

THE NEW TESTAMENT BELIEVERS' INCORPORATION OF THE TRIUNE GOD IN THEIR BEING THE BODY OF CHRIST (1)

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Christ is all and in all.
(Col. 3:11)

For some time in this journal I have focused my attention on the unique way that the Triune God works in His economy to carry out His eternal purpose among humankind. I have characterized this unique way—His *modus operandi*—as His incorporation both in Himself and with His New Testament believers. The term *incorporation* is taken from Witness Lee (*Issue 21-22, 24-26, 40-42*) and is meant to describe first the compound reality that exists among the three of the Divine Trinity, that is, that the three mutually indwell one another (John 14:10-11; 10:38; 17:21) and therefore that the three mutually work together as one (John 14:10; 5:19). The apprehension of this compound reality has long been held to be essential to a proper understanding of the Trinity in the Christian church (Ayres 296). But this compound reality characterizes not only how the Triune God is and works in Himself but also how His New Testament believers live and serve in Him through His salvation. Thus, the term *incorporation* describes second the reality that the Triune God and the believers mutually indwell one another (John 14:20; 17:21; 15:4) and mutually work together as one (John 14:12; 6:57).

I feel that there is much value in the new term as it precisely expresses the mode by which the inseparability of operations among the three of the Divine Trinity occurs. When the Father acts, He does so by working in the Son by the Spirit (e.g., Gen. 1:1-3; Heb. 1:2; John 1:3; Col. 1:16; Psa. 33:6). Likewise, when the Son acts (e.g., Matt. 12:28) and when the Spirit acts (e.g., Rom. 8:9), each incorporates the operations of the other two when He acts. While it is certain that the New Testament assigns differing agency of action to each of the three of the Trinity and thereby establishes clearly the distinction between Them, we should never make the mistake that any one of the three acts separably. Rather, each incorporates the operations of all three in Their every action. In every action of God each of the three operates distinctly

according to the realities that make each distinct in the Godhead, but what we may assign to the Father as His action, for example, incorporates the operations of both the Son and the Spirit. Perhaps a simple example will suffice. When God created the universe, He did so in a very particular way. While we could expect Him to have simply willed things into existence, He did not create in this way. Rather, He created first one thing and then another in this way: “And God said...” (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26). Both the will and the word were present, and these two point to the distinct operations of the Father and of the Word (the Son) in each single action of God. Because They mutually indwell one another, They incorporate the operations of one another when either of Them acts. It is the same with the actions of the Spirit. This inseparability of operations, which issues eternally from the mutual indwelling of the three in the Divine Trinity, occurs by way of each incorporating the operations of the others in His actions and not by each acting independently or even successively. It is true that we can find successive actions of God throughout the New Testament, but we should understand that each action in succession is in itself an incorporation of the operations of all three; not one of these actions is to be taken as the separate work of only one of the Divine Trinity, for such an understanding goes against the very intrinsic existence of the Divine Trinity as the one God, which is upheld by the mutual indwelling of the three.

While we can almost grasp the outline of this mystery in the Divine Trinity, we are almost stumbled when we attempt to consider that the believers are likewise an incorporation of the Triune God in their life and service. But the Lord Jesus Himself guides us into this realization when we read Him saying, “In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you” (John 14:20); and, “That they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us” (17:21); and, “As the living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me” (6:57); and, “Truly, truly, I say to you, He

who believes into Me, the works which I do he shall do also; and greater than these he shall do because I am going to the Father” (14:12). Here we see the believers’ mutual indwelling with the Triune God as well as their mutual living and working together as one with Him. Again, *incorporation* describes the precise way that they should live and serve as God’s New Testament believers, not independently from Him nor in reverent imitation of Him but by way of incorporating in their living and action His life and operation. This, of course, requires a very narrow understanding of the Christian life. If the Triune God is not operating within a believer’s action, then the action is not genuinely of God, regardless of what a believer may think that he or she is doing. This narrow understanding matches the Lord’s word to His disciples in John 15:5: “I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing.” This mutual indwelling and mutual working together as one by way of incorporation is the reality of the genuine Christian and church life, and such a life of incorporation annuls the merely moral, ethical, and behavioral understanding of the Christian life that characterizes much of modern Christian thought today.

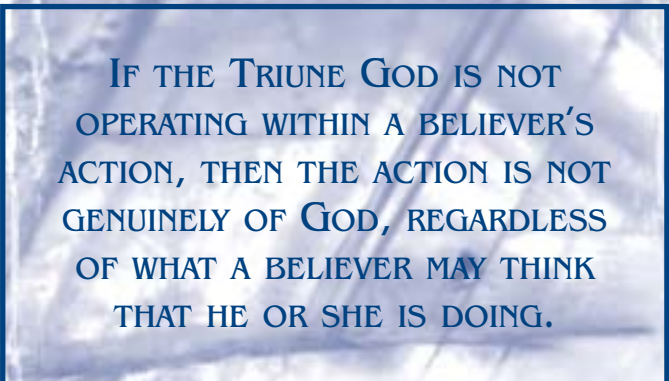
Though mutual indwelling and mutual working together as one have been recognized clearly and taught forcefully (off and on) since at least the fourth century, to my knowledge no thorough study of this compound notion as found in the New Testament exists. Thus, it seemed good to me to try to tease out the many instances of incorporation from the text of the New Testament, particularly from the Gospel of John and the Epistles. This I have done in a series of ten articles in this journal, beginning in 2004. The first two articles dealt with the incorporation of the operations of the Triune God in Himself and with His believers in the Gospel of John. My point in these two articles was to show that John’s Gospel is not simply concerning the incarnate God but more precisely concerning the incarnate incorporate God. All that Christ does in the Gospel of John He does by incorporating the Father, and He is quite forceful in making that clear throughout John’s narrative. But in addition to this, the Lord makes it clear that the believers are to enter into a similar kind of living and serving through Christ’s eventual coming into them in the actions of the Spirit of reality. Thus, the Johannine Jesus serves as both the bridge and model for the believers’ incorporation of the Triune God in their Christian and

church life. He is not merely an exemplar, though indeed through His living as narrated by John He models what it means to incorporate God in a human life, but through His own indwelling of the believers through His Spirit in their spirit He becomes the organic bridge into such an incorporate living.

Of course, it is in the Epistles that we would expect this bridge and model of incorporation to be fully developed, and thus, I turned my attention to the Epistles to see what could be found there. In eight articles I examined in sequence the incorporation of the Triune God first by Christ (85 instances, covered in one article), then by the Spirit (61 instances, covered in two articles), then by the believers (368 instances, covered in five articles; the others to be covered in the remaining articles). Over 70% of all the textual instances of incorporation in the Epistles relate to the believers, and this fact in itself is a quite

telling indication that the writers of the New Testament envisioned the Christian life not as a mere ethical life but as a life that incorporates the operations of God in all that the believers are and do. Among the instances of incorporation by the believers, there emerges a subset related particularly to the character and service of the apostles (115 instances), and these

instances clearly indicate that in their function to establish and build up the churches of God the apostles rely not on their natural constitution and ability but on the operation of the Triune God within them. I devoted two of my last five articles to the incorporation of the Triune God in the character and service of the apostles. These instances of incorporation by the New Testament apostles are in stark contrast to the many Christian ministries today that rely on the natural charm and influence of naturally gifted persons. In the next three articles in this series I focused on the incorporation of the Triune God by the common believers in their full salvation, in their virtues, walk, and practical service, and in their spiritual functions. Again, the overriding impression that we are left with after examining all these instances of the believers’ incorporation is that the Christian life is not something that believers live out by their own natural effort and ability. Rather, it is a living that incorporates the operations of the Triune God within them; that is, it is a living out of the God who operates in them. Thus, it is in every way the continuation of the Son’s incorporation of God in His own human living on the earth.



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The particular criteria for seeking instances of incorporation in John through Jude were simple. First, I was looking for instances where in the action of any one of the three of the Divine Trinity or in the action of the believers the operation of one or more of the three of the Trinity was additionally indicated. Second, in each instance I was looking for textual indications of the incorporating action and of the incorporated operation, not just implications that each existed in the instance. The clearest example of the fulfillment of these criteria as they apply to the incorporation of the Triune God in Himself is probably in John 14:10: “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.” Here the Son says that He speaks (the incorporating action), but when He speaks, the Father who abides in Him does His works (the incorporated operation). The Son does not speak from Himself; thus, there is no separate and independent action here. Rather, the Father works in the speaking of the Son, and it is the Father’s operation incorporated in the Son’s action that provides the external basis for our belief in who the Son is: “Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; but if not, believe because of the works themselves” (v. 11).

One of the clearest examples of the fulfillment of two these criteria as they apply to the believers’ incorporation of God’s operation is in Philippians 2:12-13: “So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only but now much rather in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure.” Here the believers are exhorted to work out their own salvation (the incorporating action), but this is possible only because God is operating within them not only to generate their willingness to work out their salvation but also to motivate their actual manifestation of it (the incorporated operation). There is an excellent play on words here in Paul’s Greek in that he uses the verb *katergō* (“work out” or “work forth”) to characterize the believers’ action and the verb *energō* (“work within”) to characterize God’s operation. The first verb, translated “work out,” does not mean to accomplish, as the English idiom denotes; rather, the sense is to work something forth to its ultimate conclusion. The believers can work forth their salvation to its ultimate goal because (“for”) God is working within them. His working within, His divine operation, effects (not simply affects) both the believers’ inward willing and inward acting (again the verb *energō*) for them to work forth their salvation to its ultimate goal of glory, which is God’s good pleasure (Heb. 2:10). Thus, the believers work forth their salvation by incorporating God’s operation within them. While it is certainly their endeavor, it is not merely their endeavor, for the endeavor incorporates the God who operates within them.

In this article I begin the final aspect of this study and will conclude this aspect in a later article. The portions that I will cover relate to the believers’ incorporation of the Triune God insofar as it relates to their being the Body of Christ. It may seem tautological to examine verses that relate to the Body of Christ and try to find instances of incorporation. The Body of Christ is, by general definition, the incorporation of Christ since the term *incorporation* implies a body (Lat. *corpus*) of some kind, even if it is metaphorical. But as should be clear from what I have written in my previous articles and what I have summarized above, there is a latent polemic in all that I am doing in this study. The three of the Divine Trinity never act separately from each other, contrary to what many Christians today think. Further, the believers are not meant to live the Christian life and serve God apart from the operations of the Triune God within them, contrary to the concept and practice of most Christians today. Likewise, the church as the Body of Christ is not a quaint metaphor for the simple congregation of people who believe that Jesus is Lord. Rather, it is an organic corporate entity that comprises the new creation which every human being in Christ is (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17); it is the corporate reality of the new creation in Christ. And what makes it a reality (as opposed to a metaphor) is that in all its aspects the church as the Body of Christ incorporates the operations of the Triune God for its existence and its function in God’s economy. This is what I will try to establish in these last articles on incorporation.

In my previous ten articles in this series, I have focused on the “personal” aspect of incorporation, showing, for example, how Christ incorporates the Father, how the Spirit incorporates the Son, or how the believers, as regenerated persons, incorporate the Triune God. I have deliberately adjusted the viewfinder of my readers to put the Son in distinct focus in one scriptural instance and the Spirit in distinct focus in another and the believers in distinct focus in yet another. Of course, my intention in this was to show in every instance that while the subject of focus is distinct, there is a necessary incorporation of operations that actually defines the whole reality of each one in focus. Thus, while we can distinguish the Son in His actions, we should understand that He is no Son at all without the Father or apart from the Father, that He incorporates the Father in all that He is and does. The same is true for the Father and for the Spirit and for the New Testament believers in their most intrinsic existence. Thus, while I have focused on the distinct activities of the Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the believers, the full reality of each action is that there is one God in operation or, with respect to the believers, there is one Body of Christ in operation. Perhaps ironically, it may be easier to appreciate that there is one God in operation in every distinct action of the Father, the Son, or the Spirit than to appreciate that there is one Body of Christ in operation in every distinct

action of the individual believers. But this seems to be the message of the apostles concerning the believers' life and service at its deepest level. I am convinced that the personal instances of incorporation that I have examined in the ten preceding articles are valid and genuine. But in a real sense it is easy to take the slant as the only true perspective. It is certainly not wrong to say that God desires all human beings to be holy, spiritual, and ultimately glorious. But it is also certainly not right to say that this is all that He desires. In Himself He is an incorporation, and all that He does He does by way of incorporation. Likewise, He has long intended that human beings would be an incorporation and that they would do all things by way of incorporation. He has had a corporate reality in mind for humankind since the very beginning: "And God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Gen. 1:27). Though the fall has frustrated His intention temporarily and even damaged human beings to the extent that their individualism is now the norm, through His economy He is recovering His chosen people through regeneration and transformation by His divine life back to His original intention that they would be in His very image. He is an incorporation in Himself, and they will be an incorporation in His salvation. The fullest manifestation of this incorporation is not in the individual Christian lives of His many believers (though each transformed believer is without doubt a wonderful testimony of His operation in them) but in the corporate reality of the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (Eph. 1:23).

As I have done in all these articles, in this article I will follow a catalog-and-commentary format in presenting the instances of the believers' incorporation of the Triune God in their being the Body of Christ. For each aspect of this topic I will list the scriptural passages that support the aspect, and then I will offer commentary on the passages that will, I hope, make the significance of the passages clear. Also, as I have done in my previous articles, I should note at the outset that I am not claiming that the particular aspects of my topic that I will present below are definitive. The challenge that has accompanied this study all along has been to find some sort of believable logical order to the many instances of incorporation that I have ascertained. To be honest, it was a much easier challenge when I focused on the incorporation of the Triune God in Himself, though even then

I could not easily be excused of forming ad hoc categories. When my attention turned to the believers' incorporation of the Triune God, the instances could be clustered safely, I felt, into large bundles, like the believers' participation in God's full salvation, or their Christian walk, or their renewed virtues, etc. But within each bundle I found the further discrimination of sub-categories less safe and less satisfying, and I lamented that there ever was a William of Ockham, whose frequent admonitions finally inspired someone to say, *Pluralitas non est ponenda sine necessitate* ("Plurality should not be posited without necessity"). But, I contend, there *was* necessity. Presenting scores of scriptural passages in each bundle without some sort of organization among them would have been even less satisfying and probably less safe. So, for each bundle I reluctantly offered categories within and trusted the kindness and largeness of my readers' hearts to pay attention less to the tenuousness of the categories and more to the simple evidence of the incorporation of the operations of the Triune God in the portions. I certainly was not hoping to establish or even suggest a systematic theology of incorporation, but I had to hazard some sort of organization for all the instances of incorporation that I found. I approach this article on the believers' incorporation of the Triune God in their being the Body of Christ with the same trepidation, with the same apology, and with the same trust in my readers.

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The Churches as the Incorporation of Christ

Apart from the self-evident semantic truth that the Body of Christ is an incorporation of Christ in some sense of the word, there are clear passages in the New Testament that relay this fact with explicit reference to the operations of the Triune God. The following passages speak of the simple fact of the incorporation of the Triune God in the very existence of the church (in distinction to the Body per se), particularly in its local aspect:

Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. (1 Thes. 1:1)

Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thes. 1:1)

Yet I was still unknown by face to the churches of Judea, which are in Christ. (Gal. 1:22)

Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and deacons. (Phil. 1:1)

In the first two verses above Paul says that the local churches are in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the third verse, that they are in Christ. It is easy to pass over these statements and relegate them to the mere rhetoric of Christian discourse. But what may be mere rhetoric to us today could not be such to Paul, who coined these expressions not from exemplars before him but out of an apprehension within him of genuine realities. It is striking that in his very first sentence on record Paul draws upon the language of incorporation to describe the believers not as individuals but as they are corporately in the church. Henry Alford notes that the Greek preposition *en* (“in”) in these phrases, “as usual, denotes communion and participation in, as the element of spiritual life” (3: 249). In both 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2 Thessalonians 1:1 the object of this preposition is the compound phrase *God the/our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*, and in this combination we should see an indication of Paul’s appreciation of the Divine Trinity, even if here he explicitly refers only to the Father and the Son. The church is in one God, who is both the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, though distinctly each so.

In Galatians 1:22 Paul again characterizes the churches in an incorporate way, this time using what has become his signature phrase *in Christ*. This phrase appears to be Paul’s particular creation and is used primarily by him in the New Testament (*TDNT* 2: 541), though Peter and John later adopt the same notion in a few places in their Epistles (1 Pet. 3:16; 5:10, 14; 1 John 2:24; 4:15-16). John will also later recall in John 15:4 the Lord’s own words that clearly relate to this notion: “Abide in Me and I in you.” This quotation is “a stronger form of the Pauline *en Christō*” (*TDNT* 4: 576), and though it is first recorded some decades after Paul coined his phrase, the Lord’s utterance certainly precedes Paul’s succinct adoption of the similar notion and indeed provides a proper basis for understanding the full import of Paul’s phrase. Paul’s *in Christ* corresponds to the Lord’s command, “Abide in Me.” Both expressions locate the believers spatially in Christ and, as Alford notes (see above), indicate the believers’ communion with and participation in Christ as the element of their spiritual life. But the Lord’s words also include the attendant promise “and I in you,” and this points more to the believers’ incorporation of Christ in all that they are and do as His believers. The first abiding (“in Me”) leads to the second abiding (“in you”). In other words, because the believers have been put into Christ and now abide in Him, He abides in them, and they are

able to incorporate Him in all that they are and do. It is the reality of Christ abiding in the believers that brings to them the reality of their incorporation of the operations of the Triune God. The benefit of being in Christ is not merely that in itself (though that in itself is indeed a great thing); rather, the benefit is more that through it Christ is also incorporated in the believers. Nevertheless, it is their being in Christ that forms the basis of His being in them and that ushers them into all that He can be in them. Thus, when Paul uses his more succinct phrase *in Christ*, he is no doubt referring to the full import of the mutual abiding of the Lord and His believers. And particularly when he says that the local churches are in Christ, he is indicating that they have been placed mystically in Christ and now draw from Christ their full existence and reality as the church. Because the churches are in Christ, they now benefit from His being in them through their incorporation of what He is and does in all that they are and do as the church.

It is one thing for the believers to be in Christ and thereby for Him to be in them as the incorporated One; it is another thing for the churches to be in Christ and thereby for Him to be incorporated in them for their existence and function as the church. But there is an important analog between the two instances of incorporation. I hope that I have adequately shown in my previous articles that the believers have their unique existence as God’s New Testament people solely and singly because of their incorporation of the Triune God. They are a new creation in Him (2 Cor. 5:17); they are His New Testament saints with His holy nature (Acts 9:13; Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2); they are the sons of God (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 3:26; 4:6-7) and the brothers of Christ (John 20:17; Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:10-12) and of one another (Gal. 1:2; Phil. 4:21; Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 8:22-23; 1 Pet. 5:9) through their regeneration in the divine life; and they are these things and much more through their incorporation of the Triune God within them. But likewise, the church is what it is solely and singly because it incorporates the Triune God in Christ and not by virtue of any other incidental characteristic that we can find in it. Certainly the church is a society, a gathering, a community, a company, a fellowship, an association, and so on, but unlike all other corporate entities that can be called these things, the church uniquely incorporates the operations of the Triune God for all that it is intrinsically, and therefore uniquely it is the church of God (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:13; 1 Tim. 3:5) and the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:12; 1:23; 5:30; Col. 1:24). While a group of Christians may call themselves a church simply because they are a group of Christians, they are only the church in reality when corporately they incorporate the operations of the Triune God in their existence and function. That, I believe, is the real significance of Paul’s description of

the church in Galatians 1:22—"the churches of Judea, which are in Christ."

When Paul opens his Epistle to the Philippians, he again alludes to the church as the incorporation of the Triune God, though this time in a less direct way. He addresses his letter "to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and deacons." The fact that he includes the phrase *with the overseers and deacons* indicates that he has in mind the church in a corporate sense and not merely the saints in a collective sense. The overseers guide the administration of the local church, and the deacons take the lead in the service of the local church; thus, their inclusion in this greeting leads us to understand *saints in Philippi* as a reference to the church in Philippi. This is in keeping with Paul's use of the term *saints* elsewhere to refer to the believers as the components of the churches—"all the churches of the saints" (1 Cor. 14:33). I should further note that here in Philippians 1:1 Paul does not distinguish the overseers and deacons as a separate class from the saints; he does not say "and the overseers and deacons" but "with the overseers and deacons," thus contemplating the saints as the whole of the church in Philippi, among whom are those who hold these offices for proper administration and service. Alford (an Anglican, by the way, and thus against the grain of his own affiliation) comments: "The simple juxtaposition of the officers with the members of the Church, and indeed their being placed after those members, shews...the absence of hierarchical views such as those in the Epistles of the apostolic fathers [e.g., of Ignatius]" (3: 153). But of greater relevance to my topic is the fact that Paul says that all the saints who are in Philippi, with the overseers and deacons, are in Christ Jesus, and again the indication is that the church is the incorporation of the Triune God, even in its local instances.

An Interlude on Christ and the Whole Trinity

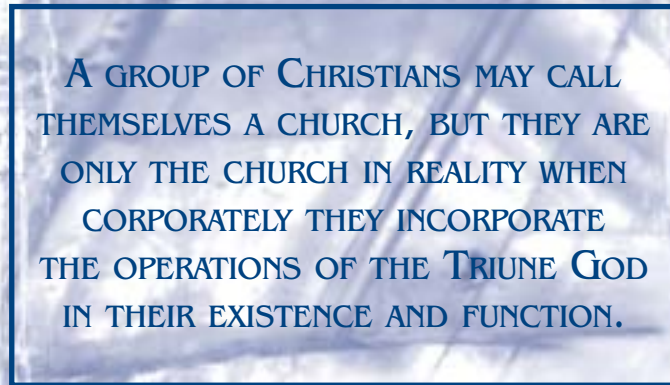
The leap from Christ Jesus to the Triune God in the previous sentence is deliberate, and before I go much further, I should defend the move; I will be relying on this equivalence much in the pages to follow, as I believe the writers of the New Testament likewise did. How we view who Christ is determines how we understand to what extent the Father and the Spirit are also involved in any reference

to Christ in the Bible. It is vitally important to understand the relationship between Christ and the Triune God if we are to apprehend as fully as possible the significance of who Christ is and what He does. A first and rude approximation of this relationship relies on the simple logic that the three labels *Christ, the Father, and the Spirit* refer to three separate beings, in this case, three Gods. Of course, every believer soon receives the help that there are not three Gods and that somehow the three are one God. But I suspect that most readers of the New Testament separate the three into three personalities, three individuals, three people notionally. Thus, when one is spoken of in the New Testament, the other two are considered to be somewhere else and not involved at all. That is why jumps in reference from Christ to the Triune God, as in the previous paragraph, may cause wariness in some readers. It is unfortunate that most Christians today do not get beyond this latent tritheism and that it influences all their reading

of the Bible. Earlier Christian students of the Bible, particularly in the early centuries of the church, worked hard to get past this rude mistake and by careful and prayerful consideration of the Scriptures saw that when any of the three acted, all three operated. Thus, they respected both sides of biblical revelation, that there is one God who is three—the Father,

the Son, and the Spirit. And when they read of Christ in the Scriptures, they understood Him to be the one God who acted with the Father by the Spirit. Examples abound, as Lewis Ayres in his *Nicaea and Its Legacy* makes clear, but one particular quotation from Augustine's *Epistle 11* shows how strong this understanding was in former times:

For the union of Persons in the Trinity is in the catholic faith set forth and believed, and by a few holy and blessed ones understood, to be so inseparable, that whatever is done by the Trinity must be regarded as being done by the Father, and by the Son, and by the Holy Spirit together; and that nothing is done by the Father which is not also done by the Son and by the Holy Spirit; and nothing done by the Holy Spirit which is not also done by the Father and by the Son; and nothing done by the Son which is not also done by the Father and by the Holy Spirit. From which it seems to follow as a consequence, that the whole Trinity assumed human nature; for if the Son did so, but the Father and the Spirit did not, there is something in which they act separately. Why, then, in our mysteries



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and sacred symbols, is the incarnation ascribed only to the Son? (229)

The whole point of Augustine's *Epistle 11* is to answer the closing question above, but two observations can be made from the excerpt. First, Augustine reports that the inseparability of the operations of the three in every action of the one is part of the universal ("catholic") faith. This understanding affects the early church's view of even the incarnation, and in that particular event the whole Trinity is seen to be involved. How Augustine words the Trinity's involvement—"the whole Trinity assumed human nature"—is enough to make many moderns blush, but we should remember that much of modern Trinitarian theology is founded on views that Augustine advanced and established for posterity. Thus, it is not easy to dismiss Augustine as aberrant. Rather, it is probably the modern notion of separate persons that needs to be adjusted. Second, Augustine admits that also in the church's understanding the incarnation is ascribed only to the Son. What may seem to be a contradiction is actually not. On the one hand, the Scriptures routinely ascribe certain actions and conditions to a given one of the Trinity; on the other hand, from the full testimony of the Scriptures we are to understand that how that One acts or what that One is depends intrinsically on the other two of the Divine Trinity. Thus, Christ says, "He who sent Me [the Father] is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him" (John 8:29) when He refers to His work on the earth. We should not expect this to change even when He is on the cross, doing what is distinctly ascribed to Him, that is, dying for our redemption. He did not become separate from the Father and the Spirit at that time, nor do we need to ascribe to the Father or the Spirit the death that He died. But we do need to see and confess that, in dying for our redemption, the Son incorporated the operations of the whole Trinity, even if we can perceive only dimly the distinctions between those operations in Him. The Son alludes to this incorporation in His death, akin to how He had related to this human living, in John 16:32: "Behold, an hour is coming, and has come, that you will be scattered each to his own place and will leave Me alone; yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." This cannot refer merely to His trial and suffering; it must refer as well to His dying for our redemption. Even then, the whole Trinity was involved in the action that Scripture clearly ascribes to the Son. If we wished to extend Augustine's way of speaking of these things, we might expect him to say that the whole Trinity assumed human death, even though it is only to the Son that that death is particularly ascribed.

I chose this one passage from Augustine—there are others by him and still more by others—because of its clear enunciation of the truth of Christ's incorporation of the whole Trinity. But, of course, the veracity of this truth is not to

be taken simply at Augustine's word. Augustine himself bases his understanding on the Scriptures, as is clear from a full reading of his writings on this matter. For my part, I have attempted to catalog, as fully as possible, the scriptural basis for Christ's incorporation of the whole Trinity first in the Gospel of John in my first article in this series and then in the New Testament Epistles in my third article. I believe that the scriptural basis for this incorporation is very clear and that only a naïve believer or a hardened tritheist would deny it.

Thus, when the Scriptures speak of Christ in any instance, we must be careful not to separate Him notionally from the whole Trinity, as though He could be separated in any real sense. He is not alone in that instance, and He does not act separably in that instance. Conversely, when we read of Christ in any instance in Scripture, we should understand that He incorporates the whole Trinity in that instance, bearing in His distinct action or condition the operations of the Father and the Spirit as well. While the writers of the New Testament will in one place refer to Christ or in another to the Father or in a third place to the Spirit, in every place we should understand the incorporation of the operations of the whole Triune God. I believe that my leaps from Christ to the Triune God throughout this article are warranted by this proper understanding of how the Triune God is and operates.

The Body of Christ as the Incorporation of the Triune God

Turning back to the collection of scriptural portions for this article, I wish now to examine the Body of Christ as the incorporation of the Triune God from a few particular perspectives. These portions are related to the intrinsic significance of the church, that is, the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23), and not simply to the church per se. Again, my goal in this examination is to show that the Body of Christ is not merely the congregation of the believers bearing the label *Body* as a metaphorical epithet. Instead, it is a corporate organic entity with a real existence that begins with and is sustained by the operations of the Triune God. Further, I hope that this examination will make obvious the fact that the Body of Christ as the incorporation of the Triune God is something that all the believers should enjoy and experience as their fullest blessing from God. It goes beyond what any one believer can experience in his or her own personal Christian life. Thus, this view of the Body of Christ flies in the face of the mindset that rejects the corporate aspect of the believers' whole identity in Christ in favor of a lone walk with the Lord. Those who hold to this mindset deprive themselves of the greater blessing of the Body of Christ and, as I hope to show, of the ultimate possibility of becoming full-grown in Christ. Certainly all the believers can grow to some extent on their own, before their Lord

only and without the church as the Body of Christ. But no believer fully matures and finally grows up into Christ as the Head apart from the fuller experience of Christ as the Body.

In Its Coming into Existence

For we are His masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand in order that we would walk in them. (Eph. 2:10)

...that He might create the two in Himself into one new man, so making peace, and might reconcile both in one Body to God through the cross, having slain the enmity by it. (Eph. 2:15-16)

Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood. (Acts 20:28)

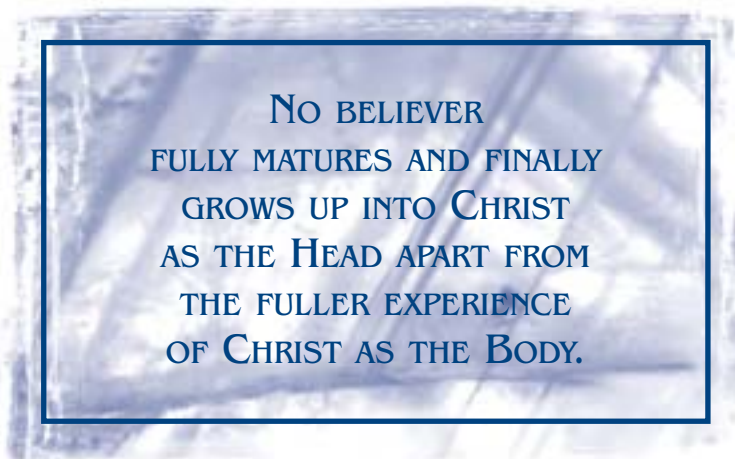
Paul tells the Ephesians that the believers as a whole are the masterpiece of God, which was created in Christ Jesus. Here he is viewing God's work not in the individual life of each believer but in His act of bringing a corporate entity into existence, not separate from His work in the believers individually but certainly distinct from it. Elsewhere Paul says that each believer is a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), but here he says that the corporate creation is His masterpiece. While the Greek word *poiēma* can have the weaker meaning of any kind of workmanship (as in Romans 1:20, where it is used in the plural—"the things made"), in this context Paul is probably alluding to the artistic meaning of the word, and thus, the translation "masterpiece" is warranted. But regardless of the connotation intended, the fact of God's creation of a corporate entity is clearly expressed in the word. The masterpiece (or workmanship) that is referred to in verse 10 is more clearly designated "one new man" in verse 15 and "one Body" in verse 16, and this further indicates that what Paul is speaking of in Ephesians 2 is a corporate reality, which has come into existence through the operations of the Triune God. God is presented as the Agent of this creative act as indicated by the possessive *His* in verse 10. The antecedent of the possessive is God, who is in focus from verse 4. In Greek the possessive is brought to the very front of the sentence, and thus, there is emphasis in

it—"For it is His masterpiece that we are." That this masterpiece was "created in Christ Jesus" further points to God as the implied Agent in the act of creation. Thus, the Body of Christ comes into existence as the creative act of God. But Paul does not leave the fact so simply stated, for he understands the inseparability of operations in the Divine Trinity and therefore furnishes us with the further fact that God created the Body "in Christ Jesus." It is probably impossible to fathom completely what Paul has in mind in this expression, but from the surface of the phrase we can understand that Christ in His very person as the God-man became the locus for God's work of bringing this corporate masterpiece into existence. But I suspect that, as in almost all other instances of his signature phrase, Paul has Christ as the constituting element in mind when he uses *in Christ Jesus* here. Certainly God has incorporated the believers into Christ (Alford 3: 98) in order to create them as His corporate masterpiece, but

more than that, He has constituted them with Christ as their spiritual element in order to genuinely make them what they are corporately, that is, the Body of Christ.

In verse 10 God is the clear Agent in the creation of the Body of Christ, but only a few verses later Paul assigns the agency for this creative act to Christ:

"...that He might create the two in Himself into one new man" (v. 15). The antecedent of the pronouns in this clause is Christ Jesus, who is in focus from verse 13. Certainly the creative work mentioned here is the same as that in verse 10. That Paul assigns the agency first to God then to Christ shows that in his mind there is no separation between God and Christ in the work of creating the one new man as the Body. In verse 10 Paul refers to the agency of the whole Divine Trinity at work in Christ Jesus, while in verse 15 he refers distinctly to the operation of Christ in the same work. Thus, when Christ operated distinctly to create the Body in Himself, He incorporated the operations of the whole Divine Trinity. Paul does not explicitly say what the operations of the Father and of the Spirit are, nor does he need to, as the Father and the Spirit are not in focus here. But what he goes on to say in the following verse is that Christ's operation to create the Body from the Jewish and the Gentile believers was for the purpose of reconciling both to God, again probably a reference to the whole Divine Trinity. Hence, Christ's distinct operation to create the Body takes the whole Trinity as its purpose, goal, and result as well.



I may be veering off-topic, but it is difficult to pass over verse 18, where Paul clearly mentions the three of the Divine Trinity distinctly in operation in the believers' enjoyment of God: "For through Him we both have access in one Spirit unto the Father." But there may be relevance to my topic, depending on how we understand the full significance of *Him* in this verse. The pronoun clearly refers to Christ Jesus, and in isolation this verse would seem to refer to Him personally. But in the context of what Paul has been saying in the preceding verses, the reference may be more logically to the Christ in whom the Body has been created and in whom the Jewish and Gentile believers have become one new man. Thus, the access that Paul speaks of here would be one that the believers experience in the Body of Christ and not merely as individuals. That he explicitly mentions "we both" seems to reinforce this notion since it refers to the two corporate peoples, Jews and Gentiles. This is really not far off from what he has already said in verse 16, where he speaks of both being reconciled in one Body to God. We do not normally think of reconciliation as a corporate matter, since the believers experience it individually, just as we do not normally think of access to the Father as a corporate matter, since the believers apparently experience it individually as well. But reconciliation in Ephesians 2 is clearly corporate and something of the reality of the Body of Christ, and there seems to be a good case for understanding access to the Father as corporate and something of the reality of the Body of Christ as well. But regardless of how we understand the full significance of *Him* in this verse, the distinct operations of the Divine Trinity are expressed very clearly by Paul here; indeed, this is one of the clearest verses showing the distinct operations of the Divine Trinity in the New Testament. Witness Lee comments: "Through God the Son, who is the Accomplisher, the means, and in God the Spirit, who is the Executor, the application, we have access unto God the Father, who is the Originator, the source of our enjoyment" (Recovery Version, Eph. 2:18, note 4). What Christ has accomplished in creating the Body is applied to the believers by the Spirit for access to the Father as the source and Originator of the work. Though Paul does not distinguish all the operations of the Divine Trinity in verses 15 and 16 when he speaks of the creation of the Body, he does so clearly when he speaks of the result of that work in verse 18, and we should expect that this kind of clarity stands at the back of every statement that Paul makes regarding the distinct operation of any of the three of the Divine Trinity.

In Acts 20:18-35 we have an oral account of Paul's word to the elders in the church in Ephesus, and in verse 28 we hear of "the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood." There is considerable controversy in this statement both in the Greek manuscripts and in Greek grammar. Of course, the difficulty lies in the

striking notion of God's own blood. To ameliorate the difficulty, some Greek manuscripts read "the church of the Lord," which surely makes the following relative clause less problematic. While the manuscript support for each reading is fairly balanced (Metzger 425), the expression *the church of the Lord* is nowhere to be found in the New Testament, but we do find *the church(es) of God* ten times in Paul's Epistles. Thus, most editors of the Greek text and most translators have opted for the latter as the original reading. Accepting this as the correct reading, some translators have suggested an alternative translation of the following relative clause in order to ameliorate the difficult expression: "which He obtained through the blood of His own," implying His own Son. This may be possible, but the only support for this absolute use of this Greek pronominal adjective is outside the New Testament; everywhere in the New Testament and particularly in Luke's writings the adjective clearly means "one's own," referring back to a previously mentioned antecedent. Thus, we would have to go out of our way to read anything but "His own blood" here and understand anyone else but God as the antecedent. It is also interesting to note that a number of writers in the early church freely adopted the expression *God's blood* without blanching (Alford 2: 230) perhaps in echo of this verse.

Of course, if we accept without alteration the text and the grammar as they seem to mean, we must understand that the reference is to Christ as the incarnate God, who as a man shed His blood on the cross for the church. But at the same time, we cannot deny the actual utterance of the text, which plainly says that God obtained the church through His own blood. Thus, two things become clear in this striking statement. First, the deity of Jesus is affirmed, and second, the whole Trinity is indicated. The implied identification of Christ as God shows that in Paul's mind Christ is God. But further, when we read here, as in other places in Paul's writings, that the church is "of God," the whole God, the whole Divine Trinity, comes to mind, not Christ particularly. I believe that this is the real import of Paul's word here. He is not referring particularly to the Lord Jesus Christ, though, of course, Christ is implied in the reference; rather, Paul is referring to the whole Trinity and to an action of the whole Trinity. The particular action of the whole Trinity here is indeed Christ's death on the cross, but it is viewed not as Christ's action alone. It is viewed as an action that incorporated the whole God, the whole Trinity. It is akin to what Paul says elsewhere about God's incorporate action to reconcile the world: "God in Christ was reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). Likewise, God was in Christ obtaining the church through the blood of Christ, and because Christ incorporated the whole Divine Trinity in this action, His blood can, without hesitation, be called God's own blood, even when at the same time we believe and affirm that God in His eternal being has no blood and

cannot die. We are simply declaring the mystery of the incarnation in this incorporate action.

What Paul says to the elders from Ephesus is really a condensed form of what he later writes in detail in chapter 2 of his Epistle to the whole church in Ephesus probably four or five years later. We have just looked at a few verses in that chapter, but it is worth noting the phrases in Ephesians 2 that expand on what Paul had previously spoken in Acts 20:28 concerning God's obtaining the church through His own blood. In Christ Jesus the Gentiles "have become near in the blood of Christ" (v. 13); Christ "has made both [Jews and Gentiles] one" (v. 14); He has created "the two in Himself into one new man" (v. 15); He has reconciled "both in one Body to God through the cross" (v. 16); He has "announced peace as the gospel to you who were far off [the Gentiles], and peace to those who were near [the Jews]" (v. 17); and "through Him we both have access in one Spirit unto the Father" (v. 18). Paul writes in great detail in Ephesians 2:14-18 the exact way that God obtained His church through His own blood, which he mentions in passing in Acts 20:28. But it should be noted that both passages refer to the incorporation of the operations of the Triune God in bringing the church as the Body into existence.

By the Spirit as Its Essence

According to Paul, the Spirit is an integral part of the reality of the Body of Christ, as the verses below indicate.

For also in one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit. (1 Cor. 12:13)

Being diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace: one Body and one Spirit, even as also you were called in one hope of your calling. (Eph. 4:3-4)

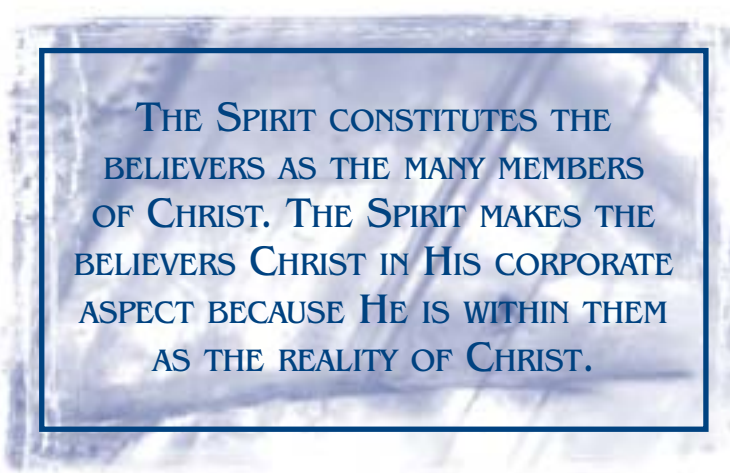
In his first Epistle to the Corinthians, written in response to a number of issues in an immature church, Paul opens up an extensive view of the church as the Body of Christ both in its intrinsic identity and in its practical living. In chapters 12 through 14 Paul deals with the problem of gifts in the church, but he does so by appealing to the revelation of the church as the Body of Christ and to the prin-

ciples that govern the church in its particular aspect as the Body. At the same time, as Gordon Fee points out, 1 Corinthians 12—14 is "the single largest block of Spirit material in the Pauline corpus" (146). This confluence in Paul's teaching on the Spirit and the Body is in itself quite telling: the Spirit is for the Body, and the Body is the proper environment and the controlling vision for the Spirit's operation in the believers' proper gifts.

In 12:13 Paul particularly explains how integral the Spirit is to the believers' participation in the Body of Christ. In verse 12 he has just emphasized the fact that the believers are the many members of Christ as the one Body. Then, in verse 13 he explains how this is so. We might expect him to speak more of Christ's actions to make the believers the many members of His Body, but instead he tells us that it is the Spirit who acts to constitute and maintain the believers as Christ's Body. The Spirit as the

reality of Christ (John 14:6, 17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 5:6) first ushers the believers into Christ as the Body ("the Christ" in verse 12) by baptizing them into Him and then supplies the believers continually as the constant drink to maintain their experience of Him for the Body. Baptism here has been variously interpreted, but in view of its being related to the

action of the Spirit, it should refer not merely to baptism in water but more importantly to the intrinsic significance of that act. In his writings Paul sees in baptism something more than the mere ritual that now characterizes it for many Christians. In Romans 6:3 he says that the believers have been baptized into Christ Jesus and into His death. Indeed, the Lord Jesus Himself instructs the disciples to baptize the believing nations into the name of the Divine Trinity (Matt. 28:19). In 1 Corinthians 12:13 we see that the believers are baptized into the one Body. These statements make it clear that baptism in water signifies a genuine reality and is not a mere form. The reality that Paul is particularly interested in in 1 Corinthians 12 is the Body-Christ, and the believers enter into that reality through the action of the Spirit. Through His action the Spirit constitutes the believers as the many members of Christ. He literally incorporates them into Christ, and He can do this because He as the reality of Christ incorporates Christ in all that He does. To be blunt, the Spirit makes the believers Christ in His corporate aspect because He is within them as the reality of Christ. Further, the Spirit is the location in reality of the believers' baptism: "In one Spirit we



were all baptized.” The natural sense of the preposition *in* here is locative, not instrumental (Fee 181), and this indicates that in reality the believers are immersed in the Spirit when they are baptized (as the water of baptism also signifies). But, then, we get a seeming conflict: Are we immersed into the Spirit or into the Body of Christ? It seems that Paul is saying both. While *in* refers to the location of this baptism, and *into*, its goal, the implication is that the Spirit as the location turns out to be the reality of the goal. The Spirit is the sphere in which the believers can genuinely be the many members of the Body of Christ.

Baptism in the Spirit, so construed, is only the initiation of the believers’ experience of the Body of Christ. Paul goes on to speak of the continual maintenance of the believers as Christ’s Body when he adds, “And were all given to drink one Spirit.” This is a highly experiential matter, and that is probably the full intent of Paul’s mentioning it.

Such expressive metaphors (immersion in the Spirit and drinking to the fill of the Spirit)...imply a much greater experiential and visibly manifest reception of the Spirit than many have tended to experience in subsequent church history. (Fee 181)

While we may easily suspect that Paul’s appeal to the intrinsic significance of water baptism went over the heads of his readers (as it probably does now), it is difficult to think that his readers did not know what drinking of the Spirit refers to. He is on very common ground with his readers here, and because of that common ground, he can bring to the fore what is particularly of importance to him, that is, that all the believers drink *one* Spirit and therefore are made one for the Body of Christ. The fact that they drink the Spirit is not new; the fact that they drink *one* Spirit and what that entails may not be so obvious. In its essence, the Christian life is a life of drinking of the Spirit continually. The believers “were all made to drink,” not once for all (as Alford 2: 581-582 understands the Greek aorist here) but as the establishment of the mode of life for them. What Paul relates in a new way here is the additional and astounding revelation that because the Spirit that they were all given to drink is one Spirit, their drinking has one issue continually and experientially—the Body of Christ. The Spirit brought the believers into the reality of being the Body of Christ when they were baptized in Him, but beyond that, the Spirit supplies the believers so that they may live as the Body of Christ in their experience with all the believers continually, which the following verses (14-27) allude to. In this latter function, the Spirit, then, becomes the very essence of the Body.

What is paramount to our study here is that for Paul the Body, which is of Christ and is Christ, depends intrinsically on the operation of the Spirit. To pare it down to its

barest proposition, the Spirit brings forth the believers as the Body of Christ and maintains them as the Body of Christ. These two, the Spirit and Christ, are not separate, nor does one stand in for the other. Rather, as we have seen repeatedly throughout this series of articles, the Spirit incorporates what Christ is and does in all that He is and does. The Spirit does not exist apart from Christ and does not do anything apart from Christ or without making Christ real, as also Christ does in relation to the Father (John 16:13-15). Thus, to make Christ corporate, that is, to bring about and maintain the reality of the Body of Christ, the Spirit must operate. In the Spirit’s operation Christ is realized as the Body.

Paul’s understanding of the integral operation of the Spirit in the Body of Christ also comes out strongly in Ephesians 4:3-4. Introducing one of the clearest trinitarian passages in the New Testament (vv. 4-6), these verses present the function of the Spirit in relation to the Body as the proper reality of the believers’ calling (vv. 1, 4). The believers are called not to be mere spiritual and holy individuals but to be members of the one Body of Christ. For this there is the need of special virtues that particularly sustain and maintain the healthy relationship between the members of the Body for the sake of the oneness of the Body: lowliness, meekness, long-suffering, love, peace. The last four of these are among the list of virtues that Paul recommends in Galatians 5:22-23 as “the fruit of the Spirit” (Fee 700), and thus, there is probably a latent reference to the operation of the Spirit even before Paul explicitly mentions Him in verses 3 and 4. If that is the case, and we need not suspect otherwise, then there is also a latent reference to the believers’ incorporation of the operation of the Spirit, for these virtues can be experienced by and manifested in the believers only by the Spirit’s operation within them and not as any natural virtue that they may have.

But in verse 3 the believers’ incorporation of the Spirit’s operation becomes explicit when Paul says, “Being diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit.” *The oneness of the Spirit* can be variously interpreted. Is it the oneness that is the Spirit’s or the oneness that the Spirit produces or the oneness that is the Spirit? (In grammatical terms, is the Greek genitive of *the Spirit* possessive, objective, or subjective?) A reasonable case can be made for each, so much so that it may also be reasonable to admit all three together as the full meaning of the phrase. But for me the subjective sense (“the oneness that is the Spirit”) recommends itself most strongly since it best aligns with (1) the “one Spirit” that we saw in 1 Corinthians 12:13 and (2) the deep hypostatic identity of the Spirit as the factor of the oneness in the Divine Trinity. Thus, the Spirit *is* the oneness of the Body of Christ by virtue of His being one in all the believers and His being the oneness of the Triune God Himself in the believers. Further, He is the one reality of Christ in all the believers as we have seen above, and this makes them

corporately the Body of Christ. But while the Spirit is the oneness itself, the believers must endeavor diligently to guard and keep His operation as such in full expression among themselves. They must incorporate the Spirit as the oneness if they are to have the Body as their reality and practicality. Apart from the Spirit as the oneness, there can be no genuine oneness of the Body, but this genuine oneness comes forth through the believers' incorporation of the Spirit's operation within them.

Paul continues simply, elegantly, and profoundly: "One Body and one Spirit, even as also you were called in one hope of your calling" (v. 4). The juxtaposition of *one Body* with *one Spirit* invites, if not demands, a relationship between the two referents, and based on what we have noticed thus far regarding the Spirit and the Body, we should understand that there is one Body because there is one Spirit in operation in the believers. As mentioned before, the Body is not simply some convenient metaphor for the congregation of the saints but a real and corporate entity that is given its reality and identity by the Spirit—one Body because one Spirit. The reality that the Spirit gives to the Body is the oneness that we have just discussed as well as God's divine nature, God's holiness, God's life, and all the other

marvelous attributes of God that the believers possess through their regeneration by the Spirit. The identity that the Spirit gives to the Body is the identity of Christ; the Body is the Body of Christ, but it is such through the Spirit's operation to make Christ real in and among the believers. The Spirit incorporates Christ to accomplish this, and the believers incorporate the Christ-incorporating Spirit to be the Body of Christ. This is really the full hope of their calling, the full goal toward which they have been called. Of course, the believers enter into this reality from the moment of their regeneration and baptism, and hopefully they grow in their experience of it throughout their Christian and church life, but there will be a full manifestation of this reality in eternity future in the New Jerusalem. This is probably not what many Christians are expecting for their future in eternity, especially if they are waiting for an eternity of bliss in a heaven of earthly pleasures. But this verse tempers, if I may use the word, the hope of the believers' calling to bring it in line with the one Body that has its reality in the one Spirit. Augustine is right: the eschaton is ecclesial in its most comprehensive sense, just as the believers today are the Body in their

most comprehensive sense. It should not surprise us that what the believers have today as their intrinsic reality will not differ intrinsically from their reality in the future. There is one Body today because there is one Spirit in operation within the believers, and in eternity there will be one corporate organic entity, symbolized by the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21—22, because there will be one Spirit in operation within the believers forever.

We should also note that in these verses Paul relates the work of the Spirit for the Body to the operation of the entire Triune God:

One Body and one Spirit, even as also you were called in one hope of your calling;
One Lord, one faith, one baptism;
One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (vv. 4-6)

TO MAKE CHRIST CORPORATE, THAT IS, TO BRING ABOUT AND MAINTAIN THE REALITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST, THE SPIRIT MUST OPERATE. IN THE SPIRIT'S OPERATION CHRIST IS REALIZED AS THE BODY.

Some scholars have suggested that Paul is quoting an early Christian creed of sorts, though this is more likely to be something that sprang from Paul's own appreciation of the Trinity (Fee 702). At any rate, it is interesting to observe that unlike the later creeds of Christendom, which present a faith in the Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the

church, Paul's declaration here runs in the opposite direction of the Body, the Spirit, the Lord, and the Father. Fee accounts this ordering to Paul's "'economic Trinitarianism,' the Trinity in terms of God's saving activity on our behalf" (705). Though the label carries negative connotations in some theological circles, I think that Fee is not applying the label negatively here. It is more his point that Paul's consideration of the Trinity is never theological in the later abstract sense but always relates to the economy of God's full salvation. In this economy the Body of Christ is indeed the ultimate goal in this age, and this serves as the main concern of Paul's presentation in these verses and therefore the first item of his declaration. But the Body of Christ is not some independent religious entity that exists on its own. Rather, it only exists by virtue of the operation of the Triune God; thus, Paul goes on to mention explicitly the three of the Divine Trinity. I have pointed out above that the juxtaposition of *one Body* with *one Spirit* points to a relationship between the two referents, but the second referent is more fully the entire Divine Trinity: one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father. The Spirit is mentioned first because it is the Spirit who

operates to make the Body of Christ a reality in the ways that we have seen above. The Spirit is “the essence and the life and life supply” of the Body of Christ (Lee, Recovery Version, Eph. 4:4, note 1). But He is also the incorporation of the one Lord and the one God and Father, and His work is also to make Christ real as the element of the Body, that is, to make it the *Body of Christ*, as well as to make God real as the very divine source of the Body, that is, to apply God as Father to the believers by being their life and life supply. The one faith is in Christ the Lord, and the one baptism is into Christ the Lord, and by these two matters all the believers are incorporated into Christ the Lord to be the many members of His Body. Ultimately, the Body of Christ exists by virtue of the one God and Father of all the believers, who is over, through, and in all the believers. Thus, the entire Trinity is involved in the formation and ongoing existence of the Body of Christ, but it is the Spirit particularly who operates to apply this Trinitarian work to believers. As Witness Lee points out,

The Triune God eventually enters into us all by reaching us as the Spirit. The oneness of the Body of Christ is constituted of the Trinity of the Godhead—the Father as the source and origin being the Originator, the Son as the Lord and Head being the Accomplisher, and the Spirit as the life-giving Spirit being the Executor. (Recovery Version, Eph. 4:6, note 3)

The Body of Christ, then, is indeed the incorporation of the entire Divine Trinity, depending solely on the operation of all three for its existence but particularly on that of the Spirit, who applies and makes real that triunifold operation.

Out from Christ as Its Head

That the Spirit is the essence of the Body is not difficult to grasp. The Spirit is not only hypostatic (or personal, if you will) but also essential. This is the apparent import of John 4:24: “God is Spirit,” and always in the Bible there is this interplay between the Spirit’s hypostatic existence and His essential or substantial quality. Likewise, in relation to the Body of Christ, the Spirit as the third of the Divine Trinity operates hypostatically (though in the way of incorporation) to make the Body the organic corporate reality that it is, yet He also provides Himself as the divine essence for the Body’s genuine constitution. But as I emphasized several times above, the Body is the *Body of Christ*, and this refers to the identity that the believers as the Body bear. They are not the Body of the Spirit or the Body of the Father. Rather, they manifest and express Christ. Thus, in this sense, Christ is the element of the Body of Christ; that is, it is His identity that the believers bear as His Body. The Body takes Christ as its element by virtue of His being the Head of the Body, as we will see in

this section, and by virtue of His being all the members and in all the members, as we will see in the next section. Because Christ is the Head of the Body, all the Body is out from Him, and the believers as all the members incorporate Him in their functioning for the Body, as the two portions below indicate.

And not holding the Head, out from whom all the Body, being richly supplied and knit together by means of the joints and sinews, grows with the growth of God. (Col. 2:19)

...the Head, Christ, out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love. (Eph. 4:15-16)

In both of these passages Paul speaks of the believers not as individuals per se but in their existence as a corporate entity, “all the Body,” and clearly indicates that they draw their activity and function as the Body out from Him. This cannot be taken as some mere representative relationship between the believers and Christ. Rather, this must be understood as the Body’s incorporation of the Head for the organic functioning of the Body. In this functioning two main operations are prominent with one result for one goal: the rich supplying and the joining and knitting together for the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love. Paul’s utterance is not identical in the two passages, but notionally he is relaying in both the very same realization that he has concerning the intrinsic reality that exists in the church among the believers. The first matter that should be in operation in the church as the Body is the rich supplying. In Colossians 2:19 this operation is generally assigned to “the joints and sinews,” but in Ephesians 4:16 it is more narrowly assigned to the joints, which are referred to as “every joint of the rich supply.” Without doubt the joints and sinews are the individual members of the Body of Christ, but even as individuals they are characterized in relational terms. Probably Paul has in mind the specially gifted persons, whose function it is to supply the believers spiritually and, by doing so, to effect the blending of all the believers as one. In his letter to the Ephesians he has just previously mentioned them in 4:11-12 and indicated that they function for the same goal that he speaks of in this verse, i.e., the building up of the Body of Christ. Their function is to richly supply, and the notion of supplying implies providing something other than one’s own resource. We should expect that this is the practical application of what Paul means by the phrase *out from whom*. The supply comes from Christ the Head, and thus, when these gifted ones function, they draw from Christ His riches for the ones they minister to. They richly supply by incorporating Christ the Head in their function.

It should also be noted that the cognate terms that Paul uses in the two passages, the verb *epichorēgeō* in Colossians and the noun *epichorēgia* in Ephesians, appear to bear special meaning in Paul's vocabulary. First, there is the etymological whisper that can be heard in the terms. The noncompounded form (*chorēgeō*) has the technical meaning "to furnish the chorus [the *choros*] at one's own expense; to procure and supply all things necessary to fit out the chorus (so very often in the Attic writings)" (Thayer, on *chorēgeō*). The noncompounded form is used only in 1 Peter 4:11 of the strength that God supplies. But Paul always uses the compounded form, with the prefix *epi-*, and the addition intensifies the meaning, which our translation indicates by the adverb *richly*. What is interesting in this etymological whisper is the notion that this is a supply for a corporate entity, a chorus, and that this supply is bountiful and attendant to every need for that corporate entity. I cannot say that Paul intended all this meaning in using this very special word group, but depending on where we locate meaning in the first place (author, text, and/or reader), it may be valid. Certainly there is an uncanny correlation between the chorus implied in the word group and the Body of Christ, where the word group is applied by Paul.

CHRIST IS THE ELEMENT OF THE
BODY OF CHRIST; THAT IS, IT IS HIS
IDENTITY THAT THE BELIEVERS BEAR
AS HIS BODY. THE BODY TAKES
CHRIST AS ITS ELEMENT BY VIRTUE OF
HIS BEING THE HEAD OF THE BODY.

Further, in Paul's usage of these terms elsewhere, the rich supply is always from God as the Agent who supplies (2 Cor. 9:10) and of the Spirit as the object who is supplied (Gal. 3:5; Phil. 1:19). Probably this is also the latent notion in the passages under our review now. In Colossians 2:19 the participle is passive, and there is no expressed agent or object. The joints and sinews are not the agents but the channel or means, as the Greek preposition *dia* ("through") with the genitive would indicate. The implied Agent of the supplying operation could be understood as God generally, but in this context it is probably more accurately Christ as the One out from whom this operation comes. Either way is correct in point of truth, since no doubt Christ incorporates God as the source of this supply in His role as Head of the Body. In Ephesians 4:16 the agency is even less explicit in the phrase *every joint of the rich supply*. Ellicott characterizes the Greek genitive (translated "of the rich supply") as "a kind of genitive *definitivus*, by which the predominant use, purpose, or destination of the [joint] is specified and characterized" (95). Alford explains that "the joints are the points of union where the supply passes to the different members, and by means of which the body

derives the supply by which it grows" (3: 120). Thus, here also Paul is referring to the joints not as the agents but as the channel and means of the rich supply. The implied Agent is no doubt Christ, who is the Head and out from whom the supplying operation occurs. The point in all this is that the joints and sinews incorporate Christ as the Head in order to channel the rich supply from Him to the members whom they minister to. Their function and service in the Body does not rely on what they in themselves can give. Rather, as joints of the rich supply, their predominant use, purpose, and goal are to pass on to the different members the supply that comes from Christ Himself as the Head of the Body. Christ the Head operates through them by way of incorporation to richly supply all the members of His Body for its growth and ultimate building up.

Paul does not specify here what the rich supply actually is, but in keeping with the use of these special terms elsewhere, we should expect that what is being richly supplied is the Spirit generally, as mentioned in Galatians 3:5, and specifically the Spirit of Jesus Christ, as mentioned in Philippians 1:19. Of course, in saying this, we must rely on the assumption that Paul has a single reality in mind at all times, even when he does not explicitly spell out the details of that single reality. But in truth how can it be otherwise? If to the Galatians he says that God bountifully supplies to them the Spirit and if to the Philippians he says that his situation will turn out to his salvation through the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (and through their petition), it is hardly a leap to expect that to the Colossians and to the Ephesians he speaks of the rich supply with the same latent notion of the Spirit of Jesus Christ in mind. Further, it is difficult to understand what this rich supply could be other than the Spirit. In this context it cannot be something material or physical, as it is out from Christ as the Head and through the gifted members as the joints and sinews. Nor can it come in the form of mere moral or ethical teachings for the adjustment of the behavior of the believers. The rich supply actually accomplishes the joining and knitting together of the believers to make them the Body of Christ in reality, and this strongly suggests the oneness that Paul relates to the Spirit's operation in Ephesians 4 and to the Spirit as the one essence in 1 Corinthians 12. In every way it seems that for Paul *epichorēgia* is almost a technical term for the Spirit's operation to supply Himself as the riches

of Christ so as to make Christ real in the believers' experience, which is paramount to their being the Body of Christ in reality.

Out from Christ as the Head and through the operation of the Spirit as the rich supply, all the Body "causes the growth of the Body" and even "grows with the growth of God." It is very easy to pass over the phrase *the growth of the Body* without questioning what it means; it is not so easy to pass over the phrase *the growth of God*. But both phrases are difficult. What exactly is the growth of the Body of Christ in Ephesians 4? What increases among the believers in their experience that can be counted as the growth of the Body? And what is the growth of God in Colossians 2? How do we understand *of God* here? Again, what we are reading in Ephesians 4 and Colossians 2 no doubt relate to the same reality, and thus, the phrase in Colossians probably explains what Paul means in Ephesians. The growth of the Body is the growth of God in the Body. *The growth of God*, as we may expect, has been understood variously. Because the thought of God growing in Himself is jarring theologically, most commentators steer clear of this possible meaning and opt for something like the increase or growth that God gives (e.g., Alford 3: 228). This interpretation also has Paul's more explicit statements in 1 Corinthians 3:6-7 as support: "God caused the growth...God who causes the growth." However, in 1 Corinthians 3 the Body is not being contemplated per se; rather, the church as God's cultivated land is in view, and the growth there is more in line with the agricultural metaphor. But the notion of God actually growing in the Body is not as foreign to Paul's thought as some may think. Just a few verses prior to Ephesians 4:16 Paul speaks of the believers arriving "at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (v. 13). Paul probably has in mind the same notion that lies behind "the growth of the Body" in verse 16 and "the growth of God" in Colossians 2:19. It is a process of growth, and the result is the full growth of the Body in the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. We need not go out of our way to avoid the thought here that Christ increases in the experience of the believers for His expression in them as His Body. In this sense, Christ grows in the believers as His Body until they fully match Him and express Him. This should also be the sense in which we understand the phrase *the growth of God*. Of course, God does not grow in Himself, but it surely seems that Paul does not blanch in saying that God grows in the Body, because Christ is the God who is growing to full measure in the Body. If we can accept this fuller meaning for the phrase *the growth of God* in Colossians 2:19, we have a way to understand more fully what the simpler phrase *the growth of the Body* means in Ephesians 4:16. The growth of the Body is the growth of God in the Body, that is, the increase of the expression of God as Christ in the members of His Body. This growth increases until finally the

believers as the Body of Christ reach their full corporate growth, that is, until they reach the full measure of the stature of what they as the church are to Christ. He is Christ, and they are the fullness of Christ. Out from Him as the Head and through the Spirit as the rich supply, they grow with the very increase of God in Christ in their experience until that stature is met in full measure. The entire Triune God is in operation for this grand result in the Body of Christ.

For the most part, Paul says the same things in these two passages. But in Ephesians 4:16 he provides one further detail that relates to what happens in the Body: "and through the operation in the measure of each one part." The detail is important because it has to do with all the believers generally and describes their function in the grand work of building up the Body of Christ. But before examining this function, we should consider the translation of this phrase in the Recovery Version (which this journal uses as its Bible version). As far as I know, the Recovery Version is unique in rendering this phrase as it does. All other English versions adopt a translation akin to what has long been in the King James Version: "according to the effectual working [= operation] in the measure of every part." At issue are two variants in the Greek manuscripts, which provide the bases for the two ways of rendering this part of the verse. Most manuscripts read here *kat' energeian*, which should be translated "according to the operation." But an early papyrus manuscript, P46, which dates from the third century and therefore predates most other manuscripts in existence, reads *kai energeias*, which should be translated "and through the operation." The difference in the two readings may not be notionally significant, but the reading from P46 more forcefully distinguishes the function of "each one part" from that of "every joint" and makes the two functions parallel. According to this reading, the Greek preposition *dia* governs these two parallel functions, and the sense is that through these parallel functions the Body is joined together and knit together so that all the Body may cause the growth of the Body for the building up of itself in love. Every joint functions as a channel of the rich supply of the Spirit that issues out from Christ the Head, and this rich supply passes on to each believer as each one part to enable the operation in each based on the measure that each has. P46 makes this clear, but the sense found in the alternate reading is not really otherwise. *Through every joint of the rich supply, according to the operation in the measure of each one part* still describes two types of members—every joint and each one part—and still relates the functioning of the two to the joining and knitting together of all the Body so that all the Body may cause the growth of the Body for the building up of itself in love. The same situation is described whereby the rich supply from every joint is passed on to each one part to enable the operation in the latter for the building up of the Body of Christ.

Under either reading of the manuscripts, the operation in each one part, that is, the functioning of all the believers as the members of the Body, turns out to be the critical factor that issues in the building up of the Body, and this operation is richly supplied by Christ as the Spirit through the functioning of the gifted ones as every joint of the rich supply. From a general perspective, we can say that all the Body causes the growth of the Body, but from a detailed perspective, we can say that the operation in each one part, supplied richly from Christ through the gifted ones, brings about the growth of the Body practically. This operation in each one part is not a mere outward doing but, as the Greek word *energeia* indicates (from *en* "in" + *ergon* "work"), an inner working within each part. That inner working can only be understood as the operation of God in Christ through the Spirit within each one believer, in line with what we have seen elsewhere in the New Testament concerning the believers' incorporation of the operations of the Triune God.

Finally, Paul concludes this verse as well as this section of Ephesians with the phrase *unto the building up of itself in love*. The building up of the Body in love is the goal for which each one part, every joint, and Christ the Head function. The rich supply of the Spirit with the resultant increase, or growth, of God in Christ as the Spirit in the believers (mentioned in Colossians 2:19 though not here in Ephesians 4:16) is also for this goal.

One has to wonder, if it is not already clear, why God has such a goal. I am content to say, as many, many others have said, that the God who is all good, who is only good, and who alone is good deeply desires to make His good known and to share His good with those whom He chooses. This is behind His action to bring about the old creation and, more importantly, to bring forth out of the old creation His new creation, which is expressed in a full way as the Body of Christ. But this contentment does not prevent me from also saying that a great part of this goal, that is, a great reason for the building up of the Body, actually lies in the process toward it, for in reaching that pinnacle of purpose, the thorough operation of the Triune God is needed and must be incorporated by the believers at every stage of the process. By incorporating Him in all His operations for the Body, they are drawn together as His Body and ultimately express His Body.

**GOD DOES NOT GROW IN HIMSELF,
BUT PAUL DOES NOT BLANCH
IN SAYING THAT GOD GROWS
IN THE BODY, BECAUSE CHRIST
IS THE GOD WHO IS GROWING
TO FULL MEASURE IN THE BODY.**

The meaning in Ephesians 4:16 is packed, but I do not think that we are finding in this verse anything more than what Paul variously expresses elsewhere. There is no need to dissect this one verse again to prove this. (We could even overlay verse 12 on this verse and find much the same meaning, though with less development.) But it is truly astounding that Paul has distilled into this one relative clause the full and complete revelation concerning the Body of Christ in its element, essence, operations, and ultimate purpose. It is, as it were, a kind of crystallization statement of the full divine revelation concerning the believers as the incorporation of the Triune God in their being the Body of Christ.

With Christ as All and in All

In the two portions above, when Paul speaks of Christ as the Head of the Body, he clearly distinguishes Christ from His believers. But in other places he strongly identifies Christ with His believers, assigning Christ's identity to the members of His mystical Body. This identification provides the further and stronger basis for saying that Christ is the element of the Body, that is, that which provides the identity for the Body and, therefore, that which makes the Body the Body of Christ and not the body of someone else. We should next examine these portions:

Where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all. (Col. 3:11)

For even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ. (1 Cor. 12:12)

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?...But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit. (1 Cor. 6:15, 17)

In Colossians 3:10-11 Paul speaks of the new man, which is the designation he gives to the church as the Body of Christ when he considers it from the perspectives of its natural sources in Adam (as here and in Ephesians 2:14-15) and of its taking Christ as its very person (as in Ephesians 4:20-24). Of course, the new man and the Body are not two different things; rather, they are the

same thing (the church) from two different perspectives. Paul was particularly graced by God to receive a full revelation of the church in all its aspects (cf. Eph. 3:2-6), and that full revelation comes out clearly in Ephesians. On this point Witness Lee offers this helpful comment, which also clarifies the significance of the church as the new man:

[Ephesians] reveals first that the church is the Body of Christ (1:22-23), the kingdom of God, the household of God (2:19), and the temple, the dwelling place of God (2:21-22). Here [in 4:24] it reveals in addition that the church is the new man. This is the highest aspect of the church. The church is an assembly of the called-out ones. This is the initial aspect of the church. From here, the apostle went on to mention the fellow citizens of the kingdom of God and the members of the household of God. These are higher than the initial aspect, but not as high as the church as the Body of Christ. Yet the new man is higher still than the Body of Christ. Thus, the church is not just an assembly of believers, a kingdom of heavenly citizens, a household of God's children, or even a Body for Christ. It is in its ultimate, uttermost aspect a new man to accomplish God's eternal purpose. As the Body of Christ, the church needs Christ as its life, whereas as the new man, the church needs Christ as its person. This new corporate person should live a life like that which Jesus lived on earth, that is, a life of reality that expresses God and causes God to be realized as the reality by man. Hence, the new man is the focus of the apostle's exhortation in this section (vv. 17-32). (Recovery Version, Eph. 4:24, note 2)

It is important to see the close identity between Christ and His church when Paul speaks of the one new man, and this comes out most clearly in Colossians 3:11. In the new man everything that naturally distinguishes human beings and, more significantly, divides them is abolished in Christ. These natural identities are replaced by Christ Himself in the new man, and Christ becomes the identity for all in the new man. *All* in this verse refers to all the believers, who make up the new man, and Paul's declaration concerning them is quite clear: "Christ is all." Alford points out that because Christ is all,

every distinctive category of humanity is done away as to worth or privilege, and all have been absorbed into and centre in this One, *Christou einai* ['to be of Christ'], yea *Christos einai* ['to be Christ']—His members, in vital union with Him. (3: 235)

All the members of His Body become Him in the new man. Of course, this is spoken from the divine and mystical view of the church, but this should not be as alien to the understanding and even consciousness of every believer as apparently it is today with many. If Paul had

stopped with *Christ is all*, we may be inclined to think that he was referring to a mere ethical identification of Christ with believers. But he goes on: "and in all." This addition provides the "mechanics" of the identification. Again, Alford helps with this: "Equally sprinkled on, living in, working through and by every class of mankind" (3: 235). Those who were formerly Greeks and Jews, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, now in the new man have Christ within them living and working, and through that operation in them they all have become Christ not merely in name but in inner reality and function. For Christ to be all and in all means that all bear Christ as their identity and incorporate Christ's living and working within them for His expression. The new man *is* Christ in His corporate existence, and because of that the church as the new man is at the same time the *Body of Christ*.

While this identity is more clearly seen in reference to the new man, Paul relates Christ's identity to the Body in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13. As in the human body all the members are one body, "so also is the Christ." Alford notices that "by the repetition, [*the body...of the body...body*], the unity of the members as an organic whole is more strongly set forth," and this strong organic whole is predicated also of Christ (2: 580). In verse 12 the allusion to the Body is through the metaphor of our human body, but in the next verse Paul turns directly to the mystical Body of Christ, as we have seen in a previous section. Through these two verses together we see that Paul directly assigns the identity of Christ to the whole Body, not just to its Head. Of course, Christ alone has the position, role, and status of being the Head of the Body, just as He alone yet as a man is at the right hand of God (Matt. 26:64; Acts 7:56; Dan. 7:13) as Lord of all (Acts 2:36; 10:36; Rom. 14:9; 2 Cor. 4:5; Phil. 2:11), as Mediator of all (1 Tim. 2:5), and as Judge of all (John 5:22, 27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom. 2:16; 2 Tim. 4:1). While He is squarely planted in creation as a genuine human being, He is still eternally God and, by virtue of this, distinct even in His genuine human existence from all other creatures. It is also by virtue of His being God that He can bear into eternity future His genuine human existence and be the man that He is for eternity (cf. Rev. 21:22, 23; 22:1, 3). But even though this distinction exists, there is also the identification of Christ with His Body that we see in Paul's writings. The identification is not nominal at all but depends on the believers' incorporation of Christ for and as His Body. When all the believers incorporate Christ, they, being many, are the one Christ, only not in His existence as the Head. This incorporation is not the believers' representation, emulation, or imitation of Christ; it is Christ Himself living and operating within them, and they, living out and working forth what He is and does within them. Through this incorporation Christ has a corporate existence and a corporate

action on the earth now and into eternity. This incorporation is as real as His incarnation, and it provides Him a mode of human living that goes even beyond, in reach and effect, His own previous earthly sojourn.

Paul also alludes to this identification of Christ with His Body in 1 Corinthians 6:15 and 17. In this passage that deals with one of the most carnal matters in the New Testament, Paul tells the Corinthians that their bodies are the members of Christ. In this section Paul is dealing with the use of the physical body, but he is mindful that the human being is a whole being, with body and spirit (and, by implication, soul), and what the believers do with their bodies involves the whole reality of their human existence, not just its physical aspect. What the believers do through their physical bodies incorporates not only their actions as individuals but also Christ in them and Christ as the Body. Their bodies are no longer just their personal members but, more importantly, now the members of Christ. Paul's realization is indeed deep and rich, and his words here only glimpse what he will say more explicitly later in this epistle in chapter 12 and still later to the Ephesians and the Colossians in his Epistles to them. But it is clear that the same realization is at work in his exhortation here concerning the use of the physical body.

A few sentences later he provides, it appears, an explanation for this identification of Christ with the believers' bodies: "But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (v. 17). Again, Paul is mindful that the human being is a whole being, and that serves as the implied premise for his statement here as well. Now, in turning to a consideration of *one spirit*, he is referring to the locus of the believer's union with Christ, which forms the real basis for his or her incorporation of Christ for His Body. In line with the reference to the believer's body, this reference to the spirit is to the believer's human spirit. But, as the argument goes, the believer's body is a member of Christ because the believer's spirit in regeneration is not merely the human spirit but now the mingling of it with the Holy Spirit (cf. v. 19).

In light of vv. 19-20, Paul's primary referent is to the work of the Holy Spirit, whereby through the 'one Spirit' the believer's 'spirit' has been joined indissolubly with Christ. Thus, by the Spirit the believer is united to the Lord and thereby has become one S/spirit with him. (Fee 133,

employing his preferred typographical mechanism to show the Spirit's indwelling of the believer's human spirit)

Thus, through the Spirit's operation in the believer's mingled spirit, the believer is now joined to the Lord, and his or her body is now Christ's member, not simply his or her body.

That Paul actually says that the believer "is one spirit" and not merely that he or she has one spirit with the Lord points to the intrinsic significance of the believer's existence in regeneration. "Here *that inner union with Christ in spirit* is meant, which is the normal state of every believer" (Alford 2: 518). In the old creation every human being is intrinsically one flesh with all other human beings (Gen. 6:3; Psa. 78:39; cf. Rom. 7:18), but in the new creation every believer is intrinsically one spirit with

the Lord. And because every believer is a whole being—spirit, soul, and body—even the physical body of the believer is joined to the Lord and now a member of Christ. Paul does not mention the human soul here because it is not relevant in the context, but we can easily understand that as part of the whole human being the soul of the believer is also to be

identified with Christ as one with Him.

How Paul deals with this highly moral issue in 1 Corinthians 6 is quite amazing. He does not view it merely as a moral issue at all, nor does he offer a moral solution to the issue. Rather, he applies his deep realization concerning the Body of Christ and draws particularly on the fact that the believers incorporate Christ in their whole being as the members of Christ. I suppose that for him to do otherwise would be to sell the believers short of who they really are. They are no longer mere moral beings nor mere individuals; now they are one spirit with the Lord and members of Christ. We all would do well to learn from Paul in this matter, if we can. Too often we shrink back and rely on the natural and physical realm for our ways and disregard (if not deny) the divine and mystical realm of Christ, His Body, and our incorporation, counter to who we really are.

* * *

It is unfortunate that so many Christians today view the Body of Christ as a mere metaphor and for this reason

THE INCORPORATION OF HIS BODY
IS AS REAL AS HIS INCARNATION,
AND IT PROVIDES HIM A MODE OF
HUMAN LIVING THAT GOES EVEN
BEYOND, IN REACH AND EFFECT, HIS
OWN PREVIOUS EARTHLY SOJOURN.

rarely enter into a living that goes beyond their individual experience as believers. I hope that I have shown above that Paul's understanding of the Body of Christ is far from metaphorical. If anything, he uses our human bodies as the metaphor for the reality that he not only saw but also lived in. What makes the church as the Body of Christ a reality is not simply the lofty view that was communicated to Paul in spirit; he did not simply receive a special view of the church and pass it on as part of his ministry to the churches. Rather, there is a real operation of the Triune God at work in and among the New Testament believers, and this can genuinely make them the Body of Christ. When the believers, who are indwelt by the Triune God in their spirit, live out His operation within, that is, when they incorporate His operation in all that they do, they are all brought into function according to that operation to be the Body and to build the Body. What Paul has passed on to the saints for all time is a vision of the operation of the Triune God as the reality of the Body and for the growth of the Body. Such a vision is surely needed if the believers are to enter into the reality of the Body in a genuine way. The Lord Spirit has done His part to give the vision, and Paul has done his part to make the vision known. In fact, what Paul has done in this regard is the major component in his completing the word of God (Col. 1:25-29; Eph. 3:2-10). Thus, in line with what is written in Ephesians 4:11-12, Christ has given Paul as a great gift to the church, and Paul has labored abundantly in the ministry to equip and perfect the saints. What is lacking is the proper and needed response of the saints to enter into the building up of the Body of Christ, as mentioned at the end of verse 12. This has long been the lack in the church throughout all its existence, and we should expect that the Lord will not return without a full response from His believers that is according to this vision. As with all aspects of the Christian life, every believer is free to choose not to obey the vision, not to partake of the Lord's grace, not to be perfected in function, and not to help fulfill God's economy to have the Body of Christ as His expression on the earth. But we know that some believers will, and the honor is great for those who do.

What the believers who are obedient to this vision will enter into is stunning and beyond all human imagination on its own (not to mention all human ability to work out on its own). It is indeed something that only the Triune God could plan and only the Triune God could accomplish. It was directly His action to bring the Body of Christ into existence through Christ's redemptive death on the cross, and it is directly His action to sustain and perfect the Body of Christ through the incorporation of His operation in the gifted ones and in each willing believer. In His action He is the Spirit for the essence and oneness of the Body, and He is Christ the Head for the element and expression of the Body. As part of His action, He provides some members as special channels of supply

to all the members, and the supply He provides is Himself as the Spirit from Himself as the Head. Ultimately and most effectively, through Himself as this rich supply He is the Spirit in operation in each one part of the Body, and those who incorporate Him in His operation function directly to build up the Body of Christ. Paul was very clear, and we should be, too—there is “one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:6), and it is this one God who in His Divine Trinity operates through His believers' incorporation of Him in order to bring forth the Body of Christ for His expression on the earth today. As the Body of Christ, the church is indeed “of God” in the deepest and most profound sense. Like Paul, we too should not be disobedient to the heavenly vision (Acts 26:19). We were made for this (Gen. 1:26), and all creation anxiously watches and eagerly waits for this (Rom. 8:19). [L&C](#)

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