

# THE PNEUMATIC CHRIST IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

by Ron Kangas

**T**he Gospel of John was written that we “may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” and that believing we “may have life in His name” (20:31). Like Peter we should declare concerning the Lord Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). If we confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in us and we abide in God (1 John 4:15). “Every spirit [of a genuine prophet] which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God,” but “every spirit [of a false prophet] which does not confess Jesus is not of God” (1 John 4:2-3a). The latter is “the spirit of the antichrist,” which denies that Jesus Christ was divinely conceived and was born as the Son of God. As children of God affirming the deity of Christ in an age of falsehood and deception, we must confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh through the divine conception of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35). The eternal Word, the very God, became flesh and tabernacled among us (John 1:1, 14). The Gospel of John thus reveals that by incarnation Christ, the complete God, became a perfect man—the God-man. Jesus is God incarnate, and as such He is the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world (v. 29). Now in our experience as believers, as regenerated children of God, the blood of Jesus God’s Son cleanses us from every sin (1 John 1:7). By believing that Jesus is *the Christ* (His title according to His office) and *the Son of God* (His title according to His person), we have life (the eternal, uncreated, indestructible life of God) in His name. The Gospel of John, therefore, bears emphatic witness that Jesus, the eternal Son of God, has come in the flesh.

This Gospel also reveals that by resurrection this wonderful One, Christ in the flesh, became the pneumatic Christ, the Christ who is the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b). This means that John unveils not only that Christ became flesh by incarnation but also that He became the Spirit (the pneumatic Christ) through resurrection. Christ is the

Word, the eternal God, who passed through the long process of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection to become the holy breath, the *pneuma* (John 20:22), that He might enter into the believers and live with them a life of coinherence (15:4).

In carrying out God’s economy for the fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose, the Lord Jesus took two steps. First, He took the step of incarnation to become a man in the flesh to declare God to humankind (1:18), to be the Lamb of God to accomplish redemption for us (vv. 29, 36), and to manifest the Father to the believers (14:9-11). Second, He took the step of death and resurrection to be transfigured into the Spirit, “another Comforter” (vv. 16-18), that He might impart Himself into His believers as their life, their life supply, and their everything for the producing and building up of the church, His Body, which consummates in the New Jerusalem as the consummate corporate expression of the Triune God for eternity. The Gospel of John, therefore, clearly reveals Christ’s two becomings. By incarnation Christ became flesh to be the Lamb of God, and in resurrection He became the pneumatic Christ, the life-giving Spirit.

**I**t is common for believers, including pastors and theologians, to emphasize Christ’s first coming but to neglect or misunderstand His second becoming. This article, the first in a two-part series, is an attempt to remedy this situation. My intention here is first to consider John’s revelation concerning the pneumatic Christ, presenting a further definition of the term *pneumatic Christ* and examining some crucial portions of this Gospel that refer to Christ’s becoming the Spirit. Then I will respond to some common objections to our testimony, grounded in revealed truth, that Christ is now the pneumatic Christ. Part two, which will appear in the next issue of this quarterly, will be devoted to the many far-reaching implications of the Johannine revelation of the

pneumatic Christ for the Christian life individually and corporately. At least three dozen important matters unfolded in the Gospel of John depend upon Christ being the life-giving Spirit in resurrection.

### A Further Definition of *Pneumatic*

In common parlance the adjective *pneumatic* means “of or relating to air,” “filled with air.” In theology it means “of or relating to the *pneuma*; spiritual.” The Greek word *pneuma* means “spirit”; it also means “breath” or “air.” Although the word *pneumatic* means “spiritual,” if we use the term *spiritual Christ* instead of the expression *pneumatic Christ*, there may be misunderstanding. *The pneumatic Christ* refers not to Christ as one who is spiritual but to Christ as the Spirit. The Christ who has passed through death and entered into resurrection is not merely spiritual—He is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17). Speaking of the resurrected Christ, John 20:22 says, “He breathed into them [the disciples] and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit is the holy *pneuma*, the holy breath. To say that Christ is the pneumatic Christ means that He is full of divine breath. In John 20 He, the life-giving Spirit, breathed Himself into the disciples as the divine *pneuma*, the divine breath, and they received Him as the *pneuma* by taking Him in as holy breath.

In John 1 Christ in incarnation is the Lamb of God for redemption, but in John 20 Christ in resurrection is the breath, the *pneuma*, for the impartation of life. The first time He came—His coming in incarnation—He came as the Lamb of God; the second time He came—after His death and in His resurrection—He came as the *pneuma*, the life-giving Spirit. Now in our experience of Him, Christ comes to us as the life-giving Spirit, as the pneumatic Christ. When we receive Christ today, we receive Him as the pneumatic Christ, as the life-giving Spirit, even as “the Lord Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18). This means that we receive Him as both the redeeming Christ and the life-imparting Christ. Day by day we may experience and enjoy not only the redeeming Christ, the Christ who died as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world, but also the pneumatic Christ, the Christ who was transfigured in resurrection to become the life-giving Spirit to dispense Himself into His believers.

**T**he pneumatic Christ is the God-Lamb-Dove (John 1:1, 14, 29, 32). Through incarnation He, the very God, became the Lamb, the God-Lamb—the incarnate

Christ as the Redeemer; through resurrection the God-Lamb became the God-Lamb-Dove—the pneumatic Christ as the holy breath. The God-Lamb-Dove signifies the Redeemer in the flesh, after accomplishing redemption, becoming the life-giving Spirit to impart the divine life into God’s chosen people. It is regrettable that many theologians see Christ only as the God-Lamb, not as the God-Lamb-Dove. This means that they know only the Christ in the flesh; they do not know Christ as the pneumatic Christ. They see and know only one aspect of the all-inclusive Christ revealed in the Gospel of John. What a great loss!

The Gospel of John clearly reveals Christ’s two becomings. By incarnation Christ became flesh to be the Lamb of God, and in resurrection He became the pneumatic Christ, the life-giving Spirit.

We all need to know Christ as the God-Lamb-Dove. If we would know Him in such a way, we need to realize that today is not the stage of Christ in the flesh but the stage of Christ as the Spirit, the pneumatic Christ. If He were still in the flesh, He could not be in us, and we could not be in Him. For Him to be in us and for us to be in Him, He must be pneumatic; He must be the Spirit. Thus, in the Gospel of John, Christ is unveiled as the Lamb of God who became the pneu-

matic Christ. It is our prayer that all the Lord’s people, especially those who are earnestly pursuing Him, will see this great and marvelous vision.

### The Spirit Who Was “Not Yet”

One portion of John that presents this vision is 7:37-39:

Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes into Me, as the Scriptures said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water. But this He said concerning the Spirit, whom those who believed into Him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.

The phrase *the Spirit was not yet* has troubled many translators of the Bible and students of theology. This phrase unveils something quite strange and mysterious concerning the Spirit of God: the truth that before the Lord’s glorification “the Spirit was not yet.” How could it be that, at the time of the Lord’s speaking recorded in verses 37 and 38, “the Spirit was not yet” when the third of the Divine Trinity as the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jehovah, and the Holy Spirit was there already? As a man Jesus was conceived of the Spirit and born of the Spirit (Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35); therefore, the Holy Spirit was an essential part of His being as the God-man, the One who is the complete God and a perfect man. How, then, could

John, commenting on the Lord's word about drinking of Him to experience the outflow of rivers of living water, declare that the Spirit was not yet? If we would answer this question in a way that corresponds to the divine revelation, we need to understand the connection between "the Spirit" and the glorification of the Lord Jesus. "The Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified."

The Lord Jesus was glorified in His resurrection. In John 7:39 *glorified* actually stands for *resurrected*. Evidence for this is provided by the question addressed by the resurrected Christ to the two distraught disciples on the road to Emmaus: "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and enter into His glory?" (Luke 24:26). The Lord's resurrection brought Him into glory (1 Cor. 15:43a; Acts 3:13a, 15a). Hence, His resurrection was His glorification.

As the eternal Son of God, the Lord Jesus possessed the divine glory from eternity past (John 17:5). When He, the God of glory (Acts 7:2), became a man, His divine glory was concealed within the shell of His humanity. We may say that the humanity which the Lord had assumed through His incarnation had become a shell to conceal the glory of His divinity. This concealed glory could be released only through the breaking of the shell of the Lord's humanity by His death (John 12:24; Luke 12:50, see *Transfigured* below). Toward the end of His ministry He spoke concerning His glorification. "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (John 12:23). "Now has the Son of Man been glorified, and God has been glorified in Him. If God has been glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and He will glorify Him immediately" (13:31-32). Then only hours before His death

He prayed that the Father would glorify Him: "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You" (17:1). For Jesus as the Son of Man to be glorified was for Him to pass through death for the release of the divine glory and to enter into resurrection for the expression of the divine glory. Consider the note in the Recovery Version on the word *glorify* in this verse:

Now He was about to pass through death so that the concealing shell of His humanity might be broken and His divine element, His divine life, might be released. Also, He would resurrect that He might uplift His humanity into the divine element and that His divine element might be expressed, with the result that His entire being, His divinity and His humanity, would be glorified.

Acts 3:13 and 15 indicate that God the Father answered His Son's prayer for glorification by raising Him from the dead.

**T**he glorification of the Lord Jesus was the uplifting of His humanity into divinity in His resurrection. Prior to His glorification "the Spirit was not yet," because Jesus' humanity had not yet been uplifted into divinity in His resurrection. To say that the Spirit was "not yet" means that the Spirit of both divinity and humanity was not yet. "The Spirit" is such an inclusive Spirit. "The Spirit" in John 7:39 is the Spirit of God who, through the resurrection of Christ, has become the Spirit of the God-man, the Spirit of the glorified Jesus. In this way the Spirit who was "not yet" became "the Spirit" who now is. Now "the Spirit" is not simply the Spirit of God possessing divinity only but the Spirit of both God and man. Thus, "the Spirit," being all-inclusive, is the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7), the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9), and the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:19).

## Transfigured from the Flesh into the Spirit

As the falling into the ground to die and the growing out of the ground transforms a grain of wheat into another new and lively form, so the death and resurrection of Christ transfigured Him from the flesh into the Spirit. As the last Adam in the flesh He became the life-giving Spirit through the process of death and resurrection. As He is the embodiment of the Father, so the Spirit is the realization, the reality, of Him. It is as the Spirit that He was breathed into the disciples. It is as the Spirit that He was received into His believers and flowed out of them as rivers of living water (7:38-39). It is as the Spirit that through His death and resurrection He came back to the disciples, entered into them as their Comforter, and began to abide in them (14:16-17). It is as the Spirit that He can live in the disciples and they can live in Him and with Him (14:19). It is as the Spirit that He can abide in the disciples and they can abide in Him (14:20; 15:4-5). It is as the Spirit that He can come with the Father to the one who loves Him and make an abode with him (14:23). It is as the Spirit that He can make all that He is and has to be fully realized by the disciples (16:13-16). It is as the Spirit that He came to meet with His brothers as the church to declare the Father's name to them and to praise Him in their midst (Heb. 2:11-12). And it is as the Spirit that He can send His disciples with His commission, with Himself as life and everything to them, in the same way that the Father sent Him (John 20:21).

Witness Lee, *The Conclusion of the New Testament*, pp. 800-801

For the carrying out of God's intention according to His good pleasure, the desire of His heart, it was necessary for the Spirit who was "not yet" in John 7:39 to become the Spirit who now is—the compounded, consummated, all-inclusive Spirit of Jesus Christ. Of course, we should never say of the Spirit of God, as the eternal third of the Divine Trinity, that there was a time when He was "not yet." Nevertheless, like John we should say of the Spirit, as the Spirit of Jesus Christ, that He was "not yet" before Jesus was glorified. The Spirit of God coexists and coinheres eternally with the Father and the Son in the Godhead. However, in John 7:39 the Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of Christ, and the Spirit of Jesus Christ was "not yet," because Jesus had not yet been glorified in and through His resurrection. After His resurrection the Spirit of God became the Spirit of the incarnated, crucified, and resurrected Christ. Unlike the Spirit of God, who had only the divine element, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, who is the Spirit of the glorified Jesus, has both the divine element and the human element. In resurrection the Lord, the pneumatic Christ, is such an all-inclusive Spirit.

**A**ndrew Murray saw this divine revelation and wrote about it in chapter five—entitled "The Spirit of the Glorified Jesus"—of his masterpiece *The Spirit of Christ*:

The expression: the Spirit was not yet, has appeared strange, and so the word *given* has been inserted. But the expression, if accepted as it stands, may guide us into the true understanding of the real significance of the Spirit's not coming until Jesus was glorified....The Son, who had from eternity been with the Father, entered upon a new stage of existence when He became flesh. When He returned to Heaven, He was still the same only-begotten Son of God, and yet not altogether the same. For He was now also, as Son of Man, the first-begotten from the dead, clothed with that glorified humanity which He had perfected and sanctified for Himself. And just so the Spirit of God as poured out at Pentecost was indeed something new....When poured out at Pentecost, He came as the Spirit of the glorified Jesus, the Spirit of the Incarnate, crucified, and exalted Christ, the bearer and communicator to us, not of the life of God as such, but of that life as it had been interwoven into human nature in the person of Christ Jesus....The Spirit of the glorified Jesus, the Son of man become the Son of God—*He* could not be until Jesus was glorified. This thought opens up to us further the reason why it is not the Spirit of God as such, but the Spirit of Jesus, that could be sent to dwell in us....Christ

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came...to bring human nature itself again into the fellowship of the Divine life, to make us partakers of the Divine nature....In His own person, having become flesh, He had to sanctify the flesh, and make it a meet and willing receptacle for the indwelling of the Spirit of God....From His nature, as it was glorified in the resurrection and ascension, His Spirit came forth as the Spirit of His human life, glorified into the union with the Divine, to make us partakers of all that He had personally wrought out and acquired, of Himself and His glorified life....And in virtue of His having perfected in Himself a new holy human nature on our behalf, He could now communicate what previously had no existence—a life at once human and Divine....Of this Spirit it is most fully true, "The Spirit was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified"....In our place, and on our behalf, as man and the Head of man, He was admitted into the full glory of the Divine, and His human nature constituted the receptacle and the dispenser of the Divine Spirit. And the Holy Spirit could come down as the Spirit of the God-man—most really the Spirit of God, and yet as truly the spirit

of man....He can now come down to witness of the perfect union of the Divine and the human, and in becoming our life, to make us partakers of it. *There is now* the Spirit of the glorified Jesus....The Holy Spirit descends as a Person to dwell in believers, and to make the glorified Jesus a Present Reality within them. (37-41)

### The First Comforter Becoming Another Comforter

The Spirit as the Spirit of the God-man, the Spirit of the glorified Jesus, is the very One called "another Comforter" in John 14:16-20:

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever, even the Spirit of reality, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him; but you know Him, because He abides with you and shall be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you. Yet a little while and the world beholds Me no longer, but you behold Me; because I live, you also shall live. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

As we will see, these verses reveal that the One who is another Comforter, the Spirit of reality, is actually the pneumatic Christ, Christ in resurrection as the life-giving Spirit.

The expression *another Comforter* in verse 16 indicates that

the Lord Jesus, the One speaking, is a Comforter. The Son was present with the disciples as a Comforter, but He said that He would ask the Father to give them another Comforter. If He were not a Comforter, He would not have said that He would ask the Father to send another Comforter, the Spirit of reality. This may sound as if there are two Comforters—the Son, who was speaking, as the first Comforter and another Comforter, who according to verse 17 is the Spirit of reality. The Spirit, being another Comforter, who is a person, might appear to be another person. The Lord Jesus was the first Comforter. Because He as the first Comforter is a person, the other Comforter, the Spirit of reality, should also be a person. It seems that in John 14 we have two separate Comforters, the Lord and the Spirit of reality, and it seems that these two Comforters are two persons. However, if we study verses 16 through 20 carefully, we will see that the second Comforter (“another Comforter”) is actually the first Comforter as the Spirit of reality. In verse 17 the Lord Jesus says that the Spirit of reality will be in the believers. Then in verse 18 He goes on to say, “I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you” (emphasis added). The *He* who is the Spirit of reality in verse 17 becomes the *I*, the Lord Himself, in verse 18. This reveals that in and through His resurrection the Lord would become the Spirit of reality. In other words, this indicates that the Christ who was in the flesh would go through death and resurrection to become the life-giving Spirit, the pneumatic Christ. Furthermore, in verses 16 and 17 the Lord Jesus speaks of another Comforter who would be in them, and in verse 20 He says, “In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” This unveils the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself would be in the disciples as the Spirit of reality, as the life-giving Spirit in resurrection. He would dwell in them as the pneumatic Christ. As the Christ in the flesh He could only be with the disciples and among them, but as the pneumatic Christ He could also be in them. The One who abides in the believers today as the life-giving Spirit is the very One who first abode with the disciples as the Christ

in the flesh and then, after His resurrection, abode in them as the Spirit of reality. (See *Another Comforter* below.)

Resurrection is indicated by two particular phrases. The first is found in verse 18: *I am coming to you*. This coming is the same as that mentioned in verse 3—“I am coming again”—and in verse 28—“I am coming to you.” According to the context of this chapter, the coming in these verses is not the Lord’s coming again from the heavens at the end of this age. On the contrary, the coming here was fulfilled on the day of the Lord’s resurrection. After His resurrection the Lord Jesus came back to His disciples to be with them forever, thus not leaving them “as orphans.” In His resurrection He came to them as the Spirit, for He was now the pneumatic Christ. The other phrase in John 14 that points to resurrection is found in verse 20: *in that day*. This day is the day of the Lord’s resurrection (20:19). The Christ in whom we are and the Christ who is in us is the pneumatic Christ, the Spirit.

The Greek word for *Comforter* (*parakletos*) in John 14:16 is the same as that for *Advocate* in 1 John 2:1b: “If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous.” The Greek word denotes a person who is called to one’s side to aid him; it refers to a helper or to one who offers legal aid or who intercedes on behalf of someone else. Therefore, it signifies an advocate or counsel. Hence, it is translated *Advocate* in 1 John 2:1b. Because the word conveys the sense of consoling or consolation, it is rendered *Comforter* in John 14:16 with respect to Christ in resurrection as the Spirit of reality. Today we may experience and enjoy Christ both as our Advocate and as our Comforter. As the ascended One in the heavens, He is our Advocate with the Father when we sin; as the Spirit He is the Comforter within us consoling us, helping us.

### The Holy Breath

The second Comforter, the Spirit of reality, was breathed

## Another Comforter

The word “another” [John 14:16-20] means that there was one already, and that this one is now another. The first Comforter was Christ. The second Comforter is the Holy Spirit....The word “another” also means another in kind, and not just another in number. Another Comforter does not mean the same kind of comforter. The kind that the disciples knew could die and leave them; He could not be with them forever. But the other kind would not be the same as this kind; the other Comforter would be with them forever. Verse 17 tells us who the other Comforter is. The other Comforter is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of reality....The most mysterious part of this portion of the Word lies in the pronoun *He* in verse 17, which is changed to the pronoun *I* in verse 18. Why is this? Please remember that the *He* is the *I* and the *I* is the *He*. The Lord Jesus is the Holy Spirit. I am not denying the doctrine of the Trinity. I am merely saying that the Lord Himself says that He is the Holy Spirit. Today the Lord Jesus is the Holy Spirit.

Watchman Nee, “The Life-releasing Death of Christ,” pp. 432-433

into the disciples by the pneumatic Christ on the day of His resurrection: "He breathed into them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit" (20:22). The Holy Spirit here is actually the resurrected Christ, the pneumatic Christ, Himself because this Spirit is His breath. The Holy Spirit, therefore, is the breath of the Son. As we have pointed out, the Greek word for *Spirit* here is *pneuma*, a word that is used for breath, spirit, and wind. Since *pneuma* has such a range of meanings, this verse can be translated, "Receive the holy breath." On the day of His resurrection the Lord Jesus breathed Himself into His disciples as the holy breath and asked them to receive that breath.

Since the Holy Spirit, the holy *pneuma*, the holy breath, is the breath of the resurrected Christ, even Christ Himself breathed into His disciples, we should not make the mistake of thinking that Christ and the Holy Spirit as His breath are two separate persons. We should not say that the breath—the Holy Spirit—is one person and that the One who exhales this breath—the resurrected, pneumatic Christ—is a separate person. Christ and His breath, the holy *pneuma*, are one; the breath is one person with the breather. This means that the resurrected Christ is the life-giving Spirit as the breath.

On the day of His resurrection the pneumatic Christ as the Spirit came back to His disciples, fulfilling His promise in John 14, and breathed Himself as the Spirit into them. By so doing He entered into His believers to be the divine essence of their spiritual life and being. From that time onward He was truly one with His disciples, for essentially He had become their intrinsic being.

John 20:22 is the fulfillment of 7:39 and 14:16. This means that the Holy Spirit as the holy breath in 20:22 is "the Spirit" of 7:39, that is, "the Spirit" who "was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified." When the Lord Jesus was glorified through His resurrection, He was transfigured into the Spirit as the holy breath. Hence, the Lord's breathing of the Holy Spirit into the disciples was the imparting of the Spirit expected in 7:39, and the disciples' receiving of the holy breath was their receiving "the Spirit, whom those who believed into Him were about to receive." In like manner, the Lord's breathing of the Holy Spirit into the believers was the fulfillment of His promise concerning the Spirit of reality as the Comforter in 14:16. In John 14 the Lord Jesus promised that He would ask the Father to send another Comforter, and then in John 20 He brought to His disciples this other Comforter,

the Spirit of reality. At that time the Spirit of reality came to the disciples to be in them, and on that day they could know that they were in the Lord and the Lord was in them. Therefore, all that the Lord promised in 14:16-20 was fulfilled at the very moment He breathed Himself into the disciples as the holy breath.

If we consider 20:22 together with 14:16-20, we will realize that the Holy Spirit, the second Comforter, is the breath of the first Comforter. According to John 14 Christ, the first Comforter, would become the Spirit of reality as another Comforter, and according to John 20 the second Comforter is actually the breath of the first Comforter. When the Lord breathed into His disciples, He did not say, "Receive another Comforter"; He said, "Receive the holy breath." In and through His resurrection the Lord became the second Comforter and then breathed this Comforter into His disciples as the Holy Spirit, the holy breath, the holy *pneuma*. Some who read this word about the Spirit as Christ's breath may ask, "Don't you believe that Christ

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as the life-giving Spirit  
is the very One who  
first abode with the  
disciples as the Christ  
in the flesh and then,  
after His resurrection,  
abode in them as  
the Spirit of reality.

and the Spirit are distinct, that Christ and the Spirit are two?" To such a question the following answer is most fitting:

Yes, I believe that, as viewed from one aspect, the outward, objective aspect, Christ and the Spirit are two. However, as viewed from another aspect, the inward, subjective aspect, the Spirit, the second Comforter, is the breath of Christ, the first Comforter. Thus, from the perspective of the inward aspect, Christ and the Spirit are one.... In order to experience the Spirit as another Comforter, as the Spirit of reality, we need the inward aspect of the Spirit, the aspect of the Spirit as the breath of Christ. When we have the Spirit as Christ's breath, then we can experience the Spirit as another Comforter. (Lee, *Fulfillment* 588).

### Objections Considered

Since some readers may be troubled by the assertions made above and understandably may have concerns and questions, it is fitting at this juncture to consider several of the most common objections to the claim, based on the divine revelation in the New Testament, that Christ, having passed through death and resurrection, is now the pneumatic Christ. For our present purpose, these objections may be classified into three groups: first, a group of three consisting of objections related to the objective Christ (Christ in Himself) and the subjective Christ (Christ in us); second, a group of four objections related to the Godhead, especially

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to the Divine Trinity; and third, a group of two objections which may be regarded as compromise solutions, by which I mean concepts of the pneumatic Christ that contain an element of truth but either come short of the complete and balanced divine revelation or adapt it to fit traditional theological formulations.

The first category of objections arises because of a lack of balance in one's theology between the objective and subjective truths in the Word of God. With respect to Christ, the term *objective truths* denotes truths related to Christ's being, nature, attributes, activities, and experiences as these exist in themselves apart from the believers' involvement, experience, and participation. The term *subjective truths* denotes truths related to Christ's person, work, and experience as these are applied to the believers in their experience and enjoyment of Him. The biblical truth concerning Christ is balanced, and to know this truth we also must be balanced. Regrettably, many believers are not balanced; rather, they are often unbalanced in the sense of emphasizing the objective truths while ignoring the subjective truths. Those who care only for the objective truths concerning Christ, especially concerning Christ in His resurrection, ascension, and coming back, may not pay adequate attention to the subjective truths concerning the resurrected Christ.

### **The Resurrected Christ Having a Spiritual Body of Flesh and Bones**

In opposition to the revelation of the pneumatic Christ—a revelation that involves both objective and subjective truths—some raise the following objection: “Christ in resurrection has a physical body of flesh and bones; therefore, He cannot be the Spirit. If you affirm that Christ is now pneumatic, you must deny His bodily resurrection.” This rejoinder is wholly without merit.

One day we at Living Stream Ministry received a letter from a theological student inquiring about our belief regarding the resurrection of Christ. He alluded to Paul's word in 1 Corinthians 15:14 and 17: “If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is vain; your faith is vain also....And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.” Then, in all sincerity, he asked whether we believed in the bodily resurrection of Christ or in “something called the life-giving Spirit.” According to his understanding we should believe either in Christ's physical resurrection or in the resurrected Christ's being the pneumatic Christ, the life-giving Spirit but not in both. However, there is no need for us to choose between them. The Word of God reveals both, and we should believe both. In keeping with the biblical principle of the twofoldness of divine truth—the principle that the Bible presents both sides of the truth without reconciling or systematizing them—our view is that Christ, on the

one hand, resurrected physically and, on the other hand, became the life-giving Spirit. The point here is that our belief in the pneumatic Christ does not in any way imply disbelief in His bodily resurrection.

In John 20, a chapter which unveils Christ as the Spirit, the *pneuma*, we have three accounts of His appearing with a body. Mary, the first person to meet the resurrected Christ, found Him to be visibly and physically present. She saw Him, heard Him, and reached out to touch Him (John 20:14-17). He was present with her as a man with a tangible body.

“When therefore it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and while the doors were shut where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst and said to them, Peace be to you. And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side” (John 20:19-20). Here we see that on the day of His resurrection, Christ with a resurrected body came back to the disciples, coming into the room where the disciples were with the doors shut. After eight days “His disciples were again within,” and “Jesus came, though the doors were shut, and stood in the midst....Then He said to Thomas [who had asked for tangible, empirical evidence of the Lord's resurrection], Bring your finger here and see My hands, and bring your hand and put it into My side” (vv. 26-27). On both occasions the doors were shut, yet He could enter the room with a body of flesh and bones. Our limited mentality cannot comprehend how He could do this, but it is a fact, and we must receive it according to the divine revelation.

**C**hrist in resurrection is a resurrected man with a spiritual body of flesh and bones. With the resurrected Christ the flesh and bones have become spiritual. He has a physical body, yet the body is spiritual. Consider the record in Luke 24. “He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, Peace to you. But they were terrified and became frightened and thought they beheld a spirit” (vv. 36-37). The disciples, troubled by the Lord's appearing, could not understand how He could suddenly appear in a closed room. Nevertheless, the Lord appeared, not as a spirit or phantasm but as a man with a physical body. He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your heart? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you behold Me having” (vv. 38-39). Then He showed them His hands and His feet. Not only was the Lord's body visible and touchable; He was also able to eat food. “While they still did not believe for joy and were marveling, He said to them, Do you have anything here to eat? And they handed Him a piece of broiled fish; and He took it and ate before them” (vv. 41-43). Here we see the Lord's physical body, which is spiritual (1 Cor. 15:44).

The Lord's appearing was mysterious. He came into the room as the Spirit, the pneumatic Christ, yet He came with a physical, tangible body. The prints of the nails could still be seen, and the place in His side which had been pierced with a spear could still be seen and touched.

Speaking concerning the resurrection body, 1 Corinthians 15:44 says, "It is sown a soulish body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a soulish body, there is also a spiritual one." A soulish body is a natural body animated by the soul; it is a body in which the soul predominates. A spiritual body is a resurrected body saturated by the spirit; it is a body in which the spirit predominates. Through the process of resurrection, the Lord's body became such a spiritual body. Although He had a spiritual body, it was nonetheless a body of flesh and bones.

The New Testament strongly and emphatically testifies that the Lord Jesus Christ was raised bodily from the dead. He now has a spiritual body of flesh and bones, a body which Paul describes as "the body of His glory" (Phil. 3:21). Christ's resurrected body is saturated with God's glory (Luke 24:26) and is transcendent over corruption and death (Rom. 6:9). We believe this just as much as, if not more than, other orthodox Christians do.

Perhaps the problem is not that we believe less but that we believe more than others do, for we believe that the same Christ who has a glorified spiritual body of flesh and bones is also the pneumatic Christ, the life-giving Spirit. He, the last Adam in the flesh, became a life-giving Spirit, and now He, the Lord, is the Spirit. The Bible reveals both aspects of Christ's person in resurrection, and we accept both without emphasizing one aspect in favor of another and without trying to reconcile them.

**T**o the theological student who questioned us regarding Christ's resurrection, we also asked a question: "The Bible says that Christ is in us (Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Col. 1:27), but the Bible also says that in resurrection He still has a body of flesh and bones? Do you, a believer in Christ who is indwelt by Christ, have the sense that a being with flesh and bones is living in you? Since Christ has a body, how can He live in you?" The proper answer to this question is that Christ can dwell in us because He is pneumatic, that is, because He is the life-giving Spirit. We believe that in resurrection Christ is the Spirit, and we believe that in resurrection Christ has a body of flesh and bones. One need not deny the latter in order to affirm the former.

## The Pneumatic Christ and the Ascended Christ

Some may suppose that by believing that the resurrected, pneumatic Christ dwells in our regenerated spirit as the life-giving Spirit we somehow deny the fact that Christ has ascended to the height of the universe and has been enthroned in the third heaven as the Lord of all. There is, of course, no incompatibility in believing both that Christ

Christ lives in us  
subjectively as the  
Spirit, and He is  
sitting objectively at  
the right hand of God  
in the heavens.  
He is both the  
pneumatic Christ in our  
spirit and the ascended  
Christ in the heavens.

lives in us subjectively as the Spirit and that He is now sitting objectively at the right hand of God in the heavens. Christ is both the pneumatic Christ in our spirit and the ascended Christ in the heavens. Stephen could say, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56), and Paul could say, "Christ...lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Hebrews 2:9 says, "We see Jesus...crowned with glory and honor," and 2 Timothy 4:22 says, "The Lord be with your spirit." Romans 8:34 reveals that Christ Jesus is at the right hand of God interceding for us, and verse 10 reveals that Christ is in us. Colossians 1:27 says, "Christ in you, the hope of glory," and 3:1

charges us to "seek the things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God." In Ephesians 1:20-21 Paul testifies that God raised Christ from the dead and seated Him "at His right hand in the heavenlies, far above all rule and authority and power and lordship and every name that is named," but in 3:17 Paul prays, "That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith." Simultaneously, Christ is in the heavens and in our regenerated spirit:

This very Christ is now the Lord in the heavens and at the same time the Spirit within us. "Now the Lord is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:17). As Lord, He is in the heavens. As the Spirit, He is within us. As the One in the heavens, He is exercising His rulership, headship, and priesthood...Whatever He carries out as Lord, He applies to us as the Spirit...Whatever He intercedes, or executes, or ministers, is transmitted into our spirit...The Lord in the heavens and the Spirit in our spirit are one. (Lee, *Heavenly Ministry* 72)

It is absolutely unnecessary, even absurd, to set up a false dichotomy between the pneumatic Christ and the ascended Christ, and it is uncharitable to accuse others of denying the latter because they believe the former. Why not rather believe all that the Scriptures have spoken concerning the resurrected and ascended Christ? Instead of holding only to one side of the truth, we should recognize the principle of the twofoldness of divine truth. This principle obtains with

respect to the pneumatic Christ and the ascended Christ. On the one hand, the Bible reveals that Christ dwells in us as the Spirit; on the other hand, the Bible reveals that He is in the heavens as a glorified God-man. “Both, then, are to be received whether we can reconcile them or no. Their claim on our reception is not that we can unite them, but that God has testified both” (Govett 8). We should receive the twofold truth concerning the pneumatic Christ and the ascended Christ and praise Him that objectively He is a man in the heavens and that subjectively He is the Spirit in our spirit:

In heaven for us He’s the glorified man,  
The Forerunner entered, fulfilling God’s plan;  
Man into God bringing and making him one  
With God in the heav’nlies, in Him as the Son.

In us all the fulness of God dwells in Him;  
As Spirit He brings God Himself thus within,  
Revealing and making God real unto us,  
God one with us building in life glorious. (*Hymns* 491)

### The Indwelling Christ and the Coming Christ

A third objection related to the objective Christ and the subjective Christ involves the indwelling Christ and the Christ who, as the glorified Son of Man, will come again from the heavens to receive His bride and take possession of the earth. Some may wonder how a Christ who dwells in us as the life-giving Spirit “with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, will descend from heaven” (1 Thes. 4:16). The answer lies in recognizing the twofoldness of the divine truth regarding Christ’s coming back. On the one hand, Christ is objectively in the heavens and will descend objectively and visibly from the heavens. Hence, from the heavens “we eagerly await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:20). On the other hand, the Lord, the pneumatic Christ, will come forth from within us, for Christ is in us as our “hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

**W**e need to be deeply impressed with the fact that the Lord Jesus will come not only from the heavens but also from within us. While we are expecting Him to descend from the heavens, we need to realize that He will also come forth from within us. He dwells in us as the hope of glory, and at His coming He will burst forth from within us and thereby bring us fully into glory. This seems to be Paul’s thought in 2 Thessalonians 1:10, where he speaks of Christ coming “to be glorified in His saints and to be marveled at in all those who have believed.” A note on the word *glorified* in the Recovery Version is helpful in clarifying the two aspects of Christ’s coming:

The Lord is the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8); He was glorified in His resurrection and ascension (John 17:1; Luke

24:26; Heb. 2:9). Now He is in us as the hope of glory (Col. 1:27) to bring us into glory (Heb. 2:10). At His coming back, on the one hand He will come from the heavens with glory (Rev. 10:1; Matt. 25:31), and on the other hand He will be glorified in His saints; that is, His glory will be manifested from within His members, causing their body of humiliation to be transfigured into His glory, conforming it to the body of His glory (Phil. 3:21). Thus, the unbelievers will marvel at Him, admire Him, wonder at Him, in us, the believers.

Perhaps the foregoing discussion will be helpful in the sense of encouraging the believers to embrace the full divine truth concerning Christ and to avoid false antitheses between objective truths and subjective truths. Yes, the Lord Jesus resurrected with a body of flesh and bones; He is in the heavens as a glorified man; and He will descend from the heavens in His coming back. Yes, the resurrected Christ is the pneumatic Christ, the life-giving Spirit; the ascended Christ is the very One who is the Spirit in our spirit; and the Christ who will come again from the heavens is the One who will come from within us. Instead of using a partial truth to oppose a complete truth, it is much better to appreciate every aspect of Christ and experience Him in His all-inclusiveness.

The second category of objections to our testimony, grounded in the Word of God that the resurrected Christ is the pneumatic Christ, involves theological considerations with respect to the Godhead and to the Triune God—the eternal, coexisting, and coinhering Father, Son, and Spirit. The issues are momentous and complex and, due to the constraints of space, can be addressed here only in a provisional way.

### Immutability and Process

In keeping with the biblical revelation, we place great emphasis on the fact that in resurrection Christ *became* the life-giving Spirit. Some take issue with this notion of Christ’s second becoming and argue that it violates the truth regarding God’s immutability. In essence, they say this: “To claim that Christ became the life-giving Spirit posits change in the very being of God. Since God is immutable and thus cannot change, Christ could not have become the life-giving Spirit. Hence, it is erroneous to teach that in resurrection Christ became the Spirit.”

The answer to this objection rests upon a proper understanding of the twofold, complementary truth of God’s immutability and His process. The Bible reveals both that God is immutable in His essence and that He has been processed in His economy. God’s process in His economy does not compromise His essential immutability, and God’s immutability in His essence does not preclude His process in His economy. In Himself God is unchanging,

for His essence is immutable. His nature is unalterable; He can never become either more or less than what He is. Nevertheless, this eternal, immutable, unchanging God has, in Christ, passed through a process in time in order to dispense Himself into man for the accomplishment of His eternal purpose. Although this process involves a sequence in time, it absolutely does not involve any change in the immutable essence of God. We believe, in accordance with the Scriptures, both in the immutability of God and in the process through which God in Christ has passed for the carrying out of His economy.

Whereas God's immutability is related to His *being*, God's process is related to His *becoming*. In particular, this process is related to the two becomings of Christ—His becoming flesh through incarnation and His becoming the life-giving Spirit through resurrection. It is absolutely crucial for us to see that the process through which Christ passed to become the life-giving Spirit is an economical, not essential, matter. "Change with God can only be economical; it can never be essential. Essentially, our God cannot change. From eternity to eternity He remains the same in His essence. But in His economy the Triune God has changed in the sense of being processed" (Lee, *Conclusion* 914-915). As the Triune God embodied in Christ, God has changed only in His economy, not in His essence. Therefore, it is no violation of God's essential immutability to teach, as the apostle John does, that in the process of God's economy Christ, who is unchanging in His being, *became* the life-giving Spirit. Now, having become the Spirit as the pneumatic Christ, He will remain forever the same (Heb. 13:8—see *The Processed Christ* below).

In following the apostle John to affirm that in resurrection Christ became the holy *pneuma*, we do not call into question God's eternal immutability. Christ's becoming the life-giving Spirit through the processes of death and resurrection is a matter only of God's economy and therefore has no effect upon His immutable essence, His unchanging nature, and His eternal Godhead.

## Not Modalism

Others object to the notion of a pneumatic Christ by insisting that for us to teach that Christ is the life-giving Spirit is to fall into the heresy of modalism. Modalism is the theological doctrine that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are not three eternally distinct persons in the Godhead but rather three temporal modes or forms of activity in which God reveals Himself. According to the modalistic concept of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are not equally and eternally coexistent and coinherent in the Godhead but are merely successive manifestations of God, or three ephemeral modes of His activity. Modalism thus denies that God is triune in His inner being, maintaining that God's revealing of Himself as Father, Son, and Spirit in no way corresponds to anything in the ultimate nature of the Godhead (Chadwick 87). For the modalists the Father, the Son, and the Spirit refer only to the way in which God reveals Himself but bear no resemblance to His inner being (Bruce 256). Modalism appears today in the heretical teaching of the Oneness Pentecostals, who claim that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not "real, distinct, coequal persons in the eternal Godhead, but are only different roles that one divine person temporarily assumes" (Boyd 9).

Modalism is contrary to God's revelation of Himself in the Scriptures. The one, true, and living God is eternally three-one. He is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, all of whom are God (1 Pet. 1:2; Eph. 1:17; John 1:1; Rom. 9:5; Heb. 1:8; Acts 5:3-4), all of whom are eternal (Isa. 9:6; Heb. 1:12; 7:3; 9:14), and all of whom exist at the same time (Matt. 3:16-17; John 14:16-17; Eph. 3:14-17; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14). In contrast to modalism, the Bible reveals that from eternity to eternity the Father, the Son, and the Spirit exist essentially in the Godhead in their co-inherence and coexistence, even during the three stages of their economical work for the carrying out of God's eternal purpose. In God's economy, His administrative arrangement, the Father has purposed in the Son and with

## The Processed Christ Remaining the Same Forever

Although God has changed in His economy, no longer will He change economically. Rather, He will remain the same. This is the reason Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes, even forever." Before "yesterday" Jesus Christ did change economically. He changed by becoming a man. He changed in resurrection by becoming the life-giving Spirit. But now, after His resurrection, Jesus Christ remains the same. In Hebrews 13:8, a verse written after Christ's incarnation and resurrection, the word "yesterday" counts from the day of His resurrection. Christ's "today" is today, and His "forever" includes the coming age and eternity. Therefore, it is a mistake to use this verse as the basis for claiming that the Triune God cannot change economically. First Christ became a man through incarnation, and then He became the life-giving Spirit through resurrection. Now that He is the life-giving Spirit He will remain forever the same.

Witness Lee, *The Conclusion of the New Testament*, p. 915

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the Spirit (Eph. 1:4-6—the first stage); the Son has accomplished the Father’s purpose by the Spirit (vv. 7-12—the second stage); and the Spirit, with the Father and the Son, applies what the Son has accomplished according to the Father’s purpose (vv. 13-14—the third stage). While God’s economy is being carried out in these three successive stages, the eternal coexistence and coinherence of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in the Godhead remain intact and are not jeopardized.

In God’s economy Christ in His resurrection became pneumatic; He became the life-giving Spirit. Contrary to modalism, this does not mean that Christ, the eternal Son of God, ceased to exist. Just as Christ’s second becoming is an economical process that does not threaten God’s immutability, so Christ’s becoming the Spirit is also an economical step that does not threaten the eternal Divine Trinity. Once again, the divine truth is twofold, this time with respect to the Trinity. On the one hand, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit coexist and coinhere distinctly in the eternal Godhead; on the other hand, the last Adam, Christ in the flesh, became the life-giving Spirit in the outworking of God’s economy. With this in view, we reject the accusation that by teaching that Christ became the Spirit in God’s economy we fall into the heresy of modalism.

### **Not a Change in Christ’s Being the Only Begotten Son of God**

Christ’s becoming the pneumatic Christ, the Spirit, in resurrection did not entail change in His status as the only begotten Son of God. The title *only begotten Son* refers to His deity and to His identity in the Godhead. From eternity to eternity Christ is the only begotten Son of God (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). As the only begotten Son He is of the same essence with the Father and the Spirit. All the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him (Col. 2:9), for He possesses the full essence of God with all its unique attributes, both communicable and incommunicable. To say, as the Bible does, that Christ is the only begotten Son of God does not mean that He was begotten of God at some point in eternity past. His begetting refers not to an event but to an eternal relationship with the Father, His unique, eternal source. In the Godhead He is the expression of God, “the effulgence of His glory and the impress of His substance” (Heb. 1:3). This is eternal, unalterable, immutable.

Nevertheless, in time the eternal only begotten Son of God became the Son of Man (John 3:13; 6:53; 13:31), the God-man who died for our sins and was raised for our justification (Rom. 4:25). In resurrection this God-man became the firstborn Son of God, making us who believe in Him His many brothers, the many sons of God. For this reason the risen Christ could say to Mary, “Go to My brothers and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your

Father, and My God and your God” (John 20:17). This indicates that through His resurrection His disciples were regenerated with the divine life, which had been released by His death (19:34). Therefore, in resurrection the eternal only begotten Son of God became “the Firstborn among many brothers” (Rom. 8:29). These many brothers are the “many sons” whom the Father is leading into glory (Heb. 2:10). Before His resurrection Christ, the only begotten Son, was the Father’s individual expression. Through His resurrection His brothers, the many sons as the multiplication of the Son in the divine life (John 12:24), were brought forth to be the corporate expression of the Father in the Son. Now the Lord Jesus can speak of His Father and our Father; He is not ashamed to call us brothers (Heb. 2:11). Because the firstborn Son—Christ, the eternal Son in His resurrected humanity—and the many sons—the regenerated children of God (John 1:12-13) who participate in His divinity but not in His deity—are the same in life and nature, God is the Father not only of the Lord Himself but also of His many brothers who are “all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26). With respect to Christ’s deity and to His identity in the Godhead, He is still the only begotten Son, and as such He cannot have brothers. Yet, in His resurrected and glorified humanity, He, the pneumatic God-man, has become the Firstborn among many brothers. The vital point here is this: Christ’s becoming the firstborn Son of God in resurrection in no way compromises or alters His eternal status as the only begotten Son of God.

**T**he principle is the same with Christ’s becoming the pneumatic Christ, the holy *pneuma*, the life-giving Spirit. With respect to His deity, He remains the only begotten Son of God in the eternal, immutable Godhead, but with respect to changes He experienced in the process of God’s economy, He, the resurrected God-man, has been “pneumatized” to become the Spirit, the Lord Spirit. On the one hand, Christ retains His eternal status as the only begotten Son of God; this is a matter of His eternal being. On the other hand, the resurrected Christ, the glorified Son of Man, is now something that He was not before—the Firstborn among many brothers and the life-giving Spirit; this is a matter of His becoming, first the flesh through incarnation and then the Spirit through resurrection. From eternity to eternity He is the unique only begotten Son, yet for eternity He will be the firstborn Son of God and the life-giving Spirit for our experience and enjoyment of Him to “the praise of the glory of His grace” (Eph. 1:6).

### **No Confusion of Persons in the Godhead**

Yet another objection to our testimony that in God’s economy Christ became the life-giving Spirit is that such a doctrine confuses the three persons of the Godhead. This objection, it is fair to say, rests on the assumption that to

identify Christ and the Spirit in any way is to confound the persons of the Godhead. At present, it is sufficient to say two things in response.

Those who raise this objection need to face the fact that it is the Bible itself which identifies Christ and the Spirit, especially when the believers' experience of the resurrected Christ is in view. It is the Lord Jesus Himself in John 14 who reveals that the One called "another Comforter" is actually Himself, the first Comforter, in resurrection. It is 1 Corinthians 15:45b which says, "The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit"; 2 Corinthians 3:17 which says, "The Lord is the Spirit"; 2 Corinthians 3:18 which refers to the resurrected Christ as "the Lord Spirit"; Romans 8:9-11 which identifies the indwelling Christ with the indwelling Spirit; 1 Corinthians 6:17 which declares, "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit"; 2 Timothy 4:22 which assures us that the Lord is with our spirit; Revelation 5:6 which clearly indicates that "the seven Spirits of God" (1:4) are the seven eyes of Christ the Lamb, thereby associating Christ and the Spirit in a most intimate and personal way. Of course, the Bible reveals that Christ and the Spirit are distinct. What seems to be neglected by many is that the Bible also reveals a real and practical experiential identification of the risen Christ and the Spirit, referring to the Spirit of God as "the Spirit of Jesus" (Acts 16:7), "the Spirit of Christ" (Rom. 8:9), and "the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:19). We would ask those who allege that we confuse Christ and the Spirit to offer their own explanation of how and when the Spirit of God became the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of Christ, and the Spirit of Jesus Christ and present their own interpretation of those New Testament texts which, in relation to the believers' spiritual experience, identify Christ and the Spirit. We do not confuse the persons of the Godhead, but we do believe and teach what the Bible reveals regarding the resurrected Christ being the pneumatic Christ, the all-inclusive, life-giving Spirit.

**W**e would also respond to the allegation of confusing the persons of the Godhead by noting that from our study and observation this objection is often raised by those who are *de facto* tritheists—believers who regard the three of the Godhead not only as distinct but also as separate. In order not to confuse, or confound, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, they consider not only that they are distinct but go to the extreme, bordering on the heresy of tritheism, that they are separate. E. Calvin Beisner exhibits tritheistic tendencies when he says, "There is one God who is a being composed of three individuals" (24). Consider

To say that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are individuals or that they are separate goes beyond the divine revelation and comes dangerously close to the heresy of tritheism.

also the following remark by Paul E. Little: "There are three separate and distinct Persons in the Godhead" (32). To say that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are *individuals* or that they are *separate*—meaning "set or kept apart" or "existing as an independent entity" (*The American Heritage College Dictionary*)—goes beyond the divine revelation and comes dangerously close to the heresy of tritheism. "There are not three individual personalities in God. There is only one divine Personality, which contains a threefold distinction" (Runia, 116).

Many who are not tritheists in doctrine are tritheists at heart. Speaking of those who "nurse an error [tritheism] in their hearts," Stuart Olyott says, "Many Christians, in their heart of hearts, tend to think of God more in terms of His three-ness than His one-ness. They think of Him more easily as Three than as One-in-Three and Three-in-One" (87). This error, Olyott goes on to say, "keeps them from thinking of God as they should" (87).

The point here is that certain ones who object that we confuse the persons of the Godhead may actually be taking offense at a biblical truth which challenges their tritheistic separation of the three of the Divine Trinity into "individuals." It may be their own proclivity toward tritheism which causes them to misrepresent as "confusion" the teaching that Christ in resurrection, being pneumatic, is the Spirit in and for our experience of Him in God's economy. Their tendency to separate the three of the Godhead may give them a false clarity concerning the Trinity. Others who fail to embrace a "clarity" resulting from such tritheistic separation of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are accused, wrongly in our case, of confusing "the persons" of the Triune God. Those who "nurse" the error of tritheism "in their hearts" by separating Christ from the Spirit should take heed to the warning issued by W. H. Griffith Thomas with respect to the theological use of the term *person*:

Like all human language, it is liable to be accused of inadequacy and even positive error. It certainly must not be pressed too far, or it will lead to Tritheism. While we use the term to denote distinctions in the Godhead, we do not imply distinctions which amount to separateness, but distinctions which are associated with essential mutual co-inherence or inclusiveness. (31)

Runia issues a similar warning: "The term 'person' is not adequate.... Today a 'person' is a self-conscious, autonomous individual. But if you apply this to the Trinity it

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sounds as if you are speaking of three Gods” (116). Only when we renounce every form of tritheism (along, of course, with modalism) can we see clearly and understand rightly what is revealed in the New Testament regarding the pneumatic Christ. Then we will realize that to say that the resurrected Christ is the life-giving Spirit is neither to teach modalism nor to confuse the persons of the Divine Trinity.

Now we come to the third category of objections, which we identify as compromise solutions because they represent a compromise of divine truth with religious tradition, especially with the tritheism that underlies much of what is supposed to be orthodox theology.

### **Christ in the Spirit instead of Christ as the Spirit**

In the attempt to explain how Christ can have a resurrected body yet dwell in the believers, some have resorted to a traditional theological formulation. Instead of saying, as the New Testament reveals, that Christ dwells in us *as the Spirit*, they prefer to teach that Christ dwells in us *in the Spirit*. Being loathe to confess that Christ *is the Spirit*, they speak of a Christ who is *in the Spirit*. The *is* of the divine revelation becomes the *in* of traditional theology. The difference actually consists in a single letter—*n* instead of *s*. Some who are so assured that Christ is now *in* the Spirit even go so far as to identify as heretical the claim that Christ in resurrection, being pneumatic, *is* the Spirit.

The formulation *Christ in the Spirit* is defective for at least five reasons.

First, nowhere are we told in the New Testament that Christ, or the Son, is in the Spirit. The Bible does say that the Father is in the Son and that the Son is in the Father (John 14:10-11; 17:21), but in the New Testament we do not have the thought that Christ is in the Spirit. Rather, we are told that the resurrected Christ became the Spirit and that the Lord is the Spirit. This Spirit is the pneumatic Christ, the Christ who in resurrection became the life-giving Spirit.

Second, those who deny that Christ is the Spirit and say only that He is in the Spirit often are neglectful of or careless in interpreting the texts which reveal or indicate that Christ is now the pneumatic Christ in resurrection. Those who insist on the traditional formula of *Christ in the Spirit* need to answer some crucial questions. How do you explain verses such as 1 Corinthians 15:45b and 2 Corinthians 3:17? If the Lord Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3:18 is not the resurrected Christ, who is He? How do you refute our understanding of John 14:16-18, especially our pointing to the fact that the One called “another Comforter” is actually the first Comforter in resurrection? How do you

explain the significance of the pronouns in this passage? First Corinthians 6:17 tells us that “he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.” If the resurrected Christ is not the Spirit, how can we be “one spirit” with Him? Also, our critics need to account for the evidence in the New Testament in support of the view that Christ is the Spirit and the complete lack of evidence for the concept that Christ is merely in the Spirit. Reciting traditional formulas will not do; the texts need to be faithfully interpreted.

Third, the expression *Christ in the Spirit* is vague and ambiguous. What does it really mean to say that Christ is now in the Spirit? Is He in the Spirit in the same way as the Father is in Him? How did resurrection cause Him to be in the Spirit? Was He not in the Spirit prior to His resurrection? Those who teach only that Christ is in the Spirit, not that He is the Spirit, need to explain how a person with a body of flesh and bones can be in the Spirit. What is the difference in saying that Christ is in us and that the Spirit is in us, both of which are biblical realities, and saying that Christ is in us in the Spirit? Does Christ actually dwell in the believers, or is He merely represented by the Spirit? Those who deny that Christ is the Spirit and who preach that Christ is in the Spirit must clearly explain what they mean. Furthermore, it is incumbent upon those who preach this to show that by so doing they are not actually avoiding or explaining away precious biblical truth in an attempt to preserve the traditions of their preferred theology.

Fourth, this inaccurate way of viewing the relationship between the resurrected Christ and the Spirit can hinder the believers in pursuing the experience and enjoyment of the pneumatic Christ revealed in the New Testament, especially in the Epistles. Genuine spiritual experience must be based on the truth. If we are inaccurate with respect to the truth, we are likely to be deficient in our experience. A Christ who is pneumatic, who is the Spirit, is a Christ whom we can eat, drink, and breathe; He is a Christ whom we can experience and enjoy as our life, our life supply, and our everything as we come to know Him in His boundless, unsearchable riches. In experience the resurrected Christ is identical to the Spirit. Seeing this biblical revelation ushers us into the genuine subjective experience of the pneumatic Christ. Denying that Christ is the Spirit and insisting that somehow He is only in the Spirit can have the effect of retaining the believers in a realm of objective doctrine and of frustrating them from the personal enjoyment of the Christ who dwells in them as the Spirit and with whom they, through regeneration, have been joined to be one spirit.

Fifth, the claim that Christ is in the Spirit may be a veiled form of tritheism. Much of traditional, “historic” theology is tritheistic, at least implicitly, and vast numbers of ordinary believers are tritheists at heart. Latent tritheism may also

be a factor in the misreading of those portions of Scripture which reveal or indicate that Christ is the Spirit. In fact, adamant insistence that Christ is not the Spirit but is in the Spirit may in some cases be a desperate attempt to defend a systematic theology that is tritheistic at the core.

For all these reasons we must reject and repudiate as inaccurate and inadequate the concept that our Christ is in the Spirit but is not the Spirit. The Scriptures attest not that Christ is merely in the Spirit but that in resurrection He is the life-giving Spirit. We therefore must continue to affirm the revelation in the Gospel of John concerning the pneumatic Christ. In our view to claim that Christ is in the Spirit and to deny that He is the Spirit is to compromise the truth regarding Christ and the Spirit.

#### **A “Pneumafied” Christ instead of the Pneumatic Christ**

A particularly striking compromise solution is propounded by Philip Wesley Comfort in his recent study *I Am the Way: A Spiritual Journey through the Gospel of John*. On the one hand, Comfort wants to say that in resurrection “Jesus became life-giving spirit” “in the sense that his mortal existence and form were metamorphosed into a spiritual existence and form” (165, 166). He firmly denies that “Jesus became the Spirit” (165), preferring to say that when the Lord Jesus arose, “the indwelling Spirit penetrated and saturated his body so as to constitute his entire being with spirit” (167). On the other hand, he says of the Lord that “He had to become Spirit” (79), and refers to “the Lord becoming Spirit through the glorification of resurrection” (79). Now that the Lord Jesus has become Spirit, we “have his Spirit” (167). Commenting on John 14:16-20, Comfort declares, “The Spirit of reality...was none other than *Christ as the Spirit* coming to them” (128, emphasis added). In one place Comfort denies that Jesus became the Spirit (165), and in another place he writes of “Christ as the Spirit” (128). Elsewhere, Comfort claims that the Son did not become the Spirit (166). Furthermore, in Comfort’s view “as spirit,” not “as the Spirit,” “Christ is now able to indwell all of his believers” (169). Thus, he testifies, “I have the glorified, resurrected Christ as spirit dwelling in me” (169). This seems to indicate that Christ dwells in him not as the Spirit but merely as spirit. This appears to be in conflict with an earlier statement: “The Spirit [not spirit] who would be in them would be none other than Christ in them” (128). Then Comfort goes on to make the following admission: “According to Christian experience, there is no distinguishable difference between the experience of Christ and the experience of the Spirit. The

A Christ who is pneumatic, who is the Spirit, is a Christ whom we can eat, drink, and breathe; He is a Christ whom we can experience and enjoy as our life, our life supply, and our everything.

two are one in the same” (128). The more I examine Comfort’s explication of the relationship between the resurrected Christ and the Spirit revealed in the Gospel of John, the more I am convinced that, at best, what he offers is a compromise between traditional trinitarian theology, with its latent or implied tritheism, and the mysterious divine revelation unfolded in the New Testament.

Apart from the inconsistencies noted above, Comfort’s compromise solution has a number of other defects. First, in actuality, Comfort has two Spirits. Christ “had to become Spirit” (not spirit); hence, the resurrected Christ is Spirit. This is the first Spirit. In addition, Comfort distinguishes this Spirit from the Holy Spirit, the second of the two Spirits implied by his theology. Christ is now Spirit, but, according to Comfort, this Spirit is not the Holy Spirit. Thus, in this exegesis of John there are two divine Spirits—the Spirit and the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, in Comfort’s theology seemingly there are two entities—two spirits—that give life: one who is called “life-giving spirit” and another who is the Spirit who gives life (John 6:63; 2 Cor. 3:6). Comfort claims that the resurrected Christ is “life-giving spirit” (not merely “living spirit”). The Bible clearly and emphatically reveals that the giving of life is a function of the Spirit of God, the third of the Divine Trinity. This indicates that, in practice, Comfort has two distinct entities who function in the way of giving life. First, there is the “pneumafied” Christ (79, 167), a “life-giving spirit” who gives life, and then there is the Spirit who gives life. It seems to me that such a view implies the existence of two life-giving Spirits. To this kind of teaching I would respond with Witness Lee: “Who is the Spirit who gives life? Do you believe that besides the Holy Spirit there is another divine Spirit who gives life? This is illogical” (*Truth* 29).

The suggestion that there are two divine Spirits—the Spirit and the Holy Spirit—and two life-giving spiritual entities—a Christ who is “life-giving spirit” and the Spirit who gives life—points to the possibility of even more serious error—a subtle form of tritheism, the notion that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are three Gods. In fact, the suggestion that there are two Spirits, with Christ as the Spirit differing from the Holy Spirit, may imply not three Gods but four, the Father, the Son, and two Spirits.

Comfort’s treatment of the “pneumafied” Christ is weakened further by his failure to distinguish between the

reality that the three of the Divine Trinity, being immutable in essence, coexist and coinhere eternally and distinctly in the Godhead and the fact that the Triune God in Christ has passed through a process in God's economy to become *the Spirit* (John 7:39), the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, in order to dispense Himself into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people. After noting that "all three 'persons' of the Godhead are eternal, distinct, and unchangeable," he goes on to say, in keeping with tradition and articulating one side of the truth, that "one did not become the other: the Father did not become the Son, nor did the Son become the Spirit. The Triune God did not evolve from one mode to another—from Father to Son to Spirit. The three have always remained distinct yet one" (166). We agree with Comfort in upholding the eternal distinction of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in the Godhead, but we take issue with his using this aspect of the truth to deny another aspect of the truth—the truth that in Christ the Triune God has been processed and consummated to be the Spirit. In this sense, Christ in resurrection has become not simply "life-giving spirit" but the pneumatic Christ as the life-giving Spirit, the Lord Spirit, the other Comforter, the Spirit of reality, the all-inclusive Spirit. By taking a portion of the truth revealed in the Gospel of John and forcing it into the confines of theological tradition with its tritheistic propensities, a theology of compromise is produced. Such a theology cannot be a proper vessel to convey the depths of the truth concerning the all-inclusive, pneumatic Christ contained in God's holy Word.

Comfort's compromise solution leaves unanswered a number of important questions: Who is the Christ who dwells in the believers—a Christ who is "life-giving spirit" or a Christ who has become "Spirit" or "Christ as the Spirit"? Are these one or two or three? What is the difference between Christ dwelling in us as the Spirit (a view Comfort expresses) and Christ dwelling in us as "life-giving spirit" (a view Comfort also expresses)? Also, how does the indwelling of Christ as "life-giving spirit," Christ as Spirit, and Christ as the Spirit relate to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit? How many are dwelling in us? What is the relationship between Christ in His heavenly ministry and Christ indwelling us as the Spirit? How does Christ live in us as "life-giving spirit" since He also has a body of flesh and bones? Perhaps the fundamental question is this: Does this writer believe that Christ Himself actually dwells in the believers, and if so, what exactly is the mode of this indwelling?

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regenerated spirit.

Comfort's teaching concerning the "pneumafied" Christ raises more questions than it solves. It not only entails compromise; it is also pervaded by ambiguity, if not confusion. In contrast, John's revelation concerning the pneumatic Christ, although mysterious and profound, is crystal clear. Instead of embracing Comfort's compromise solution, it is much better to affirm, with apostolic writers such as Paul and John, that since Christ in resurrection has become the life-giving Spirit, the Lord is now the Spirit and it is as the Spirit that He dwells in us and is one with our regenerated spirit.

#### **Our Need to Know the Pneumatic Christ**

In anticipation of material to be covered in the second part of this article—to be entitled "The Experience of the Pneumatic Christ Revealed in the Gospel of John"—and as a conclusion to this part, I wish to identify six reasons why all the believers in Christ need to know Christ as the pneumatic Christ revealed in the Gospel of John.

*To know the pneumatic Christ is to know a crucial point of the truth concerning the person, work, and ministry of Christ.* To deny the pneumatic Christ is to deny a great truth presented by the apostle John. Consider the "flow" in the Gospel of John. Christ as the very God—the eternal Word who was with God and who was God—became flesh and tabernacled among us. As the God-man He lived the life of a God-man, denying His natural human life to live by the Father, to do the Father's will, to seek the Father's glory, and to accomplish the Father's work. After living such a divinely human life, He died an all-inclusive death on the cross, where He was crucified as the Lamb of God to take away sin, as the bronze serpent to deal with Satan, and as a grain of wheat to release the divine life for His multiplication and the divine glory for His corporate expression. Then He resurrected physically with a body of flesh and bones and pneumatically (or, spiritually) became the Spirit as the promised second Comforter. On the day of His resurrection, He appeared to His disciples in His resurrected body and breathed Himself into them as the Holy Spirit, the holy breath, to be their life, their life supply, and their everything for the producing and building up of the house of God. If we see this clearly and if we receive it without compromise, we will begin to realize that for the carrying out of God's New Testament economy, it was absolutely crucial for Christ, the eternal Son of God in the Godhead, to pass through death and enter into resurrection to become the pneumatic Christ, the holy *pneuma*.

*The Spirit as the pneumatic Christ is actually the reality of*

*Christ's resurrection.* If we would know Christ and the power of His resurrection (Phil. 3:10), we must know Him as the Spirit (1:19). In contrast, to deny that Christ is the life-giving Spirit is virtually equal to denying the reality of Christ's resurrection. The pneumatic Christ, the life-giving Spirit, is the life pulse of the Lord's resurrection. If the Lord Jesus had merely been resurrected with a body and had not become the life-giving Spirit, His resurrection would simply be an objective fact (although, of course, a marvelous one) unrelated to life and to our experience of Christ as life (John 10:10; 11:25; 14:6; 1 John 5:11-12; Col. 3:4). Christ's resurrection, which is a matter absolutely related to life, was not only an act in itself; it was a process to bring forth the life-giving Spirit (Lee, *Conclusion* 797-799).

*The pneumatic Christ is the Spirit of reality, who guides us into all the reality (John 14:16-17; 15:26; 16:13-15).* The reality into which the pneumatic Christ guides us is Himself as the embodiment of the Father. If we deny the Spirit of reality by denying that the resurrected Christ is this Spirit, we will limit ourselves to the realm of objective orthodox doctrine and will therefore remain devoid of reality. We may teach the truth about Christ objectively, but we will not have Christ as our reality inwardly.

*It is only as the Spirit that Christ can dwell in us.* The Christ who came in the flesh could be with and among His disciples, but He could not be in them. Knowing that it is God's desire to dwell in the believers in Christ as the Spirit, the Lord Jesus went away from them through death and then came back to them in resurrection as the indwelling life-giving Spirit. If we do not know the pneumatic Christ, we cannot properly and adequately know the indwelling Christ. An indication of this lack of knowledge is the fact that today's Christians often speak of a Christ who is with them but rarely testify of their experience and enjoyment of the Christ who is in them.

*Only by knowing the pneumatic Christ can we experience and enjoy the all-inclusive Christ revealed in the Gospel of John.* This Gospel is profoundly rich in the revelation of Christ in His all-inclusiveness: He is the Word, God, the tabernacle, the temple, the Son of God, the Son of Man, the Christ, the ladder, the Savior, the Lamb of God, the way, the reality, the life, the light of the world, truth, grace, resurrection, the bronze serpent, the Shepherd, the door, the pasture, the riven rock, the bread of life, the Bridegroom, the grain of wheat, the true vine, the breath of life, the great I Am. What a Christ! Only when we breathe Christ into us as the Holy Spirit, the holy *pneuma*, do we have the reality of this wonderful One in our daily Christian life and experience. If we would experience the all-inclusive Christ presented in John, we must know the pneumatic Christ revealed in John.

*Only by experiencing and enjoying the pneumatic Christ can we become the corporate expression of Christ.* In the Gospel of John this corporate expression, the object of God's dispensing and the goal of His economy, is signified by the temple, the bride, the kingdom, the flock, the Father's house, the true vine, and the new man. If in reality and practicality we would participate in this organic, corporate expression of the processed and consummated Triune God in the resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit, we must know, experience, and enjoy the pneumatic Christ revealed in the Gospel of John. AFC

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