

Jesus Christ:

It is the question that demarcates the line between life and death. It is the question that forces a consideration of the Christ. It is the question that Jesus asked of His disciples in the days of His flesh: “Who do you say that I am?” While others variously saw Him as John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets, Peter, having received a revelation from the Father in the heavens, rightly answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” In contrast to the Lord’s usual response to Peter’s impetuous outbursts, there was praise rather than rebuke. And in His praise the Lord amplified the significance of Peter’s confession: “I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:15, 16, 18).

Throughout much of the history of the church, Peter’s confession has served as the standard of the Christian faith concerning the person of Christ. Given the Lord’s amplification of Peter’s confession, its utilization as such a standard seems both appropriate and valid. Consequently, most considerations of the person of Christ begin and end with the confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. It seems sufficient to recognize that He is God manifest in the flesh. In December of every year, as Charles Wesley writes, many “hail th’ incarnate Deity” in celebration of His person, and in April of every year, as Wesley further writes, many also triumphantly proclaim that “Christ the Lord is ris’n indeed” in celebration of His work. The person and work of Christ have been refined into a dual confession, namely that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself through His death on the cross (2 Cor. 5:19).

There is an intrinsic relationship between the person and work of Christ. The latter depends upon the former. Without a proper realization of the person of Christ, all of His actions would bear but limited meaning to His disciples, both then and now. Without a realization of the divine in Christ, for example, the eternal efficacy of His death on the cross would not be recognized or preached. Without such a realization, the Christian faith would be framed around a perfect man who, in Himself, found satisfaction and acceptance before God but whose obtainments and attainments could not be reproduced in the lives of His imperfect disciples no matter what intensity of admiration and imitation. Happily, however, Peter was blessed with a revelation of the divine in Christ, and “from that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised” (Matt. 16:21).

It is significant that the Lord first spoke of His redemptive work on the cross and of His vindicating resurrection only after His disciples had a clearer understanding of His divinity. All work flows from the person, and the import of one’s work depends upon the significance of one’s person. Work, however, also reflexively impacts upon one’s person. Paul revealed an understanding of this reflexive impact, as it relates to the person of Christ, when he declared to the Corinthians, “So then we, from now on, know no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him so no longer” (2 Cor. 5:16). In Paul’s view of the person of Christ, there was an advancement beyond the view contained in Peter’s confession. In this advancement, however, he did not discard the rock upon which the church is built; rather,

Last
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Spirit

by John Pester

he built upon it with spiritual materials, including the divine nature of the Father, the redemption of the Son, and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, which were made available to the Body of Christ upon the death of Christ as the last Adam and upon His resurrection as the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 3:12; 15:45).

In considering the person and work of Christ, we must declare the miraculous incarnation of God within the womb of a human virgin, we must acknowledge the Son's assumption of flesh and blood for the sake of serving as a perfect substitutionary sacrifice on our behalf, and we should extol the efficaciousness of His eternal redemption, which was potentiated by His indestructible, divine life (1 Pet. 1:18-20; Heb. 7:16) and demonstrated by His subsequent resurrection. But is this enough? Have we fully explored His person by just acknowledging that all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Him bodily (Col. 2:9), and do we fully understand the implications of His death and resurrection as they relate back to His very person? In effect, how can we, like Paul, build upon the foundation of Peter's confession, if we, as members of the household of faith, are content with Peter's foundational understanding and ignore the implications of Paul's further unveiling of the person of Christ as both last Adam and life-giving Spirit? Paul's revelation of the person of Christ in His death and resurrection should force a renewed consideration of Christ, especially as it affects our confession and experience of Him, and it should force a more honest evaluation of the work which we purportedly do in the name of our crucified and resurrected Lord and Savior.

Reconsidering Christ

At first glance Paul's description of Christ as last Adam and life-giving Spirit seems less than significant. Both terms are used but once in the New Testament, and each instance actually occurs in the same verse—1 Corinthians 15:45. Even then, these unique descriptors occupy only half of the verse, the latter half. It hardly seems that there is sufficient cause for a claim that one's consideration of the person of Christ should include, much yet revolve around, these two appellations. Much seems to be expected of the reader. Very little, however, actually is expected, other than a willingness to momentarily drop the tendency to personally privilege some portions of the Scriptures above others, and to examine the context in which Paul reveals these two unique and marvelous descriptors of the crucified and resurrected person of Christ.

Whether we admit it or not, we all privilege some portions of the Scriptures above others, based on factors such as content, personal taste, and theological inclinations. At the level of content, for example, some will read and reread the histories of the early patriarchs in Genesis, considering them as patterns of faith (Heb. 11:4-22), but routinely skip over Leviticus and Numbers, considering the details of the tabernacle, the oft-repeated descriptions of ritual sacrifices, and the accounting of the twelve tribes of Israel to have little bearing on New Testament faith. Others will read the Psalms before reading the Song of Songs. Isaiah, with its numerous prophetic utterances concerning Christ in His death and resurrection, is cited more often than the remonstrances of Jeremiah or the visions of Ezekiel. In the New Testament, the Gospel of John is presented as a Gospel primer that is the most accessible to new believers. The narrative of Acts is more easily engaged than the structure of Revelation. Even Peter recognized that not all of the writings of the apostles were on equal footing in the area of ready comprehensibility (2 Pet. 3:16).

In addition to the privileging of content, there is a privileging that occurs at a more personal level based on personal experiences. Every believer seemingly has a favorite verse, favorite chapter, and favorite book. Few of these favorites, I surmise, come from Philemon, while many come from Romans and Ephesians. This is not to denigrate the privileging that comes from having the living and operative word of God abiding in our hearts; it is simply to bring patterns of human arrangement to the fore for consideration. All Scripture is indeed God-breathed and profitable for teaching (2 Tim. 3:16); however,

it is difficult to equally privilege all Scripture in our experience precisely because of the limits of our understanding and experience.¹

Ultimately, there is a privileging that occurs as a result of theological inclinations. Catholics have a higher regard for the Epistle of James than do most Protestants. Conversely, verses stressing salvation by grace are more privileged by Protestants. Within Evangelical circles, no verse has greater import than John 3:16. Pentecostals treasure Acts 2:38, and Reformed theologians of the Calvinist persuasion have designated verses which support the acronym of their theology, TULIP.

If we honestly admit to the existence of the human tendency to privilege that which we know, an argument that the New Testament contains only one reference to Christ as last Adam and life-giving Spirit actually says very little. It speaks more about one's theology than about the faith, more about one's experience than about the reality that is in Jesus (Eph. 4:21), and more about one's hermeneutic than about the teaching of the apostles that informs the New Testament. In essence, there is no inherent right to withhold an attribution of significance to Paul's description of Christ as last Adam and life-giving Spirit on the basis of its singular inclusion in the fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. Instead of being dismissive on the basis of our patterns of privilege, we should ask a more obvious question: Why does Paul use these unique designations within this chapter?

First Corinthians 15 is unique in its thorough and direct discussion of the resurrection of Christ, including the implications for the Christian faith. In verses 1 through 11, Paul speaks of Christ's resurrection, both as it is preached (vv. 1-4) and witnessed (vv. 5-11). In verses 12-19, he provides a rebuttal to those who would heretically argue that there is no resurrection. In verses 20-28, he presents the history of resurrection, and in verses 29-34, he discusses the moral influence of resurrection. In verses 35-49, the section containing his description of the crucified and resurrected person of Christ, Paul presents the definition of resurrection. Finally, in verses 50-58, Paul highlights the victory of resurrection over corruption and death, which ultimately serves as a motivation for the work of the Lord.²

There is no argument about the centrality of this chapter in presenting, developing, and defending the distinctive of the Christian faith, that being the resurrection of the incarnated Son, the God-man Jesus, following the completion of His work of redemption on the cross. Nowhere else is Paul more detailed and direct. Without the resurrection, faith in Christ is vain; so his defense of the resurrection is essential. It is the reality of resurrection that distinguishes the Christian faith from all religions. We do not worship a dead God, but a living God who is operative in our lives. Luke Timothy Johnson affirms the centrality of resurrection in the church's historical appraisal of its faith distinctive: "Christianity in its classic form has not based itself on the ministry of Jesus but on the resurrection of Jesus" (134). Witness Lee further affirms the centrality of resurrection to the totality of Christian experience as revealed in the New Testament in a footnote to 1 Corinthians 15:12:

In this chapter the apostle dealt with the Corinthians' heretical saying that there is no resurrection of the dead. The Corinthians were like the Sadducees (Matt. 22:23; Acts 23:8). This was the tenth problem among them. It is the most damaging and destructive to God's New Testament economy, worse than the heresy of Hymenaeus and Philetus concerning resurrection (2 Tim. 2:17-18). Resurrection is the life pulse and lifeline of the divine economy. If there were no resurrection, God would be the God of the dead, not of the living (Matt. 22:32). If there were no resurrection, Christ would not have been raised from the dead. He would be a dead Savior, not a living One who lives forever (Rev. 1:18) and is able to save to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25). If there were no resurrection, there would be no living proof of our being justified by His death (Rom. 4:25 and note), no imparting of life (John 12:24), no regeneration (John 3:5), no renewing (Titus 3:5), no transformation (Rom. 12:2;

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2 Cor. 3:18), and no conformity to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). If there were no resurrection, there would be no members of Christ (Rom. 12:5), no Body of Christ as His fullness (Eph. 1:20-23), and no church as Christ's bride (John 3:29), and therefore no new man (Eph. 2:15; 4:24; Col. 3:10-11). If there were no resurrection, God's New Testament economy would altogether collapse and God's eternal purpose would be nullified. (Recovery Version, note 1)

In a chapter devoted to an explicit defense of the vital essence of the Christian faith, namely Jesus' victory over death, as energized by the divine life of the Triune God, there should be little wonder that Paul explicitly speaks of Christ as being both last Adam and life-giving Spirit. Through His death and resurrection, Christ, the last Adam, became the life-giving Spirit, and as such, He is now able to impart, to give, the very element which effectuated His own resurrection—the divine life of the Triune God—to those who believe. This impartation is possible because He is the Spirit. Simply stated, the life-giving Spirit is the definition, issue, and application of resurrection. The reality of resurrection involves nothing less than Christ becoming the life-giving Spirit. If we recognize the centrality of resurrection, we should be willing to privilege Paul's placement of these singular references to the person of Christ above our narrow hermeneutics, our personal tastes, and our limited theologies, and consider at least for the moment what is at stake in our confession of Christ as last Adam and life-giving Spirit.

Confessing Christ as the Last Adam and Life-giving Spirit

To confess Christ, simply put, is to confess Him for who He now is.³ Paul's confession of Christ did not begin from the standpoint of Christ's earthly ministry. Rather, he viewed Christ from the vantage point of crucifixion and resurrection. In His crucifixion, Paul viewed Christ as the last Adam, and in His resurrection, he viewed Him as the life-giving Spirit. What he states in 1 Corinthians 15:45, he develops elsewhere in his Epistles, sometimes explicitly⁴ and at other times implicitly. This is not to suggest that Paul did not value the earthly ministry of Christ or see its relationship to the economy of our salvation. In fact, his use of each of these crucial appellations builds upon the broad implications of Peter's confession.

Christ Crucified—the Last Adam

In the Lord's questioning of His disciples in Matthew 16, He began with a simple query, "Who do men say that the Son of Man is?" (v. 13). In so identifying Himself, the Lord not only spoke to the prevailing perceptions of those who were aware of His ministry, that is, that He was merely a man, but also of the reality of His incarnation, that is, that He was truly human, truly of the race of Adam. In the disciples' report of the common perceptions, there is no indication that He was regarded as anything other than a man, albeit a mysterious man.⁵ The mystery of the incarnation, therefore, comes into focus only with the revelation that He also is the Son of God. The revelation that He possessed the divine nature by virtue of His divine sonship, however, did not subsume the reality that as God, He was enfleshed, joined to the Adamic race, by virtue of His incarnation within the womb of a human virgin.⁶ Peter's confession, rather than establishing just the divinity of Christ, established His unique status as a God-man. No longer could the disciples view Him as just man or, more importantly, as just God. He was fully God and fully man; He was God manifested in the flesh. Thus He was uniquely linked to the human race, to the line of Adam. As such, He was a man in the old creation, the creation corrupted by the disobedience of the first Adam (Rom. 5:12), and even a man in the lineage of Adam, as Luke attests in his genealogy (Luke 3:38). Paul's designation of Christ as the last Adam recognizes Christ's assumption of flesh and blood and His association with the old creation, a creation under curse and infected with sin and death, but it also reflects a deeper understanding of the redemption that Christ wrought through His death on the cross.

When Christ was crucified on the cross, no mere man died, a God-man died. The old creation was terminated on the cross in the person of Christ as an instantiation of Adam, and the termination of the old creation on the cross was effectual and applicable in the person of Christ as an instantiation of God. It is for this reason that Christ is called the last Adam. Without the effectiveness of His termination of the old creation being compounded into His divine person and being made available through the life-giving Spirit in resurrection, there would be no end to *our* participation in Adam's lineage and legacy of death. His death to us would have been just another death in the long procession of Adam's descendants, all of whom are destined for death. He would not be the last Adam, but just another Adam. To all who believe into Him, however, He is the last Adam because His effective termination of all that is associated with Adam, including sin, sins, and death, is available through the life-giving Spirit.⁷ Now He is more than just a God-man, the essence of Peter's confession; He is a redeeming God-man who has annulled the body of our Adamic sin, our old man, which we no longer need to serve as slaves (Rom. 6:6).

Having been freed from the bondage of sin by being freed from Adam as our representative head through the redeeming death of the last Adam, believers can walk in newness of life (v. 4), having grown together with Him in the likeness of His death and resurrection (v. 5), and bear the image of the heavenly that should have been the portion of the first Adam (1 Cor. 15:49). Believers also can reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:17), the second man⁸ (1 Cor. 15:47), exercising the dominion that also should have been the portion of the first Adam. The death of the last Adam thus terminates all vestiges of our identification with the first Adam and the old creation and makes possible our identification, even incorporation, with the second man, Christ, the representative Head of the new creation.

Christ Resurrected—the Life-giving Spirit

The crucifixion of Christ was the termination of the old creation; the resurrection of Christ was the germination of the new creation, and this germination is realized through the impartation of the divine life through Christ as the life-giving Spirit. As the last Adam, Christ has terminated and overcome all the barriers to our identification with Him (sin and sins). This identification is actualized, however, only through the impartation of the divine life. Using Paul's terminology, the redeeming action of the crucified Christ, as the last Adam, cleanses our earthen vessels, but the life-giving action of the resurrected Christ, as the life-giving Spirit, imparts the treasure into these vessels (2 Cor. 4:7). In a footnote to 1 Corinthians 15:45, Witness Lee summarizes the implications of Christ being the life-giving Spirit.

Through creation Adam became a living soul with a soulish body. Through resurrection Christ became a life-giving Spirit with a spiritual body. Adam as a living soul is natural; Christ as a life-giving Spirit is resurrected. First, in incarnation He became flesh for redemption (John 1:14, 29); then, in resurrection He became a life-giving Spirit for the imparting of life (John 10:10b). Through incarnation He had a soulish body, as Adam had; through resurrection He has a spiritual body. His soulish body has become a spiritual one through resurrection. Now He is a life-giving Spirit in resurrection, with a spiritual body, ready to be received by His believers. When we believe into Him, He enters our spirit, and we are joined to Him as the life-giving Spirit. Hence, we become one spirit with Him (6:17). Our spirit is made alive and is resurrected with Him. Eventually, our present soulish body will become a spiritual body in resurrection, just like His (vv. 52-54; Phil. 3:21). (Recovery Version, note 1)

It is difficult for many believers to accept the revelation of 1 Corinthians 15:45.⁹ It is argued that the life-giving Spirit is not the Spirit, but "a spirit." The refutation of this is a simple question: Are there two Spirits whom Christians must acknowledge or one? There is only one Spirit, it is the Spirit who gives life (John 6:63), the Spirit of

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life (Rom. 8:2), the Spirit of Christ (v. 9), the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:19), the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). Although different aspects of this one Spirit are portrayed in each of these designations, there is one Spirit (Eph. 4:4). In “1 Corinthians 15:45—Last Adam, Life-Giving Spirit,” James D. G. Dunn comments on the relationship between Christ and the Spirit with insight and honesty:

Paul identifies the exalted Jesus with the Spirit—not with a spiritual being (πνεῦμα ζῶν) or a spiritual dimension or sphere (πνευματικόν), but with the Spirit, the Holy Spirit (πνεῦμα ζωοποιούν). Immanent christology is for Paul pneumatology; in the believer’s experience there is *no* distinction between Christ and Spirit. This does not mean of course that Paul makes no distinction between Christ and Spirit. But it does mean that later trinitarian dogma cannot readily look to Paul for support at this point. A theology which reckons seriously with the ἐγένετο of John 1:14 must reckon just as seriously with the ἐγένετο implied in 1 Cor. 15:45b. (165)

John 1:14 speaks of the Word becoming flesh, and 1 Corinthians 15:45b speaks of another becoming, the last Adam becoming the life-giving Spirit. Both becomings are essential for the carrying out of the divine economy. The Word became flesh for the sake of our redemption, the last Adam became the life-giving Spirit to make all that Christ obtained and attained available to those who believe into Him. It is the Spirit who gives life and who guides us into all the reality, the reality which is in Jesus (John 6:63; 16:13; Eph. 4:21). The essence of the Christian faith is the life of the Triune God being dispensed into tripartite vessels who, through a progressive and corporate experience of the divine life that conveys the imprint and pattern of the life of the God-man Jesus, grow up into Him in all things, thereby expressing God’s image and exercising His divine authority (1 Thes. 5:23; Eph. 4:15). In this endeavor the flesh profits nothing.¹⁰ Only the life of the Triune God is effectual (John 6:63). We must be born again by receiving the Holy Spirit in our spirit (20:22; 3:6-7). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life, the life-giving Spirit. In resurrection, Christ became the life-giving Spirit, and the divine life within the shell of His humanity was released (12:24). The proof of this release is our regeneration unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet. 1:3). As it has been earlier noted, resurrection is “the life pulse and lifeline of the divine economy,” and it is the life-giving Spirit, the resurrected person of Christ, who effectuates this life pulse within the lives of the believers. To deny the life-giving Spirit is to deny the kernel of Christian faith and Christian experience. It makes vain that which is not vain.

Experiencing Christ as the Last Adam and Life-giving Spirit

The truth of Christ as the last Adam and life-giving Spirit can be examined sequentially as matters of doctrine, but our experience of these truths does not follow the doctrinal sequence. As a matter of doctrine, the crucifixion of Christ as the last Adam precedes the resurrection of Christ as the life-giving Spirit, but as a matter of experience, our identification with Christ as the life-giving Spirit brings us back to the experience of Christ as the last Adam. Paul utters this aspect of experience well in his Epistle to the Philippians when he speaks of his own aspirations to “know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (3:10). In experience, we are not conformed to His death first and then experience the power of His resurrection; rather, the power of His resurrection brings us into conformity with His death. There are two reasons for this. The first is based on the person of Christ as He now is, and the second is based on the work of Christ as it applies to us as we now are.

In His person the crucified and resurrected Christ is now the life-giving Spirit. All of the experiences of Christ in His incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection have been compounded into the life-giving Spirit and are available only through the life-giving Spirit. In order to learn Christ as the reality is in Jesus, we must touch the life-giving Spirit. In order to be conformed to the death of Christ, we need to touch

the life-giving Spirit. In order to experience our resurrected and ascended position in the heavenlies, we need to touch the life-giving Spirit. The life-giving Spirit in resurrection is the only entrance into all that Christ has attained and obtained. Therefore, our experience of Christ begins when we touch the life-giving Spirit, who in turn makes all of the experiences of Christ available to us through the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (1:19). In this supply, for example, there is the cross with its effective termination of all that continues to hinder us in our pursuit of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus (3:14). Simply put, in order to experience any aspect of Christ's work, we must touch the person of Christ, and He now is the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit in resurrection.

The work of the life-giving Spirit is informed not by who He is but by what we are. While we are in fact a new creation and joined to the second man, we still have a body of death. Figuratively speaking, all believers have one foot in the new creation and one in the old. More accurately stated, our spirit is life because of righteousness (Rom. 8:10), but there is still a need for our soul and body to experience a fuller and final saturation with the divine life. Our mind, therefore, needs to be set on the spirit in order to be life and peace, and life still needs to be given to our mortal bodies (vv. 6, 11). The principal work of the life-giving Spirit is to apply the all-terminating death of the last Adam to every aspect of our untransformed being as we sojourn in this world with an adamic body of death that is still influenced by the law of sin and of death (v. 2). The operation of the life-giving Spirit frees us from this law by serving as a stronger and higher law, the law of the Spirit of life (v. 2). In the operation of this law, the effectiveness of Christ's death is applied, and our servitude to sin is experientially broken as a result of our identification with Christ in His death, a death which crucified the old man and annulled our body of sin (6:6).

While the life-giving Spirit in resurrection brings us back to the experience of the last Adam and His effective termination of all that characterizes the old creation, our experience of this termination does bring us further into the realm of the divine life in resurrection. As Paul succinctly states, "If by the Spirit you put to death the practices of the body, you will live" (8:13). This is our Christian hope—living with God, walking in newness of the divine life, reigning in this life through the One, bearing fruit unto sanctification as a demonstration of our growth in the divine life, which is a progression from children who are born of God to sons of God who are led by the Spirit and ultimately joint heirs who are fully glorified with Christ (6:8, 4; 5:17; 6:22; 8:16, 14, 17). This hope is founded on Jesus Christ, the last Adam and life-giving Spirit, and this hope is realized as the life-giving Spirit applies the effective work of the last Adam in our experience.

Working in Christ as the Last Adam and Life-giving Spirit

There is one final aspect of knowing and experiencing Christ as the last Adam and life-giving Spirit that should serve as a sober warning for all who seek to build upon the foundation that has been laid, that being Jesus Christ, the God-man, the unique incarnation of God in the flesh. At the end of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul concludes his defense of the resurrection and his unveiling of the crucified and resurrected person of Christ with the following words: "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (v. 58). *Therefore* points back to all that Paul presented concerning the resurrection. Knowing that there is resurrection and that the reality of this resurrection is available through Christ as the life-giving Spirit, there is a positive motivation for us to abound in the work of the Lord. And conducting ourselves in this work according to and through the resurrection life of Christ is our surety that our labor is not in vain. Concerning our knowing of the resurrection, Witness Lee writes, "Not believing in the truth of resurrection causes us to be disappointed concerning our future, thus making us discouraged in the work of the Lord. Faith gives us a strong aspiration to abound in the work of the Lord with the expectation of pleasing the Lord in

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resurrection at His coming back” (Recovery Version, 1 Cor. 15:58, note 2). Concerning our conduct in the work of the Lord, he further writes that our labor is

not by our natural life and natural ability but by the Lord’s resurrection life and power. Our labor for the Lord in His resurrection life with His resurrection power will never be in vain, but will result in the fulfilling of God’s eternal purpose through the preaching of Christ to sinners, the ministering of life to the saints, and the building up of the church with the experiences of the processed Triune God as gold, silver, and precious stones (3:12). This labor will be rewarded by the returning Lord in the day of the resurrection of the righteous (3:14; Matt. 25:21, 23; Luke 14:14). (Recovery Version, 1 Cor. 15:58, note 3)

According to the context of Paul’s motivating word, the labor that is not in vain is the labor that is conducted in the reality of the resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit. It is not in vain because it will receive a reward when the sort of work it is becomes manifest:

Each will receive his own reward according to his own labor....According to the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation, and another builds upon it. But let each man take heed how he builds upon it. For another foundation no one is able to lay besides that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. But if anyone builds upon the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, stubble, the work of each will become manifest; for the day will declare it, because it is revealed by fire, and the fire itself will prove each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built upon the foundation remains, he will receive a reward; if anyone’s work is consumed, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Cor. 3:8, 10-15)

Those who sense the calling of the Lord to work together with Him should answer the call, but in sobriety and gravity, knowing that the nature of their work will one day be manifested and judged. The fire of the Lord’s judgment will prove every work. The work that will last and will receive the Lord’s recommendation is that which uses the proper material, not the wood of the natural man, not the grass of the fallen man of the flesh, and not the stubble that issues forth from the untransformed earthly man, but rather the experiences of the golden, divine nature of the Father, the silver of the redeeming Christ, and the precious stones of the transforming Holy Spirit. All of these experiences are in the life-giving Spirit and only in the life-giving Spirit. These experiences build upon the foundation that has been laid, these experiences build the church, and these experiences, having been ministered and wrought into the Body of Christ, will consummate the eternal economy of the Triune God. The test of any work is not “results,” not numbers of followers, not the manifestation of signs and wonders, and not any number of outward indications that seem so easily to distract the Lord’s believers and puff up the natural man; it is the manifestation and impartation of the resurrected Christ as the last Adam and life-giving Spirit.

May we, as the Body of Christ, begin to build upon the foundation of Christ, the unique God-man, first by expanding our confession of the person and work of Christ to acknowledge Him as He now is, the life-giving Spirit in resurrection who is the focal point of God’s dispensing of the divine life with the compounded riches of the experiences of Christ, especially His death and resurrection. And then may we actually build by earnestly and humbly allowing the Spirit to guide us into all the reality that is available through our Christ, the last Adam, the life-giving Spirit. ✠

Notes

¹Reading the Bible should be a daily practice precisely because it is living and operative, and every contact with the Word affords the Lord a constant opportunity to make His Word spirit and life to us. This will enlarge the boundaries of our personal privileging, hopefully serving to equally enlarge our hearts.

²The foregoing division of 1 Corinthians 15 is from Witness Lee's outline of 1 Corinthians 15 as it appears in the Recovery Version of the New Testament.

³Jaroslav Pelikan begins his six-volume history of the development of doctrine with a succinct definition of doctrine that includes the notion of confession: "What the church of Jesus Christ believes, teaches, and confesses on the basis of the word of God: this is Christian doctrine" (1). This threefold definition is a progression from what is first believed, but perhaps not fully articulated, to an articulation through teaching, and ultimately to a confessing of what is considered to be rightly taught.

Without setting rigid boundaries, we shall identify what is "believed" as the form of Christian doctrine present in the modalities of devotion, spirituality, and worship; what is "taught" as the content of the word of God extracted by exegesis from the witness of the Bible and communicated to the people of the church through proclamation, instruction, and churchly theology; and what is "confessed" as the testimony of the church, both against false teaching from within and against attacks from without, articulated in polemics and in apologetics, in creed and in dogma. (4)

Even though Pelikan acknowledges that the boundaries of what is believed, taught, and confessed are not rigid, there is an implied hierarchy that creates thresholds of acceptability for the acknowledgment of orthodox doctrine. At the top of this hierarchy are the doctrines that have been codified into creeds.

There is a fundamental limitation with this view, one which does not rest with Pelikan's formulations but rather in the church's reification of the creeds as normative statements of faith. The three most significant councils in early church history, Nicea in AD 325, Constantinople in AD 381, and Chalcedon in AD 451, principally addressed only the issues of the Triune God, the divinity of the Holy Spirit, and the nature of the human and divine in the person of Christ, all of which were affirmed in response to heretical teachings then in vogue. The resurrection of Christ, while affirmed, was never a matter in doubt or in much debate. Consequently, the crucified and resurrected person of Christ was never significantly addressed in these early councils and the creeds that issued forth from them. As these creeds came to be regarded as normative statements of faith, much of the detail of the divine economy was lost to the Body of Christ as a matter of its confession. Hence, significant matters of truth were little taught, and ultimately little believed, all to the detriment of the church's experience of Christ, the life-giving Spirit. Consequently, there is a need for a broader confession of the person of Christ, one that is taught and incorporated into the spiritual worship and experience of the believers. Such a broader confession must begin not with creeds that essentially affirm only Peter's confession of the incarnated Christ but rather with a recognition of Paul's confession of the crucified and resurrected Christ, the life-giving Spirit, the Christ who now is.

⁴Paul explicitly discusses the first Adam and the last Adam in Romans 5. He identifies Adam as a type of Christ in verse 14, and then in verses 15 through 19, he presents a full comparison and contrast of actions:

But it is not that as the offense was, so also the gracious gift is; for if by the offense of the one the many died, much more the grace of God and the free gift in grace of the one man Jesus Christ have abounded to the many. And it is not that as through one who sinned, so also the free gift is; for the judgment was out of one offense unto condemnation, but the gracious gift is out of many offenses unto justification. For if by the offense of the one death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. So then as it was through one offense unto condemnation to all men, so also it was through one righteous act unto justification of life to all men. For just as through the disobedience of one man the many were constituted sinners, so also through the obedience of the One the many will be constituted righteous.

The actions are comparable only to the extent that Adam's act of disobedience and Christ's act of obedience were human actions. The actions are principally contrastive.

⁵This is a common view even today.

May we, as the
Body of Christ,
begin to build upon
the foundation of
Christ, the unique
God-man,
by expanding our
confession of the
person and work of
Christ to
acknowledge Him
as He now is,
the life-giving Spirit
in resurrection
who is the focal
point of God's
dispensing of the
divine life with the
compounded riches
of the experiences
of Christ, especially
His death
and resurrection.

⁶Prior to His unveiling as the Son of the living God, He was regarded as being merely a man. After His unveiling, He easily could have been regarded as being only divine. The Docetists, for example, whose teaching the apostle John addressed his Epistles, were of this view. The Lord Himself, however, gave no ground for such an understanding by continuing to refer to Himself as the Son of Man throughout the course of His earthly ministry (Matt. 16:27; 17:9, 22; 18:11; 19:28; 20:28; 24:27, 30, 39, 44; 25:31; 26:24, 45).

⁷This is not to suggest that Christ's death did not, at a universal and ontological level, bring the old creation to an effective end. For the moment, however, the proof of this termination is evident only in the lives of believers, and then only in the lives of those who, through being experientially joined to the Lord in their spirit, have access by faith to the effectiveness of Christ's death. To these, He is indeed the last Adam, both ontologically and experientially.

⁸In much of the literature concerning 1 Corinthians 15, Christ is often called the second Adam, inappropriately linking Paul's description of Christ as last Adam and second man. This is unfortunate because there is a unique revelation associated with each term. Witness Lee points out the distinction in a footnote to verse 47:

Christ is not only the last Adam (v. 45) but also the second man. The first Adam (v. 45) is the beginning of mankind; the last Adam is the ending. As the first man, Adam is the head of the old creation, representing it in creation. As the second man, Christ is the Head of the new creation, representing it in resurrection. In the entire universe there are only two men: the first man, Adam, including all his descendants, and the second man, Christ, comprising all His believers. We believers were included in the first man by birth and became a part of the second man by regeneration. Our believing has transferred us out of the first man into the second. In regard to our being part of the first man, our origin is the earth and our nature is earthy. In regard to our being part of the second man, our origin is God and our nature is heavenly. (Recovery Version, note 2)

⁹Most of the difficulty in accepting this view of Christ lies in a tritheistic understanding of the Trinity that many Christians unconsciously hold. When the three of the Trinity are considered to be both distinct and separate, rather than the orthodox understanding that they are distinct but not separate, saying that Christ became the Spirit in resurrection seems modalistic, for how can the second of the Trinity, the Son, become the third of the Trinity, the Spirit, unless He ceases to be the Son. The flaw in this misperception lies in the failure to recognize the mutual *perichoresis* that characterizes the Trinity. When the Son was on the earth, He was not acting alone; the Triune God was operative in His incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection. In the economy of God's salvation from Matthew through John, the operation of the Triune God is characterized by the Son who was with the Father by the Spirit. Following Christ's resurrection, from Acts through the Epistle of Jude, the operation of the Triune God is more accurately characterized by the Spirit as the Son with the Father (Recovery Version, Chart of God's New Testament Economy).

¹⁰The flesh that profits nothing includes much of modern Christianity with its emphasis on ethical behavior, morality, and self-improvement. Having begun by the Spirit we cannot be perfected by the flesh which can, with religious dexterity, pursue a form of godliness but lack any real experience of godliness, the manifestation of God in the flesh through the impartation of the divine life (Gal. 3:3; 2 Tim. 3:5; 1 Tim. 3:16).

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