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Cross and New Covenant in the New Testament

The Gospels and Acts

In this chapter and the next, we survey various parts of the New Testament for their witness to the new-covenant model we began to propose in chapter 1. In this chapter we will look at Mark, Matthew, Luke-Acts, and John. In chapter 3 we will consider the writings of Paul, Hebrews, and Revelation. Our emphasis in both chapters will generally be two-pronged. We will note (1) the way in which the cross gives birth to the new covenant, as well as the various aspects of it (as discussed in chapter 1) effected by Jesus' death. We will also focus on (2) the nature of participation in that salvific and paradigmatic death as an integrated life of cross-shaped vertical and horizontal love, for according to the New Testament the signature of the living, resurrected Jesus on the life of his followers is the cross on which he died.[1] This second aspect of our discussion will provide the basis for a more detailed examination of participation in Jesus' death in the form of cruciform faithfulness and love, to which we will turn in chapters 4 and 5. In addition, in these chapters we will take some note of the theme of the

1. Throughout the book I will frequently use the word "cross" as shorthand for Jesus' death, even when texts do not specifically mention the cross or crucifixion.

cross and peace, though we will turn to the new covenant as the covenant of peace more fully in chapters 6 and 7.

CROSS AND NEW COVENANT IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS AND ACTS

Cross and New Covenant in Mark

What is the significance of the cross in the Gospel of Mark? This is the Synoptic Gospel that most fully fits Martin Kähler's famous description of a gospel as "a passion narrative with an extended introduction," so there is much that could be said. The shadow of the cross reaches back from chapter 15 to at least chapter 2 of Mark. Although Jesus' healing and teaching dominate the first half of the gospel, his suffering and dying take center stage beginning in chapter 8.

Those looking for evidence of the New Testament's sacrificial or substitutionary view of the atonement have found a showcase text in Mark 10:45, which paradoxically combines the images of Son of Man (Daniel 7) and of Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53).[2] But this text is not merely, or even primarily, about the mechanics of atonement. Its christological claim is linked to a summons to discipleship. This is in fact the case in all four of the passion predictions in Mark (of which 10:45 is part of the third) and therefore in all of the Synoptic Gospels, since Matthew and Luke take them up. Jesus calls his disciples to a life of "taking up their cross" (Mark 8:34 and parallels in Matthew and Luke) that is analogous to his own death and can therefore be termed "cruciform existence" or "cruciformity." According to the corollaries of the three passion predictions, this cruciform existence consists of (1) self-denial—losing oneself as the path to finding oneself—in witness to the gospel (8:31–34 par.); (2) hospitality to the weak and marginalized, represented by children (9:31–37 par.); and (3) service to others rather than domination (10:32–45 par.), all with the possibility of suffering (13:9–13 par.). Discipleship will be a life of "danger and dishonor . . . shame and suffering."[3] We will explore this threefold cruciform participation more fully in chapters 4 and 5.[4]

2. See Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, 754–57.

3. Hooker, *Not Ashamed of the Gospel*, 54.

4. As we will see in chapter 4, a synoptic "passion prediction" is more appropriately linked with what follows and called a "prediction-summons."

The call to cruciform discipleship is, in fact, a call to covenant faithfulness, a summons to embody, simultaneously, the two tables of the Law. We see this clearly in the story of the encounter of Jesus with the man who wanted to know what he had to do to "inherit eternal life" (10:17–22, shortly before the third passion prediction). After Jesus replies with a recitation of the requirements of the second table of the Law and the man claims his compliance with them from his youth (10:19–20), Jesus informs him that he lacks one thing, and that to fulfill that one thing the man must sell his possessions, give the proceeds to the poor, and follow Jesus (10:21). The promise that the man would thereafter "have treasure in heaven" suggests that the thing he lacks, and will now gain, has something to do with his relationship with heaven, with God, and therefore with the first table of the Law. The fulfillment of that table takes place by following Jesus, as if Jesus functions in the role of God, the proper focus of life's commitments and direction. At the same time, this radical love for God is not separated from love for others; in fact, the two are inextricably interconnected, as giving to the poor and having treasure in heaven are here two sides of the same coin of discipleship. In fact, we could say that following Jesus is the way to simultaneously fulfill—really fulfill—both tables of the Law: love of neighbor, especially the poor, and love of God.[5] Moreover, in caring for the poor, Jesus' disciples become not only Christlike, but also, as the Scriptures of Israel make clear, Godlike, for God is the God who attends to the needs of the poor and oppressed (e.g., Psalm 82). Such covenant faithfulness also creates justice for the poor, at least for the poor who would benefit from this potential disciple's divestment, thus showing the link between covenant faithfulness and *shalom*.

Having heard the three summonses to cruciform discipleship, along with the story of the man seeking eternal life, the audience of Mark's gospel, whether ancient or contemporary, is more than likely overwhelmed by the cost of being part of the people of the covenant reconstituted around Jesus. Thus, upon finally hearing the words of Jesus at the Last Supper—"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (14:24)—the audience can breathe a sigh of relief. Why? Because Jesus' imminent death will create the covenant community that the entire gospel narrative has described: a community of missional, self-giving, loyal-to-God disciples who are able and willing to suffer and die for their commitment. To be sure,

5. For a recent theological examination of the connection between love for God and love for the poor, see Anderson, *Charity*.

Jesus' death will not create such a community apart from the resurrection (which Jesus has also predicted three times), but it is Jesus' death that is the covenant-creating and community-creating act. As Morna Hooker has written, "[Jesus'] reference to the covenant takes us back to the covenant made between God and his people on Sinai, which established them as his people . . . Jesus' blood seals a new covenant, and in doing so establishes a new community . . . [T]hrough Christ's death a new people of God is created."[6] Hooker continues: "The death of Jesus is the beginning of something new: it is the ransom which creates a new people, the means of establishing a new covenant."[7] At the same time, the setting of the Passover meal reminds us that before Sinai there was the Exodus, the event of liberation that inaugurated the original covenant.[8]

Mark 15:39 is the climax of Mark's story of the cross: "Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'" Of the many things that could be said about this crucial text, two are especially significant, one focused on soteriology and one on Christology/theology (though of course the two are inseparable). First, within the narrative of Mark, the cross is *salvific*, and it is so in a comprehensive way, offering "revelation to the blind, reconciliation to the estranged, and redemption to the outsider [i.e., Gentiles]."[9] Jesus is the new temple (see 15:38), the place where God and humanity meet, the place where "the blood of the covenant poured out for many that Jesus anticipated . . . has now ratified the binding relationship between God and humanity."[10] In other words, "the cross brings together the human and the divine in the person of Jesus and effects a new covenant binding them together."[11]

Second, the cross is *revelatory*: Jesus is God's Son. The cross as revelation of Christ's identity as Son of God is, at least implicitly, a profound theological statement of the inseparability of act and being. The Son of God did what he did in life and in death because that is what it means to be the

6. Hooker, *Not Ashamed of the Gospel*, 59.

7. Ibid., 67. According to Hooker (55), the ransom text echoes the redemption from Egypt and from Exile more than Isaiah 53, though others would see Isaiah 53 echoed in a significant way.

8. See below on Luke for more on the Passover—new covenant connection.

9. Gamel, "Salvation in a Sentence," 65.

10. Ibid., 75.

11. Ibid., 77.

Son of God. Thus, discipleship is not merely following the Son of God who accidentally or arbitrarily died, but following the one who has died because that is the fullest manifestation of the self-giving and reconciling nature of the Son of God, and thus of God himself.[12] Therefore, to follow Christ in the way of the cross is more akin to participating in the reality or life or story of God—God's narrative identity, we might say—than to following someone at a distance or even imitating a master. To be the new covenant people is truly a new experience of knowing, loving, participating in, and being like God.

Cross and New Covenant in Matthew

Matthew is the only gospel that specifically says that Jesus' blood is spilled for the forgiveness of sins: "Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins'" (Matt 26:27–28). As noted earlier, in this dominical claim we should probably hear echoes of at least three scriptural texts and themes—the Passover/Exodus, the blood of the covenant (Exod 24:6–8), and the new covenant and its forgiveness (Jer 31:31–34)—plus, in light of Matthew's ransom text (Matt 20:28 = Mark 10:45), the suffering servant's death (Isa 53:12).

We would be wrong, however, to conclude that the covenant about which Jesus speaks in Matthew is reducible to the forgiveness of sins in some narrow (i.e., "vertical" only) sense. Rather, receiving God's forgiveness is part of existence as a community of salt and light (5:13–16) that is called and empowered to practice forgiveness (5:21–24; 18:15–20) and its associated virtues, such as deeds of mercy and compassion (9:13 and 12:7, citing Hos 6:6[13]) like those of their Master (9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 18:33; 20:34). These practices result in part from the reality that the covenant established by Jesus' death is the covenant of peace, of *shalom*.[14] Although the Last Sup-

12. Although I am using traditional Christian theological (even ontological) categories here, the argument works even if we take "Son of God" language primarily, or exclusively, to be messianic rather than Trinitarian. As God's appointed representative, the anointed one (king or messiah) acts representatively of God in such a way that what he does is what God would do—in fact it is what God does (e.g., judge the poor with justice).

13. Cf. 5:7; 23:23; 25:31–46.

14. So also Swartley, *Covenant of Peace*, 75, 89–90. We will return to the covenant of peace in chapters 6 and 7.

per text is an explicit statement of the purpose of Christ's death (like the "ransom" text), to limit that purpose to the vertical relationship would be to rip it out of its context, negating the message of the rest of the Gospel.

This *forgiven* and *forgiving* new-covenant community embodies, indeed fulfills, the two tables of the law. As Richard Hays persuasively argues, the Matthean audience is being called to follow the one whose "hermeneutic of mercy" and claim to fulfill the law (5:17–18) yield for his disciples a mandate to love God and neighbor (22:34–40, based on Mark 12:28–34). Matthew's specific point is that "everything else in the Torah 'hangs' upon them [the two love commands]; everything else must be derivable from them. In consequence, the double love command becomes a hermeneutical filter—virtually synonymous with Hosea 6:6—that governs the community's entire construal of the Law."[15]

Matthew famously concludes with the Great Commission text (28:16–20). This too needs to be understood in connection with the covenant inaugurated by Jesus' death. Disciples, members of the new-covenant community, are sent out to make more disciples who similarly fulfill the Law by obeying Jesus. This missional activity, and implicitly the life of double-commandment discipleship as a whole, is not done alone but by means of the power of the always-present Jesus (28:20), the one who is the covenant-God-with-us (1:23).

Cross and New Covenant in Luke-Acts

The role of the cross in Luke-Acts has been warmly debated. Not only does Luke lack the phrase "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" in his account of the Last Supper, but he also famously omits (intentionally or not) the Markan/Matthean "ransom" text (Mark 10:45 = Matt 20:28) when he places the call to discipleship from the third passion prediction in the context of the Last Supper (22:24–30). These and other features of Luke have caused significant confusion and, in some quarters, consternation around the question of Luke's theology of the cross. Is it an atoning, sacrificial, redemptive event? Is his death a death for sins or only the death of a martyr and prophet?

15. Hays, *Moral Vision*, 101, in a section called "The Hermeneutic of Mercy" (99–101). Hosea 6:6 reads, "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."

The new-covenant model both alleviates some of our distress and refocuses our interest. Luke is the only synoptic writer who uses the precise phrase "*new* covenant."[16] According to the prophetic tradition, the new covenant includes the forgiveness of sins; it is highly likely, then, that Luke's account implies forgiveness and thus an atoning death, especially in light of the word of forgiveness from the cross in 23:34.[17] But Luke's associating Jesus' death with the new covenant is more comprehensive than a word or act of forgiveness. As John Carroll and Joel Green have said, "The cup after the meal is a metaphor for a new covenant enacted through the blood Jesus spills 'on your behalf.' Jesus here interprets his death as an event enabling a new covenantal loyalty, a gift creating a new covenantal community (cf. also Acts 20:28). His self-sacrifice is a means of benefaction for the community of his followers."[18]

Here Carroll and Green point out at least two significant elements of a "benefaction" that is, in fact, a transformation: the creation of a "new covenantal community" and the enabling of a "new covenantal loyalty," two of the main features of the new covenant and of the proposal being advocated in this chapter.

In addition, the setting of the Passover meal, as in the other Synoptic Gospels, also suggests covenant and thus new covenant. The Passover meal was a time of remembering and participating in the deliverance of God's people from slavery, the start of the special covenant and the birth of the people of the covenant. It was an act of grace, of mercy, of liberation—all key dimensions of Luke's theology. Now, at this Passover meal, the Last Supper is really the First Supper, the first celebration of the new covenant. By Jesus' sacrificial and covenant-making death, the community of the new covenant, the people whose sins are forgiven, is born.[19]

16. On the assumption that Luke 23:20 is original to the gospel. See n. 20 in chapter 1. For new-covenant themes in Luke-Acts, see Peterson, *Transformed by God*, 45–76.

17. Although some early manuscripts omit the word of forgiveness from the cross, I find it nearly impossible to explain the words of Stephen in Acts 7:60 apart from the presence of the saying in Luke's original gospel. For compelling arguments that this is the case, see especially Brown, *Death of the Messiah* 2:975–81. For a succinct recent statement of the case for authenticity, see Carroll, *Luke*, 466, who includes additional bibliography. For a concise but compelling case for connecting new covenant and atonement here, see Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 763.

18. Carroll and Green, *Death of Jesus*, 69.

19. See the succinct but insightful discussion in Carroll, *Luke*, 435–36 (despite his suspicion—with which I disagree—that Luke himself did not include the new-covenant text).

For Luke, then, this means Jesus' death, as part of a whole divine event of deliverance (suffering, death, resurrection, ascension/exaltation), has a particular purpose that is not *less than* atonement (something that effects the forgiveness of sins) but is *much more* than that. The forgiveness of sins is certainly important; it is an integral sign of the new exodus and new covenant. But forgiveness is only part of the larger purpose of God in the Messiah's suffering and death; the larger purpose is to create a new people who will both be and bear universal witness to the new covenant—which is really a (re)new(ed) covenant—that means salvation for all.[20] This is, in part, why Luke is relatively un-preoccupied with the "mechanics" of atonement.[21]

At this point an important theological point about the very notion of a "new covenant" needs to be made. Commenting on its appearance in Luke's gospel, Joel Green wisely and rightly says this: "Setting the cup-word [Luke 22:20] within the larger framework of Luke's presentation of Jesus' ministry disallows any notion of a 'new covenant' discontinuous with the old, for Luke has emphasized the continuity between the ancient purpose of God and its fulfillment in the coming of Jesus."[22] The same is fundamentally true, it can be argued, for the rest of the New Testament writers who use or allude to the language of new covenant—even the writer to the Hebrews (see discussion in the next chapter).

Finally, we see in Luke's handling of the three Markan passion predictions and their corollary calls to discipleship the especially close connection Luke envisions between the death of Jesus and the countercultural cruciform and missional existence of disciples. Disciples need to (1) take up their cross *daily* (9:23; "daily" being present only in Luke); (2) follow Jesus and share his mission, even to Jerusalem, without hesitation or distraction (9:43b–62); and (3) remember *on the very eve of Jesus' death* that they are called to forsake the cultural norms of hubris and domination to

20. On this whole point, see Mallen, *Reading and Transformation of Isaiah*, 118–25, 132–33. Mallen goes back and forth between the language of "new covenant" and that of "covenant renewal."

21. That said, it still seems likely, despite the absence of the ransom text, that Luke understands Jesus' crucifixion not only as a sacrificial death for sin (see discussion above), but also as the death for sins of God's servant described in the fourth servant song (Isa 52:13—53:12). The narrative of Jesus' death corresponds in various details with aspects of that song (e.g., emphasis on innocence, interceding for transgressors), and in Luke 22:37 Jesus quotes Isa 53:12 ("counted among the lawless"). It is more likely that Luke is implicitly referring to the entire song rather than "weeding out" certain dimensions of it.

22. *Gospel of Luke*, 763.

embrace cross-shaped service (22:24–30).[23] This call to cruciform discipleship is then symbolized in the act of Simon Cyrene, who literally—and symbolically—takes up Jesus' cross on the way to the crucifixion, graphically depicting the life of the new-covenant community (23:26).[24]

It is as such a Jesus-like community, empowered by the Spirit, that the apostles and those who respond to their message in repentance and faith will bear witness (24:48). The Acts of the Apostles, Luke's narrative of early Christian life and mission, will relate this witness-bearing existence in detail. Indeed, Luke's dramatic narrative of Pentecost itself is his way of stating (among other things) that the Spirit-filled community of the new covenant promised by Jeremiah and Ezekiel has arrived.[25] "Luke's point," writes Luke Johnson wittily, "is not the pyrotechnics of theophany, but spiritual transformation."[26] It is the age of Israel's restoration and resurrection (Ezekiel 37), as well as the age of salvation for the nations (Luke 24:47),

23. In Luke the second Markan passion prediction and its immediate aftermath (Luke 9:43b–50) become the segue to the narrative of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (9:51—18:14), which itself begins with another call to discipleship and a sending out (9:51—10:20). Luke actually splits the third Markan passion prediction and discipleship call into two parts, leaving the prediction in the Markan narrative context (Luke 18:31–34) but moving the call to the Last Supper (Luke 22:24–30). See the discussion in chapter 5.

24. Bøe (*Cross-Bearing in Luke*, 198–220) rejects the idea of Simon as a disciple because his cross-bearing is not voluntary. This misses the narrative and theological point, however; the question is not whether Simon is a disciple but whether his act symbolizes discipleship—a subtle but significant difference.

25. So also, e.g., Talbert, *Reading Acts*, 25; Parsons, *Acts*, 36–37; Parsons, *Luke: Storyteller*, 153–54; Thompson, *Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus*, 125–43. Acts 2 "unfolds with an ideal portrayal of the community of the new covenant" (J. Potin, cited in Bovon, *Luke the Theologian*, 259). Parsons notes the importance of the new covenant to Luke, but also that the most important covenant for him is the Abrahamic covenant (*Luke: Storyteller*, 153–54). It is unnecessary to play these two off each other, however, since for Luke the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant is in fact the new covenant effected by the blood of Jesus. Similarly, it is not necessary to argue for only one particular biblical image or tradition behind Pentecost; it is a lovely merger of Sinai, temple, and new-covenant themes—and much more. The theophany (and its "fireworks") is temporary, but the presence of the Spirit, like the new covenant, is permanent. McKnight (*Jesus and His Death*, 312–21), traces the origins of the church's new-covenant hermeneutic, not to Jesus (in general or at the Last Supper), but to early Christian reflection on the meaning of the Pentecost event. It is more likely that the church reflected further on the new covenant in light of the coming of the Spirit.

26. Johnson, *Acts*, 45. Johnson does not relate Pentecost specifically to the new covenant, but he does suggest that Luke probably has covenant renewal in mind (45–46) and that the Spirit's arrival indicates once again for Luke that Jesus brings Israel's hopes to fruition—and to the nations (47).

brought about not by Jesus' death alone, but also by his resurrection and exaltation.[27] Nonetheless, in Acts Luke does not ignore or discount the salvific value of Jesus' death, as some have charged. The most important texts are Acts 8:32–33 and Acts 20:28.

The conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–40) is the result of Philip's explaining to him the christological significance of these lines (as presented by Luke) from Isaiah 53:

> [32]Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. [33]In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." (Acts 8:32–33)

What has concerned many interpreters is Luke's omission of the references in Isaiah 53 to the servant's vicarious suffering (e.g., the verse immediately preceding Luke's citation: "But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed" [Isa 53:5]). But this concern is misplaced. For one thing, it should be obvious that the eunuch was reading the whole text of Isaiah 53 (or 52:13—53:12), and for Luke (as for Isaiah), this would include the fact of the servant's suffering and his exaltation, plus the various interpretive comments about these events in Isaiah. For another, Luke's overall understanding of Israel's Scripture, particularly Isaiah, is that it is the interpretive framework for the entire story of Jesus (including his suffering and exaltation), on the one hand, and for the related story of God's gracious mission to redeem Israel and save all the nations (and all kinds of people), on the other.[28] In other words, the story of the eunuch's conversion represents the effectiveness of the word about Jesus' suffering and death in extending the mission of God—and thus the covenant people of God—to Ethiopians and to eunuchs, to Gentiles and to the marginalized.[29] This does not require an explanation of how Jesus' death works but only a witness to

27. Thompson, *Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus*, 71–87. Parsons (*Luke: Storyteller*, 104) interprets Jesus' *exodos* as a unified event of suffering and death followed by resurrection and exaltation, not just his death. So also, e.g., Johnson, *Luke*, 153, 162.

28. See Luke 24:25–27, 47–49, and the likely connection between Acts 8 and that text suggested by Parsons (*Luke: Storyteller*, 105–7). On Isaiah as interpretive framework for Luke, see Mallen, *Reading and Transformation of Isaiah*.

29. Johnson (*Acts*, 158) notes that Isaiah's hopes for the future depicted the inclusion of Ethiopians (Isa 11:11) and eunuchs (Isa 56:3–5).

the fact that it does work—and it works with this particular, unexpected result.[30]

Acts 20:28 reads as follows: "Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son."[31] The endless debates about whether this text reflects an understanding of Jesus' death as an atoning sacrifice are understandable and, indeed, significant. But they are sometimes an exercise in confusing the penultimate with the ultimate and thereby missing Luke's main points, which are two—neither of which is about the "mechanics" of atonement. The first point is ecclesial, new-covenantal: in the death of "his own son" God has "obtained" a people, "the church of God." The verb "obtained with the blood" probably alludes to both election and covenant ("obtained"), on the one hand, and to purchase, redemption, and atonement ("with the blood"), on the other.[32] The Lukan Paul's emphasis, in context, is on the *effect* of this death, the creation of the church. God has created something and charged humans with its oversight and care. It is not the duty of church leaders to debate the intricacies of atonement theory, says Paul/Luke, but to protect the church that now belongs to God from "savage wolves" (Acts 20:29). This leads to the second point: church leaders, including Paul, participate in the ongoing work of God's Spirit and, in effect, in the death of God's Son, by offering themselves sacrificially to insure that no "blood" (life) is lost among those who are part of the people obtained by the blood of God's Son (Acts 20:26).[33]

This "church of God" obtained by the Son's blood is multicultural, multinational. The death and resurrection of Jesus that effects the resurrection

30. Similarly, e.g., Parsons, *Luke: Storyteller*, 95–107.

31. A similar text is Rev 1:5, discussed below.

32. There are numerous translational and interpretive difficulties surrounding Acts 20:28. Johnson (*Acts,* 363) points out that the verb "obtain" or "acquire" (*peripoieō*) is associated in the LXX with Israel's election (i.e., covenant). For a recent argument that Acts 20:28 focuses on Jesus' atoning sacrifice and is the functional equivalent of Mark 10:45, see Marshall, "Place of Acts 20.28." Marshall also allows for a *Christus victor* dimension to both texts (165–66) and sees clearly the pastoral co-text of the word about atonement.

33. Says Paul immediately before the words of Acts 20:28: "Therefore I declare to you this day that I am not responsible for the blood of any of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:16–27). A few lines later, he speaks of his self-supporting manual labor as an example of caring for the weak and putting into practice Jesus' pronouncement that "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:34–35). In his own letters, Paul identifies his self-support by manual labor as an imitation of Christ's self-gift on the cross (1 Thess 2:5–9; 1 Corinthians 9; cf. 2 Thess 3:7–9).

of Israel means also for Luke the inclusion of the Gentiles, as the Spirit is poured out on people of all nations, creating a restored and unified people that the new-covenant prophets barely imagined.[34] The Spirit enables the apostles and others to live communally and hospitably, welcome Jews and Gentiles alike, preach the good news and prophesy, forgive sins, forgive enemies, heal, suffer faithfully for the good news, and generally continue the activity and mission of Jesus.[35] The founder of the new covenant continues to shape the life of the community of the new covenant, by the Spirit, in order that it might continue that which Jesus "began to do and teach" (*ērxato ho Iēsous poiein te kai didaskein*; Acts 1:1).[36] Although Luke does not relate this activity explicitly to the cross, it is clear that such ecclesial practices as suffering for the gospel (faithfulness to God) and practicing radical self-donation and hospitality (love for others, especially the "weak" [Acts 20:35]) are rooted in Luke's story of Jesus that culminates on the cross in those very practices. And it is those cruciform practices that Luke, in the words of Paul, highlights in the context of Acts 20:28 as the sign of the Spirit's powerful presence ("captive to the Spirit"; Acts 20:22).

CROSS AND NEW COVENANT IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

The Gospel of John has a rather full theology of Christ's death. Craig Koester finds four Johannine themes about Jesus' death in the Gospel: an expression of love, a sacrifice for sins, victory over sin, and revelation of divine glory.[37] In a word, paradoxically, God's love in the death of Jesus means his death brings life:

34. There are of course hints about the eschatological inclusion of Gentiles in the prophets. Of particular importance may be Isa 2:2–4, with its language of international reconciliation—a coming covenant of peace.

35. Hays (*Moral Vision*, 123–24) notes that the community of goods (Acts 4:32–35) is in fulfillment of the ideal covenant community described in Deut 15:4–8. By the presence of the Spirit, the community of the new covenant is called to embody that ideal.

36. RSV. The NRSV unfortunately misses this connection with "all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning." See Hays, *Moral Vision*, 112, 120–22, for an affirmation of the RSV sort of translation and of my point here. See also Thompson, *Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus*, though Thompson (curiously) devotes little attention to key aspects of Jesus' ongoing salvific presence in the church described in Acts, such as healing and hospitality.

37. Koester, *Word of Life*, 110–23. The first three of these, interestingly, correspond quite closely to the three traditional models of the atonement.

> The centrality of love holds together the human and the divine, the sacrificial and the militant dimensions of Jesus' death. Love also creates the consummate paradox in John's understanding of the crucifixion: the death of Jesus can be a source of life. It is by dying that Jesus reveals the love of God, and when this love evokes faith, it brings people into the relationship with God that is true life (3:16).[38]

To these eloquent words we might add two corollary points that are particularly significant for our study. First, for John, as John 3 as a whole tells us, the cross is connected to new birth; it is those who embrace Jesus' death (John 3:11–21) who are born again/anew/from above by the Spirit (John 3:1–10), a clear allusion to the rebirth of God's people forecast by Ezekiel 37. Second, although it is clear that individuals—represented by Nicodemus—must enter this "relationship," this "life," one by one, it is equally clear from the echo of Ezekiel's promise that this life will be a life in community, the new-covenant community formed by Jesus' life-giving, resurrection-effecting death. John does not dwell on the "mechanics" of how Jesus' death effects life in this new community, but he does draw careful connections between the crucifixion and the community it creates. The cross is like a magnet, drawing people to Jesus (John 12:32).

Several texts in the so-called "farewell discourse" (or "discourses") of John 13–17 express the themes about Christ's death identified by Koester. However, although speaking of John 13–17 as the farewell discourse tells us something about the form and basic rhetorical function of these chapters, the phrase says very little about their theological content and function.

John 13–17 constitutes more than just a farewell discourse. Rekha Chennattu calls these texts "discipleship discourses." She argues (independently from the present writer) that John 13–17 draws heavily on Old Testament covenant motifs. The discourses constitute Jesus' teaching about his forming a new-covenant community of disciples marked especially by a relationship of intimacy and covenant-keeping vis-à-vis God, and of love for one another. They will share in the divine mission enacted in Jesus, with similar obligations and risks. John 20–21, Chennattu contends, actualizes the promissory teaching given in chapters 13–17.[39]

38. Ibid., 123.

39. Chennattu, *Johannine Discipleship*. Chennattu also discusses the handful of other scholars who have dealt similarly with this subject.

Chennattu's observations are insightful and her argument compelling. Although the word "covenant" does not appear in John 13–17, it is clear that Jesus is assembling a community of committed and loyal friends (15:13–15) who will be the core group of a new-covenant community that embodies his divine mission after his death.[40] He is saying to them, in effect, "We (Father, Son, and Spirit) will be your God, and you will be our people." In these chapters we find community and covenant as well as cruciformity (13:1–17, the footwashing scene; 13:34–35; 15:12–13), charismatic revelation and empowerment (14:15–27; 15:26–27; 16:13–15), and mission (15:1–8, 16, 27; chap. 17)—with its attendant consequence of persecution (15:18–21; 16:33; 17:11–16).

Chennattu's work needs to be supplemented, however, by emphasizing more forcefully and consistently the close connection in John 13–17 between covenant discipleship and Jesus' death. These chapters are, in effect, an extended commentary on the synoptic claim that Jesus' death creates the new-covenant community. They contain a description of the community formed precisely by that death.[41] It is a community of forgiven people restored to covenant relationship with God; empowered by the Spirit to live in Christlike, cruciform loyalty to God and love for one another in spite of persecution; and sent out on a Christlike mission. John 13–17 tells us why Christ died or, narratively speaking within the Gospel itself, why Christ will die. In both the promissory discourse (chapters 13–17) and the narrative of fulfillment (chapters 20–21), we encounter a missional community of atonement.

The farewell discourse is given as Jesus' hour to depart, to die and return to his Father, has arrived (13:1). The event narrated in these chapters that gives rise to the entire discourse is Jesus' parabolic action of foot

40. Moloney (*Love in the Gospel of John*, 88–92, 150–52) convincingly argues that Jesus' death effects a "gathering"—we might say an "in-gathering"—of peoples as they are drawn to him and to God via the cross. It includes, but is not limited to, his mother and John as symbols of the new community. This motif of gathering is an element of the new covenant, as we saw in chapter one. For a range of new-covenant themes in John and especially 1 John, see also Peterson, *Transformed by God*, 157–84.

41. In the Synoptics, teaching about the shape of the covenant community is presented primarily before the narrative of Jesus' last meal, whereas in John such teaching comes during and after the meal. The overall narrative effect is the same: the death of Jesus creates the kind of covenant community he calls for in his teaching. The "historicity" of the footwashing episode, especially with the setting at Jesus' last meal, has been debated. For the issues, see Clark-Soles, "John 13: Of Footwashing and History," though I would find more features of the account to be likely historical than she does.

washing. Put the other way around, the farewell discourse is an extended commentary on the foot washing (which is itself a parabolic version of the passion predictions and related texts found in the Synoptics).

The enacted parable of footwashing is given two distinct but inseparable interpretations by Jesus (and thus by John). First, it is a unique act of cleansing that only Jesus can perform and that is mandatory for a relationship with him (13:8b–10); this is the salvific, or atoning (forgiving) dimension of his death. Second, the foot washing is a paradigmatic act of servant-love that is mandatory for his disciples to replicate (13:12–17). Jesus' example (*hypodeigma*; 13:15) is not merely one of general hospitality or service, but of death-like, cruciform self-giving; the example is, in fact, his exemplary death.[42] Both Jesus, who speaks in the narrative, and John,[43] who has constructed the narrative, move seamlessly from one interpretation to the other.[44] The parabolic action is more, however, than a symbol. It is more like a sacrament, an invitation to *participate* in Jesus' death, both as beneficiaries and as imitators.[45] Disciples *benefit* from the servant-Jesus' death as cleansing from sin and *imitate* it as loving care for others. Both Jesus and John see these two aspects of his death as inherently inseparable. The gift is also demand. *There is no cleansing without discipleship, no vertical relationship without horizontal relationships, no atonement without ethics*.[46]

42. See Culpepper, "Johannine *Hypodeigma*," 143. The common notion that footwashing was a servant's duty has been challenged by Coloe, "Welcome into the Household of God" (408), who argues that servants generally only brought a basin of water to the guest. If her analysis of the data is correct, then Jesus' example and admonition to imitation are all the more radical. (I owe these references and insights to Chris Skinner in his essay "Virtue in the New Testament," 308n31, 309.) Moloney observes that *hypodeigma* occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, and that it is regularly used elsewhere in Jewish literature of exemplary death (*Love in the Gospel of John*, 106–7).

43. By "John" I mean the final narrator of the Gospel.

44. Indeed, while it is not altogether clear what "these things" (*tauta*) refers to in 13:17—"If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them"—the most likely referent of the plural is both being washed and washing

45. For the participatory sense of imitation in John, see below.

46. This covenantal integration of the vertical and the horizontal, and their connection to Jesus' atoning and paradigmatic death, is particularly strong in 1 John in such texts as 1 John 1:5–7; 2:9–11; 3:14–18 (3:16–17: "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?"); 4:7–13, 19–21 (4:20: "Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen"). See further in chapter 5.

Moreover, the horizontal dimension of this covenant life is not independently defined and described; it grows organically out of the one act of Jesus' self-giving death. Accordingly, Jesus explains the second interpretation of his death as a "new commandment" (13:34), not because the *commandment* to love is new, but because its *shape* is new. It is now Christlike, cruciform love: "As I have loved you" (13:34; 15:12–13).[47] The self-giving of Jesus in death embodies the love of God (see John 3:16, arguably the Gospel's interpretive key[48]) that both liberates and binds. It liberates people from sin and binds them to God in a covenant relationship that similarly seeks the good of the other. The liberated and bound community, that is, the cleansed and covenanted community, is in the process of becoming like the loving God revealed in the loving death of Jesus (see 13:1b). As Chennattu emphasizes, the *imitatio Dei* (imitation of God) was an integral part of the covenantal relationship between the people and God: "You shall be holy for I am holy."[49] *Imitatio Dei* has become *imitatio Christi*, which, because Jesus is the Word and self-revelation of God (1:1–18), is ultimately *imitatio Dei*.

Two major issues must still be addressed at least briefly. First, is this love truly Godlike and Christlike if it is only directed toward fellow disciples, toward "one another"? Second, is an ethic of imitation, especially imitation of self-giving love, simply a "new commandment" that will remain unrealized due to human sin?

To deal first with the second question, Jesus in John does not present us merely with an ethic of commandment and imitation. It is better described as a spirituality of mutual indwelling that makes possible the fulfilling of the obligation of imitation, not dissimilar from what we will find in Paul.[50] Already in John 14, when Jesus refers to the requirement of keeping his commandments as the demonstration of love for him and the Father, he makes it clear that the disciples can do nothing on their own power but will have the indwelling presence of Jesus in the person of the Spirit/Advocate (14:17–20, 26, 28).[51] The nature of this relationship is further disclosed in

47. Skinner, "Virtue in the New Testament," finds significant resonances between John's ethic of self-giving and sacrifice and Paul's ethic of cruciformity, in each case highlighting the centrality of love.

48. For the view that John 3:16 (or 3:16–17) is the interpretive, or hermeneutical, key to the Fourth Gospel, see Moloney, *Love in the Gospel of John*, esp. 3, 5–10, 33–34.

49. Chennattu, *Johannine Discipleship*, 59–61.

50. Also, not surprisingly, in 1 John. See the discussion in chap. 4.

51. Even the gift of the Spirit may be connected to the death of Jesus, if the end of John 19:30 is better translated "he gave his Spirit" rather than he "gave up his spirit"

chapter 15, in which Jesus speaks of a reciprocal residency between himself and his disciples: "Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me" (15:4). This does not decrease the force of the expectation. It is still a matter of commandments, or covenantal obligations, but it does alter the *manner* in which the obligations are fulfilled. The prophetic language of the new covenant, made effective by the indwelling of the Spirit or the law within, is behind this formulation of covenantal requirements here even as it will be in Paul.[52] *But the prophetic promises of mutual covenant relationship and (one-way) interiority have merged to become mutual indwelling.* We are moving beyond imitation toward theosis: becoming like God by participating in the life of God.

Now to address the first question: Is love for one another sufficient? What about love for outsiders generally and for enemies in particular? Here we must consider two things: the Johannine context of (current or coming) persecution and the missional impetus of John 17. When a community is experiencing or expecting persecution, it is critical that it sustain itself in love. The community of disciples in John is going to be pursued, persecuted (15:18–21; 16:33; 17:11–16). It will die without an ethos of mutual love, support, and unity, as Jesus himself knows (15:16–17; 17:11–16). But equally important is the corollary ethos of mission. The disciples will share in Jesus' fate because they share in his mission, which is in fact God's mission. Following the promises of persecution in chapters 15–17, Jesus does not order his disciples to flee or hide but to join him in his mission of bringing eternal life to the world. He prays to his Father, "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (17:18) and asks only for their protection (17:15). Their internal love and unity, therefore, is not merely an end in itself but a means to the success of the mission, of the *missio Dei* (17:21–23). The upshot of all this is that the disciples are in fact called to love the world, even the world that hates and persecutes them, because they participate in the world-centered love and mission of God manifested in the Son, *especially in his death* (3:14–17). *To embrace the Son's death is to embrace God's world-mission and thus to embody God's love in the world.* This will include even enemies. "Jesus does not make intense

(NRSV), though this proleptic giving of the Spirit is finally completed only in the resurrection narrative (20:22). See, e.g., Brown, *Gospel According to John XIII—XXI,* 931; Moloney, *Love in the Gospel of John*, 30.

52. The Holy Spirit is "John's answer" to Jeremiah's promise (Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 478).

communion among disciples an end in itself; it exists *that God might be made known*."[53] By their missional love, the disciples will bear witness to the sort of God revealed in Jesus, above all in his death: a God who loves "the world," that is, all of humanity.[54]

The narrative and christological basis of this kind of love is found also in the narrative setting of the actual farewell/discipleship discourses.[55] Although interpreters have rightly focused their attention on the footwashing scene as the parable of Jesus' love, they have often overlooked the significance of the entire meal. Jesus shares this final meal as a symbol of his love for and commitment to all of his friends, even the one who would soon betray him (Judas) and the one who would soon deny him (Peter). Moreover, the evangelist tells us that Jesus does this fully aware that Judas and Peter would betray and deny him (13:26, 36–38)! In other words, Jesus himself did not limit his love to friends who were true friends. He laid down his life for friends (15:14–15) who were, like Peter and Judas, deniers and betrayers—for enemies, in other words. Thus when Jesus offers himself as the paradigm of loving friendship, his definition of "friends" is so broad that when he extols laying down one's life for one's friends (15:13), it should be heard *inclusively* rather than *exclusively*. Judas the betrayer has left, but Peter the denier is still present. To love friends as God does in Jesus is, in effect, to love enemies. What Paul says explicitly and bluntly in Rom 5:6–10 about the cross as God's act of enemy love, John says implicitly and gently but no less powerfully, even if it is not his primary intent or focus.

To summarize the theological importance of the farewell discourse in relation to the atonement: the death of Jesus will create a community of committed friends of Jesus who indwell him and are indwelt by him/his Spirit. Within this relationship they will participate in his death in four ways: receiving his forgiveness, fulfilling the obligations of a covenant relationship by continuing his self-giving love for others, experiencing hatred and persecution similar to that which caused his death, and extending God's mission to the world. That is, as a community of atonement they are a covenantal, cruciform, charismatic, missional community.

53. Moloney, *Love in the Gospel of John*, 131, referring especially to John 17.

54. See especially Moloney's discussion of "What Sort of God" (answer: a God who loves the world, a God who sends) in ibid., 55–68.

55. I am indebted to Moloney (ibid., 107–21) for stimulating the following observations, though Moloney does not use the word "enemy" in his discussion, and he probably reads Jesus' giving of the morsel of bread (13:18–30) to Judas a bit too positively.

When the crucified but resurrected Jesus returns to his disciples, it is these and other new-covenant themes that appear in his words with them, but with particular emphasis on the missional dimension (John 20:19–23). The risen Jesus twice speaks words of peace (vv. 19, 21a). Sandwiched in between these words is the evangelist's narrative of Jesus' self-identification as the crucified-but-risen Lord: he reveals his wounded hands and side (v. 20). This Jesus then sends the disciples out to continue his mission of forgiving sins and furthering that which forgiveness makes possible: new and abundant life because of the cross, because of the crucified. He gives them the promised Spirit to accomplish that task (vv. 21b–23). This "Johannine Pentecost," then, continues the new-covenant motif: Spirit, mission, forgiveness.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have considered the links between the cross and the establishment of the new covenant in the four canonical gospels and Acts. Throughout the chapter we have found that these writings express, in various ways, the reality that the death of Jesus effected the promised new covenant and thereby created the community of the new covenant. Those who embrace this life-giving death begin a journey of participation in it that will be marked especially by peaceful practices of faithfulness and love—the two dimensions of the covenant—empowered by the Spirit. When we now turn to the rest of the New Testament, we will find these same sorts of foci and themes, the same kind of music with creative but recognizable improvisations.