

LIVING UNDER THE DIVINE ADMINISTRATION  
THROUGH THE DIVINE DISPENSING  
OF THE PROCESSED CHRIST  
AS THE LAST ADAM AND LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT:  
THE GOSPEL PRESENTED IN 1 CORINTHIANS 15

by John Pester

The litany of problems in the local church in Corinth is so extensive and the need for corrective in the form of proper teaching and genuine experience so apparent that those who read the first Epistle to the Corinthians tend to view it as a series of separate, disjointed instructions on practical matters in the Christian life. And because Paul so effectively deals with the core problems of the Corinthians, including divisions (1:10—4:21), an evil brother (5:1-13), lawsuits among believers (6:1-11), the abuse of freedom (6:12-20), the marriage life (7:1-40), the eating of things sacrificed to idols (8:1—11:1), head covering (11:2-16), the Lord's supper (11:17-34), the gifts (12:1—14:40), the matter of resurrection (15:1-58), and the collection of the gift (16:1-9),<sup>1</sup> the overarching emphasis in his teaching of the gospel is easily missed. This is all the more understandable because the problems that plagued the Corinthians plague us all. To the extent that these problems equally expose and force us to examine ourselves and our practices, it is easy to get lost in the details of Paul's responses. In effect, when we come to Paul's Epistle, being self-centered "Corinthians," we see only ourselves and our condition and fail to see and know Christ (2:2), the One who has been processed through death to be the last Adam and through resurrection to be the life-giving Spirit (15:45).

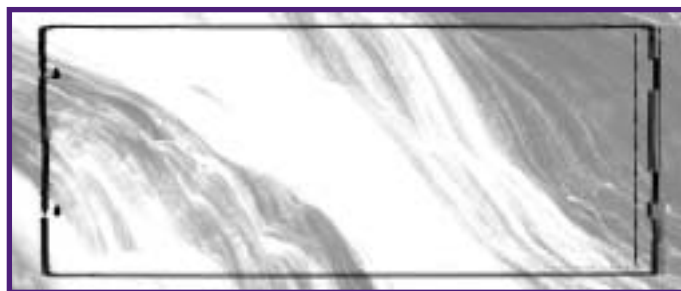
But the processed Christ is the focus of this Epistle, and Paul comprehensively unfolds the gospel of the processed Christ from the first chapter to the last. Even knowing that Christ is the

focus of this Epistle doctrinally,<sup>2</sup> it is easy to miss this point experientially because this wisdom, which is the processed Christ who is to us and toward us as grace, is still hidden in a mystery, the depths of which can only be revealed through the Spirit (1:30; 15:10; 2:7, 10). Since this mystery concerns the depths of God, things which the eye has not seen and ear has not heard (v. 9), it is not surprising that many scoff at the notion that Christ has been processed for our experience (v. 30), for our union in life (6:17), and for our incorporation into Him as His

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Body for the execution of His divine administration in the universe (vv. 15; 12:12; 11:3). In this administration there is the heading up of all things in Christ and the elimination of sin and death, through the stewardship, the dispensing, of the divine, eternal, victorious resurrection life of the processed Christ (Eph. 1:10, 22; 1 Cor. 15:25, 54-57). And since this mystery also has not come up in the human heart, it is not surprising that the announcement of this mystery sounds strange to ears accustomed to hearing only the wisdom of this age, especially the wisdom of our religious age. Nevertheless, God has prepared an economy for us (2:9). His preparation involves His process, and this process involves the death and resurrection of the Lord of glory (v. 8).

The process that God has prepared involves the incarnated Christ entering into death through crucifixion and then passing out of death through resurrection to not only become the Lord of glory but also to bring us into this same glory by enabling us to be put into Him (1:30).<sup>3</sup>



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The glory that Paul speaks of, the glory that consummates the economy that God has prepared for us, has two principal features, which are mutually dependent upon the other and which together comprise the core of Paul's teaching, not only in 1 Corinthians but in all of his ministry. These two features include the dispensing of the divine life, which is the resurrection life, and the heading up of all things in Christ through the execution of His divine administration. Glory is God expressed. The expression of God comes out of the divine life and nature, and the expression of God produces order in the universe. This is image and dominion: the image of God comes out of the divine life, and the dominion of God is extended through the expression of the image of God.

Throughout the entirety of his ministry, Paul presents the processed Christ, who has passed through death and resurrection in order to impart His divine life into the believers so that they can participate in an economy that is unto the fullness of the times to head up all things in Him (Eph. 1:10). Throughout the entirety of 1 Corinthians, Paul points to the divine life, embodied within the crucified and resurrected Christ, as the corrective to all the problems of the Corinthians, all of which tellingly indicate a need for heading up within the divine administration. Throughout the entirety of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul summarizes the content of his ministry as the gospel by alluding to the operation of the resurrection life which enables us to reign with Christ in this age for the final defeat of sin and death in the ages to come, even to the point of subduing all things under His feet and delivering up the kingdom to the Father (vv. 27, 24). And in 1 Corinthians 15:45, Paul crystallizes the gospel and his ministry by distilling it down to its intrinsic essence, rooting it in the Scriptures, interpreting the reality of the processed Christ with spiritual words, and speaking of it in words not taught by human wisdom when he emphatically states, "The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit."<sup>4</sup>

### The Divine Life and Divine Administration in 1 Corinthians

The tendency to view the content of Paul's ministry as a series of disjointed teachings, especially as it is presented in 1 Corinthians, is evident in many of the characterizations of the content of chapter 15, the chapter on resurrection. Most commentators consider Paul's words as a polemical response to a heretical teaching circulating among the Corinthians that there was no resurrection of the believers even though Christ had resurrected. As such, Paul's emphasis on the matter of resurrection is assumed to be primarily doctrinal in nature,<sup>5</sup> and consequently, commentary is limited to the thrust and the effectiveness of his polemic responses. This doctrinal emphasis subsequently produces a narrow discussion on the eschatological aspects of the believers' bodily resurrection, rather

than on the believers' participation in and experience of the resurrection life that makes the bodily resurrection even possible. In effect, the content of chapter 15 is examined from the perspective that resurrection is an event rather than a process that illuminates the central content of the gospel itself—the believers' fellowship in the divine life for the purpose of their participation in the divine administration.

The fact that Paul begins his response to the heresy of no resurrection with a reference to the gospel, which he received, which he announced, and which, interestingly, is able to save those who already believe (vv. 1-3), should alert us to the fact that he is attempting to do more than just frame a response to believers who are under the influence of Greek philosophy. Instead, the false teaching that there is no bodily resurrection presented him with a unique opportunity to reiterate and summarize the central points that he has presented earlier in his Epistle and throughout all his ministry. Karl Barth, in his book *The Resurrection of the Dead*, notes,

The ideas developed in 1 Cor. xv. could be better described as *the methodology of the apostle's preaching*, rather than eschatology, because it is really concerned not with this and that special thing, but with the meaning and nerve of its whole. (109)

Being thus concerned with the meaning of the whole of the apostle's preaching, Barth views the content of chapter 15 as filling in the contours of the gospel message which elsewhere Paul only sketches in a general way:

The chapter devoted to the Resurrection of the Dead does not stand in so isolated a relation to the First Epistle to the Corinthians as at first glance might appear. It forms not only the close and crown of the whole Epistle, but also provides the clue to its meaning, from which place light is shed on the whole, and it becomes intelligible, not outwardly, but inwardly, as a unity. We might even say that this *central* significance of the ideas expressed in the chapter extends beyond the limits of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. Here Paul discloses generally his focus, his background, and his assumptions with a definiteness he but seldom uses elsewhere, and with a particularity which he has not done in his other Epistles as known to us. The Epistles to the Romans, the Philippians, and the Colossians cannot even be understood, unless we keep in mind the sharp accentuation which their contents receive in the light of 1 Cor. xv., where Paul develops what elsewhere he only indicates and outlines, and which first imparts a specific and unmistakable colour to his ideas in general. (5)

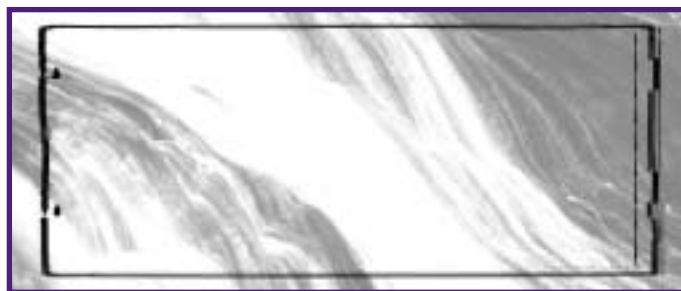
M. E. Dahl comes to a similar conclusion when he comments on the ability to find within chapter 15 "a

consistent biblical-Pauline world-view worthy of consideration as a system of insights perfectly capable of standing on its own without any extra-biblical philosophical buttresses” (10). Although Dahl and especially Barth make a case for the unity of Paul’s thought as presented in chapter 15 and throughout all of his ministry, they do not clearly state what the unifying thread is, especially as it is revealed in chapter 15. In the case of Barth, the reader is left to sift through the density of his language and perhaps the inadequacies of the translation to come to the conclusion that it is resurrection itself that is key.

In a footnote on verse 12 of chapter 15, however, Witness Lee is able to link the importance of resurrection to many of the central items of truth that Paul presents throughout his ministry, showing that it is the underlying support for the fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose and, therefore, of indisputable significance in the economy of God. He writes,

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; 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)

*The divine life cannot be separated from the person of Christ, and the divine life cannot be received apart from the processed Christ.*



All of the verse references in the footnote above point to the centrality of resurrection in the present, ongoing economy of God, not just to its significance as an eschatological event in the future. In this light, it is easy to see why Barth does not regard chapter 15 as an “isolated” teaching, but rather as the “close and crown” of the entire Epistle. It is not isolated because the resurrection life is the source of our regeneration which makes us living, the source of our renewing, transformation, and conformation to the image of the Son, and the source of our incorporation as members of the Body of Christ, all of which are necessary for our participation in the eternal purpose of God. It is the close and crown because the resurrection life produces the Body, the bride, and the new man in this age, all of which signal the consummation of the eternal purpose of God.

Resurrection is central to our participation in God’s purpose and to the consummation of God’s purpose. Resurrection is the intrinsic essence of the divine life, and the divine life is expressed through resurrection. To speak of resurrection in its essence is to speak of the divine life. The divine life regenerates, renews, transforms, and conforms us. Resurrection also reproduces the divine order that is inherent in the divine life, and the divine order is applied through a divine administration in resurrection. To speak of resurrection in its application is to speak of the divine administration. Chapter 15 is a full development of the operation of the divine life that has been imparted into the believers through the process of Christ’s death and resurrection to establish a divine administration that can set in order everything that is contrary to the image and dominion of God. Chapter 15 is the close and capstone of the entire Epistle because its emphasis on the divine life, which produces order in the divine administration, is the focus of all of Paul’s exhortations in the earlier chapters of 1 Corinthians.

#### **The Divine Life and the Divine Administration**

The divine life is an essential, intrinsic component of the divine administration. The divine life cannot be separated from the person of Christ (John 1:14; 10:10), and the divine life cannot be received apart from the processed Christ (1 John 5:12). We must be in the living Christ in order to be

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enlivened with the divine life. In life and through life, our union with Christ becomes a reality, and our participation in the kingdom of God, the realm of God's divine administration, also becomes a reality. There is no life apart from Him and no heading up apart from Him. The divine life is the resurrection life, and in addition to raising us up in that day, this life enables us to reign in life in this age. In *Reading Corinthians* Charles Talbert makes this connection in his discussion of 1 Corinthians 15:25-26 by acknowledging that the reign of Christ began with His resurrection and must continue until all of His enemies have been put under His feet: "Between Christ's resurrection and parousia is his heavenly rule ('For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death,' vv. 25-26)" (99). Verse 25 locates a significant portion of Christ's reigning in the present age of the church, and it indicates that many of the problems that must be put under His feet are those that are present in the church when the called saints do not live according to their calling (1:2, 9).

**L**iving according to the divine life under the divine administration is the realm of fellowship into which we have been called. Because the divine life is the basis for a proper living under the divine administration, Paul presents the crucified and resurrected, the living and processed, Christ as the unique solution to all of the problems in the church in Corinth. For the problem of divisions, he presents the processed Christ, who is undivided in His incorporation of the believers through His death and resurrection, as symbolized by baptism (v. 13). For the problem of the evil brother, he presents the processed Christ, who has been sacrificed as our Passover through death to become an unleavened feast in resurrection for our enjoyment (5:7-8). For the problem of lawsuits among believers, he presents the processed Christ, who is the source of our washing, sanctification, and justification in resurrection (6:11). For the problem of the abuse of freedom, he presents the processed Christ, who is joined in resurrection to the believers as one spirit (6:17). For the problems related to marriage, he presents the processed Christ, who bought us with a price through death, being content to remain in the status into which He was called (7:23-24; Matt. 26:39; Phil. 2:8). For the problem of eating things sacrificed to idols, he presents the processed Christ, who died not only for all the believers, even the weaker brothers (1 Cor. 8:11). For the problem of head covering, he presents the processed Christ, who is fully submissive to the divine ordination in both death and resurrection (11:3). For the problem of the Lord's supper, he presents the processed Christ, who is symbolized in the one bread and realized in resurrection as the one Body (10:17). For the problem of gifts, he presents the processed Christ, who is functioning through many members in an orderly manner in resurrection as the corporate Christ (12:12). And he

concludes his discussion of the Corinthian problems by reiterating the fact that the resurrection life of Christ can be the unique solution to their problems because He has been processed as the last Adam and the life-giving Spirit (15:45). When this processed Christ is experienced and applied as resurrection, order arises out of the chaos and disorder created by sin and death.

### **The Dispensing of the Divine Life for the Divine Administration**

The local church in Corinth was a church in disorder, and the purpose of Paul's letter and his coming to them was to set the situation in order by dealing with the chaotic elements that were clearly and openly manifest to all and which had been reported to the apostle Paul (1:11). The elements of chaos in the church, including divisions, open immorality, unresolved disputes, the stumbling of members of the Body through the abuse of freedom and the eating of things sacrificed to idols, and the indifference to the members of the Body through the abuse of gifts, were an indication of the deeper, active operation of sin and death within the church (15:34, 21, 26). And just as the Corinthians' conduct reflected this operation, Paul's way of providing the necessary corrective to the church reflected his deep desire to bring the church back under the divine administration in the Body of Christ, first, by reminding them of their attachment, their fellowship, with the processed Christ through his teaching (1:9; 10:16), and second, by supplying the resurrection life to them through his stewardship so that they could be empowered to be victorious over the sting of death (4:1-2; 9:17; 15:54-56).

**T**hrough his teaching and his stewardship, involving both judgment and exhortation, Paul wanted to bring the believers in the church in Corinth out of death and into a living within the kingdom of God through the dispensing of the resurrection life. His desire for the church in Corinth to be under the divine administration through the divine dispensing is revealed in his plain declarations, in his inspired utterance in response to specific problems, and in the division and arrangement of the contents of the Epistle to the Corinthians.

In 4:19-21, Paul plainly declares his intention to focus on matters related to the divine administration, saying,

I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will ascertain not the speech of those who are puffed up but the power. For the *kingdom of God* is not in speech but in power. What do you want? Should I come to you with a *rod* or in *love* and a *spirit of meekness*? (emphasis added)

Paul's coming was the coming of the kingdom for the purpose of establishing kingdom rule. Divine administration

involves judgment, whether it is conducted with a rod or in a spirit of meekness. Paul's used the rod (5:5, 13) and demonstrated a spirit of meekness in order to restore those who had been overtaken in offense (Gal. 6:1; 1 Cor. 9:12; 10:23). Irrespective of his method of dealing with problems, everything he said and did was for the purpose of establishing order in the church: "The rest I will set in order when I come" (11:34).<sup>6</sup>

In Paul's utterance related to specific problems, it is also possible to see the intrinsic operation of the divine dispensing of the divine life which produces order through administration. Consider his treatment of the exercise of the gifts in the meetings of the church. Paul's emphasis on life can be seen in his repeated use of the word *same*: there are distinctions of gifts, but the *same* Spirit; distinctions of ministries, but the *same* Lord; and distinctions of operations, but the *same* God (12:4-6). In other words, all the gifts, which are manifestations of life, are sourced in the living, processed Triune God, who in His essential and economic being is distinct but not separate. Consequently, any distinctive gift that genuinely arises from the impartation of the divine life will be imbued with the order that is inherent within the Triune God. In a church that is under the dispensing of the divine life, all can "prophesy one by one that all may learn and all may be encouraged" (14:31). The ability for all to prophesy comes out of the capacity inherent within the divine life, not out of natural talent or eloquence. *All* truly means all, and thus our living attachment as members of the Body is the only qualification that is needed for all of us to function in the Body. And when a gift comes out of the divine dispensing, it is always manifested in an orderly manner. Thus, genuine prophesying is orderly: it is one by one, rather than in confusion and chaos (v. 33). And equally important, genuine function benefits the Body as all learn and all are encouraged. When the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets and when all things are done becomingly and in order (vv. 32, 40), all of the things that issue from the functioning of all of the saints result in the building up of the Body (v. 26), which is the enlargement of the realm of the divine administration.

Paul's desire for the church in Corinth to be under the divine administration through the divine dispensing is evident also in the division of the contents of 1 Corinthians.

Since he speaks of the divine life for the divine administration, he also presents the contents of his Epistle in an orderly manner. In the *Life-study of First Corinthians*, Witness Lee insightfully highlights Paul's arrangement:

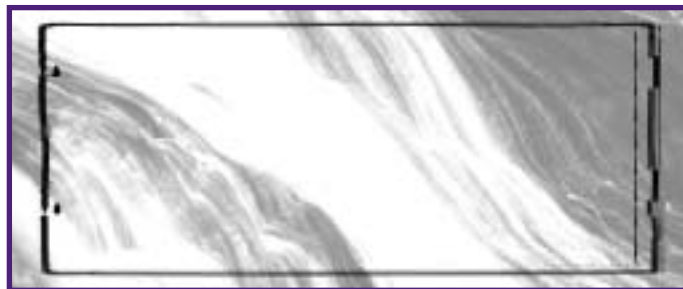
We have pointed out that the book of 1 Corinthians may be divided into two large sections, with chapters one through ten forming the first section and chapters eleven through sixteen, the second section. In the first section Paul deals with the daily life of a Christian. For this, Christ is needed. Christ is the unique factor to solve all the problems in a Christian's daily life...In the second section of this book, chapters eleven through sixteen, Paul deals with five problems in the realm of God's administration. If we would know the divine administration, we need to realize that a rebellion has taken place in the universe. (583-584)

In chapters eleven through fourteen we have the Head, the Body, and all the gifts with the functions for the operations to carry out God's administration. All this, however, must be in resurrection. In creation God does not have a way to carry out His administration, for both the angels and mankind rebelled against Him. But in resurrection God has a way to carry out His administration. As Christians we must be a resurrected people, and the church must be in resurrection. Only in resurrection can

we realize God's headship, discern the Body, and be members of the Body. Christ cannot have the Body except in resurrection. If there is no resurrection, there can be no church. The church is in resurrection, and we also are in resurrection. (588-589)

***The application of the crucified Christ in resurrection as the life-giving Spirit experientially solves every problem and results in a divine administration.***

All the problems in Corinth indicate that there was a shortage in the believers' living under the divine administration. In the first ten chapters, Paul deals with problems related to sin, sins, the flesh, the presence of spiritual death, and even physical death (11:30). These elements of the old creation cannot be found in Christ and in those who are experientially living in the kingdom of God. Consequently, the unique solution to every problem is Christ, who has passed through the cross and who has terminated sin, sins, the flesh, and death in His death as the last Adam. The application of the crucified Christ in resurrection as the life-giving Spirit experientially solves every problem and results in a divine order and administration. Simply put, when the



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crucified and resurrected Christ, the processed Christ, is applied as life, God carries out His divine administration and heads up all things in Christ.<sup>7</sup>

After addressing a specific set of problems, which he chose to address in order to illustrate the availability of Christ as life,<sup>8</sup> Paul brings the Corinthians to the matter of the divine administration in chapters 11 through 14. Finally, in chapter 15, he points them to resurrection as the basis for the believers' experience of the crucified Christ in resurrection for the expression of the divine administration. Resurrection makes the divine dispensing of the processed Christ possible, and in resurrection God's divine administration is carried out through the processed Christ.

### **The Divine Life and Divine Administration in 1 Corinthians 15: The Gospel of the Processed Christ**

The processed Christ is the gospel, and Paul begins his discussion of resurrection in chapter 15, the "close and crown" of the Epistle and his ministry, by referring to the gospel generally and to the content of the gospel specifically:

Now I make known to you, brothers, the *gospel* which I announced to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, *through which also you are being saved*, if you hold fast the word which I announced to you as the *gospel*, unless you have believed in vain. For I delivered to you, first of all, that which also I received, that *Christ died for our sins* according to the Scriptures; and that *He was buried*, and that *He has been raised* on the third day according to the Scriptures. (vv. 1-4, emphasis added)

**T**he gospel that Paul announced is not a dead gospel of letters; it is a living communication, a stewardship, containing and conveying the living and operative power of the divine life with its intrinsic ability to consummate the full salvation of the Triune God by delivering the Corinthians from the vestiges of their sins, which were exposed in the earlier chapters. This gospel, which is able to save those who have already believed, is the same gospel that Paul speaks of in Romans 5:10, the "much more" gospel that is so missing in today's Christianity: "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*" (emphasis added). The vast majority of Christianity has "received" and "announces" only a gospel of reconciliation, made possible by the redemptive death of Christ, but they are not standing in a gospel that has the capacity to save in life, which also has been made possible by Christ's life-releasing death. In essence, they have a gospel of the last Adam, that is, a gospel that presents the truth related to

Christ in His death, but they do not have a gospel of the life-giving Spirit, that is, a gospel that brings them into the experience of Christ in His resurrection. This is the gospel that is most needed by us and by the Corinthians, who were mired in the consequences of their ongoing sins, following their justification and regeneration.

Paul is not speaking to nominal believers, that is, to false believers,<sup>9</sup> but to genuine brothers and sisters in the Lord who have lost sight of the contents of his gospel, and thus, were no longer reaping the benefits of the operation of the divine life. Dahl notes,

All recognize that the Epistle is directed only to Christians and moreover that the arguments in it could only be convincing to Christians. Furthermore, most commentators are of the opinion that it is only to believers that the whole matter applies. (16)

Given the status of the recipients of his letter, that of genuine believers living in the soul and the flesh (1 Cor. 2:14; 3:1), it is of paramount importance to Paul to focus their attention on the gospel and its content.

**I**n contrast to the way verses 3 and 4 of chapter 15 can be so easily read, the content of the gospel is not a doctrinal or creedal formulation that requires our mental assent.<sup>10</sup> Rather, the content is Christ who has died for our sins as the last Adam and who was raised on the third day as the life-giving Spirit. The gospel through which we are being saved conveys the processed Christ, not simply a set of "beliefs." To the extent that we stand in this gospel, which is animated and energized by the resurrection life and which brings in divine order and administration, we participate in God's salvation in life, escaping the vanity in our living and labor that is the consequence of not holding to truth in love and of not growing up into Christ in all things (v. 2, 10, 58; Eph. 4:15, 17).

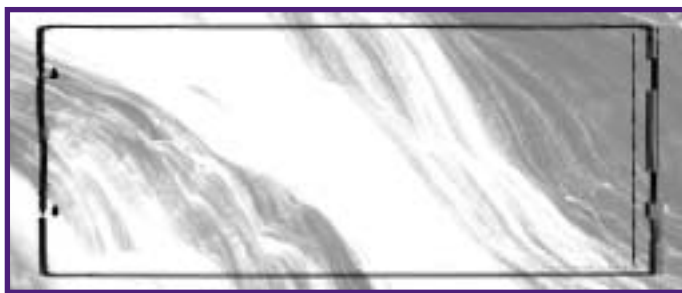
Barth makes a trenchant observation concerning Paul's emphasis in his presentation of the gospel, noting that the "superior confidence of Paul in the impregnable power of what established the Church must, from the outset, be kept in view...It is not truth that is threatened, but men in their relation to truth" (126). Paul's discussion of the gospel and resurrection should not be viewed merely as a "defense" of the truth—the truth of the gospel is unassailable, impregnable from attack, and ultimately triumphant because the word of the Lord which has been announced as the gospel abides forever (1 Pet. 1:25). God remains faithful because He cannot deny Himself; it is only the believers who can become faithless in relation to the truth (2 Tim. 2:13). Truth is truth; it is only our experience of the truth that is threatened by an inadequate understanding and appreciation of the processed Christ as the content of the gospel.

## The Processed Christ: The Last Adam

The first part of the gospel concerns Christ, who has been processed through death according to the promise of the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3), and the term that Paul uses to describe Christ in this process is “the last Adam” (v. 45). The processed Christ who died for our sins according to the Scriptures is the last Adam. The only place in the Scriptures where this term is mentioned is verse 45, but this does not make it insignificant simply by virtue of its apparent isolation. Rather, it is significant precisely because of its location in the one chapter where Paul feels compelled to plainly reiterate the essence of the gospel, which he had received and previously had delivered to them (1:1-3). Although Paul’s gospel is “according to the Scriptures,” the term that he uses to describe Christ is not an exact quotation of the Scriptures; it is an interpretation of the Scriptures. Nevertheless, when he unveils the processed Christ as the last Adam, he gives it the same force of Scripture by placing it in the context of what “is written” in the Scriptures (v. 45). The term *last Adam* is Paul’s spiritual interpretation of the Scriptures, which he presents in words taught by the Spirit (2:13); it is Paul’s explanation of how the death of Christ has been made effectual to and in the believers in the person and through the work of the crucified and resurrected Christ.

Many commentators take note of verse 45 and of Paul’s use of the phrase *it is written*, and apply this attribution to just the first half of the verse, that is, to *The first man, Adam, became a living soul*. Typically, this portion of the verse is included within quotation marks, “The first man, Adam, became a living soul,” because it is a clear reference to Genesis 2:7, which says, “Jehovah God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.” Many commentators, however, also argue that the second half of 1 Corinthians 15:45, “the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit,” should not be considered as part of Paul’s declaration of what has been written of in Scripture. This argument seems logical on its face, especially since there is nothing close to this term in the rest of the Scriptures. To sustain such a “logical” stance, however, one must, ironically, be willing to ignore the fact that its inclusion in Paul’s Epistle makes it a *de facto* part of the

**The term last Adam is Paul’s explanation of how the death of Christ has been made effectual through the work of the crucified and resurrected Christ.**



Scriptures. A willingness to give the greater weight of “Scripture” to the phrase *the first man, Adam, became a living soul* than to the phrase *the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit* may also come out of an inability or trepidation on the part of commentators to explain how the last Adam, who is clearly Christ, could become a life-giving Spirit without violating the mystery of the Trinity, either from a modalistic or tritheistic perspective.<sup>11</sup>

In point of fact, however, as R. C. H. Lenski indicates, even the first half of verse 45, which is Paul’s preamble to his crystallization of the death of Christ through the use of the term *the last Adam*, “The first man, Adam, became a living soul,” is not an exact quotation of Genesis 2:7. He states, “Both the Hebrew and the LXX read: ‘Man became a living soul.’ Paul is taken to task for reproducing this in the fuller form: ‘The first man Adam became a living soul.’” (717). Lenski goes on to say that “Paul is charged with a rabbinical and targumistic practice which adds all manner of remarks to a Scripture text as though they belonged to the original” (717), but he defends Paul’s insertion of the words *first* and *Adam* because they “bring out the true sense of the passage most clearly” (719).

Paul inserts these words of interpretation, *first* and *Adam*, because he wants to make two critical points related to the gospel, which involves the application of the person and work of Christ in those who have been called into the fellowship of the Son. The word *first* indicates that there is a relationship, a link, between the first and the last and, by extension, all who come in between the first and the last. This link is not merely a sequential one in terms of time, because Paul also adds the word *Adam* in order to speak of Christ as the last Adam. Consequently, the relationship that the two Adams and all the believers share is one of life and nature; we share an organic lineage. The sin that entered into the world through Adam’s transgression was not merely passed on in the way of imputation but in the way of constitution through life and nature (Rom. 5:19). In His incarnation Christ put on the human nature, coming in the likeness of the flesh of sin (8:3). Being thus joined to humanity, He could take this humanity to the cross and redeem it in His work through His person as the last Adam, terminating all the negative factors in the universe to open the way for His divine life to be

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imparted into a new race of God-humankind. Because of the terminating work of the last Adam on the cross, the heading up work of Christ in the new creation can be carried out in His person as the second man, the Head of the Body (1 Cor. 15:47).

The words *first* and *Adam* are inserted to show Christ's identification with the first man, Adam. By designating the man who became a living soul, but who also brought sin, sins, and death into the human race as the "first man, Adam," Paul clarifies beyond any doubt that the work of the last Adam on the cross has effectively dealt with all the negative factors that plague fallen humanity. By speaking of the first Adam and the last Adam, Paul leaves no doubt that the source of all our problems has been terminated. The true sense of the entire passage in verse 45, written of in both the Old and New Testament portions of the Scriptures, is conveyed succinctly in the following footnotes:

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, 1 Cor. 15:45, note 1)

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. (15:47, note 2)

In His person and work as the last Adam, Christ has terminated all the old creation with all its attendant problems related to sin, sins, the flesh, and death—all

the problems that plagued the Corinthians. Without speaking of Christ as the last Adam, Paul realizes that the death of Christ easily could be viewed as an isolated human event with no organic connection to the believers. Consequently, he interprets the Scriptures to give meaning and immediacy to the gospel by speaking of both the first and the last Adam. By presenting Christ as the last Adam, Paul underscores the effectiveness of Christ's death on behalf of the believers.

### *The Processed Christ: The Life-giving Spirit*

By presenting Christ as the life-giving Spirit, Paul underscores the application of the crucified Christ in His resurrection to the believers. Consequently, the second part of the gospel concerns Christ, who has been processed through resurrection according to the promise of the Scriptures (v. 4), and the term that Paul uses to describe Christ in this process is "the life-giving Spirit" (v. 45). The processed Christ, who rose on the third day according to the Scriptures for our enlivening in the divine life, is the life-giving Spirit. This is the reason Paul offers a further interpretation of Genesis 2:7 in verse 45 by speaking of Christ as the life-giving Spirit. Similar to his use of the term *the last Adam*, the only place in the Scriptures where the term *life-giving Spirit* is used in this precise formulation is verse 45,<sup>12</sup> but again this does not make it insignificant simply by virtue of its apparent isolation. Rather, it is significant precisely because of its organic connection to the person who is the last Adam. The life-giving Spirit is the last Adam: they are one. When the last Adam rose on the third day, He became the life-giving Spirit in His person and work. If our conscience truly is held captive to the Word of God, it should be a matter of conscience to speak of Christ becoming the life-giving Spirit, especially if we are willing to laud His work on the cross as the last Adam. Paul makes the connection; it seems as if commentators should at least acknowledge it, even if they cannot explain or embrace it.

There are glimpses of understanding concerning the significance of Paul's use of the term *life-giving Spirit* in various commentaries, but often there is a complete failure to address it or a flat refusal to consider anything other than the eschatological implications of the term that he links so clearly with the operation of resurrection life in the person and work of Christ. Robert Candlish evidences some understanding of the significance of the term *life-giving* by pointing to the resurrection of Christ which made the giving of life possible.

Thus far [referring to the work of Christ prior to His resurrection], the last or second Adam is no life-giver, no quickener. He is a life-winner, a life-conqueror... Undoing, by his atoning sufferings and death, what the

first Adam had done by his sin—accomplishing and fulfilling, by his perfect obedience, that righteousness in which the first Adam failed—the last Adam comes forth at his resurrection,—and then for the first time,—in the new character of “a quickening spirit.” (237-238)

Thus, as “a quickening spirit,” the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, dying and rising again, is in a position and is able to quicken spiritually our whole nature, in all its parts. (240-241)

Candlish notes, “It was at his resurrection, and in virtue of his resurrection, that ‘the last Adam was made a quickening<sup>13</sup> spirit’” (238). He goes on to rhetorically ask, “How is he a quickening spirit?—not quickened merely, but quickening—not living only, but life-giving—not simply himself possessing spiritual life in the body, but imparting it to others?” (238). Although Candlish recognizes the “life-giving” aspect of the Christ as the Spirit, he, like many other commentators, sees this primarily in terms of Christ giving life to our bodies at the coming resurrection.

Coates sees no involvement of Christ as the life-giving Spirit in the current lives of the believers, stating, “We are not quickened by the last Adam for this world, nor for things connected with this life” (117). Godet echoes this, saying, “In our context, it seems to me that the term [*life-giving*] should not be applied to the communication of spiritual life, but rather to the spirit’s action on the body, which serves as its organ” (849-850). He rhetorically asks whether “the epithet ζωοποιούν, *quicken*ing, already points to the influence which Christ will exercise over the body of His own at the Advent to glorify it like His own,” and answers, “It is evident that Paul is tending to this idea” (851).

Lenski, at least, is willing to draw the connection between the words *life-giving* and *spirit*, although it is not clear whether he sees any essential connection between the spiritual life that flows to us and the Spirit who gives life. Nevertheless, the following quotation is helpful in seeing the significance of the term *life-giving Spirit* in relation to our experience of the divine dispensing of the life of the processed God. Lenski writes,

We should not separate the two words πνεῦμα ζωοποιούν. “Life-giving spirit” designates Christ

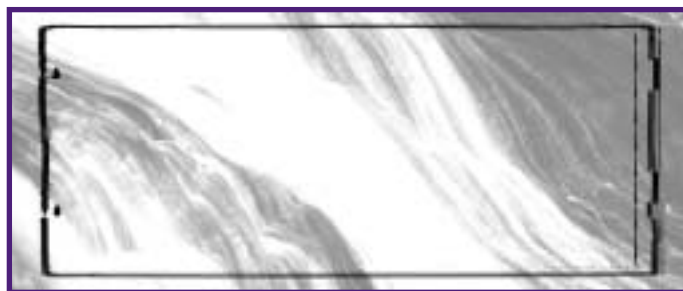
in relation to us: he is the fountain of spiritual life for us. That spiritual life flows, not from his body, although it has become a spiritual body and the body of his glory, to our body; but from the spirit that dwells in his glorious body to our spirit that dwells in our body and thus quickens us spiritually and gives us life (ζωή). (722)

Given these glimpses, I appreciate the insight offered in the outline of 1 Corinthians 15 in the Recovery Version of the Bible, especially as it pertains to the significance of verse 45. This verse is included in a section entitled “The Definition of Resurrection, vv. 35-49” (536). To consider resurrection as an event, apart from understanding its impact on the person and work of the processed Christ as they are applied to the believers, is to miss the central definition of resurrection, which is the life-giving Spirit. Resurrection manifests Christ, who is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25), as the life-giving Spirit to the believers; that is, it manifests not only what Christ is in His essential being but also what He is in His economical operation toward us. For the believers, to know Christ is to know Him as the life-giving Spirit. For the believers, to know resurrection is to know Christ as the life-giving Spirit. In order to experientially speak of resurrection and to experientially speak of Christ, we need to speak of the life-giving Spirit.

***Resurrection manifests Christ as the life-giving Spirit; it manifests what Christ is in His essential being and what He is in His economical operation toward us.***

In this context, it would be helpful to reconsider an earlier reference to footnote 1 for 1 Corinthians 15:12 in the Recovery Version of the Bible, which speaks of resurrection as the life pulse of the divine economy, especially with reference to regeneration, renewing, transformation, and conformity to the image of Christ, and also to the believers being members of Christ, the Body of Christ, the bride, and the new man. If the words *life-giving Spirit* were substituted for *resurrection* in this note, there would be no change in meaning:

If there were no [*life-giving Spirit*], 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; 2 Cor. 3:18), and no conformity to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). If there were no [*life-giving Spirit*], there would be no members of Christ (Rom. 12:5), no Body of Christ as His fullness (Eph. 1:20-23), and no



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church as Christ's bride (John 3:29), and therefore no new man (Eph. 2:15; 4:24; Col. 3:10-11).

Regeneration, renewing, transformation, and conformity to the image of Christ are all life processes; that is, they are dependent upon our receiving and experience of the divine life. When the life of God enters our spirit, we are regenerated and born of God. When the life of God is imparted into us, there is the renewing of the Holy Spirit. When the life of God saturates our mind, we are renewed in the spirit of the mind and transformation comes out of this renewing, and when the life of God fills our entire being, we will be conformed to the image of Christ, which is the destiny of God's choosing and our calling. Similarly, being members of Christ, the Body, the bride, and new man are all corporate expressions of the corporate life of God which has been dispensed into us, joining us in a fellowship of life that is expressed in these four ways. Without the life-giving Spirit, the resurrection life that is needed to initiate, sustain, and impel the divine economy forward could not be applied to the believers, and indeed we would be of all men most miserable (1 Cor. 15:19).

**T**he life-giving Spirit is Paul's crystallization of both resurrection itself and the resurrection of Christ as the gospel, and the three words in this designation are significant in the believer's experience of the gospel. The word *life* refers to the divine, eternal, uncreated life of the processed Triune God, into which all of the experiences of Christ in His incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension have been compounded for our experience and enjoyment. The word *giving* speaks of the processed Triune God's desire to dispense all the riches of the divine life into His chosen, called, and redeemed believers. The word *Spirit* refers to the means by which the dispensing of His eternal life is made possible. The fellowship that we have with the Triune God is the fellowship of the Spirit and a fellowship of spirit. Without Christ becoming the life-giving Spirit in resurrection, there would be no ability on His part to impart His life and no ability on our part to receive the dispensing of the divine life. This is because the life-giving Spirit does not dispense the unprocessed life of the Triune God into us, but rather the life that now contains the redemptive elements that were added through His death on the cross, and which alone can enable us to have fellowship with God (Heb. 9:14). Truly, without the last Adam becoming the life-giving Spirit in resurrection, there would be no capacity on the part of the Triune God to righteously dispense Himself into us, the believing "Corinthians."

### ***The Processed Christ: The Life-giving Spirit Joined to Our Spirit***

The dispensing of the life-giving Spirit is centered in our human spirit which has been joined to the Lord as one

spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). Paul speaks of our union with Christ in the context of his response to the problem in the church in Corinth related to the abuse of freedom, specifically their use of their physical bodies in the pursuit of fornication. This seems like such an unlikely context for the presentation of this deep truth, but a quick examination of some of the themes running throughout the chapter show a remarkable correlation to the themes present in chapter 15. In both chapters Paul speaks of the resurrection (6:14; ch. 15); in both chapters he speaks of the kingdom and of inheriting the kingdom (6:9-10; 15:24-28, 50); in both chapters he speaks of judgment (6:3-4; 15:25); in both chapters he speaks of glory in relation to our physical bodies (6:20; 15:40-43). And most tellingly, in both chapters, when he comes to the central point, the crystallized point, he grounds his utterance in a spiritual interpretation of the Scriptures: In chapter 6, he presents the truth of our human spirit being joined to Lord in the context of Genesis 2:24, "For he says, 'The two shall be one flesh.' But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (vv. 16-17), and in chapter 15, he grounds his utterance concerning the last Adam becoming the life-giving Spirit in Genesis 2:7. This is not an insignificant correlation because it underscores the point that the believers being joined as one spirit to the Lord, who is the life-giving Spirit, is ultimately related to God's original intention in His creation of humanity as revealed in Genesis. The working out of God's economical intention as revealed in Genesis is the gospel. Consequently, in chapter 15 Paul takes the opportunity of the heretical spiritual teachings of the Corinthians to present the methodology, the process, of the gospel that matches God's intention as presented in Genesis, and in chapter 6 Paul takes the opportunity of the gross fleshly practices of the Corinthians to present the application, the experience, of the gospel that equally matches God's intention as presented in Genesis. Paul speaks of the first man, Adam, to point the way to a greater appreciation on our part for the economical process of Christ, as the last Adam, becoming the life-giving Spirit, and Paul speaks of the physical union of Adam and Eve to point the way to a greater appreciation and experience of our union with Christ as the life-giving Spirit in our spirit, which is now a mingled spirit. This mingled spirit is full of life, full of resurrection, and is increasingly full of purpose as sin and death are defeated daily as Christ's reigns in us and through us as the church.

This victory over sin and death...must become our daily experience in life through the resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit (v. 45), who is one with our spirit (6:17). Hence, we should live by and walk according to this mingled spirit. (Recovery Version, 1 Cor. 15:57, note 1)

### ***Living under the Divine Administration through the Divine Dispensing***

A meaningful Christian life is one that is lived under the

divine administration through the dispensing of the divine life by the life-giving Spirit in our mingled spirit. Such a life has two principal characteristics: both our living, that is, what we are in our person, and our labor, that is, what we do in our work for the Lord, have purpose and meaning.<sup>14</sup> The operation of the divine resurrection life in us in this age keeps us out of the realm of vanity. Without the dispensing of the divine life, which produces a divine administration, our believing and our faith would be in vain and our labor would be in vain as well (vv. 2, 14, 10, 58). “If Christ had not been resurrected to live in us as our life and everything, our faith in Him would be fruitless, worthless, and without any issue, such as the impartation of life, freedom from sin, victory over Satan, and growth in life” (Recovery Version, v. 17, note 1), and “Without the living Christ in resurrection, both the proclamation of the gospel and our faith in the gospel would be empty and void, having no reality” (v. 14, note 1). May the Lord open our eyes more to see the things that could not come up in the hearts of man because it is simply beyond our comprehension in our fallen condition to realize that God desired to pass through a process to impart Himself in His divine life into our God-created human spirit to be fully joined with us in life and nature so that He could express Himself and exercise His dominion through us by heading up all things in the universe in Christ. May the gospel of the processed Christ be taught everywhere, bringing more of God’s people into the experience of His divine economy. Thankfully, the grace of God is toward us, empowering us to live and labor in the last Adam, the life-giving Spirit. **AFC**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>All of my references to the structure and outline of the first Epistle to the Corinthians are based upon the outline developed by Witness Lee and contained in the Recovery Version of the Bible.

<sup>2</sup>Understanding the entire contents of the holy Word as a revelation of Christ should be an axiomatic consideration in a worker’s effort to cut straight the word of the truth and to deliver the proper contents of the gospel, but often it is not (2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Cor. 15:3). Often what is delivered is not the Scriptures that testify of Christ (Luke 24:27, 44) but that which testifies of ourselves for the sake of our boasting (1 Cor. 1:31; 2:5).

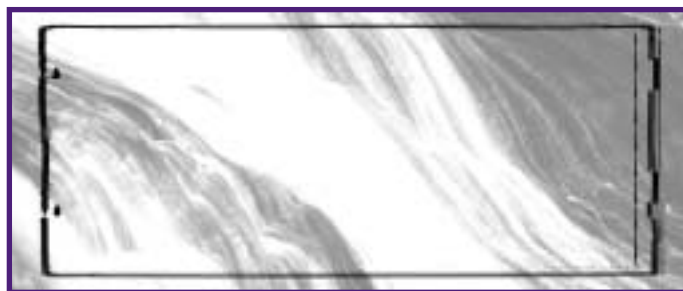
<sup>3</sup>It is not too much to say that God’s preparation is His economical process, which involves the incarnation,

human living, death, and resurrection of Christ. Paul clearly links what God has prepared in 1 Corinthians 2:9 to the Lord’s crucifixion and resurrection as the Lord of glory in verse 8. The Lord confirmed the indispensability of this prepared process when He spoke to His disciples, following His resurrection, saying, “Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and enter into His glory?” (Luke 24:26). The necessity of Christ’s suffering and entering into glory is related to the fulfillment of God’s economy, according to the preparation that came out of His “determined counsel and foreknowledge” (Acts 2:23). The suffering is related to His death by crucifixion at the hands of the rulers of this age, and His entering into glory is related to His resurrection. The depths of God that have been prepared for us include the riches of the processed Christ, which cannot be separated from the processed Christ Himself. The cross reference supplied by Witness Lee in the Recovery Version of the Bible to the word *prepared* in 1 Corinthians 2:9 points to Matthew 25:34, which says, “Then the King will say to those on His right hand, Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” It is illuminating and encouraging to realize that God’s preparation is also related to the kingdom, the realm of His divine administration.

<sup>4</sup>The remainder of this article is an attempt to prove this assertion. Neither time nor space allows for a presentation of the broadest point, that is, that the entirety of Paul’s ministry is focused on the processed Christ, who is life to the believers for the purpose of expressing the divine image and establishing the divine dominion. And since my focus is on 1 Corinthians 15 broadly and verse 45 more narrowly, I also can only briefly cover these matters as they are presented in all of 1 Corinthians. If there is sufficient demonstration of the crystallization inherent in verse 45, hopefully the reader will consider the content of the entire chapter, the entire Epistle of 1 Corinthians, and Paul’s entire ministry in the same light. In any case, may our faith be strengthened and may our stand be more aligned to the divine economy that God has prepared for those who love Him.

<sup>5</sup>A footnote at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 15 in the Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible illustrates the tendency to not only view the content of the chapter as a new topic within a disjointed discourse but also to view it merely as a doctrinal presentation: “At this point, Paul shifted to a new topic of great concern to him: the integrity of the gospel message with regard to the doctrine of the resurrection” (1865). It is as if chapter 15 is an afterthought with no cohesion to a central message.

*Without the dispensing of the divine life, which produces a divine administration, our believing and our faith would be in vain and our labor would be in vain as well.*



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<sup>6</sup>The relationship between judgment and order, that is, between judgment and a living under the divine administration, is experientially portrayed in 1 Corinthians 11:29-34. The emphasis has been added to the verses below.

For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks *judgment* to himself if he does not discern the body. Because of this many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we discerned ourselves, we would *not be judged*. *But being judged by the Lord*, we are disciplined that we may not be condemned with the world. So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, *that you may not come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.*

<sup>7</sup>There is an aspect of living under the divine administration through the divine dispensing that is significant throughout 1 Corinthians but which cannot be developed in detail this article—the loss or gaining of a divine reward. It is our experience of the divine dispensing that will determine our status in relation to the God who will prove our works by the testing of fire, the testing of divine judgment (3:13). Paul was ever cognizant of this reality, and he lived his life in the light of this righteous accounting. Talbert alludes to the presence of this influence even in chapter 15, when he states, “1 Cor 15:1-58 is a thought unit held together by an inclusion (vv. 1-2, brethren/in vain; v. 58, brethren/in vain)” (96). Without a proper focus, there is the real possibility that our belief and our labor can be in vain, that is, our living may not yield the benefits that are possible when the grace that is toward us is not in vain but daily operates in our living and our work. A footnote to verse 58 states,

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, 15:58, note 3)

It is the grace, the processed God, that is toward us, that is imparted into us, which enables us to labor more abundantly as stewards of the mysteries of Christ (1 Cor. 15:10; 4:1-2), and which gives us assurance that our labor is not in vain. The determination of whether we have labored in vain is not dependent on our own assessment in this age, and neither can it be measured by outward accomplishments and the approval of men in this age (Gal. 1:10). Our borders may be “enlarged” and our work may be “prospered,” but this enlargement and prospering may merely reflect the efforts of our flesh. The determining factor is the extent to which our work builds with gold, silver, and precious stones, that is, with the processed Triune God. And this determination is through fire (1 Cor. 3:13).

It is not uncommon for one who labors for the Lord and even in the Lord to feel, at times, that there is no fruitful indication of value in his labor. This is to be expected, but at such times, our consideration should not turn to how we can improve on our “results” but to whether the Lord is standing with us (2 Tim. 4:16-17). If He is, that is enough! Witness Lee echoes the proper attitude of a slave of Christ in his comments on Isaiah 49:4, “But I said, I have labored in vain; / I have used up my strength for nothing and vanity; / Yet surely the justice due to me is with Jehovah, / And my recompense with my God.” He writes,

In Isaiah 49:4, Isaiah told us that he considered himself as laboring in vain, using up his strength for nothing and vanity; yet he was assured that the justice due to him was with Jehovah and his recompense with his God. I had this kind of feeling and experience in the past. Quite often I felt that I was living in vain and that I had used up all my strength for nothing, for vanity. After serving the Lord for a while, we may feel that we are laboring in vain. We may feel exhausted and that we have used up our strength for nothing in vanity. All the servants of the Lord have the same kind of feeling. On the one hand, in the morning we may be happy, praising the Lord that we are carrying out the top job. Later in the day, however, we may feel that we are laboring in vain for nothing. Despite this, Isaiah said that he was assured that the justice due to him was with Jehovah. I can testify that although people have condemned me and defamed me, deep within I have the assurance that the justice due to me is with Christ. He knows whether I labor for vanity or for reality. The justice due to me is with Jehovah, and the recompense due to me is with my God. (*Isaiah 325*)

<sup>8</sup>In 1 Corinthians 11:34, Paul concludes his discussion of the problems related to the Lord’s supper, saying, “And the rest I will set in order when I come.” *The rest* indicates that Paul was aware of other problems in the church in Corinth but chose to address only a select set of them. The ones he chose, no doubt, reflect his deeper desire to bring the church into the divine dispensing for the furtherance of the divine administration. While it is reasonable to assume that he would not neglect the most pressing problems, it is also reasonable to assume that he had a broader intention in the selection of the problems he chose to address and in his arrangement of his responses to these selected problems. Witness Lee states, in regard to the word *rest* in verse 34, “This indicates that the apostle did not give instructions for everything related to the practice of the church. For ‘the rest’ we need to seek the Lord’s leading, based on and governed by the principles set forth in the New Testament” (Recovery Version, note 1). The principles set forth in the New Testament are the principles associated with the economy of God, the teaching Paul taught in every church, and which he charged others to receive and impart (4:17; 1 Tim. 1:3-4).

<sup>9</sup>The failure to understand God’s full salvation as an ongoing process of being saved in His life (Rom. 5:10), following our

justification by faith and regeneration by the divine life, combined with a shallow understanding of faith, can lead to a significant misunderstanding of Paul's concern that the believers in Corinth had "believed in vain." Often this is interpreted to mean that their believing was not a valid act of faith. This view is echoed in John MacArthur's study notes on 1 Corinthians 15:

Somebody who goes along for awhile believing, then changes to unbelief, gives evidence that he was never saved to begin with. He has "believed in vain." He has had a worthless, useless, uncommitted faith. In fact, there are many people who believe that Jesus died and rose again—but they aren't Christians! Why? *Because faith without commitment is useless faith.* (16)

Paul's concern was not that the Corinthians were unbelievers but that they were failing to reap the benefits of their belief, especially the precious and exceedingly great promises that positioned them to become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). They had believed, but their faith was not effectual or operative because the grace of life, which had been made available to them through their genuine response to Paul's gospel and which was toward them, was not being received and experienced.

Faith makes the riches of Christ available to us (Eph. 3:8). But if we do not receive and enjoy them, there is possibility that the years that we have to experience and enjoy the Lord can be eaten by the cutting and consuming locusts of a natural and fleshly living. Such a living is not necessarily an indication that one is an unbeliever. Instead, one may walk like an unbeliever simply because he does not realize the possibility of experiencing the surpassing greatness of His power which is toward us who believe, which operated in Christ in raising Him from the dead (1:19-20). Paul did not regard the Corinthians as false believers but merely befuddled and confused believers, even fleshly believers, whose divine inheritance was of no practical value to them, primarily because they had lost sight of the dispensing of the divine life of the processed Triune God. It is possible for the "children of Zion," as types of genuine believers, to lose many years of fruitful harvests by not being aware of or entering into the economy of God (Joel 2:23-25). But it is the harvest that has been lost, not their status as children of Zion. Thankfully, these years can be restored as the poured out Spirit is received by those who call upon the name of the Lord (vv. 28, 32).

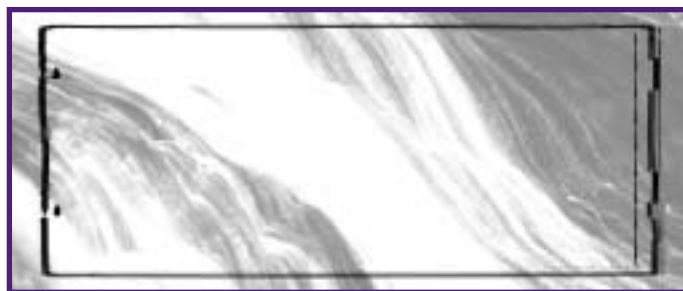
<sup>10</sup>When Paul's treatment of resurrection in chapter 15 is viewed primarily as a doctrinal presentation, commentators marshal various apologetic arguments in order to "prove" the fact of the resurrection for the sake of buttressing the believers' "faith." This is especially evident when faith is understood as being the mental "assent" to the facts of the Lord's resurrection. Some of these arguments, in addition to completely missing the mark, can even weaken one's objective agreement with the truth by employing lines of logic that hold little weight upon even the most cursory examination. Consider the following "proof" of resurrection:

The greatest subjective proof of the resurrection is the very existence of the church. The very fact that the Corinthians had received it, stood on it, and continued in it, is evidence that Christ was alive...Also, let me add, here we are, 2,000 years later, still believing in the resurrection. I believe we are the greatest subjective proof in the world that Jesus rose from the dead. Do you realize that for these 2,000 years, while we have been continuing in the faith, the skeptics of the world have done their best to disprove the resurrection and have never been successful? In fact, the longer we live, the greater the resurrection evidence is, because we are the living evidence that He is alive! (MacArthur 18)

The mere continuance of the idea of resurrection in the above quotation is touted as evidence of the resurrection itself. The persistence of a belief in an idea, however, is not a proof of the reality of the contents of that belief. Many religious beliefs which are not in accord with the divine revelation have been around longer than the teachings of the apostles, and there are still people who attempt to practice these beliefs, but this is not a proof of their beliefs. The subjective proof of resurrection involves the demonstration of Spirit and power that is practically revealed in a living under the divine administration, a living which manifests God in the flesh through the church as the mystery of godliness. This living is corporate and organic because the living God is the God of the living (1 Tim. 4:10; Matt. 22:32; 1 Tim. 3:15).

<sup>11</sup>In considering the central chapter on resurrection and the central verse that makes the reality of resurrection applicable to the believers, not just in the age to come, following the resurrection of our bodies, but more importantly in this age in which Christ must reign in the church in order to implement His divine administration, it is remarkable how 1 Corinthians 15:45 receives only scant and cautious attention.

*The  
Corinthians  
were befuddled  
and confused  
believers  
because they  
had lost sight  
of the  
dispensing  
of the divine  
life of the  
processed  
Triune God.*



I largely credit the scant attention to a lack of revelation. Consider for example, Paul's unique designations for Christ in verses 45 and 47, *the last Adam* and *the second man* respectively. *The last Adam* refers specifically to Christ in His incarnation as a member of the adamic race, who through the effectiveness of His redemptive sacrifice, terminated all that is of Adam and the fallen race of humankind. As the last, He is the point of termination. With Christ on the cross, the fallen race of Adam came to an end. *The second man* refers specifically to Christ in His resurrection as the head of an entirely new race of humankind, that is, the race of God-humankind, which has been regenerated through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet. 1:3). The phrase *the second man* contains no reference to Adam because nothing of Adam has passed through the cross. There is also a clear distinction between the humanity of Christ prior to the cross and after the resurrection because as the term implies, the second is not the first. The second man is the head of the new race of which Christ is the Head, and we are the members of His Body. In the Head and in the Body, there is redeemed and uplifted humanity because the humanity of Christ was divinized on the day of His resurrection, the day of the begetting of His humanity with divinity (Rom. 1:4; Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5). Despite these clear distinctions, however, many commentators routinely combine the terms, especially referring to Christ as "the second Adam," a combination which subtly undermines the content of the gospel (see Candlish, pp. 236-249; Barth, p. 171; and Dahl, p. 16).

I largely credit the cautious attention to cowardice, a spirit of which we have not been given by God (2 Tim. 1:7). Why is it so difficult for some to simply say Amen to the Word of God that they proclaim is infallible: The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit? Some hedge around the verse by simply ignoring it. Some diminish its economical impact by lower-casing the *s* in *Spirit*, as if this will eliminate the trinitarian complexities that they so assiduously seek to avoid, not realizing that their insistence on a lower-case *s* introduces much more troubling and even heretical trinitarian complexities. After all, are there now two Spirits who give life, one the Holy Spirit (John 6:63) and the other the life-giving Spirit of 1 Corinthians 15:45? And of those who venture to explain, who even come close to the truth, some seem to backtrack and obfuscate when they encounter resistance. A good example of this is contained in the footnotes to 1 Corinthians 15:45 in the New Geneva Study Bible, published in 1995, and subsequently revised and reprinted as the Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible in 2003. In the 1995 edition, the following note on verse 45 is included:

Paul clarifies his meaning by continuing the contrast between the first and the last Adam (vv. 21, 22 note). The Greek word translated "being" (*psyche*) is related to the word translated "natural" in v. 44 (*psychikos*), while the word "spirit" (*pneuma*) corresponds to "spiritual" (*pneumatikos*). The words "life-giving spirit" are most probably a reference to the Holy Spirit. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are not the same Person, but He and the Spirit are identified in terms of their presence and activity in the

church. This identity, known to us because Jesus too is life-giving, is the fulfillment of Jesus' role as Messiah and commenced with His resurrection and ascension. To be in Christ is to be in the Spirit also (6:11, 15, 19; 12:19). The association of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and life is apparent in Rom. 8:9-11 and 2 Cor. 3:6, 17, 18). (1823)

The rhetoric in this passage straddles the fence quite nicely, but at least one foot tends to dangle on the side of truth. The verse uses a lower-case *s*, but the note says that it "most probably" refers to the Holy Spirit. It rightly says that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are not the "same Person," but that they are identified in presence and activity. No attempt, however, is made to define the mode of this identification. It also says that to be in Christ is to be in the Spirit. It is not clear, however, whether this is an issue of the believers' economical experience of our mutual coinherence and incorporation into the processed God or whether we are separately and distinctly in Christ and also in the Spirit. In this note at least some effort is made to address the complexities of the divine economy.

In the subsequent revision, however, much of this effort is abandoned. The Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible substantially modifies this note, although the framework of the note remains essentially intact. The note states,

Paul used a quotation from Genesis 2:7 to clarify his meaning by developing the contrast between the first man and the last man (see note on vv. 21-22). As part of his human, Messianic work, Jesus became a "life-giving Spirit" at the time of his resurrection. That is, he received his spiritual, or glorified, body and became inseparable from the Holy Spirit in his work and existence (without losing his personal identity as the Son). Note the strong connection between Christ, the Spirit and life in Romans 8:9-11 and 2 Corinthians 3:6, 17-18. (1867)

The indication that the phrase *life-giving spirit* in the verse is a reference to the Holy Spirit is dropped from the note, although, interestingly, the phrase, as quoted in the note, contains the upper-case word *Spirit*. I suspect that this will be changed in subsequent editions to a lower-case *s*. There is no mention of "identification," and the closest it comes to this idea is to speak of the inseparability of Christ and the Spirit, but this inseparability can be interpreted along a vast range of possibilities, all the way from a modalistic, heretical understanding of inseparability to the inseparability that comes from persons who are involved in a close-working relationship, which is also heretical in a tritheistic sense.

<sup>12</sup>My reference to a precise use of the term *life-giving Spirit* elsewhere in the Scriptures should not be regarded as an indication that there are no other verses that encapsulate and confirm the teaching that Christ is a life-giver. In relation to Christ consider John 4:14; 5:21; 10:28; and 17:2, and in relation to the Spirit consider John 6:63; Romans 8:11; and 2 Corinthians 3:6. It is a tribute to Paul's boldness that he would plainly point to the coinhering and coexisting connection

between the Son and the Spirit in regard to the life-giving economic work of the Trinity by speaking of the processed and resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit.

<sup>13</sup>Perhaps the most interesting interpretation of Paul's use of the term *life-giving*, which is rendered as *quicken* in many versions, including the King James Version, is provided by C. A. Coates. He draws a sharp distinction between resurrection and quickening, relegating both processes, as they apply to the believers, to some point in future. He views resurrection as a separation from our sinful and natural condition, which then enables our raised bodies to be quickened or enlivened to live in a new region, a heavenly region (117-118). In a question and answer segment, Coates confuses the power of resurrection with the results of Christ's work on the cross, and then confuses and confines the quickening of the Spirit to the actual bodily resurrection of the believers.

*Ques.* Do you distinguish between quickening and resurrection?

C.A.C. Yes, very much so, because resurrection takes you out of all connected with the former history. (119)

*Ques.* You spoke of new birth and quickening. Are they the same thing?

C.A.C. Oh no, not a bit of it! New birth has quickening in view. (122)

*Ques.* The order in John's gospel is born again, resurrection and quickening. Is that the moral order, the order in which they are understood?

C.A.C. I think so. (122)

Coates's distinction between new birth or regeneration and quickening also reveals a shortsighted understanding of the role of the dispensing of the divine life. Without the giving of life there would be no regeneration because regeneration depends upon the receiving of the divine life. Believers are not somehow "born again" apart from the divine life so that they later can be quickened with this spiritual life after the resurrection of the body. The divine life is received in this age by believing in the Lord; it is imparted into our human spirit in this age with respect to righteousness, spreads to our soul in this age with respect to sanctification, and ultimately will saturate our body with respect to redemption (1 Cor. 1:30).

<sup>14</sup>The connection between Paul's stewardship and the divine administration is experientially portrayed in 1 Corinthians 4:1-21. He begins with reference to his stewardship (v. 1), establishing the fact that his stewardship is within the boundary of what has been

written (v. 6), that is, that he has not gone beyond or outside of the realm of the truth in his stewardship. He points out that there is a coming judgment from the Lord in regard to his conduct within his stewardship (vv. 4-5). He assures them that there is a proper living and reigning within the kingdom of God in this age (v. 8), which is integrally related to its connection with his teaching which he teaches in every church (v. 17). Paul's faithful stewardship produces a proper living under the divine administration that will issue in praise from God at the appropriate time (v. 5).

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