

# PAUL'S

May God the Father grant us a spirit of wisdom and revelation that we may see the mystery of Christ (Eph. 1:17). May we be able to say with Paul that by revelation this mystery was made known to us. May

# HEAVENLY

**P**aul was commissioned by the Lord to complete the word of God in the New Testament (Col. 1:25) concerning two great mysteries: the mystery of God, Christ, (Col. 2:2) and the mystery of Christ, the church (Eph. 3:4). Paul declared, "This mystery is great, but I speak with regard to Christ and the church" (5:32). This is the great mystery of godliness, which is God manifested and expressed in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:15-16). God is a mystery, and Christ as the embodiment of God to express Him is the mystery of God. Furthermore, the church as the Body of Christ to express Christ is the mystery of Christ. Thus, the church is the mystery of Christ, who is the mystery of God, who is Himself a mystery. The church as the Body of Christ is mysterious to the uttermost. We can apprehend this mystery only by revelation. This is why Paul said, "By revelation the mystery was made known to me" (Eph. 3:3). Watchman Nee makes the following crucial statements regarding our need for a revelation of the Body of Christ:

As Christians we need very much to see the Body of Christ. But the only way we can see the Body of Christ is by God's revelation. We cannot understand the Body of Christ with our mind. Even if we have all the knowledge there is about the Body of Christ, we still may not have seen the Body of Christ or touched the reality of the Body. Only those who have received revelation from God will see the Body of Christ, and only they will enter the reality of the Body. (11-12)

The Body of Christ is not a doctrine; it is a realm. It is not a teaching, but a life. Many Christians seek to teach the truth of the Body, but few know the life of the Body. The Body of Christ is an experience in a totally different realm. A man can know the book of Romans without being justified. Similarly, a man can know the book of Ephesians without seeing the Body of Christ. We do not need knowledge; rather, we need revelation to know the reality of the Body of Christ and to enter the realm of the Body. Only a revelation from God will usher us into the realm of the Body, and only then will the Body of Christ become our experience. (17)

# VISION

BY ED MARKS

the Lord save us from being the wise and intelligent, from whom God would hide the mysteries of His economy (Matt. 11:25). Instead, may we be like infants, children, who are not occupied with old thoughts and concepts but are emptied from within and open to receive new revelation and new thoughts from the mind of God concerning His heart's desire (cf. Mark 10:14-15).

Paul is the only writer of the New Testament to use the term *the Body of Christ* (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 1:22-23; 2:16; 4:4, 16). He received this particular and awesome revelation at his conversion. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus, later known as Paul, is unique in the record of the Scriptures. There are not adequate adjectives to describe its import in the history of God and man. Whatever expressions one would use to describe its contents would be in the realm of understatement. But we must try here, by the mercy of God, to relate what Paul called *the heavenly vision* (Acts 26:19). The contents of Saul's conversion are so crucial to the divine revelation that it is recorded three separate times in the Acts of the Apostles—in chapters nine, twenty-two, and twenty-six. As Paul drew near to Damascus a light from heaven flashed around him. He called this "a light from heaven beyond the brightness of the sun" (26:13). May we open to the Lord to receive this light from heaven. We will use Acts 9 as our basic text to see that Saul's recorded encounter with the ascended Christ on his way to Damascus contains in seed form the intrinsic contents of his entire ministry in his fourteen Epistles, focused on the revelation of the Body of Christ. In the following portions of Scripture, we would like to highlight three particular words which contain great revelation:

But Saul, still breathing threatening and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked for

letters from him to Damascus for the synagogues, so that if he found any who were of the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. And as he went, he drew near to Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. And he fell on the ground and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting *Me*? And he said, Who are You, Lord? And He said, I am *Jesus*, whom you persecute. But rise up and enter into the city, and it will be told to you what you must do. (vv. 1-6)

**I**n order to bring Saul into the fellowship of the Body of Christ He sent a disciple named Ananias to him. The Lord told Ananias, “Go, for this man is a chosen *vessel* to Me, to bear My name before both the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel” (v. 15).

The three words which we have highlighted above are *Me*, *Jesus*, and *vessel* (Lee 211-217). Let us consider each one of these words and the revelation contained therein.

### The Great and Wonderful “Me”— The Mystery of Christ

We have to take note of whom Paul was persecuting. He was breathing out threatening and murder against *the disciples of the Lord*. But the voice from heaven said, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting *Me*?” Then Paul asked, “Who are You, Lord?” And He said, “*I am Jesus, whom you persecute.*” Who is this “Me” here and who is this “Jesus” here? Although Saul was persecuting the disciples of the Lord, the voice from heaven did not ask, “Why are you persecuting them?” but “Why are you persecuting *Me*?” Although Saul was persecuting the disciples of the Lord, the voice from heaven did not say, “They are the disciples of the Lord whom you persecute,” but “I am Jesus, whom you persecute.” The disciples of the Lord are this “Me” and this “Jesus.” A note concerning this in the Recovery Version of the New Testament is wonderfully illuminating:

A corporate “Me,” comprising Jesus the Lord and all His believers. Saul did not have this revelation. He thought that he was persecuting Stephen and other Jesus-followers, who were in the Way, which he considered heresy (24:14). He did not know that when he persecuted these he persecuted Jesus, for they were one with Him by being united to Him through their faith in Him. He considered that he was persecuting people on earth, never thinking that he touched anyone in heaven. To his great

surprise a voice from heaven told him that He was the One whom he was persecuting and that His name was Jesus. To him this was a unique revelation in the universe! By this he began to see that the Lord Jesus and His believers are one great person—the wonderful “Me.” This must have impressed and affected him for his future ministry concerning Christ and the church as the great mystery of God (Eph. 5:32) and laid a solid foundation for his unique ministry. (Acts 9:4, note 1)

The Lord’s brief word to Saul was an unveiling of the Body of Christ. Is not a person’s body him? Is not his finger him? Is not his ear him? If his finger were to be struck, “persecuted,” by a hammer, would he not shout in pain? He would not ask, “Why do you persecute my finger?” but “Why do you persecute me?” To persecute his finger is to persecute him. In like manner, to persecute the disciples of the Lord is to persecute Jesus Himself, because His disciples are His very members, the members of His Body (Eph. 5:30). In this sense, His disciples are Jesus. They are organically united to Jesus through their faith in Him. Of course, they do not possess His Headship or His Godhead, which are incommunicable, but they possess His divine life (1 John 5:11-12) and His divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4) for His divine expression. Just as a person’s body is his expression, the Body of Christ is the expression of Christ. Through Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, He and His believers are now one great corporate, wonderful, mysterious person.

**T**he individual Jesus in the Gospels was the embodiment of God, the One in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt bodily (Col. 2:9). His physical body was the temple of God, the dwelling place of God. The incarnation was a great transition from the material realm to the personal realm. In the Old Testament God dwelt in the material temple. In the New Testament He dwells in a person. Jesus prophesied that the temple of His body would be destroyed on the cross and raised up in resurrection. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up....He spoke of the temple of His body” (John 2:19, 21). When Jesus was crucified, the temple of His physical body was destroyed. When He resurrected, His physical body became His mystical Body. Now His mystical Body, of which we are members, is the temple of God, the dwelling place of God (1 Cor. 3:16-17; Eph. 2:21-22).

The Lord Jesus likened Himself in His incarnated state to a grain of wheat: “Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless

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the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). The shell of the grain is the embodiment of the wheat germ, the wheat life. Jesus was the embodiment of the divine germ, the divine life. As the unique grain, He had to fall into the earth to die so that the divine germ, the divine life, within Him could be released. His resurrection was a germinating, life-dispensing resurrection in which He produced His believers as many grains through regeneration (1 Pet. 1:3). These many grains are then ground and blended together into one bread, one loaf. This one bread is the Body of Christ: “Seeing that there is one bread, we who are many are one Body” (1 Cor. 10:17). “God has blended the body together” (12:24).

Through His resurrection and ascension, the man Jesus was made the Head of the Body (Eph. 1:22). As the Head of the Body, He is the mystery of God. Through His resurrection and ascension, He also was enlarged and expanded to include myriads of believers, who became the members of His Body. Now He is not only the Head of the Body (Col. 1:18) but also the Body of the Head. This Body is the mystery of Christ. He is in totality, as the Head and the Body, the one new man—the corporate Christ (Eph. 2:15). Thus, Paul says, “For even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ” (1 Cor. 12:12). This verse unveils the Christ who is the Body, the Body-Christ. Mary McDonough, in her classic work *God’s Plan of Redemption*, says that this is the “Composite Christ,” the Christ who is completed by and composed of His many members (81).

Shortly after the Lord appeared to Paul, He began to educate him concerning the Body of Christ. Acts 22 tells us that after the Lord Jesus revealed Himself to Paul, he asked, “What shall I do, Lord?” Paul expected an answer from the Lord as the Head, but the Lord would not answer him directly. Instead, He would answer him and direct him through a member of His Body. The Lord responded by saying, “Rise up and go into Damascus, and there it will be told to you concerning all the things which have been appointed to you to do” (v. 10). First, Paul encountered the ascended Lord as the Head of the Body. Then the Lord directed him to go into the city so that he could know Him as the Body and know Him in and through a member of His Body. It is very touching to hear Ananias coming to Paul and saying, “Brother Saul” (v. 13). This shows that Paul had received the Lord as his

life essentially to become a brother of Christ. Without Ananias’s visit to him, Paul’s salvation could not have been confirmed, and he could not have been identified with the Body of Christ. Without Ananias, Paul had no way to receive his sight. Without Ananias Paul had no way to be filled with the Holy Spirit for God’s economical move (9:17-18). Without Ananias Paul had no way to carry out his God-appointed ministry (22:14-16). What a lesson this is to us! Without the members of the Body of Christ, we have no way to go on with the Lord. Many times we have no revelation from God. We cannot see. We must learn to depend on the members of the Body, on Christ as the Body, for new revelation. Many times we do not have the power to serve the Lord for His purpose. Often it seems that we have no way to carry out our function in the Body in God’s unique ministry. We must learn to depend on the prayer of the members so that we can be filled with the Spirit of power to accomplish our God-appointed service. Hear what Watchman Nee has to say in regard to our need to depend on our fellow-members:

What are the eyes, ears, hands, and feet? They are Christ Himself. The Head is Christ, and the Body is also Christ. Each member is a part of the life of Christ. If I refuse the help of my fellow-members, I am refusing the help of Christ. If I am not willing to acknowledge my need of them, I am not willing to acknowledge my need of Christ. Just as I cannot be independent from the Head, I cannot be independent from the Body. Individualism is hateful in the sight of God. What I do not know, another member of the Body will know; what I cannot see, another member of the Body will see; what I cannot do, another member of the Body will do. Therefore, I must allow the other members of the Body to minister to my needs. We must avail ourselves constantly of the fellowship of the Body, for it is our very life.

Sooner or later, all individual Christians will dry up. As long as we live in the Body, we will receive the supply of the Body, no matter what our condition is. Every member should learn to treasure the supply of the Body and to treasure every member. We must all learn to live in the Body, that is, we must all learn to live in the supply of the Body. (23-24)

From the time of Paul’s conversion, he always depended on Christ’s members to enjoy Christ as his supply, both spiritually and in material things. The New Testament twice records how Paul escaped the governor of the Damascenes

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by being lowered down through the city wall in a basket (Acts 9:24-25; 2 Cor. 11:31-33). In fact, this was part of Paul's compelled boasting to the Corinthians to attest to the verity of his apostleship. As an apostle, his boast was not in his strength and individualism, but in his weakness and dependence on the Body. In the Body of Christ, we are either "in the basket," receiving the supply and help from the other members or we are "at the other end of the basket," supplying and helping the needy members. The mutual interdependence and mutual supplying of Christ among the members of His Body is the dispensing of Christ as life that builds up the Body. All that Paul was, all that he did, and all that he had were for the Body. He said that he was willing to spend and be spent on behalf of the fickle Corinthians, even though his abundant love for them was unrequited (2 Cor. 12:15). Paul was Body-conscious and Body-centered, unlike the self-centered Corinthians.

**F**irst Corinthians 12 is a marvelous account of the revelation of the one Body of Christ with many members, and it displays to us Paul's burden for the Body. Verse 12, as we have pointed out, unveils that the Body is Christ, the corporate Christ. In verse 13 Paul shows us that the Body was formed by our being baptized in one Spirit, and that the Body is constituted and maintained by our drinking the one Spirit. Verse 3 of chapter twelve shows us that the way to drink the one Spirit is to call upon the name of the Lord: "No one can say, Lord Jesus! except in the Holy Spirit" (lit.). As a persecutor of the church, Saul of Tarsus was empowered by the chief priests to bind all the ones who called on the name of the Lord. This indicates that calling on the Lord's name was a sign of the Lord's followers. It must have been an audible sign which designated one as a Christian. The early Christians were those who called upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in every place (1:2). While Saul was watching the garments of Stephen's murderers, he heard Stephen calling upon the Lord and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" (Acts 7:59). It is significant that Ananias commanded the converted Saul to be baptized and wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord (22:16). Paul began his Christian life by calling on the name of the One whom he had formerly detested. He began his Christian life by being baptized in one Spirit into one Body and by calling on the Lord to drink the one Spirit, who is the content and reality of the Body. Paul was one who called upon the name of the Lord, and he taught this practice as the way to enjoy the Lord's riches for the building up of His Body (Rom. 10:12-13; 2 Tim. 2:22).

Verses 14 through 22 of 1 Corinthians 12 show the indispensability of each member of the Body of Christ. There are two snares in this section of the Word, of which we as members must beware. The first one is the member who says, "Because I am not...I am not of the body (vv. 15-16). This member compares himself with other members, whom he feels are more gifted than he is. This is to despise oneself and desire to be something other than what one is. "But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, even as He willed" (v. 18). Each of us has been placed in the Body of Christ according to God's will. Each member of the Body is a gift to the Body. What one member can do, the other members cannot do. Furthermore, "If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were the hearing, where would the smelling be?" (v. 17). Seeing that one is an indispensable member of the Body of Christ is a great salvation. "We all must see our position in the Body of Christ. If we truly see our position in the Body, it will be as though we were saved a second time" (Nee 16). Seeing our position in the Body saves us from ambition, rivalry, and jealousy. Seeing our position in the Body frees us to function in the Body according to God's will. Seeing our position in the Body frees us to realize that we should simply be what we are in Christ for the sake of His Body. Another snare that we members must avoid is to have the following attitude toward any member: "I have no need of you" (v. 21). This is to be proud and despise our fellow members. To despise a member of Christ is to despise Christ. To feel that we are better than others or above others means that our concept is not organic but hierarchical and organizational; it means we have not seen the Body. There is no hierarchy or organization in the Body of Christ; there is simply the functioning of the members according to God's will for the benefit of the entire Body.

Paul continues in verses 23-27 of chapter twelve to speak about the blending together of the members of the Body of Christ. In verse 24 Paul says that "God has blended the body together." To be blended is to be mutually adjusted, harmonized, tempered, and mingled. Our being blended together also implies the losing of distinctions. This blending takes place through our fellowship with one another. Genuine fellowship harmonizes us; genuine fellowship tempers us; genuine fellowship mingles us together; and genuine fellowship causes us to lose our particular distinctions, which are the peculiar traits of our natural disposition. This is the fellowship of the Body of

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Christ (1 Cor. 10:16-17), the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14). The Greek word for *fellowship* means “joint participation,” “common participation.” Fellowship is actually the flow of the Spirit of life within and among the members of Christ’s Body. The circulation of the blood in our physical body is a picture of this. The Spirit is the “blood” of the Body of Christ, and the circulation of the Spirit in and among the members is the fellowship of the Spirit and of the Body. The reality of the Body of Christ is in this fellowship, and the fellowship is the blending of the Body.

This blending can be seen in the type of the meal offering in Leviticus 2. We have pointed out that in 1 Corinthians 10:16 Paul likens the Body of Christ to one bread, one loaf. This loaf is produced from the believers as the many grains being broken and blended together into dough, a new lump, for the Lord (5:6-7). When Paul speaks of the Body being one bread, he has the type of the meal offering in view. The meal offering was composed of fine flour mingled and blended with oil and also with frankincense and myrrh. Leaven and honey were prohibited from the meal offering. Both the individual Christ and the corporate Christ are the reality of this meal offering. The fine flour signifies the fine, even, balanced, uplifted, and pure humanity of Jesus. The oil signifies the Spirit of God. Frankincense signifies Christ’s resurrection, and myrrh signifies the death of His cross. Our fellowship with one another should always be through the cross, with the ingredient of myrrh, the death of Christ. Also, our fellowship should always be by the Spirit, with the ingredients of oil and frankincense, the Spirit as the reality of resurrection. Furthermore, our fellowship and love for one another should always be according to the pure and fine humanity of Jesus. In such a fellowship Christ is dispensed into the members for the building up of the Body of Christ in the meal offering church life. In such a fellowship there is no leaven, signifying evil and heretical things. Leaven also includes ambition, which brings corruption into the Body. Also, in such a fellowship, there is no honey, signifying natural affection. Our love for one another should not be our natural love, but the love of Christ. Natural affection, honey, ferments and brings in rottenness. Thank the Lord for the genuine fellowship which builds up the Body of Christ by blending the members of the Body into one. Paul’s seeing of the Body of Christ, as set forth in 1 Corinthians 12, began on the day of his conversion, when he saw that the Lord Jesus and His followers were one great corporate “Me.”

### **Jesus—The Processed and Consummated God, Who Is the Lord of All, the Head of the Body, and the Life-giving Spirit**

**S**aul realized that the voice from heaven was the voice of the very God whom he thought he was serving, so he asked, “Who are You, Lord?” When the Lord told Saul, “I am Jesus, whom you persecute,” this became a revelation to him which was shattering and annihilating to his natural man. Saul was a Hebrew of Hebrews trained at the feet of the learned rabbinical scholar, Gamaliel (Phil. 3:5; Acts 22:3). He was a zealot for the traditions of his fathers. He was a hater of Jesus and His followers, whom he perceived as a destructive threat to his sacred religion of Judaism. The ones who stoned Stephen laid down their garments at Saul’s feet, and he approved of Stephen’s killing (Acts 7:58; 8:1). He “persecuted the church of God excessively and ravaged it” (Gal. 1:13), thinking that he was offering service to God. This fulfilled the Lord’s prophetic word to His disciples: “An hour is coming for every one who kills you to think that he is offering service to God” (John 16:2).

When the light beyond the brightness of the sun blinded Saul and the voice from heaven spoke to him, he realized within that he did not know the very Lord whom he thought he was serving. Thus, he asked, “Who are You, Lord?” Then he found out that the very Lord, indeed the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the great I Am (Exo. 3:14-15), was named Jesus. What painful realization must have worked in the proud Saul from that moment to humble him to the uttermost! What depths of repentance and confession this must have wrought in him! What monumental revelation must have been televised into his being as he prayed in physical blindness for three days in Damascus without food and drink (Acts 9:9, 11)! Witness Lee speaks of this in his *Life-study of Acts*:

It is likely that as Saul was praying, vision after vision and revelation after revelation came to him concerning Christ and the church. His experience during those days may have been one of watching a heavenly television in which he saw many things concerning the Lord Jesus. As he saw these things, Saul may have said, “Jesus the Nazarene is Jehovah. He is my Savior. No wonder that His followers testified strongly that He was resurrected. He surely has been resurrected, for He appeared to me from the heavens.” Saul may have gone on to consider the Lord’s ascension, which implies His incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection. Saul may have come to realize

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that as the One who is now in the heavens, the Lord passed through the process of incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension.

We need to be impressed with the fact that for three days Saul did not eat or drink. All he did was pray. While he was praying, the revelation concerning Christ was “televised” into his being. Saul beheld a wonderful view of the Lord on this heavenly television. No longer did Saul have any doubt concerning Christ’s resurrection. He also came to believe in His incarnation and death. Through the visions that he saw during those days, Saul received the full message of the gospel. (212)

When Saul could see physically, he was blinded with pride. Now that he was blinded physically, the eyes of his heart were opened to see that Jehovah, the great I Am, the very God of the universe, was the Man Jesus. Paul, no doubt, realized that God had become a man! Thus, he became a great proponent of the deity of the “Christ, who is over all, God blessed forever” (Rom. 9:5). It is through Paul that we discover that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ (Col. 2:9). Thus, outside of Christ there is no God.

The God who spoke to Paul from heaven was Jesus. This meant not only that God had become a man but also that this man went through a process to eventually ascend to heaven. The process through which the God-man Jesus passed—incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension—is implied in His brief word to Paul at his conversion. In Paul’s Epistles there is a revelation of the processed and consummated God, that is, of the God who passed through a wonderful process to be consummated as the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b) so that He could impart Himself into His chosen and redeemed people to make them the living members of His Body.

The incarnated Jesus passed through the process of human living. Paul tells us that He took “the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men” and that He was “found in fashion as a man” (Phil. 2:7-8). Such a Christ becomes a pattern of living the life of a God-man for His many members. As a member of Christ’s Body, Paul bore the characteristics of Christ’s human life in his human life. He bore in his body the brands of Jesus (Gal. 6:17). To him this was the reality in Jesus, “the actual condition of the life of Jesus as recorded in the four Gospels” which must be duplicated in His many members (Recovery Version, Eph. 4:21, note 1).

Paul’s Epistles also reveal that the God-man Jesus passed through an all-inclusive death. He came “in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3). Christ was in the likeness of the flesh of sin, but He did not participate in any way in the sin of the flesh. When He was lifted up on the cross, He was the reality of the bronze serpent in Numbers 21, which had the likeness of a serpent but not its poison (John 3:14). On the cross Christ crucified the flesh (Gal. 5:24) and took away sin. He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21). He became what we are that we might become what He is.

Furthermore, Paul shows that through Christ’s death and resurrection He created His masterpiece—the Body of Christ as the one new man. Ephesians 2:10 says that we are His masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus. Where did this creation take place? Verse 15 tells us that on the cross Christ abolished “in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances, that He might create the two in Himself into one new man, so making peace.” Christ’s death and resurrection were the process through which He was doing His greatest work, that is, creating God’s masterpiece. On the cross He abolished in His flesh the law of commandments in ordinances, the different ways of living and worship, which divide the peoples of earth. In resurrection He created in Himself as the sphere and element the one new man. In this one new man, which is His Body, “there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all” (Col. 3:10-11). This means that in the Body of Christ as the one new man, Christ is all the members and in all the members.

In Ephesians 1 Paul shows us that the surpassingly great power of God operating in the resurrected and ascended Christ produced the Body of Christ. God caused this power to operate in Christ

in raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavenlies, far above all rule and authority and power and lordship and every name that is named not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and He subjected all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all. (vv. 20-23)

God’s resurrecting power, ascending power, subjecting power, and heading-up power are *to* the church. The

IN PAUL’S EPISTLES THERE IS A REVELATION OF THE PROCESSED AND CONSUMMATED GOD, THAT IS, OF THE GOD WHO PASSED THROUGH A WONDERFUL PROCESS TO BE CONSUMMATED AS THE LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT SO THAT HE COULD IMPART HIMSELF INTO HIS CHOSEN AND REDEEMED PEOPLE TO MAKE THEM THE LIVING MEMBERS OF HIS BODY.

word *to* implies a transmission. The Body of Christ was formed and came into being by the transmission of the fourfold power of God operating in the transcendent Christ. This surpassingly great power is toward us who believe (v. 19) to make us the Body of Christ.

Paul tells us that in Christ's resurrection, He was consummated to become the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b). The Lord Christ is the very Spirit who gives life to us (2 Cor. 3:17, 6). The disciples whom Saul was persecuting were indwelt by Christ as the life-giving Spirit. Because Christ as life was in them, they were one with Christ as the living members of His Body. To persecute them was to persecute Christ. This is why C. S. Lewis says that to be a Christian is to be a "little Christ" (153). Christ is both the Head and the Body. As the members of His Body we have Him as our life (Col. 3:4) to make us believers the "little Christs," who together compose His Body to become the composite Christ, which is the duplication, continuation, reproduction, enlargement, and expansion of Christ.

A classic hymn written by Witness Lee praises the Lord for the processes through which He passed to produce His Body as His increase for His expression:

In the bosom of the Father,  
Ere the ages had begun,  
Thou wast in the Father's glory,  
God's unique begotten Son.  
When to us the Father gave Thee,  
Thou in person wast the same,  
All the fulness of the Father  
In the Spirit to proclaim.

By Thy death and resurrection,  
Thou wast made God's firstborn Son;  
By Thy life to us imparting,  
Was Thy duplication done.  
We, in Thee regenerated,  
Many sons to God became;  
Truly as Thy many brethren,  
We are as Thyself the same.

Once Thou wast the only grain, Lord,  
Falling to the earth to die,  
That thru death and resurrection  
Thou in life may multiply.  
We were brought forth in Thy nature  
And the many grains became;

As one loaf we all are blended,  
All Thy fulness to proclaim.

We're Thy total reproduction,  
Thy dear Body and Thy Bride,  
Thine expression and Thy fulness,  
For Thee ever to abide.  
We are Thy continuation,  
Thy life-increase and Thy spread,  
Thy full growth and Thy rich surplus,  
One with Thee, our glorious Head.  
*(Hymns 187-188)*

The Jesus whom Saul was persecuting was the very God who had passed through the process of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection to become the life-giving Spirit. As the life-giving Spirit, He dispenses Himself into His many members to make them His Body for His expression in oneness with Him as the glorious Head. This Jesus was also made Lord in His ascension (Acts 2:36). In His ascension He did not discard His humanity. Rather, He is the ascended Man-God on the throne, crowned with glory and honor. As Stephen was being martyred, he saw the ascended Christ as the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God (7:56).

**E**ven the prophet Ezekiel saw the heavens opened up to him so that he could see this ascended Man-God on the throne (Ezek. 1:26). This Jesus, the enthroned Man-God, the ascended Head of the Body, was the One whom Saul encountered on the way to Damascus. We can see from this brief fellowship that the Lord's saying to Saul, "I am Jesus, whom you persecute," contains the entire revelation in Paul's Epistles of Jesus as the processed and consummated God, who is the Lord of all, the Head of the Body, and the life-giving Spirit.

#### **A Chosen Vessel—The Tripartite Man Destined to Have God as His Content**

The ascended Lord, the enthroned Man-God, sent Ananias to Paul, telling him that this man was a chosen vessel to Him. It may have been from Ananias that Paul learned he was a chosen vessel. Is it no wonder that Paul's writings speak emphatically of man being a vessel to contain the Christ of glory? The vision of man as a vessel brings us back to God's original intention concerning man. God wants man to be His vessel for containing Him and expressing Him by being filled with Him. God created man in His image with this intent

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(Gen. 1:26). Just as a glove is created in the image of a hand in order to contain and express a hand, so man was created in the image of God in order to contain and express God.

**G**od created man as His vessel in a particular way. He formed man of the dust of the ground, breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul (Gen. 2:7). Man's body is of the dust of the ground; his spirit is something of God's breath, the breath of life; and his soul, the seat of his personality, is the issue of God's breath coming into the formed dust. The Hebrew word for *breath* in Genesis 2:7 (*neshamah*) is the same word for *spirit* in Proverbs 20:27, which says, "The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord." Man's body possesses world-consciousness so that he might contact the material world; his soul possesses self-consciousness and is the seat of his personality; and his spirit possesses God-consciousness that he might receive and contact God.

Man can substantiate God because he has a God-contacting organ. We can substantiate things in the material world by using our five physical senses of seeing, tasting, touching, smelling, and hearing. How wonderful it is that we believers have a "sixth sense"! We can sense and substantiate the invisible Spirit-God by exercising our God-given spirit. Man does have a spirit by which he can see God, taste God, touch God, smell God, and hear God. This spirit within man is what Pascal refers to as the God-shaped vacuum within every man which only God can fill.

Paul saw clearly that man is a tripartite vessel when he said, "May your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thes. 5:23). Paul also saw how crucial man's spirit is for receiving God, contacting God, and being filled with God. Paul served God in his spirit (Rom. 1:9) and reminded us that the Lord as the Spirit of grace is with our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22; Phil. 4:23; Gal. 6:18; Heb. 10:29b; Rom. 8:16). He reminded Timothy that God had not given him a spirit of cowardice, but of power and of love and of sobermindedness; thus, he should fan his spirit into flame to make his service for the Lord burning in spirit and to make his spiritual gifts flaming (2 Tim. 1:6-7; Rom. 12:11). Paul's Epistles reveal that the divine Spirit dwells in our human spirit (Rom. 8:16) and that these two spirits are blended together to be one mingled spirit (1 Cor. 6:17).

Our experience of the Spirit in our spirit is so critical for the building up of the Body of Christ that Paul speaks of our spirit in each of the six chapters of his Epistle to the Ephesians, an Epistle concerning the Body of Christ. In chapter one he prays that we would have a spirit of wisdom and revelation (v. 17). In chapter two he says that God's dwelling place is in our spirit (v. 22). In chapter three he prays that we would be strengthened with power through God's Spirit into our spirit, our inner man (v. 16). In chapter four Paul reveals that our mingled spirit needs to spread into our mind to become the spirit of our mind for its renewing (v. 23). In chapter five Paul commands all the believers to be filled in their spirit (v. 18). We are vessels whose purpose is to be continually filled with the Spirit in our spirit. Finally, in chapter six Paul exhorts us to receive the sword of the Spirit, which Spirit is the word of God, by means of all prayer, praying at every time in spirit (vv. 17-18). Our spirit mingled with the divine Spirit is the key to the building up of the Body of Christ.

**F**urthermore, our spirit mingled with the divine Spirit is the key to knowing the pneumatic Christ as the indwelling treasure in us, the earthen vessels. Paul speaks of our being earthen vessels in 2 Corinthians 4:6-7:

Because the God who said, Out of darkness light shall shine, is the One who shined in our hearts to illuminate the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not out of us.

Here Paul goes all the way back to Genesis 1 to describe what happened to him at his conversion. Verse 1 tells us that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Then verse 2 tells us that the earth became waste and void, darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God brooded over the surface of the waters. Then in verse 3 God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light." Before Paul's conversion his whole inner being was waste and void and he was in darkness. But the convicting and sanctifying Spirit was brooding over him to prepare him to receive Christ. Then the very God who said, "Let there be light" to produce the old creation shined in Paul's heart to make him a new creation. His shining in Paul's heart brought the Christ of glory as the incomparable treasure into him, an earthen vessel. The vessel is worthless and fragile, but the treasure is priceless and indestructible. The purpose of the vessel is

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to contain and be filled with the treasure to become the treasure's expression.

In Romans 9 Paul says that God's chosen and redeemed people are vessels unto honor (v. 21) and vessels of mercy, which God had before prepared unto glory (v. 23). We are vessels to contain the God of honor, the God of mercy, and the God of glory. Paul also speak of these vessels of honor in 2 Timothy 2:20-21. Paul shows us that God's desire is to dispense Himself as life into man's entire tripartite vessel. In Romans 8 Paul shows that by this divine dispensing, our spirit becomes life (v. 10). Then this life spreads out from our spirit into our mind, the leading part of our soul, to make our mind life. The mind set on the spirit is life (v. 6). Finally, He who raised Jesus from the dead gives life to our mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells us (v. 11).

**I**t is by being filled with Him as life that we are fully saved in His life. God created man as a vessel and placed him before the tree of life with the intention that man would be filled with Him as life (Gen. 2:9). Although man fell and sin entered into man, God never gave up His original intention. He was incarnated, partaking of flesh and blood, so that He might die on the cross, take away our sin, and reconcile us to Himself. This reconciliation brings us back to His intention to fill us with life. So Paul says, "For if we, being enemies, were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more we will be saved in His life, having been reconciled" (Rom. 5:10). There is much more to the Christian life than redemption with reconciliation. God's redemption is the procedure to bring us back to His purpose that we might be saved in His life. This salvation in life is our being filled with Christ as life in our entire tripartite being. Christ first comes into our spirit to regenerate us with His life (John 3:6). Then He sanctifies us in our soul by saturating us with His holy and divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4; Eph. 5:26). The addition of God's holy element to our being causes us to be metabolically transformed in life by the renewing of our mind (Rom. 12:2). The spreading of His life into our inward parts also causes us to be conformed, shaped, into His glorious image (Rom. 8:29). Finally, His life swallows up the death in our mortal bodies to glorify us, making us the same as He is in our entire tripartite vessel—spirit, soul, and body (2 Cor. 5:4; Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:2).

It is by our being filled with Christ as life that we grow in Him as our life, and this growth in life is the building up

of the Body of Christ. All the Body causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love (Eph. 4:16). A physical house is an organization built with lifeless material, but a living organism is built up by its growth in life. Because the Body of Christ is an organism and not an organization, it is built up by the growth of the divine life in all of its members. When Christ as life is ministered from one member to another, the Body grows with the growth of God, with the increase of God as life (Col. 2:19).

At his conversion Paul saw a vision of the Body of Christ, the wonderful "Me." He also saw that Jesus is the very God who has been processed and consummated to become the ascended Lord, the Head of the Body, and the life-giving Spirit to be dispensed into His many members. Finally, he saw that we are vessels made to be filled with Christ as life to make us men of life for the building up of the Body of Christ.

Paul's Epistles reveal that what the Lord wants is for us to be open vessels, loving Him, receiving Him, and being filled with Him to allow Him to be everything to us and do everything in us, through us, and for us. When we open our entire being to Him without reservation, He has the way to dispense Himself with all His riches into us for the building up of His Body. The Body of Christ is His great corporate vessel to contain Him and be filled with Him for His expression. The entire divine revelation of God's eternal economy is embodied in the three words which the Lord spoke to Paul at his conversion on the way to Damascus—*Me*, *Jesus*, and *vessel*. This was Paul's heavenly vision. May it also become ours. **A&C**

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BECAUSE THE BODY OF CHRIST IS AN ORGANISM AND NOT AN ORGANIZATION, IT IS BUILT UP BY THE GROWTH OF THE DIVINE LIFE IN ALL OF ITS MEMBERS. WHEN CHRIST AS LIFE IS MINISTERED FROM ONE MEMBER TO ANOTHER, THE BODY GROWS WITH THE GROWTH OF GOD, WITH THE INCREASE OF GOD AS LIFE.