ingredients necessary to facilitate our own and one another’s spiritual development.

Developmentalists have identified reciprocity as a critical component in normal human development toward maturity (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 2005; Magnusson & Allen, 1983; Lerner, 2002). One may define reciprocity as mutual interaction among developing persons. The interactions take a variety of forms and take place in a variety of social settings. A developing person is any human at various stages of the lifespan who engages in social interactions with other developing humans. The social interactions that occur between developing persons serve as instigators of development that prompt further development in all parties involved in the exchange. Bronfenbrenner (1979) analogizes developmental reciprocity to “a ping-pong game” (p. 57) in which there is mutual feedback that produces progressively more complex patterns of interaction and an increase in the complexity of the learning process. The outcome of such mutual

¹ We use the term “Christian development” as a synonym for spiritual formation, spiritual growth, faith formation, spiritual development and a host of other terms all of which seem to constrict what is meant when they are used. The term Christian development encompasses a holistic perspective that includes but is not limited to physical, intellectual, emotional, social, moral, and spiritual dimensions of the created human.

interactivity and interdependence between developing persons is that it “produces its most powerful developmental effects” (p. 57). Magnusson (2001) asserts that “At each specific moment, individual functioning is determined in a process of continuous, reciprocal interaction between mental factors, biological factors, and behavior . . . and situational factors” (p. 27). Thus reciprocity characterizes individual functioning among the various human “factors” or dimensions that interact with each other. Consequently, Magnusson can conclude “The interaction process per se will thus precipitate development” (p. 39).

Reciprocity in Dyads and Other Social Relationships

The basic form of reciprocal social interaction is the dyad: a social relationship between two persons who “pay attention to or participate in one another’s activities” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 56). Dyads form the basic building block of the microsystem and may involve two spouses, a parent and child, two friends, a pastor and parishioner, or even a student and teacher. Dyads should be mutually beneficial to both individuals and it is this mutual benefit that sustains the relationship long-term.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that reciprocity is one of the chief properties that characterize dyadic interaction leading to further human development. The consensus among developmental social scientists is that without such social reciprocity between and among developing persons, normal human development is impossible. Whereas older views of development gave more weight to either nature (innate biological patterns that govern development) or nurture (social environmental conditions), work that is more recent has seen that both components are necessary for humans to develop normally (Lerner, 2002). Thus, a reciprocal relationship between these two critical elements is

necessary. Developmental reciprocity encompasses reciprocal relationships that emerge in dyads, triads, and other forms of social networking. Without these reciprocal interactions and reciprocal social relationships between committed persons we impede normal human development.

Reciprocity in Social Ecologies

Social relationships in a dyad expand to include households, classrooms, organizations, and churches. Social networking theory as set forth by Degenne and Forsé (1999), Nooy, Mrvar, and Batagelj (2005), and Wasserman and Faust (1994) help us understand how people in these expanded social contexts relate to one another and influence one another for good or for ill.² Bellamy, Moo, and Castle (2004) reported on a national study of Australian Anglican and Protestant church attendees that sought to determine those who had influenced respondents' spiritual development. Fifty-five percent reported parents as a positive influence on faith formation, 60% identified local church workers (pastors, Sunday school teachers, and youth leaders) as positive influences, 31% reported other family members, 28% religious ministries, and 19% reported friends as having a positive impact on faith formation. The researchers observed from their results that

Faith by its very nature is an individual response. Yet this does not mean that faith is developed in isolation from others. Church and family have been important institutions within which religious faith develops. Some people provide signposts for the journey of faith, leading a person to a greater realisation about the nature of faith. Others play a facilitator's role, introducing a person to significant people or experiences (p. 15).

² For example, a recent study at the Harvard Medical School on the prevalence of obesity over the last 30 years concluded that "Network phenomena appear to be relevant to the biologic and behavioral trait of obesity, and obesity appears to spread through social ties" (Christakis and Fowler, 2007, p. 370).

It seems clear from this example that social interactions serve as mechanisms of human development whereby innate developmental potentials interface with social intercourse. Bronfenbrenner (2005) echoes this observation when he writes, “Each member of a microsystem influences every other member” (p. 161).

Reciprocity, which involves “concomitant mutual feedback” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 57) among the parties involved creates “bidirectional interaction between an individual and his or her environment” (Magnusson, 1983, p. 7). The bidirectional interaction creates a reciprocal relationship that makes possible environmental influences upon persons, as well as a person-to-person impact. Such dynamic social bi-directionality understands the developing person as an active agent in one’s own development acting with intentionality and purpose. Consequently, one cannot explain or understand individual functioning and development apart from this “environmental context in which the individual develops and is functioning” (Magnusson, p. 8). Social relationships in the microsystem and larger social ecology make it possible for persons to be “interconnected in a dynamic process of mutual influence and change” (Magnusson, p. 8).

Such multi-level social interactions take place across the lifespan and make possible “the course of individual development” (Lerner, 2002, p. 165). Further, these developmentally instigative interactions operate holistically upon the developing person. Aspects of this holistic development include biological, psychological, behavioral, and mental components that interact within the personal ecosystem to bring about whole person development. As a result the whole person is the center of such a “holistic interactionist viewpoint” (Lerner, p. 176). Magnusson, Lerner, and Bronfenbrenner would argue that any analysis of the developing person that only takes into account a

single aspect of this whole person will necessarily produce an incomplete picture of that person. At the same time, “A change in one aspect affects related parts of the subsystem and, sometimes, the whole organism” (Magnusson & Stattin, 1998, p. 700). Christian theologians and educators often overlook this scientific reality. Too often we focus exclusively on the *spiritual* aspect of Christian development to the neglect and exclusion of other aspects of the whole person and consequently give a distorted picture of development and the created person’s totality (Howard, 2006).

Magnusson (1995, 1999a, 1999b) and Magnusson and Stattin (1998) broaden out Bronfenbrenner’s concept of reciprocity beyond the self-contained dyadic relationship in the microsystem as a major feature of interactional developmental dynamics. Thus, these developmentally beneficial social interactions serve as influences on human development across the lifespan. All social networks partake of this interactive-reciprocal quality and produce changes in behavior, attitudes, emotions, beliefs, knowledge, and values among all participating persons producing positive human development and adaptation.

A Bio-Spiritual Hermeneutic

The hermeneutical principle governing our observations is that natural processes of growth, whether botanical or human, are similar to spiritual processes of growth and so offer the Christian a way to appreciate and understand biblical and theological formulations regarding Christian development and spiritual maturity. Hunter (1960) argues that the parables of Jesus assume “what is valid in one sphere is valid also in the other” (p. 8). The “one sphere” is the natural realm that served as the starting point of the parabolic sequence Jesus employed in his public teaching. The “other sphere” is the spiritual realm (or the kingdom realm) that Jesus wanted his followers to understand.

Consequently, Jesus could direct his disciples to “consider the lilies, how they grow” (Luke 12:27). This directive makes no sense apart from the working assumption that natural growth mirrors spiritual growth. Such developmental understandings of human growth and development offer Christian educators insights into the processes of spiritual formation.

Now that we have established the critical role that reciprocity plays in the process of human development imbedded in social ecologies, we can move to an analysis of similar patterns of reciprocity described in the New Testament as one of the most important factors that promotes whole person Christian development. As Morrow (2008) suggests, “Spiritual formation is divinely enabled by God through three essential resources: God’s Word, God’s Spirit, and God’s people” (p. 45). While we will mention in passing the first, and address briefly the second, our primary focus will be with the third resource: God’s people. We in no way want to suggest any depreciation of the first two resources but our focus is on the one we tend to neglect: the role that the community of faith, God’s people, plays in the spiritual development process that facilitates individual and corporate transformation.

Allēlōn Reciprocal Pronouns in the New Testament

The Greek New Testament utilizes a unique word to refer to social relationships between committed Christians in what the Apostle Paul calls “the body of Christ,” the Church. This Greek word is *allēlōn* and it functions as a reciprocal pronoun.³ Most often in English translations of the Greek New Testament this one Greek word is translated “one another,” or “each other.” While there are exceptions in usage, the word *allēlōn* “is

³ While another Greek word, *eautōn*, can also be translated “one another,” due to limitations of space our focus here will be exclusively on the meaning and usage of the Greek word *allēlōn*.

used in connection with groups of persons who are in some way peers and with reference to relationships within a homogeneous group in order to express communication with or, sometimes, negative conduct toward, each other” (Kramer, 1990, p. 63). Kramer explains that New Testament writers use the term “primarily in the description of the (obligatory) conduct of Christians in the community toward each other, with emphasis on mutuality and culminating in the love command” (p. 63).

The word *allēlōn* expresses concepts like mutuality, reciprocity, equality, sharing, and exchange. In the New Testament the term conveys a relationship between two or more people committed to one another through a common faith in Jesus Christ. The relationship is interactive with each person contributing to the welfare of the other through a variety of connections, behaviors, attitudes, and actions. For instance, Christ commanded his followers to “love one another” (John 13:34), which many believe serves as the umbrella description for all subsequent *allēlōn* commands. Moreover, Christians are encouraged to “build up one another” (1Thess 5:11), to “pray for one another” (James 5:16), “forgive one another” (Eph 4:32), “greet one another” (2Cor 13:12), “be kind to one another” (Eph 4:32) “be hospitable to one another” (1Pet 4:9), “serve one another” (Gal 5:13), “comfort one another” (1Thess 4:18), “stimulate one another” (Heb 10:24), “admonish one another” (Col 3:16), “confess to one another” (James 5:16), and “submit to one another” (Eph 5:21).

Moulton and Geden (1897) list 100 occurrences of *allēlōn* in the Greek New Testament. When one examines these various directives it is obvious that they envision a wide range of actions and attitudes. The verbs linked to the reciprocal pronoun cover a host of duties and obligations that one may describe as holistic in orientation. No single

aspect is in view, but instead a whole range covering multiple situations, emotions, attitudes, and behaviors. The key to all of this is social exchange. One person does not perform all of these behaviors for others but everyone adopts an *allēlōn* perspective with the net result that everyone benefits holistically from the interaction. Hence, Fee (1989) can say that “In the early church everything was done *allēlōn* (p. 179).

Allēlōn as a Mechanism for Spiritual Formation

Most commentators who analyze the usage of the *allēlōn* commands in the New Testament (and they are few) focus on their significance for ministry or relationships. Hoch (1995), for example, says that this word expresses “the reciprocal nature of ministry within the church” (p. 247). By contrast, Jacobson and Jacobson (2003) see the *allēlōn* commands as directives toward the building of authentic relationships among Christians “that defined their life together” (p. 21). Still yet, Lohfink (1984) while admitting their reference to “the everyday life of Christians” also notes that they may refer “to the *liturgical conduct* (emphasis his) which Paul hoped for and desired” (p. 103). While all of these approaches are valid they leave out another important role that this term plays within the Christian community of the New Testament. Viewed from a different perspective, we see that this term explains to us another way in which Christians grow in their faith. These 100 commands, some of which are duplicated in one form or another, cover a wide range of interactions, connections, mutual activities, reciprocal behaviors, attitudes, and relationships among members of the Body of Christ, the Church. All of this mutual (reciprocal) social exchange serves as a precipitating mechanism for further growth as a Christian (individual dimension) and as a Christian community (corporate dimension). One may dare propose that without such mutual exchange among

Christians, it is impossible to conceive of Christian growth. The communal nature of the church as the Body of Christ suggests that we do not grow toward maturity in isolation from one another but by our connections and interactions with one another (Rom 12:3-8; 1Cor 12; Eph 4:7-16).

Holistic Reciprocity in the Christian Community

Ecology of human development models such as Bronfenbrenner, Lerner, and Magnusson offer, insist that the whole person assumes a central role in their system. Each proponent of holistic interactionist models of human development characterizes the whole person using different adjectives in a desire to describe what constitutes a whole person. For instance, Bronfenbrenner (2005) uses terms like “cognitive” and “socioemotional” (p. 139) and the “physical and “psychological” (p. 140) to characterize the whole person. Lerner varies his description from one context to the next but uses terms such as biology, cognition, personality, behavior (p. 178) or biological, psychological, and behavioral or mental, biological, and behavioral (p. 176). While Magnusson argues that one must adopt a view of the developing person “as an integrated totality rather than as a summation of variables” (1983, p. 372) he refers to several variables that constitute such a whole person.

No matter how the various developmentalists slice and dice their view of the human person in an effort to explain the complexity of the “integrated totality,” we must always insist on viewing the persons from a holistic perspective rather than compartmentalized. A synthetic view of the whole person is not only the centerpiece of interactive models of human development but seems to be the consensus view among biblical scholars and theologians. Whether one studies human anthropology from an Old

Testament or New Testament perspective the conclusion is identical: the biblical view is that of whole persons comprised of various aspects each of which constitute the whole.

Berkouwer (1962) cogently summarizes the biblical view of the human person when he notes that, “God’s revelation directs our glance towards man in his totality” and then goes on to state that

a fairly good consensus of opinion has arisen among theologians. They are increasingly conscious of the fact that the Biblical view of man show him to us in an impressive diversity, but that it never loses sight of the unity of the whole man, but rather brings it out and accentuates it (p. 199).

A diversity-in-totality view of the human person is most evident in the various verb forms linked with the reciprocal pronoun *allēlōn*. These various verbs suggest a wide range of ways in which Christians interact with each other. When divided among the various human dimensions representing whole person development a picture emerges of the numerous ways in which reciprocal interactions took place within the Christian community of the New Testament. Since these various dimensions interact with one another it is often difficult to make hard and fast decisions and thus one should avoid hardening of the categories. The fluidity that exists among and between the categories makes it difficult to be dogmatic about the final placement of each command. With that disclaimer in place the following *allēlōn* categories are proposed:

Physical

Wash (<i>nipto</i>) one another’s feet	Jn 13:14
Greet (<i>aspazomai</i>) one another with a holy kiss	Rom 16:16

Emotional

Love (<i>agapaō</i>) one another	Jn 13:34
Be kind (<i>charizomai</i>) to one another	Eph 4:32

Social

Accept (<i>proslambanō</i>) one another	Rom 15:7
Bear (<i>bastazō</i>) one another's burdens	Gal 6:2
Wait (<i>ekdexomai</i>) for one another	1Cor 11:33
Submit (<i>hupotassō</i>) to one another	Eph 5:21
Forbear (<i>anexomai</i>) one another	Col 3:13
Show concern (<i>merimnaō</i>) for one another	1Cor 12:25
Honor (<i>proēgeomai</i>) one another	Rom 12:10
Be at peace (<i>eirēneuō</i>) with one another	Mark 9:50

Moral

Do not lie (<i>pseudomai</i>) to one another	Col 3:9
Do not slander (<i>katalaleō</i>) one another	Jms 4:11
Do not judge (<i>krinō</i>) one another	Rom 14:13

Spiritual

Confess (<i>ezhomologeō</i>) your sins to one another	Jms 5:16
Pray (<i>euxomai</i>) for one another	Jms 5:16
Admonish (<i>noutheteō</i>) one another	Col 3:16
Consider (<i>katanoēō</i>) how to stir up one another	Heb 10:24
Let us pursue building up (<i>oikodomē</i>) one another	Rom 14:19
Comfort (<i>parakaleō</i>) one another	1Thess 4:18

A careful examination of this partial list of reciprocal commands indicates that they target different aspects of a whole person. Some of these reciprocal commands focus our attention on the emotional dimension, while others direct our attention to the physical, social, emotional, moral, and spiritual aspects of the created person. They seem deliberately to cover a wide range of human capacities and a wide range of human relationships. One could imagine that Jesus need only to have uttered the umbrella reciprocal command “love one another” and that would have sufficed. Yet, it seems as though the New Testament deliberately elaborates on this generic reciprocal command so that we do not lose the point that the diversity of the created human requires diverse approaches that encompass the “integrated totality” of the person.

Specific Reciprocal Behaviors and Attitudes That Promote Christian Development

The verbs that grammatically link to the various one another (*allēlōn*) commands indicate specific behaviors and attitudes that Christians are to display and produce for each other's mutual benefit. As with the command to "build up one another" some of the reciprocal commands are more general in nature and cover a host of attitudes and behaviors. Space does not permit a full analysis of each of the reciprocal commands but a sample from each of the five categories mentioned above will illustrate the general tenor of them all.

The imperative "greet one another with a holy kiss" (Rom 16:16) illustrates the physical dimension with social overtones and implications. The physical act of kissing another was common in the world of the first century church and involved a physical embrace of the other circumscribed by social mores. The physical act of kissing and embracing one another carried with it social implications that illustrate the fluidity of the categories suggested above. Physical embrace implied social embrace and acceptance into a larger community. The *mutual exclusion* of the Jew-Gentile relationship that existed before Christ gave way to *mutual embrace* illustrated in the holy kiss (Volf, 1996).

The directive to "be kind to one another" (Eph 4:32) reflects an emotional commitment to others in the community of faith that might take a variety of forms of expression. The word embraced the idea of "friendliness, kindness, and mildness" (Verbrugge, 2000, p. 609) and illustrated in Christian interaction the kindness of God toward sinners (Eph 2:7; Tit 3:4).

The socially constrained command to “be hospitable to one another” (1Pet 4:9) directs our responsibility to see our whole person development as Christians from a holistic perspective. We often think of spiritual development within a narrow band that involves scriptural instruction, preaching, and personal devotions with prayer. Biblical faith formation covers a wide spectrum that embraces the fullness of Christ as a perfect human being. Included in this is the need for social interaction between and among brothers and sisters in Christ. The admonition to be hospitable to one another embraces our need for more than spiritual stimulation or emotional comforting. We also need opportunities when we serve one another, sometimes through the provision of food and drink, in an informal atmosphere conducive to conversation and camaraderie. Jesus modeled the importance of hospitality by his frequent acceptance of invitations to the homes of others and his extending of invitations for others to join him for meals. The greatest such invitation certainly has to be the Lord’s Supper to which he invites his followers to eat and drink with him from a common cup and loaf.

The moral imperative “do not slander one another” (James 4:11) reflects those *allēlōn* imperatives that appear in a negative form intended to prohibit certain behaviors and attitudes that might damage the social fabric of the faith community and thus inhibit proper spiritual development. Slander was morally reprehensible for Christians because it used the sanctified tongue to disparage another brother or sister.

The command to “comfort one another” (1Thess 4:18) covers a wide range of actions from encouragement to support to comfort in bereavement. The *paraklēsis* word group in the New Testament always involves someone coming alongside another to give some kind of aid. The word usually has a verbal connotation. That is, comfort and

encouragement usually take the form of words spoken to another who is in distress or need.

All of these reciprocal interactions and the host of others mentioned in the New Testament drive us to engagement with one another emotionally, socially, morally, physically, and spiritually. In these various encounters and exchanges we give and receive. It is in the interchange with others to whom we are deeply committed in Christ that mutual reciprocal development emerges. The command “not to forsake the assembling of yourselves together” (Heb 10:25) is a clear indication that such community interactions are required and necessary not optional. The interactions take on a variety of forms and cover a wide range of attitude and behaviors because they seem intended to produce whole person transformation into the fullness of Christ. Neglect of any of these reciprocal relationships diminishes our mutual transformation and hinders the church’s ability to gain a hearing in an increasingly post-Christian culture.

Reciprocal Formation

The reciprocal nature of the various interactions and mutual exchanges between members of the Christian community, the Church, engages all of the participants in an interactive socio-spiritual network. The bidirectional characteristic of these interactions replicates the bidirectional reciprocity identified in Bronfenbrenner, Lerner, and Magnusson’s view of how humans develop. Bronfenbrenner (1979) writing in regard to the “affective relation” that develops in reciprocal interactions between persons notes that “To the extent that they (affective relations) are positive and reciprocal to begin with and become more so as interaction proceeds, they are likely to enhance the pace and the probability of occurrences of developmental processes” (p. 58). That last phrase is

extremely significant because it indicates the directionality of these reciprocal social interactions that make up our human ecologies. The reciprocal exchanges between persons that take various forms and degrees of interaction serve as what Bronfenbrenner (2005) describes as “developmentally instigative activities” (p. 10). This leads Bronfenbrenner to Proposition C: “If one member of a dyad undergoes developmental change, the other is also likely to do so” (p. 65). Bronfenbrenner refers to this phenomenon “as a context not merely of reciprocal interaction but of reciprocal development” (p. 65). Thus reciprocal interaction leads to reciprocal development. The developmental system that is created by these relationships becomes a “vehicle . . . that *stimulates and sustains development processes* (emphasis ours) . . . as long as they remain interconnected . . . in a bond” (p. 66). The New Testament portrays Christians *in a bond* with Christ and with one another through the Greek word *koinōnia* and its cognates as well as the many *syn*-compounds.⁴ This bond provides the socio-spiritual glue that produces opportunities for joint participation in some common activity or experience.

This may be exactly what Paul means by his use of reciprocal commands in general and the specific reciprocal command to “build up one another” (Rom 14:19) as well as his appeals to mutual edification (*oikodomēo, oikodomē*) especially in 1Corinthians 12-14 where the interactive imagery of the Body of Christ is most dominant. His argument in this section reaches a crescendo in chapter 14 as he seeks to drive home the point that the Church, as the Body of Christ, is an organically interconnected ecosystem and that one member may not think only of self-centered spiritual benefit (Snyder, 1983; 2002). The issue of speaking in tongues in corporate

⁴ One may find the *syn*-compounds variously translated as “together with,” “fellow,” as in “fellow-soldier” or “joint” as in “joint-heirs.

worship is certainly in view but his concept goes far beyond that issue. He makes the point repeatedly in this chapter that corporate edification is preferred over personal edification (1Cor 14:4, 5). Our attitude as members of the Body of Christ should be that espoused in 14:12, “seek to abound for the edification of the church.” Just because an individual believer may receive edification through a spiritual activity does not justify it in Paul’s mind: “For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified” (14:17). He expands this concept beyond tongues when he argues in 14:19 “I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.” The word “others” is *allous* – a pronoun that serves as the etymological base for our reciprocal pronoun *allēlōn*. The bottom line for Paul is “Let all things be done for edification” (14:26). He does not mean edification of the individual member of the Body of Christ alone but the mutual edification of the whole Body. Dunn (1998) draws the same conclusion from the 1Corinthian 14 passage when he writes, “In all this the important point of principle which emerges is that the individual’s prerogative is always subordinate to the good of the whole” (p. 597).

Reciprocal interactions among and between the members of Christ’s body, no matter what form they may take, are to produce ongoing edification of both the individual and the community. In all of Paul’s references to edification he always stresses “the mutual harmony, the right relationship of community and individual” and that edification “consists in mutual admonition, encouragement, warning, patience (Ridderbos, 1975, p. 437). As Christians we have a bond of fellowship (*koinonia*) created through Christ that joins us together (*syn*) in mutual care and concern for each other. It is in this reciprocal exchange of behaviors, attitudes, and actions that we influence one another toward

Christian development. When we act this way toward each other we create *reciprocal Christian development*. When one acts lovingly toward another that person changes; conversely when one receives such love the recipient changes. Similarly, the reciprocal action of showing forbearance results in change on the part of one another. These reciprocal relationships stimulate our growth in faith and that growth can only happen as we relate to one another as members of the ecosystem of the Body of Christ.

Several New Testament *allēlōn* texts help us understand how this reciprocal interaction between and among members of the Christian community produces mutual spiritual benefit. In Romans 1:11, 12 Paul opens his letter to the church at Rome by expressing his desire “to share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you.” Romans 1:11 seems conjoined to 1:12 by the “that” (*touto de*) because he explains what form the strengthening (*steridzō*) will take. Although the Greek text is somewhat difficult to translate precisely because it is somewhat cumbersome (“that is to be encouraged together in you through the in one another faith yours both and mine”), smoothed out it reads something like “so that we may be mutually encouraged through one other’s faith, both yours and mine.” The *allēlōn* reciprocal pronoun functions as the means whereby Paul and the church may be encouraged together and strengthened in the faith. It is “the one another faith” of Paul and the church at Rome that makes possible their mutual encouragement and strengthening. To be sure that the church at Rome understands precisely what he means he appends “both yours and mine.” That is, “both your faith and my faith.” As Oden (1992) succinctly states, “Paul longed to see the Christians at Rome ‘that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith’ (Rom 1:12). This mutuality and interdependent support is intrinsic to life in the Spirit” (p. 282). The

reciprocal interaction of Paul's faith and the corporate faith of the church at Rome had a positive beneficial effect on the church. The result of this reciprocal interaction was that Paul and those engaged with Paul appear to have experienced reciprocal spiritual development.

The other text that illuminates this reciprocal developmental characteristic of faith is 1Thessalonians 3:11-13 that sits at the nexus of a transition from the first part of Paul's epistle (the so-called "praise section") to the second (the so-called "paraenesis section").⁵ This transitional section takes the form of an intercessory prayer that Paul offers on behalf of the church at Thessalonica. The intercessory prayer contains three petitions: (1) Paul's wish to visit them personally; (2) the continued growth of their love for one another, for outsiders, and for him; (3) for steadfastness in holiness until the Lord returns. We want to delimit our analysis to the first part of his second petition regarding their further growth in love for one another (*allēlōn*). Paul's reference to growth is provided in the form of two optative verbs (*pleonazō* and *perisseuō*) used as synonyms to reinforce his emphasis on the church's growth in love for one another.

The love that Paul wishes to see abound and increase is to be "toward one another and toward everyone" (*eis allylous kai eis pantas*). While later at 5:12-13 he will direct the church to honor and love those who work among them, here the emphasis is on love for one another. What is important for our purposes is to see that Paul expects that reciprocal interaction between and among members of the church in Thessalonica, will produce further growth in love in the church. The reciprocal pronoun combined with the emphatic use of the growth synonyms clearly indicates that Paul understands growth in love to be a by-product of reciprocal interaction. Hence, Richard (1995) can say that the

⁵ Linda McKinnish Bridges, *1&2 Thessalonians*, 2008:95.

church at Thessalonica “is a young community whose formation and development are not yet sufficiently advanced, that is, a community whose faith must continue to increase intellectually and experientially” (p. 171). One of the means Paul encourages to see this church’s faith abound and increase is the reciprocal exchange of love that produces reciprocal Christian development. A similar perspective emerges from Colossians 3:14 (“And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity”) and prompts Peterson (2000) to conclude that “The new idea is that perfection/maturity is attained or actualized only as Christians in fellowship show love to one another” (p. 195).

The Holy Spirit baptizes us into the Body of Christ and that puts us into new relationships. It puts us in a relationship with Christ as Head of the Body and in relationship with all of the members of Christ’s body. The Spirit baptizes believers into a Christian ecology of relationships. Growth occurs when we maintain an interactive relationship with Christ, God’s word, the Holy Spirit, and one another. Growth is not *either* individual or corporate; it is *both* individual and corporate. So again, our growth as an individual Christian takes place as part of an ecology of reciprocal relationships that cover all aspects of our whole person transformation reflecting the fullness of Christ.

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Reciprocal Formation

Our theology of Christian education should give a prominent place to the ministry of the Holy Spirit as the “Spirit of truth” (John 16:13) whom Jesus promised his disciples (and us) would “guide you into all the truth.” A missional understanding of the ministry of Christian education recognizes that without the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit we are incapable of effective witness whether that witness takes the form of proclamation (*kerygma*) or edification (*didachē*).

A biblical theology of the Holy Spirit leads one to recognize that throughout redemptive history as recorded in the scriptures, the Spirit of God carried out his ministry utilizing creation and creational capabilities (such as human development). The Spirit of God is there at creation “hovering over the waters” (Gen 1:3) to bring cosmos out of chaos. God’s Spirit blows through the valley of dry bones “and they came to life and stood on their feet” (Ezek 37:10). It is the “the Holy Spirit” as “the power of the Most High” (Luke 1:35) who makes it possible for Jesus to be “conceived by the Holy Spirit.” God as Creator and Redeemer is able to integrate both creation and redemption into a harmonious synergy to accomplish eternal purposes. This is Cowell’s (2002) point when he writes, “The purpose of God in redemption is continuous with the purpose of God in creation; the work of God in creation is restored and completed in the work of redemption” (p. 190).

The Spirit of God empowers persons, among other things, through their natural abilities and skills making the person so empowered an effective instrument to carry out God’s purposes. God’s Spirit enables persons like Bezalel to carry out God’s plans for the tabernacle (Exod 28:3; 31:3; 35:21), the elders of Israel to administrate and organize the people (Num 11:25), Joshua to provide competent and courageous leadership (Deut 34:9); and David to serve as a charismatically endowed king of Israel (1Sam 16:13). The Book of Judges serves as an illustration to Israel of how a Spirit empowered human leader functions.⁶ As we see in the Book of Judges, God’s Spirit does not obliterate the human either in regard to personality, ability, or functionality. Regarding Othniel the text tells us that “The Spirit of the Lord came upon him” (Judg 3:10). But as Hutton (1994)

⁶ We are indebted to our colleague Dr. George Schwab for his insight into the distinctive role of the Holy Spirit in Judges as well as that provided by former Old Testament professor, Leon Wood (*The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*).

observes, “. . . this empowerment cannot be divorced from earlier notes regarding Othniel’s qualifications and social location” (p. 66). Hutton goes on to note that “Othniel, through his credentials of social position and military prowess, was in a position to receive further confirmation of his leadership” (p. 67). In this way and others, the Spirit of God works through created human capacity and energizes it so that it effectively accomplishes God’s purposes. For as Berkhof (1946) contends in regard to the operation of the Holy Spirit:

By his general operations he originates, maintains, strengthens, and guides all life, organic, intellectual, and moral. He does this in different ways and in harmony with the objects concerned. In the redemptive sphere He also originates the new life, fructifies it, guides it in its development, and leads it to its destiny (p. 426).

The key phrase here is “in harmony with the objects concerned.” The Holy Spirit cooperates with human creational structures, attributes, abilities, and processes to bring about redemptive “development” when a person experiences new birth in Christ. Creation is the handmaiden of redemption and yet redemption involves, as Paul reminds us, “the redemption of our body” (Rom 8:23). God’s indwelling Spirit energizes and transforms Christians as human beings so that they reflect “the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13) and the “fullness of God” (Eph 3:19) which results in us being made complete as redeemed human beings (1Cor 1:10; 2Cor 8:6; 13:9, 11; Col 1:28; 2:10; 1Thess 3:10; 5:23; James 1:4).

It is this unique role of the Holy Spirit that Williams (2007) addresses in regard to how Anselm understood the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He summarizes Anselm’s view by stating that

. . . the same dynamism by which the Holy Spirit is life-giver within the Trinity also characterizes the Spirit's work in the economy of creation, redemption, and transformation. By planting supernatural seeds and giving them growth, the Holy

Spirit vivifies all of creation and thereby brings all things—but especially God's rational creatures—to their appointed end (p. 627).

Implications

If one assumes the validity of the critical necessity for various types of reciprocity both for normal human development and Christian development, what does this suggest for the practice of ministry? First, it seems evident that we need to be much more intentional about fostering interactive relationships among Christians in all of the different types of social communities we form (schools, organizations, groups), in the family, and in the church. Second, it means that we must pay attention to all of the reciprocal commands because they reflect a whole person and thus a whole community perspective. Third, we must place a much higher value on relationships and other forms of social intercourse along with our already high view of the role of scripture and the Holy Spirit in facilitating the process of Christian development. We simply cannot divorce social relationships from the larger discussion of Christian formation and focus our attention almost exclusively on the practice of individual spiritual disciplines, important as they are to Christian growth. The imperative form of *allēlōn* and other New Testament imperatives are most often corporate in application “and have to do first of all with the community and its life together” (Fee, 1989, p. 179). Lastly, it suggests that teachers, ministers, administrators, and parents deliberately foster interpersonal relationships covering a wide range of activities and interactions with their students, parishioners, colleagues, and children if they wish to promote mutual edification and transformation as the Holy Spirit energizes and empowers.

Summary

Interactionist models of human development illuminate biblical descriptions of reciprocal interactions among and between believers. The *allēlōn* reciprocal pronouns and similar terms (*oikodomē*, *syn*-compounds) suggest that spiritual development toward whole person transformation imaging Christ requires a variety of interactive exchanges across diverse socio-spiritual ecologies empowered by the Holy Spirit and grounded in scripture. Apart from these mutual exchanges we not only impede individual Christian development and so “quench the Spirit” but the church as a whole does not experience needed edification that produces a Bride “in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing” (Eph 5:27).

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