

This principle addresses the problem of the time element in salvation, which is basically this: how can spiritual blessings which are based upon the time-space facticity of Christ's death and resurrection be applied before these events occur? In connection with our topic it can be framed in this fashion: how could Old Testament believers be regenerated or indwelt by the Holy Spirit until Christ died, rose, ascended and sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost? One answer is that none of these blessings could come to any Old Testament believer until Christ actually accomplished redemption in time. The problem with this answer is that it would exclude Old Testament believers from some of the benefits of Christ's atonement, but include them in others, even though the time problem is the same for both kinds of benefits (unless one posits another basis of salvation than that of Christ's shed blood). A second answer to this problem is that Christ's redemptive work was certain in God's eternal purpose, and thus atonement benefits could be applied before the atonement was actually accomplished in time, and especially to Old Testament saints. If the time problem is resolved in this second way, then the door is opened to the potential application of all of the benefits of Christ's redemption to the believer under the older dispensation, the only qualification pertaining to those benefits which are inherently impossible to apply or those which are specifically denied to the Old Testament believer by scriptural statement.

The third principle may be stated as follows: an epistemological mystery is not necessarily an ontological mystery. This principle addresses the problem of the concept of "mystery" in the New Testament, which is really twofold: (1) Is a mystery something totally unknown in past ages or only dimly and partially known? (2) If a spiritual reality was not revealed at all in the Old Testament, or not revealed as clearly in the Old Testament as in the New, does it follow that the spiritual reality did not exist in the Old Testament period? If we adopt the hermeneutical principle that non-revelation of a truth equals non-existence of the corresponding reality, what does this do to the concept of the progress (or unfolding) of revelation in Scripture? What does this principle do to such timeless truths as that of the Trinity, for as Warfield points out, "Whether there really exist traces of the idea of the Trinity in the Old Testament ... is a nice question."⁶ If we reject the principle -- "not revealed, therefore nonexistent then the possibility is opened that Old Testament believers experienced a number of blessings which were not explicitly revealed in the Old Testament.