

THE CORPORATE GOD IN 1 CORINTHIANS: LIVING IN THE DIVINE FELLOWSHIP OF THE INCORPORATED TRIUNE GOD THROUGH THE DIVINE DISPENSING OF THE LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT FOR THE PRODUCING OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

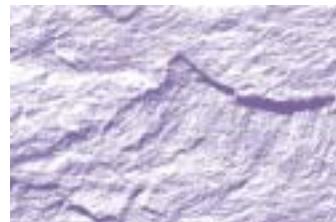
BY JOHN PESTER

The place of the first Epistle to the Corinthians in the development of crucial aspects of Christian thought and practice in light of the biblical revelation of the economy of salvation deserves special reconsideration.¹ When contrasted with the Epistles of Paul to the Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians, the focus and content of the subject matter that 1 Corinthians presents seem to pale in comparison. Although Paul comments on the practical situations in the local churches that are the recipients of his general Epistles, his exhortations typically follow extended portions of teaching related to broader doctrinal matters that form much of the body of the Christian faith as it has been defined and handed down to successive generations of believers.

While we are touched, for example, with Paul's extensive concluding remarks to the saints in Rome (15:25—16:24), our attention in Romans is focused more on its full development of the judicial and organic aspects of the gospel of God (1:1; 5:10). While we are intrigued by the glimpse into the activities of the Judaizers throughout the region of Galatia, our appreciation of Galatians is based more on its clear exegesis of the Scriptures, contrasting the law and the revelation of God's Son, who is living and being formed in us (1:16; 2:20; 4:19). While we are encouraged to follow the exhortations in Ephesians to love wives, submit to husbands, and nurture children in the discipline and admonition of the Lord (5:25, 22; 6:4), the eyes of our heart are overwhelmed more by the unveiling of the church's spiritual blessings in Christ and its role in fulfilling the eternal purpose of God (1:18). While we consider the tension between Euodias and Syntyche in Philippians as an object lesson in the danger of rivalry and contention (4:2), we treasure more the pattern of Christ's condescension and exaltation in the accomplishment of redemption (2:6-11). While we are encouraged to live according to the arbitrating peace of Christ in Colossians (3:15), we marvel more at the revelation of Christ as the centrality and universality of God, the Head of the Body, and the new man (1:9—3:11). And while we are humbled by the exhortations in 1 and 2 Thessalonians to live a holy life for the church life, we focus more on the rapture and the man and mystery of lawlessness (1 Thes. 4:13—5:3; 2 Thes. 2:3, 7).

When we subsequently consider 1 Corinthians and its contribution toward the accomplishment of Paul's charge to complete the word of God (Col. 1:25), this book is not regarded as highly. In part, this may relate to the personal nature of the problems that Paul addresses, which seemingly argue more for the need of practical correction and encouragement than for divine revelation. It also may relate to the fact that Paul's detailed admonitions constitute the majority of the Epistle's content and thus appear to be its main focus.² And lastly, it may relate to Paul's departure from his usual pattern of presenting doctrine in the first part of an Epistle and then applying this truth to the believers' experience in the concluding part,³ giving 1 Corinthians an appearance of being a loosely organized letter.

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A reversal of our understanding and diminution of the revelatory aspects of this Epistle, however, is very much in order. The scriptural truths that are mysteriously unveiled and mysteriously woven throughout the text of 1 Corinthians form the very core of the Christian message. In fact, it is only through this unveiling that Paul is able to supply the necessary corrective of the all-inclusive Christ to the practical problems of the Corinthians.⁴ The profundity of Paul's teaching can be seen in his references to God's wisdom, God's predestination, and God's depths (1:21, 24, 30; 2:6-7, 9-10), items which have not come up in man's heart but which now have been revealed to us through the Spirit who is mingled with our human spirit through regeneration (John 3:6). Thus, when Paul speaks of God's hidden wisdom, which He "predestined before the ages for our glory" (1 Cor. 2:7), he has every intention of showing how our entrance into this glory is accomplished. When he speaks of "things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and which have not come up in man's heart" (v. 9), he has every intention of providing us with a glimpse of the reality of these mysterious matters. And when he speaks of the Spirit's ultimate operation to reveal the depths of God to the spirit of man (vv. 10-12), he has every intention of unveiling Christ as the life-giving Spirit, who is mingled with our spirit and who joins us to the Lord as one spirit (15:45; 6:17).

Wisdom, predestined, and depths all point to a divine and mystical realm that is the structure and focus of this Epistle. In 1 Corinthians Paul is actually speaking of eternal matters related to the economy of God, even though he is addressing temporal matters related to our fallen soul and corrupted flesh. The problems in the church in Corinth, however, provided Paul with an opportunity to contrast the wisdom of this age with the eternal wisdom of God which, according to His predestination, brings the believers into the depths of the incorporated Triune God through the divine dispensing of the Triune God and produces the Body of Christ as the enlargement of the corporate God. The intrinsic focus of these terms, furthermore, can be subsumed within a proper understanding of another critical term that Paul uses in his introduction to this Epistle—*fellowship* (1:9).

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This fellowship is the fellowship of the Son, the fellowship that the Son enjoys and has eternally enjoyed within the incorporated Triune God. According to God's wisdom and predestination, the believers are brought into the depths of God by being called into the fellowship of the Son. In contrast to this glorious realm, the Corinthians were confined to a realm of the flesh through their pursuit of the wisdom of this age. Because they were ignorant of God's wisdom (10:1; 12:1; 15:34), Paul redirected them to Christ as God's wisdom and produced an Epistle that provides an entrance into the fellowship of the corporate God for all believers. Through God's faithful calling of us into the fellowship of the Son and through His continual dispensing of the Son as the life-giving Spirit, every saint can enter into the depths of God.⁵ In fact, apart from our participation in the fellowship of the Son, this matter could never come up in our heart!

Called into the Fellowship of His Son

Paul begins this Epistle by referring both to his calling and to the calling of the saints (1:1-2). He is a called apostle, and the believers are the called saints. The status of both Paul and the saints in the church in Corinth is a function of God's calling. The Greek word for *church*, *ekklesia*, even bears the meaning of being called out. With the commonly understood denotation of the word *called*—separation for the sake of sanctification—as in the case of Abraham, who was called out of a land of idols (Heb. 11:8), and the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2), which was called out of the worship of idols, little consideration is given to the purpose of God's calling beyond separation. Consequently, even though the matter of God's calling is a critical component of Paul's word to the Corinthians, commentators often do not attach much significance to the introductory nine verses of chapter 1.⁶

God's calling, however, should not be exegetically separated from His purpose. God calls because He has a purpose. His calling in time is related to His predestination in eternity past, and His predestination is related to His incorporated glory in eternity future. As Paul succinctly states elsewhere, "Those whom He predestinated, these He also called; and those whom He called, these He also justified; and those whom He justified, these He also glorified" (Rom. 8:30). The calling of God involves not only separation from the corrupting elements of the flesh and the world, which mainly speaks of our justification in Christ, but also involves an entrance into the realm of the divine fellowship, which speaks of our glorification in Christ.⁷ Our calling involves hope as much as a rescue. Throughout his Epistles, Paul's ministry is focused on opening eyes, on enlightening all that they may see the economy of the mystery, which alone can produce the hope of His calling (Acts 26:18; Eph. 3:9; 1:18). This is the burden at the heart of verses 1 through 9 of 1 Corinthians chapter 1, and in verse 9 Paul identifies the purpose of our calling, the purpose of our predestination, as fellowship: "God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son."

Given the sparse treatment that the word *fellowship* receives from many commentators, who are eager to get to the more "relevant" portions of the Epistle, it is not surprising that when the word is referenced, it is often discussed in a superficial way. By examining our own personal understanding and by looking at various translations of this verse, it is easy to assert that most Christians read this verse in an individual and objectively devotional way.⁸ Rather than understanding that we have been called *into the fellowship of the Son*, many consider verse 9 to mean that we have been called *to fellowship with the Son*.

Fellowship with the Son

This superficial tendency is amply illustrated in *Building Gold, Silver and Precious Stones: A Devotional Exposition of 1 Corinthians 3:8-15*, which, as the author, N. A. Woychuk, points out in his preface, is not intended to be a "dogmatic interpretation" of the verses as much as a "devotional and inspirational exposition." Woychuk links his interpretation of gold with fellowship, based on Exodus 25:22, which contains Jehovah's word to Moses concerning communing with Him from between the gold cherubim above the mercy seat: "There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony" (KJV). Woychuk defines fellowship as building "gold," which is "Conscious Communion with God—a child of God in vital, direct, and personal fellowship with the Heavenly Father" (69). He subsequently links fellowship with the Father to fellowship with the Son by referring to 1 John 1:3. Even though he speaks of the Son, most of his attention and devotional exhortation is focused on the believers' need for an intimate, individualistic fellowship with the Father: "The greatest thing you can do for God today is simply to commune intimately with Him" (69). Near the conclusion of the section on gold, he inserts a hortatory prompt:

When did you last have real fellowship with God? Please understand the question. When were you definitely occupied with God and enjoying His presence? Is not your fretting, your fussing, your fuming, your fainting evidence enough that you have long time been absent from Hebron. Now, "Hebron," a city of Judah, twenty-two miles south of Jerusalem, means "fellowship." (74-75)

Woychuk extends his definition of fellowship by pointing to the need for the believers to also pursue an intimate fellowship with one another, which relegates the fellowship of the Body of Christ to an equally objective realm. He writes,

Fellowship signifies "fellows in the same ship." Christian fellowship is a family circle of those who are related through the blood of Jesus Christ, and whose hearts are interwoven

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with deep family feeling. They unbosom to each other their joys, their sorrows, their cares, and their conflicts. They converse with one another as to the soul's health and progress. And in all their spiritual companionship, the Lord Himself is the centre, drawing their hearts together, and the Lord is the circumference, graciously binding them into a communion of saints. (96-97)

Woychuk's understanding of fellowship in relation to the Father, the Son, and the Body has an emotional appeal that is seemingly rooted in the Word, but we could substitute a psychiatrist for Christ in the above quotation and be left with not much more than a call to participate in a heartfelt but emotionally draining group-therapy session. This is not fellowship, and it is certainly not the fellowship of the Son. The fact that commentators so quickly move from these introductory verses to the problems spoken of in the ensuing chapters of 1 Corinthians is an indication that superficial concepts of fellowship have a great, but negative, influence on our understanding of the New Testament revelation of fellowship. Indeed, the fact that these verses are given such short attention speaks more of our willingness to accept and conform our experience to a limited view of the fellowship of the Son than it does of their actual importance in unveiling the divine and mystical realm of fellowship.

The Fellowship of His Son

It may seem counterintuitive, almost foolish, to consider and accept the simplest reading of the text of verse 9, namely, that we *were called into the fellowship of His Son*, but much can be gained from receiving in meekness the implanted word (James 1:21). In order to properly understand the import of fellowship, we need to see that it involves *us* and *the Son*; it is not individualistic. We need to see that fellowship is a realm to enter *into*; it is not an outward, devotional practice. And finally, we need to see that this fellowship is particular and specific; it is *the fellowship of His Son*.

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According to the New Testament revelation, fellowship is a corporate matter, involving the believers and the Son, and it is through the Son in the Spirit unto the Father, that is, between the believers and the Triune God and also between the believers in one spirit as members of the Body of Christ. The cup which we bless is the fellowship of the blood of Christ, binding the believers and Christ in a union established and sustained by the Lord's redemptive death (1 Cor. 10:16). The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit are with us all (2 Cor. 13:14). Our fellowship with the apostles is our fellowship with the Father and with His Son (1 John 1:3). Our fellowship with God in the light is the foundation of our fellowship with one another (vv. 6-7). Since the nature of fellowship is corporate, the practical expressions of this fellowship in the New Testament, both positive and negative, are corporate as well. The believers in the churches of Macedonia besought of Paul an opportunity for the fellowship of the ministry to the saints (2 Cor. 8:1-4). The saints in Philippi participated in fellowship unto the furtherance of the gospel, and within their fellowship of spirit there was the divine capacity to think the same thing and the one thing (Phil. 1:5; 2:1-2). At a point in his ministry, no church had fellowship with Paul in the matter of giving and receiving other than the church in Philippi (4:14-15). And all the problems in Corinth can be traced back to their failure to see and appreciate the realm of the divine fellowship into which they had been called. They were spiritually enriched, even devotional, but ultimately individualistic, divisive, and fleshy (1 Cor. 1:5, 10; 3:1). Their lack of fellowship, which deprived them of the means to be anything other than fleshy, is the reason that Paul begins his Epistle by pointing them to the locus of fellowship, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is theirs and ours, the corporate portion of the church, both locally and universally (1:2). In his *Life-study of 1 Corinthians*, Witness Lee demonstrates the importance of fellowship as an organizing principle in this Epistle by connecting the words *theirs* and *ours* in verse 2 with *fellowship* in verse 9.

Some Bible scholars believe that in verse 2 the words *theirs* and *ours* refer to places. I do not agree with this interpretation. Here Paul is not speaking of their place and our place as if to say that they call upon the name of the Lord Jesus in their place and that we call upon His name in our place. This should not be Paul's thought here. He is saying that the very Lord Jesus Christ upon whose name we are calling in every place is our Lord and their Lord, our portion and their portion. This means that all the saints have the Lord as their unique portion. The reason for this is that we all have been called into the fellowship of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. (25)

Fellowship involves both *us* and *the Son* because the Son is the unique portion of all the believers, even the same shared portion to all the believers. This indicates that there is a mutual experience and enjoyment of Christ among the believers, which involves more than just intimate communication. This is not to suggest that there is not an intimate component to fellowship; there is. But this intimacy does not occur in an outward and objective realm but in an organic realm that is the issue of our firm attachment to Christ and His anointing (2 Cor. 1:21): "To have fellowship with God is to have intimate and living contact with Him in the flow of the divine life according to the Spirit's anointing in our spirit" (Recovery Version, 1 John 1:6, note 1).

If fellowship involved only outward communication between an individual believer and the Lord, then there would be no need for Paul to speak of being called *into the fellowship*, but rather only *to fellowship*. *Into* implies a realm, and this realm is really a person to whom all the believers have been organically joined, making Him theirs and ours. This understanding of fellowship is not unknown to commentators, but it is not a concept easily grasped. Frederic Louis Godet, for example, not only speaks of fellowship as the believers' participation in the life of Christ but also takes issue with Meyer's understanding that fellowship is an objective and future matter:

We need not with Meyer apply the phrase, *the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ*, to the state of glory in the heavenly kingdom. The term κοινωνία, *fellowship*, implies something inward and present. Paul means to speak of the participation of believers in the life of Christ, of their close union to His person even here below. (60)

Even when a proper understanding of fellowship as participation in the divine life is presented, many commentators still face the difficulty of defining the operational parameters of this fellowship, that is, the means by which our union and participation in Christ are mediated and actualized. R. C. H. Lenski declares that "our communion with Christ is mediated on his part by Word and sacrament, in and through which he comes to us, in and by which he makes his abode with us and dwells in us" (35). This principle is so fixed in Lenski's mind that he further states, "There is no fellowship of Christ with us apart from his Word and sacrament" (35).

While there is a role for the Word in this process because it has the capacity to initiate faith and join us to the Lord when we receive it as spirit and life and to strengthen our union through the supplying of the Spirit (John 6:63; Rom. 10:17; Gal. 3:5), sacramental explanations that rely upon mystical processes within objective rituals are lacking in scriptural support. Nevertheless, sacramental explanations of our union with and participation in the fellowship of the Son abound throughout all branches of Christendom—Eastern and Western, Roman Catholic and Protestant. There may be many tertiary influences behind this phenomenon, but the principal reason for this, I think, relates to the need for the eyes of our heart to be enlightened to see the role of our regenerated human spirit and the role of the consummated Spirit of Christ in the economy of God's salvation. Without a vision of the Spirit mingled with our regenerated human spirit, the church will continue in ignorance, relying upon outward, objective explanations of our participation in the fellowship of the Son. It is all the more ironic that these two points, which have been obscured and even lost in the

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church's general understanding of God's economy, run as powerful undercurrents throughout 1 Corinthians.⁹

If a believer does not know that he has a human spirit, capable of receiving the things of the Spirit because he has been joined to the Lord as one spirit (1 Thes. 5:23; 1 Cor. 2:10-13; 6:17), and does not know the Spirit, as it has been effected by the economy of salvation, the entire life and living of a Christian can be conducted only according to outward forms and rituals rather than in the fellowship of the Son. When Witness Lee speaks of the depth of the meaning in the term *fellowship* and the difficulty of exhausting its meaning, he nevertheless concludes his comments by linking the meaning of fellowship—the union and mutual participation of God and man in the person of Christ—with the economical reality of our being joined to the Lord as one spirit.

This word *fellowship* is profound and very deep. I do not believe that any Christian teacher or expositor of the Bible can exhaust the meaning of this word. Fellowship does not merely mean that there is communication between you and someone else; it also denotes participation in that one. Furthermore, it means that we and Christ have become one. It also means that we enjoy Christ and all He is, and that He enjoys us and what we are. As a result, there is not only a mutual communication, but a mutuality in every way. All that Christ is becomes ours, and all that we are becomes His. We all have been called by God into such a mutuality between us and the Son of God. I do not believe that in any other language there is an adequate equivalent for the Greek word for *fellowship*. We have been called into the fellowship of God's Son. We have been called into a mutuality in which we enjoy what the Son of God is, and in which we are one with Him and He is one with us. Elsewhere in this Epistle, in 6:17, Paul says, "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit." We have been called into such a oneness. In this oneness we enjoy what Christ is, and He enjoys what we are. (*Life-study 24-25*)

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Our entrance into the fellowship of the Son begins with the regeneration of our human spirit by the divine Spirit of life. Although our regenerated human spirit is life because of righteousness (Rom. 8:10), the union itself is organic. We are joined to the Lord and thus have been called *into* the fellowship of the Son. Without this understanding, the instrumentality for our union shifts from our mingled spirit to ceremonial observances related to the sacraments that speak only symbolically of our union with Christ.¹⁰

The fellowship of His Son, however, does not refer to symbolic ceremonies but rather to the fellowship that the Son Himself participates in and experiences. Before there ever was the potential for regenerated humanity to participate in the fellowship of the Son, the Son was in fellowship, living and eternally coexisting and coinhering in a fellowship, a mutual participation, exclusive to the Triune God Himself. The Son enjoys and participates in fellowship within and by virtue of His eternal coexistence and coinherence with the Father and the Holy Spirit. As a consequence, the eternal life, nature, and being of the Triune God are reflected in the term *fellowship*, and the Triune God thus exemplifies the meaning of the word *fellowship*. Within the Godhead, the three of the Trinity eternally coexist with and coinhere in one another, mutually interpenetrating and participating in a divine and mystical union sustained by the divine life and fellowship that flows in it. Thus, *the fellowship of His Son* points to a divine and mystical realm of joint participation, reflecting the eternally coexisting and coinhering persons of the Trinity.

The Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, is self-existing, ever-existing, and coinhering, with the three of the Divine Trinity dwelling in one another. According to John 14:10 and 11 the Son is in the Father, and the Father is in the Son. This indicates that the Father is embodied in the Son and the Son is the Father's embodiment, forming a divine and mystical realm, the realm of the Triune God. Therefore, the Triune God Himself is a divine and mystical realm. (Lee, *Divine 36*)

The best glimpse into the fellowship of the Son is provided in the Gospel of John.¹¹ In chapter 14, just prior to His crucifixion and resurrection, a process that would complete the calling of the believers into the same divine and mystical realm of fellowship, the Son spoke of His fellowship with the Father, saying,

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; but if not, believe because of the works themselves. (vv. 10-11)

The Son is eternally in the Father, and the Father is eternally in the Son, but their mutual coexisting and coinhering is not a static matter; it is a dynamic realm of mutual participation and fellowship, which the Lord demonstrated throughout His divinely human living on the earth. The words of the Father were the words of the Son, and the speaking of the Son was the working of the abiding Father. Every work of the Father in the Son was an issue of the fellowship of the Son with the Father. When the Lord spoke of His fellowship with the Father, He also spoke of our participation in this fellowship, saying, “In that day,” following His resurrection and coming as another Comforter, “you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you” (v. 20). The fellowship into which we have been called is an enlarged fellowship that is organically patterned and sustained by the eternal fellowship that is present within the Triune God Himself. By being joined to the Lord, we are joined to Him as He coexists and coinheres in the Trinity. If *the fellowship of His Son* is not seen in this light, it is very easy to overlook the one term in 1 Corinthians that defines the very purpose of our regenerated existence and to casually regard fellowship as either a devotional communication with God or a sacramental observance, neither of which will bring us into the depths of God and into a living in the reality of the fellowship of the Son.¹²

The Fellowship of the Incorporated Triune God

The fellowship of the Son, by virtue of the distinct but not separate coexistence and coinherence of the persons of the Triune God—Father, Son, and Spirit—is the fellowship of the incorporated Triune God. The Triune God is an eternal incorporation, living and working as one yet three, three yet one. In eternity past, when the Triune God said, “Let Us make man in Our image” (Gen. 1:26), He was an incorporate being, living and moving in the principle of fellowship. “The Greek word [for *fellowship*] means *joint participation, common participation*. Fellowship is the issue of the eternal life and is actually the flow of the eternal life” (Recovery Version, 1 John 1:3, note 3). Within the triune being of God, the eternal life is continuously flowing and operating, manifesting the joint, essential participation of the persons of the Trinity in the economical actions of each person. In the fellowship and because of the fellowship of the incorporate Triune God, the words *Let Us* and *Our image* were mutually uttered, signaling an economical desire on the part of the Triune God to enlarge their incorporation into humanity. And in the fellowship of the incorporate Triune God, the actions necessary to accomplish the intent of these words were then executed.

The Incarnation of the Son Bringing the Divine Incorporation into Humanity

The Triune God’s desire to enlarge His incorporation by making a man who could bear His image and exercise His dominion predates the fall of created humanity and, in many respects, was unaffected by the fall. With or without the fall, humanity still needed to receive the divine life in order to participate in the fellowship of the divine life. Prior to the fall, the pure created vessel of humanity needed to be filled with the divine life, and after the fall, the corrupted vessel of humanity needed to be cleansed and then filled with the divine life. In many respects, the fall only provided an opportunity for the wisdom of God to be fully displayed through its confounding the wisdom of all who oppose

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Him. The display of God's wisdom began with the incarnation of the Son, as the first and necessary step to redeem and cleanse the human vessel that God desired to incorporate into His being. In the incarnation, the Divine Incorporation was brought into humanity and mingled with humanity in the person of Christ.

In *The Ascension of Christ*, William Milligan speaks of the impact of the incarnation upon the incorporate being of the Triune God at length and in an insightful manner. He states, "When, therefore, we endeavour to conceive what Jesus was on earth, we must think of Him as filled with the Spirit in both the natures that are essential to His Personality" (177). According to Milligan, the two natures of Christ—divinity and humanity—"cannot be separated without destroying the unity of His Person. In Him they meet and mingle and interpenetrate each other" (177). The incorporate principle of the essential being of the Triune God was enlarged and manifested in the person of Christ, whose humanity in addition to His divinity was animated and sustained by the Spirit. Milligan quotes from *The Person and Work of the Holy Ghost* by Hutchings to speak of how the incarnation in turn economically impacted the incorporate being of the Triune God:

If it be part of a true definition of the Spirit that "through the Spirit interpenetrating and embracing the Father and the Son, there is a mutual co-inherence and eternal fellowship between the Divine Persons," that co-inherence and fellowship must have been effected by the changed condition of the now and for ever Incarnate Son. (190-191)

To Milligan's credit, he sees that the incarnation was not carried out apart from the incorporate principle that animates and sustains the divine fellowship and thus had an economical impact within the being of the coexisting and coinhering Triune God. However, he does not speculate on how this was metaphysically accomplished. Even though the wisdom hidden in God has been revealed, there is still an element of mystery in speaking of this wisdom, which we do well to respect (Eph. 3:9; 1 Cor. 2:7). It is, after all, the Spirit's revelation, not the Spirit's explanation, of these matters that is the precursor of our ability to receive the things that have been graciously given to us by God (v. 12). Although Milligan does not attempt to explain what occurred in the incarnation, other than to assert an enlargement of the divine incorporation in the person of Christ, he does speak of what did not occur in the incarnation.

The union of the Divine Son with the Divine Father could never be interrupted, whatever the self-limitations which the former, in becoming man, might, not apart from His Divinity but in the power of His Divinity, impose upon Himself. As from everlasting ages of the past, so through all the ages as they run their course, and to the everlasting ages of the future, the Three Persons of the Trinity must, while no doubt be thought of separately, form such a unity that they shall be more than *beside*, that they shall be *in* each other, and that no one of them can ever have a place assigned to Him out of the Hypostatic union, in which some other existence might occupy the sphere He is supposed to have resigned. When, therefore, the Second Person of the Trinity took flesh and dwelt among us, He was not less *in* the Father than before, and at that great epoch the Holy Spirit was not less than formerly *in* both the Father and the Son. The Son did not by His incarnation forfeit that Divine *Hypostasis* which He had always been, nor could He then receive what He had eternally possessed. He rather filled the manhood which he assumed with the power of the Divinity which He retained; and thus filled it at the same time with the Spirit which dwelt in that Divinity. (176-177)

Because so many Christian "teachings" fail to see, respect, or present the teaching of the apostles¹³ in regard to the incorporate nature and fellowship of the Triune God, most Christians view the incarnation as a separate and distinct activity of the second of the Trinity, as if the Son somehow detached Himself from Father and Spirit and came into humanity to do a separate and detached work, albeit for the glory of the

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Father and under the anointing power of the Holy Spirit. This, as Milligan points out, is incorrect. Without seeing the predestined purpose inherent in the economy of God, who desires to bring the believers into His incorporate fellowship, this is a common understanding, even if it is latent and unarticulated. When redemption is seen as the final goal of God's work, a separate and distinct work of the second of the Trinity seems sufficient to accomplish this end. But such a limited arrangement could never bring us into the glory of the Triune God, which is the expression of the God of glory.

By the incarnation, the incorporate principle of fellowship, inherent in the being of the Triune God, was extended to humanity and enlarged by the mutual interpenetration and mingling of divinity and humanity in the person of Christ. The Trinity was not diminished by the incarnation through some forfeiture of the hypostatic existence of the second of the Trinity. Rather, when the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Christ bodily (Col. 2:9), it was in the principle of incorporation; that is, when the second of the Trinity became flesh and tabernacled among us, as Milligan notes, "He was not less *in* the Father than before, and at that great epoch the Holy Spirit was not less than formerly *in* both the Father and the Son" (176).

In the incarnation the Trinity was enriched by the divinely uplifted humanity of Christ, and thus opened the way for the enrichment of redeemed humanity through its incorporation into the Divine Trinity also became possible. "The three in the Divine Trinity were incorporated already in eternity past. Through His incarnation, this incorporated One came into time. Whatever He does in time is to incorporate all His chosen ones into His incorporation to make a great universal incorporation" (Lee, *Issue* 39). The realization of God's desire for man to fully bear the image of God in life and nature but not in the Godhead,¹⁴ however, required a further step in the economy of God, involving the resurrection of Christ as the life-giving Spirit.

In Resurrection Christ as the Life-giving Spirit Bringing the Divine Incorporation into Redeemed Humanity

In the incarnation the divinely incorporated Triune God was brought into humanity and mingled with humanity in the person of Christ, but a further step was necessary in order to accomplish the purpose of God's predestined calling. In order for this divine incorporation to be enlarged in redeemed humanity, there was a need to compound and mingle the experiences of human death, human resurrection, and human deification into the divine life through the death, resurrection, and deification of the humanity of Christ,¹⁵ and then to impart the eternally efficacious elements of this compounded divine life into those of faith, thus enlarging the fellowship of the Son through the Spirit. On the day of His crucifixion, Christ accomplished an eternal redemption, and on the day of His resurrection, He was designated the Son of God in His humanity according to the Spirit of holiness (Rom. 1:4; see also Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5), thereby bringing humanity into divinity. On the day of His resurrection, as the last Adam, Christ also became a life-giving Spirit to impart all the elements of the Triune God's enlarged and enriched incorporation into redeemed humanity, with the exception of His Godhead. How it is possible for redeemed humanity to become part of the corporate God in life and nature but not in the Godhead, I do not know. But just as Milligan wonderfully points out that union between the Father and the Son was not interrupted by the incarnation no matter what "self-limitations" the Son may have imposed on Himself through the power of His divinity (176), I fully grant that the Triune God has the capacity in the same power of His divinity to limit our access to the Godhead, while at the same time granting us full access to the riches of His divine life through His giving of Himself through the Spirit.

Through the life-giving Spirit, which Paul purposefully speaks of in 1 Corinthians 15:45, our participation in the fellowship of the Son is made possible. The principle of

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fellowship and incorporation, that is, the mutual participation and working of the Triune God, which was operative in the incarnation, human living, and death of Christ, was also operative in the resurrection of Christ. Milligan notes that there is a “fundamental principle of the New Testament, that the whole Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—co-operate in the work of our redemption” (202), and in the same principle, the Father, Son, and Spirit cooperated in the work of resurrection and in the application of the redemptive aspect of Christ’s death and the regenerative aspect of His resurrection to the believers. This application involves the working of the incorporated Trinity, especially in regard to the economical impact of the resurrected God-man on the incorporate being of the Triune God.

The New Testament presents this impact through its revelation of the Spirit after the resurrection of Christ. In speaking of the Spirit who was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified in His resurrection and ascension (John 7:39), Milligan draws a distinction between the New Testament revelation of the Spirit and the Holy Spirit, saying,

Not that “the Holy Spirit” had no existence before that time [of resurrection], an idea which it is unnecessary to controvert. Not that the Holy Spirit had not been previously “given,” for we know that He had been given. But “Spirit” in the peculiar sense in which the New Testament uses the word—that is, the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of the glorified Lord, and in the full exercise and manifestation of His power—had not yet begun to operate upon the minds of men. Then only could He do so when our Lord Himself entered on that stage of His Being to which St. Paul applies the term “quickening or life-giving Spirit,” and when He could bestow the Spirit in fulness from the ever-springing fountain of His own Spirit-life. (212)

The life-giving Spirit came into economical existence on the day of the Lord’s resurrection: the last Adam became, just as the Word became (1 Cor. 15:45; John 1:14). In resurrection the experiences of the last Adam were compounded into the Spirit and were made available to the believers through the Spirit, newly consummated. “The divine and mystical realm into which we may enter today is actually not simply the divine and mystical realm of the Triune God but the divine and mystical realm of the consummated Spirit and the pneumatic Christ” (Lee, *Divine* 36). Through His becoming the life-giving Spirit, Christ became pneumatic, enabling the Triune God to enlarge His corporate being through the inclusion of redeemed humanity in answer to the Lord’s concluding prayer for oneness in John 17. In this prayer the Lord indicated that genuine oneness involved

the mingling of the believers with the Triune God...[In 17:21] the Father is in the Son, the Son is in the believers, and the believers are in the Son, who is in the Father. This means that the believers are one with the Triune God in the divine and mystical realm of the pneumatic Christ and the consummated Spirit. (*Divine* 47-48)

The consummated Spirit is the life-giving Spirit,¹⁶ and through the life-giving Spirit, we have been brought into union with the Triune God. Commenting on the same passage in John 17, Emile Mersch in *The Whole Christ* reiterates the intent of the Lord’s prayer: “Men have a true union with Christ, a real and ontological union; He is really and truly in them and we are in Him; we are really and truly one in Him as He is one with the Father” (8-9). J. N. D. Kelly makes a similar comment on the understanding of some of the prominent church fathers:

Like Athanasius before him, Cyril interprets Christ’s petition that His followers may be one as Father and Son are one as implying, not simply a moral union of the kind postulated by the Arians, but a real or “physical” union (φυσικῆς ἐνώσεως)...He stresses the role of the Holy Spirit in bringing this unity about: “We all receive the same unique Spirit

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into ourselves, the Holy Spirit, and we are all thereby conjoined with one another and with God. Although we are distinct from one another and the Spirit of the Father and the Son dwells in each, nevertheless this Spirit is one and indivisible. Thus by His power He joins together the many distinct spirits in unity, making them as it were a single spirit in Himself." He also connects this unity with the eucharist in a way which is characteristic of his teaching throughout. (405-406)

In addressing how such an ontological and organic union is possible, Mersch speaks of the simplicity that comes from faith: "That this union be hard to explain is of small moment; is it to be regretted that God should have given us a union with His Son that transcends our own limited views?" (9). God is God, and if He chooses to confound the wisdom of the age with the foolishness of preaching (1 Cor. 1:21), so be it. If, according to Paul, even the foolishness of God is wiser than men (v. 25), how much higher is the actual wisdom of God? The power in the foolishness of preaching is contained in the power of the spoken word of God,¹⁷ and so in regard to the mysteries in God's economy, our trust must be in the declaration and proclamation of the word. Having a spirit of faith, we believe and therefore we speak:

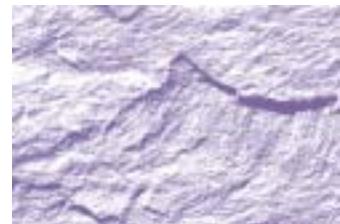
The consummated Triune God and the regenerated believers became an incorporation in the resurrection of Christ. John 14:20 says, "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." "In that day": This is in the day of the Son's resurrection. "You will know that I am in My Father": The Son and the Father are incorporated into one. "And you in Me": The regenerated believers are incorporated into the Son and into the Father in the Son. "And I in you": The Son in the Father is incorporated into the regenerated believers. Here we have three *ins*. In verse 17 we have a fourth *in*: "The Spirit of reality...abides with you and shall be in you." The *in* of the Spirit of reality in verse 17 is the totality of the three *ins* in verse 20. The *in* in verse 17 is a general statement, and the three *ins* in verse 20 are the detailed statement. (Lee, *Issue 25-26*)

Because of and through the life-giving Spirit, the divine life is communicable and available. The divine life is communicable to humanity because the elements of the Lord's incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection have been compounded into it. The divine life now contains, for example, the redemptive elements of Christ's shed blood on the cross, which justifies us in life (Rom. 5:18). God and man can mutually participate in one another because the separating stain of sin has been removed. Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed, and in the divine life, there is now a feast to be kept (1 Cor. 5:7-8). The divine life also contains the power of Christ's resurrection, which, like a seed producing after its own kind, will reproduce the glory of God that is our predestined calling (15:38-42). The divine life is available to humanity because Christ's obtainments and attainments have been pneumatized in Him through His becoming the life-giving Spirit. With the divine life being communicable and available economically, the incorporated Triune God is now working to enlarge the corporate fellowship of His Son through the dispensing of His divine life. In essence, Christ, who is the wisdom of God, is now being made wisdom to us from God (1:24, 30).

The Fellowship of the Son and the Dispensing of Christ as the Wisdom of God

In the economy of God, the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit to give Himself as life to redeemed humanity: "I am coming to you" (John 14:18). The Spirit of Christ who is now in us receives and declares the things of Christ (v. 17; 16:14), which have been graciously given to us by God, in our regenerated and mingled spirit (1 Cor. 2:12). It is possible for us to know the things of God, which only the Spirit knows, because we have received Christ as the life-giving Spirit in our human spirit (v. 11). When we received the Spirit, our human spirit was regenerated, and as the innermost part of our being, it was mingled with the totality of the Triune God. Milligan expresses this reality well:

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When spirit is brought home to spirit, the Spirit of Christ to the spirit of man, the two cannot in the nature of things remain separate from each other. The one cannot be set within the other as a precious jewel may be set in gold, the jewel remaining the jewel, the gold the gold. They must rather mingle like two different atmospheres, each diffusing itself throughout the other, so that both shall be found in every particle of their united volumes. The Spirit is more than a guide or instructor of those in whom He dwells, and He does more than reveal to them the great example they are to imitate. He penetrates their being; He acts as the centre of their life. "He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit." (183-184)

The Spirit we have received "is not so much the Third Person of the Trinity in His original and absolute existence, as that Spirit in the effect produced upon Him by the economy of salvation" (193).¹⁸ Consequently, "when this Spirit, as the Spirit of the Living Lord...is received by us, He must be so received as to penetrate and pervade our whole nature" (193). In God's wisdom, Christ was crucified and resurrected in His economy, becoming the life-giving Spirit, in order to be wisdom to us (2:7). The penetration and pervading of the Spirit of Christ throughout our entire being is the process of Christ being made wisdom to us with respect to righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1:30).

Wisdom to Us: Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption

In contrast to the Corinthians, who thought that wisdom resided in the mind, Paul declared that the Christ whom he preached was the wisdom of God. Paul preached the crucified Christ (v. 23), that is, the Christ who passed through the economical process of death in order to become the life-giving Spirit in resurrection. It is this Christ whom we can know as God's power and God's wisdom (v. 24) and who can become wisdom to us in our progressive experience of salvation, which will complete our being called into the fellowship of the Son. Godet notes that salvation, as defined by the "substantives" of righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, is the "realization of the Divine *plan*," as designated by the word *wisdom* (119). For Godet, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption are in "grammatical apposition" to wisdom (119). Christ has been made wisdom to us with respect to three crucial elements that define God's salvation: righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

Christ became wisdom to us from God as three vital things in God's salvation: (1) righteousness (for our past), by which we have been justified by God, that we might be reborn in our spirit to receive the divine life (Rom. 5:18); (2) sanctification (for our present), by which we are being sanctified in our soul, i.e., transformed in our mind, emotion, and will, with His divine life (Rom. 6:19, 22); and (3) redemption (for our future), i.e., the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:23), by which we will be transfigured in our body with His divine life to have His glorious likeness (Phil. 3:21). It is of God that we participate in such a complete and perfect salvation, which makes our entire being—spirit, soul, and body—organically one with Christ and makes Christ everything to us. This is altogether of God, not of ourselves, that we may boast and glory in Him, not in ourselves. (Recovery Version, 1:30, note 2)

Each of these vital elements involves the dispensing of Christ as life through the economical operation of the life-giving Spirit. When the Spirit first gives us life with its compounded element of the effectiveness of Christ's death, our human spirit is regenerated, based on Christ's righteous fulfillment of God's righteous requirement. As the Spirit continues to give us life, our soul is sanctified in the divine life, based on Christ's holy nature, transforming our mind, emotion, and will and making us persons capable of proving what the will of God is (Rom. 12:2), that is, of manifesting the hope of our calling. Godet emphasizes that sanctification, the process of being made holy, involves a divine work that is centered on the dispensing of Christ as life: "Christ Himself is the holiness of the believer as well as his righteousness. This new work is

PAUL PREACHED THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST WHO PASSED THROUGH THE ECONOMICAL PROCESS OF DEATH IN ORDER TO BECOME THE LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT IN RESURRECTION. IT IS THIS CHRIST WHO WILL COMPLETE OUR BEING CALLED INTO THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SON.



due to His exaltation to glory, whence He sends the Holy Spirit; and by Him communicates His own life to the justified believer" (120). The Spirit's giving of life ultimately extends to the matter of the glorification, the redemption of our body, at the time of the Lord's coming (1 Cor. 15:43). Just as the Spirit has the capacity to give life to our mortal body now, the divine life that the Spirit has given will be manifested in the sons of God in glory (Rom 8:11, 17-23). At that point, we will bear the image of the heavenly (1 Cor. 15:49) and fulfill the purpose of our being called into the fellowship. We will bear the image of the heavenly, not in an outward manner but because we have been fully mingled with and incorporated into the triune being of God through the mutual participation of the Son as the Spirit in us.

Our participation in Christ the Son as the Spirit brings us into the things which have been graciously given to us by God. These things are the experiences of Christ that we can apply in our everyday situations, especially those that expose the fallen human actions that emanate from our corrupted soul and flesh. The resurrection life that we need to overcome our "Corinthian" failures is available in the fellowship of the Son in our mingled spirit. We can participate in and mutually enjoy Christ as our God-given portion only by being in the fellowship of the Son. This is the reason 1 Corinthians unveils an all-inclusive Christ who is available in all His riches through the dispensing of the divine life.

He is the portion given to us by God [1:2]. He is God's power and God's wisdom as righteousness, sanctification, and redemption to us (vv. 24, 30). He is the Lord of glory (2:8) for our glorification (2:7; Rom. 8:30). He is the depths (deep things) of God (2:10). He is the unique foundation of God's building (3:11). He is our Passover (5:7), the unleavened bread (5:8), the spiritual food, the spiritual drink, and the spiritual rock (10:3-4). He is the Head (11:3) and the Body (12:12). He is the firstfruits (15:20, 23), the second man (15:47), and the last Adam (15:45); and as such He became the life-giving Spirit (15:45) that we may receive Him into us as our everything. This all-inclusive One, with the riches of at least twenty items, God has given to us as our portion for our enjoyment. We should concentrate on Him, not on any persons, things, or matters other than Him. We should focus on Him as our unique center appointed by God, that all the problems among the believers may be solved. It is into the fellowship of such a One that we have been called by God. This fellowship of God's Son became the fellowship that the apostles shared with the believers (Acts 2:42; 1 John 1:3) in His Body, the church, and should be the fellowship that we enjoy in partaking of His blood and His body at His table (10:16, 21). Such a fellowship, which is carried out by the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14), must be unique because He is unique; it forbids any division among the members of His unique Body. (Recovery Version, 1 Cor. 1:9, note 2)

To experience Christ as God's power, God's wisdom, the Lord of glory, the depths of God, the unique foundation, the Passover, the unleavened bread, the spiritual food, the spiritual drink, and the spiritual rock, the Head, the Body, the firstfruits, the second man, the last Adam, and the life-giving Spirit is to be mingled with and incorporated into the Triune God through the mutual participation in all that the Son now is and can be to us. All the problems that Paul chose to address in his Epistle were carefully selected to show the Corinthians how to experience Christ as the wisdom of God. Each problem afforded Paul an opportunity to highlight an aspect of Christ that is available to the believers through the fellowship of the Son. The most pressing problem that Paul chose to address, division and factions, points to the most important issue of our union and participation in Christ—the Body of Christ. For Paul, the presence of divisions was the paramount proof that the Corinthians were not living in the fellowship of the Son. It is still a proof today.

The Fellowship of the Son Producing the Body of Christ, the Corporate God

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coexistence and coinherence with the Father and the Spirit, both as it existed prior to His incarnation as the Word and after His resurrection as the life-giving Spirit. The defining component of this fellowship is oneness among the three. There is distinction but absolutely no separation. The three are joined and blended as one, just as the Lord revealed in His prayer in John 17. This same principle of fellowship has been enlarged to include the believers, thereby producing the Body of Christ, which is distinct but not separate from the Christ (1 Cor. 12:12) and which God has blended together (v. 24).

All the believers should be one, even as the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father, that they also may be in both the Father and the Son. The Son is in the believers and the Father is in the Son, that the believers may be perfected into one ([John] 17:21, 23). Our oneness must be the same as the oneness among the three of the Triune God. Actually, the believers' oneness is the oneness of the Triune God. It is in the Triune God that we can be perfected to be one. The real oneness, therefore, is in the Triune God. (Lee, *Divine 47-48*)

By being called into the fellowship of the Son, we have been called into the corporate fellowship of the Triune God, and in this fellowship, a mutuality is manifested among all the members of the Body of Christ. The church is an organic entity, not an organizational structure, that has the capacity to manifest the oneness of the Triune God, and as we walk in the light of the fellowship of the Son, we have fellowship with one another in a practical way (1 John 1:7). Because of the fellowship that expressed and carried out God's predestined desire for humanity to bear the image of Christ, Mersch can speak of the Body of Christ as the ontological focus of the Triune God in eternity past:¹⁹

The manner of being, therefore, that God willed for man was an *esse in Christo*, an existence in Christ. Human ontology, viewed in its origins, was in reality a supernatural ontology, an ontology of members destined to be joined together in a body: we have existence in order that we may become members of the Saviour. (22)

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Because of the believers' participation in an enlarged fellowship through the death of Christ as the last Adam and the dispensing of the life-giving Spirit, Milligan can speak of the Body of Christ as our ontological destiny in eternity future. He declares that the end of the economy of grace will be a perfect union "in a glory now given though only partially realised, of Father, Son, and all believers in one uninterrupted, unchanging, eternal unity" (229). And because of our ability to participate in the fellowship of the Son, Witness Lee can speak of the Body of Christ as the ontological expression of the Triune God in the local churches today:

These saints, the believers living in Corinth, were the components of the church in Corinth. Nevertheless, this Epistle was written not only to them, but also to "all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, who is theirs and ours." There is to be no difference. Furthermore, according to verse 9, God has called us all into the fellowship of Christ. We have been called into the oneness, into a mutuality, between us and Him. Therefore, there should not be any preference with respect to local churches or individual believers. Only Christ—no other one—is the unique center of all Christians. (*Life-study 27*)

Paul similarly focuses on the Body of Christ—predestined according to the wisdom of God in eternity past, manifesting the glorious image of the heavenly Christ in eternity future, and capable of expressing the incorporate oneness of the Triune God in the local churches today. All of these points depend upon and issue from the fellowship of the Son into which we have been called and which has been enlarged by our entrance into this divine and mystical realm. In dealing with division in Corinth, Paul was not

just dealing with a “big” problem; he was dealing with the one matter that, by definition, nullifies the operation of grace that produces the corporate God. Division nullifies the operation of the life of Christ, which is the bond of unity that enables us to live in the fellowship of the Son as members of His Body.²⁰

Living in the Fellowship of the Son

The fellowship of the Son is the fellowship of the incorporate Triune God, and our living in this fellowship produces the corporate God. Through the fellowship of the Son, God and man are joined and cohere in the Son. This mutual participation both produces and manifests the Body of Christ. The church in Corinth, given its extreme immaturity, its puffed up self-importance, its contentious wranglings, and its sharp divisions, seemingly is the last place one would expect the apostle to release such a profound revelation concerning the organic unfolding of God’s wisdom, but no other place could have been more appropriate. There is nothing in our natural constitution that qualifies us to participate in the fellowship of the Son. It is God who has called us, and it is God in His faithfulness who will complete our calling (1 Thes. 5:24). We are all fallen Corinthians, but we all have a faithful God. May we be those who live in our calling and in the fellowship of the Son simply by calling upon the name of the Lord and breathing Him in as life. We have been called to call, and in our calling, God faithfully carries out His calling of us into the fellowship of His Son. **[AC]**

Notes

¹The stated focus of *Affirmation & Critique* is to motivate a reconsideration of the crucial aspects of Christian thought and practice in light of a vital, yet neglected, aspect of the Bible—the *oikonomia* of God (Eph. 3:9). I can think of no other Epistle more deserving and more in need of reconsideration than the first Epistle to the Corinthians.

²Talbert in *Reading Corinthians* and Gooch in *Partial Knowledge* exemplify this tendency, each considering the first four chapters as an introduction to the remaining chapters that focus on the problems at Corinth. Talbert states,

1 Cor 1:1—4:21 has a preparatory function. It both establishes Paul’s authority and calls on the Corinthians to emulate him and lays a foundation for the content of the answers to be given to many of the issues raised in the letter from the church. With this behind him, the apostle can move to the paraenetic section of the letter (chaps. 5—16). (11)

Gooch considers the first four chapters as bearing a unified theme only to the extent that Paul’s feelings of concern are borne throughout. He states, “It will be apparent that the emotional intensity of Paul’s writing is not uniform throughout chapters 1—4. There is no ‘unity’ in overt tone; but there does seem to be a depth of feeling that binds together the whole passage” (19). The simple fact that Gooch is looking for a connection between the content in the first four chapters and the remainder of the Epistle, but sees little more than an emotional one, is indicative of his inability to see Paul’s broader and more central emphasis on the matter of fellowship.

³Consider the following divisions of the content of Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians, taken from the outlines contained in the Recovery Version of the Bible. The major aspects of the gospel of God in Romans are presented in 1:18—15:13, while the practical consummation of the gospel is covered in 15:14—16:27. In Galatians the revelation of the apostle’s gospel is presented in 1:6—4:31, while the walk of God’s children is covered in 5:1—6:17. In Ephesians the blessing and position received by the church in Christ are presented in 1:3—4:16, while the main section on the living and responsibility needed for the church is covered in 4:17—6:20. In Colossians the revelation of Christ as the preeminent and all-inclusive One is presented in 1:9—3:11, while the section on living in union with Christ is covered in 3:12—4:6.

⁴In his book, *The Ascension of Christ*, William Milligan addresses the role of Christ in His heavenly ministry, drawing primarily from the revelation contained in the Epistle to the

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Hebrews, but he also devotes a chapter to the role of the Spirit in the economy of salvation, following the resurrection and ascension of Christ. In many respects, he presents an excellent and illuminating discussion, in which he points to (1) the coexistence and coinherence of the persons of the Trinity, both in eternity and in the various stages of God's economy (176-177); (2) the mingling of divinity and humanity in the person of Christ (177); (3) the need for understanding the difference between the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament and the Spirit in the New Testament following the resurrection of Christ (223-224); (4) the believers' organic identification with Christ that respects and retains the exclusivity of the Godhead for the Triune God alone (229-230); (5) the identification of Christ as the life-giving Spirit for the purpose of dispensing His "Spirit-life" into the believers (212); the mingling of the divine Spirit and the human spirit (183-184); (6) the major steps of Christ in the accomplishment of God's economy, including His incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension, and coming as the life-giving Spirit to enliven the members of the Body of Christ (255-256); and (7) the mutual coinherence and interpenetration of the persons of the Trinity being a realm of fellowship available to the believers as the Body of Christ (184, 189-191, 193). Given the clarity of Milligan's understanding of the hope of our calling, it is instructive to look at his assessment of the state of the church at the time he wrote *The Ascension of Christ* in 1891. The following assessment is contained in the concluding paragraphs of his book.

The very Church of Christ to which we would naturally turn for help seems powerless; the light of men, but her light dimmed; the salt of the earth, but the salt with its savour lost; hardly to be distinguished from a world that cares for little else than the newest luxury or folly; often ignoring if not denying the most characteristic doctrines of her faith, and eager to make that best of both worlds which seldom has any other meaning than making the best of this world, and letting the next world take its chance, while at the same time her different sections are busier contending with one another than with the common foe, without mutual forbearance, or sympathy, or helpfulness, or love. (335)

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CORPORATE GOD
AND IN GLORY.



What is so striking about Milligan's description is its echo of the condition in Corinth. Is this not an apt description of the church in Corinth, a church that had lost its light and its savor and had become indistinguishable from the world in its pursuit of luxury and unrecognizable to the household of faith in its denial of the most characteristic item of the faith—the resurrection of Christ? Milligan speaks also of contentions and a lack of mutual forbearance, sympathy, helpfulness, and love—all hallmarks of the church in Corinth. When the church degrades to such a condition, those who recognize the intrinsic situation are empowered to speak God's wisdom, which has been hidden in a mystery, because it is only the content of this mystery—realized, appreciated, and experienced—that has the capacity to lift the church not just out of its problems but into its divinely ordained position of fellowship in the corporate God and in glory.

⁵Our entrance is both positional, accomplished once for all by God putting us in Christ Jesus, and dispositional, because we experience Christ as our sanctification by calling on the name of the Lord (1:30, 2).

⁶As mentioned in footnote 2 above, both Talbert and Gooch consider the first four chapters to be an introduction to Paul's treatment of the problems in Corinth. As a consequence, the actual introductory verses in chapter 1 receive an even lighter treatment. Talbert does not even reference verse 9 in his brief one-page discussion of verses 1 through 9, casting the content more as a formulaic introduction than anything. He states,

The traditional introduction of a Greek letter consisted of the formula A to B, greeting, followed by a prayer form. In 1 Cor 1:1-9 Paul has adapted this conventional opening for his own purposes...Having introduced his letter with the conventional form, adapted as needed, the apostle is ready to move to the body of the epistle. (3)

Gooch echoes this sense when he writes, "We may leave aside the set formality of the introduction and begin with the section 1:10-16" (18).

⁷Peter repeats this same thought when he says that the believers are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people acquired for a possession, so that you may tell out the virtues of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). In 5:10 he

links God's calling with God's glory when he speaks of "the God of all grace," who has called us "into His eternal glory in Christ Jesus."

⁸There are many translations of this verse that capture its essential thought. The American Standard Version says, "God is faithful, through whom ye were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord"; the King James and New King James Version say, respectively, "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" and "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord"; Darby's New Translation says, "God is faithful, by whom ye have been called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord"; the Revised Standard Version says, "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord"; and Rotherham's Emphasized Bible says, "Faithful is God, through whom ye have been called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord."

There are also several versions that capture the essence of the verse, even though they depart from a more literal translation of the Greek. The New English Bible says, "It is God himself who called you to share in the life of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and God keeps faith," and the Jerusalem Bible says, "Because God by calling you has joined you to his Son, Jesus Christ; and God is faithful." Both of these versions do not use the word *fellowship*, but they present the reality of fellowship, which is being joined to Christ by sharing in the divine life of the Son.

There are, however, other versions that crudely reinforce the mistaken view that fellowship is an individual and objective devotional exercise between separate and distinct people, the Lord and the believer, and ignore Paul's revelation of the believers being joined to the Lord as one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). In these versions, fellowship is closely associated with friendship. The Amplified Bible says, "God is faithful—reliable, trustworthy and [therefore] ever true to His promise, and He can be depended on; by Him you were called into companionship *and* participation with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord"; the New American Standard Bible says, "God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord"; the New International Version says, "God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful"; and the Living Bible says, "God will surely do this for you, for he always does just what he says, and he is the one who invited you into this wonderful friendship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." Although the translations that present a more accurate understanding of the text are greater in number, the most inaccurate translations currently are the most popular.

While acknowledging a potential for bias, I still favor the translation contained in the Recovery Version, published by Living Stream Ministry, which says, "God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." This translation is faithful to the Greek text. It also stresses the point that the word *fellowship* is related to the fellowship of the Son, that is, to the fellowship that belongs to the Son, indicating that fellowship is in the divine and mystical realm of the Son's intrinsic fellowship in the Triune God. But in contrast to all the others that speak of *the fellowship of his Son*, it combines this point with the fact that our calling comes *through* God, that is, through His active involvement in an economy of salvation, rather than just *by* a benevolent but objective act of bestowal. *Through* implies God's organic, economic involvement in our being called into His organic fellowship.

⁹Verses that refer to the human spirit in 1 Corinthians include 2:11; 5:5; 7:34; 14:2, 14-16; and 16:18. Verses that refer to the consummated Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, include 2:4, 10-14; 3:16; 6:11; 7:40; 12:3-4, 7-9, 11, 13; and 15:45. It is difficult to categorize some verses as referring principally to either the human spirit or the divine Spirit. These verses, which point to the regenerated spirit of the believers that has been mingled with the Spirit, include 4:21; 5:3-4; and 6:17 and 19.

¹⁰This is not to say that there is not a divine and mystical component to the Lord's supper or to baptism. If there were not, the Lord would not have commanded us to "this do" in relation to His supper or to "go therefore" in relation to discipling and baptizing the nations (1 Cor. 11:24-25; Matt. 28:19). As we begin to exercise our mingled human spirit and experience the riches of Christ that are available to us, however, our understanding of these symbols of fellowship will be adjusted organically to see, appreciate, and display them as a testimony of our eternal, incorporate union with the Triune God.

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¹¹In *The Gospel of the Spirit: A Study in the Fourth Gospel*, Ernest Cadman Colwell and Eric Lane Titus stress the influence of Paul's letters as a "point of departure" for John in the writing of his Gospel and Epistles, especially in John's emphasis on the Spirit (42), stating, "The evangelist's use of sources is illustrated further by his treatment of Pauline ideas...The areas of dependence...[include] the concept of the Spirit" (47). They contend that John's

interest lay primarily not in the events described but in their symbolic value indicative of the eternal significance of Jesus. This being the case, it was possible for him not only to use sources which dealt with the career of Jesus but also those which reflected developments within the church. (42-43)

These observations are important for several reasons. First, not much attention is given to the influence of Paul in the writings of John, even though all of Paul's writings were available to John for his consideration prior to writing his Gospel, Epistles, and Revelation. In the course of John's consideration, Paul's treatment of both fellowship and the Spirit would not have been overlooked. Second, not much attention is given to the strengthening of Paul's "developments" in the writings of John, especially in the matters of fellowship and the Spirit. Paul spoke of the fellowship of the Son, but when the brightness of the revelation in his completing ministry was diminishing among the churches, John mended the rift in the net of the divine revelation by developing and declaring that this fellowship is the fellowship of the apostles (cf. Matt. 4:21), which is a fellowship with the Father and His Son. Paul also spoke of Christ as the life-giving Spirit, but when the church departed from the faith, as expressly foreseen by the Spirit (1 Tim. 4:1), John mended the rift by pointing to the Spirit as the source of fellowship, flowing as rivers of living water out of the innermost being of the believers and flowing eternally from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 22:1). Colwell and Titus point out that for John, "The term 'living water' [in John 7:38] is equivalent to life-giving Spirit" in 1 Corinthians 15:45 (128), and that "behind the Nicodemus story seems to be the great emphasis of 1 Corinthians 15 on Christ as 'life-giving spirit'" (138).

John's development and support of Paul should be all the more expected, given his emphasis on the fellowship of the apostles (1 John 1:3). He was in the fellowship of the apostles, and he presented the apostles' teaching; he was not seeking a place of his own based on a vision of his own. He was one with Paul to the point that the "mysterious fellowship of the eternal life," which Paul presents in 1 Corinthians, "should be considered the subject" of 1 John (Recovery Version, note 3).

¹²In *Outlines of the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, C. A. Coates presents a remarkably shortsighted understanding of fellowship, when he states,

It is a serious thing to play fast and loose with the fellowship. The Lord is jealous. If we become careless and slack He does not. If we become careless and slack we lose the value at the present time of all that we have been called to. The fellowship is the great feature of the present moment; we shall not have it in heaven...The privileges of the fellowship are not eternal but are limited by time. We ought to value it much more than we do because it is not eternal. Let us hold to it for we shall never have it again. (5-6)

It is difficult to follow Coates's logic in his statement, but in his mind fellowship clearly has no eternal component; it is something only for this age. Even if we accept the misplaced notion that fellowship is an outward, devotional activity between God and humanity, the prevalent notion of going to heaven, which is equally misplaced in regard to the truth of the Scriptures, typically trumpets our ability in the eternity future of heaven to bask in the glorious presence of the Lord, that is, to fellowship *with* the Lord, face to face, for eternity. Coates's interpretation of fellowship seems to deny even this. The sign of the river of water of life flowing from the eternal throne in Revelation 22:1, however, is a sign of our eternal fellowship with the ever-existing and ever-coinhering Triune God; that is, we will enjoy an eternal fellowship of the Spirit (the river, see also John 7:39) who proceeds from with the Father and the Son (God and the Lamb). By stripping fellowship of its eternal component, Coates, unwittingly I believe, dilutes our understanding of fellowship and dangerously subverts a proper understanding of the Triune God and His economy. If fellowship is not eternal, then neither is the Triune God. Likewise, His economical actions to bring us into the fellowship of the Son, particularly His death and resurrection, will not have an eternal effect.

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¹³According to Acts 2:42, the early church “continued steadfastly in the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles, in the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Continuing in the teaching of the apostles is being in the things that unveil God’s economy concerning Christ and the church, which brings us into the fellowship of the apostles, which is with the Father and the Son. Fellowship is “the communion and communication between the believers in their communion and communication with God the Father and Christ the Son” (Recovery Version, note 1). John also refers to the fellowship of the apostles in his first Epistle in its experiential application and consequences. By joining ourselves in the fellowship of the apostles, there is an entrance into the fellowship with the Father and His Son (1:3). In a footnote to this verse, Witness Lee points out that the Greek word for *fellowship* means “joint participation, common participation.” As such,

Fellowship is the issue of the eternal life and is actually the flow of the eternal life within all the believers, who have received and possess the divine life. It is illustrated by the flow of the water of life in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:1). All genuine believers are in this fellowship (Acts 2:42). It is carried on by the Spirit in our regenerated spirit. Hence, it is called “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor. 13:14) and “fellowship of [our] spirit” (Phil. 2:1). It is in this fellowship of the eternal life that we, the believers, participate in all that the Father and the Son are and have done for us; that is, we enjoy the love of the Father and the grace of the Son by virtue of the fellowship of the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14). Such a fellowship was first the apostles’ portion in their enjoyment of the Father and the Son through the Spirit. Hence, in Acts 2:42 it is called “the fellowship of the apostles,” and in this verse “our [the apostles’] fellowship,” a fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. (Recovery Version, note 3)

¹⁴While Milligan rightly extols our incorporation with the Triune God, he also, like Witness Lee, maintains a distinction that reserves the Godhead to the Triune God alone, even in His economical interaction with redeemed humanity. Milligan writes, “To whatever extent the glorified Lord identifies Himself with those to whom He has given His glory, and however close may be the resemblance between Him and them, He retains His absolute and unequalled pre-eminence” (229-230).

¹⁵While many balk at the term *deification*, it is counterproductive to embrace a term such as *union* but deny the impact of that union, which must include our participation in the divine life that animates this union and the transformational issues that derive from this union. To deny a divinizational impact from our union with Christ, quite simply, nullifies any benefit that can come from speaking of our union with Christ. In *The Whole Christ* Emile Mersch speaks of the doctrine of deification in relation to our union with Christ, the church’s incorporation with Christ, and the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father. He also points to the presupposition or *a priori* assumption of divinization in the writings of the fathers.

For it is precisely in explaining what Christianity is that the Fathers explain this union of men with Christ. Thus, for instance, it is in their teaching on the unity and necessity of the Church that they speak of our incorporation with Christ in the Church, and it is when they treat of the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father that they formulate a doctrine of the divinization which men receive as members of the Incarnate Word. As a matter of fact, this doctrine of divinization is often presupposed instead of being treated *ex professo*. Naturally enough, such occasional fragments of doctrine are not always easy to recognize. (6)

¹⁶Milligan is quite insightful in regard to the need for the church to be brought into the revelation of the mystery in regard to the work of the Spirit in the New Testament. In a rather lengthy passage, he discusses the Spirit who was not yet in John 7:39, which he labels “Spirit” or “Holy Spirit” to differentiate from the operation of “the Holy Spirit” in the Old Testament and in the pre-resurrection experiences of the incarnate Word. In particular, he speaks of the difficulty of dealing with the economical identification of Christ and the Spirit in the New Testament.

Much remains to be done before we can hope to reach consistent and clear views upon the Person and Work of the Spirit under the New Testament dispensation. It may be

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difficult to explain why it should be so. But in all probability the chief explanation is our failure to recognise with sufficient distinctness that that "Spirit," or "Holy Spirit," to which the Church's vitality must be always due is the Spirit of Christ, the ever-living human as well as Divine Lord, and that He has been too exclusively thought of as the Third Person of the Trinity in His metaphysical existence. We know that to the Lord Jesus Christ the redemption of man is owing, and that He is as much the Finisher as the Author of our faith. When, accordingly, we hear of another work not less essential, but which seems to be carried out less by Him than by an independent Person, our minds become confused, and we are tempted to dismiss the subject. On the other hand, let us feel that the Spirit given by the exalted Redeemer is His own Spirit, the Spirit by whom He forms Himself within us, and the different parts of the plan of our salvation will blend into one. (224)

May the Spirit reveal these things increasingly within us and to the corporate Body of Christ so that we may more fully enter into the hope of our calling. It is not without economical significance that Paul writes of one Body, one Spirit, and one hope of our calling in the same sentence in Ephesians 4:4.

¹⁷Preaching often seems foolish because it outwardly appears to be buttressed by tautological arguments, but in many respects to us, God is tautological: To us, He reveals Himself as the "I AM WHO I AM" (Exo. 3:14). But, wonderfully, in this revelation there is a divine response of faith.

¹⁸Milligan further develops the link between the Spirit and Christ in respect to the economy of salvation in the following quotation:

As the Spirit of the exalted and glorified Lord, He is not the Third Person of the Trinity in His absolute and metaphysical existence, but that Person as He is mediated through the Son, who is human as well as Divine. It is on this particular aspect of His being that He diffuses Himself through the members of Christ's body, and abides in them. Only as human, entering into and coalescing with what is human, can He be also our Spirit dwelling in a living and real way within us. (189)

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The idea of the Church as mystically one with Christ was vividly alive in the West; indeed Hilary [of Poitiers], who may have been influenced by his Eastern contacts, had a particularly strong sense of it. Through baptism, he argues, believers undergo a spiritual transformation of their bodies and "enter into fellowship with Christ's flesh"; "He is Himself the Church, comprehending it all in Himself through the mystery of His body", and so they are incorporated into Him..."The Christians themselves along with their Head, because He has ascended to heaven, form one Christ. It is not a case of His being one and our being many, but we who are many are a unity in Him. There is therefore one man, Christ, consisting of head and body." Christ and His members are "one person" (*una quaedam persona*), an organic unity in which all have their several functions, and which is figuratively represented in the one bread of the eucharist. (409, 413-414)

²⁰The essence of the utterance in this sentence is taken from Milligan's reference to a quotation in *God's Revelation of Himself to Men*, p. 269, by Andrews. No detailed citation information is given (196).

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Footnotes from the Recovery Version of the Bible

"Father, concerning that which You have given Me, I desire that they also may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory, which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. **Righteous** Father, though the world has not known You, yet I have known You, and these have known that You have sent Me" (John 17:24-25).

be: The Son is in the divine glory of the Father's expression. Therefore, for the Son's believers to be with Him where He is means that they are with Him in the divine glory to express the Father. The fulfillment of this matter began with the Son's resurrection, when He brought His believers into participation in His resurrection life, and will consummate in the New Jerusalem, when His believers will be brought fully into the divine glory for the ultimate corporate expression of the Triune God in eternity.

Righteous: The world neither knows nor wants the Father, but the Son and the Son's believers do. Hence, the Father loves the Son and His believers so that He gives His glory to both the Son and His believers. In this matter He is righteous and just. In sanctifying the Son's believers, the Father is holy (v. 11). In loving the Son and His believers so that He gives the Son and the believers His glory, the Father is righteous.

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