

# KNOWING PAUL'S BURDEN AND INTENTION IN 1 CORINTHIANS

BY JOHN CAMPBELL

The apostle Paul told the Corinthians, “I, when I came to you, brothers, came not according to excellence of speech or of wisdom, announcing to you the mystery of God” (1 Cor. 2:1). Paul announced to the Corinthian believers the mystery of God, speaking God’s wisdom in a mystery, “the wisdom which has been hidden, which God predestined before the ages for our glory” (v. 7). Eye has not seen these deep and hidden things, ear has not heard them, nor have they come up in man’s heart, for they are known by the Spirit alone, who searches the depths of God and reveals them to us (vv. 9-10). God’s economy is a great secret. The secret of the universe is the divine Spirit, and the secret of man is his human spirit (Gen. 1:2; John 4:24; Job 32:8; Prov. 20:27; 1 Cor. 6:17). However, just as it is easy to see the outward things of the universe and of man without seeing their inward secret, it is easy to see the outward subjects and matters in the first Epistle to the Corinthians without seeing the hidden depths within it.

Outwardly, this Epistle speaks of many matters, such as divisions in the local church with factions and strife (vv. 10-13; 3:4), a negligent and haughty attitude toward the apostle (4:3-8), fornication in incest (ch. 5), lawsuits among believers (6:1-11), the abuse of freedom (vv. 12-20), questions on marriage life (ch. 7), eating of things sacrificed to idols (ch. 8), the Lord’s table (10:14-22), head covering (11:2-16), spiritual gifts (12:1—14:40), resurrection (ch. 15), and the collection of material offerings (16:1-3). However, hidden within all these matters we can find the depths and mysteries of God—the subjective experience and enjoyment of Christ and His cross to produce the church as the Body of Christ. In order to know these hidden things of God, we must be spiritual men receiving spiritual things as they are conveyed in spiritual words (2:12-15). That is, we must deal with, touch, and be touched by the two spirits revealed in this book—the divine Spirit and the human spirit.

In order to understand a book of the Bible, we need enter into the thought of the writer to discover his burden and intention. In order to enter into the riches of 1 Corinthians, we must go beyond the outward issues in it to touch the heart of the apostle, who was burdened to feed the soulish and fleshly believers in Corinth with the spiritual riches in Christ so that they would become spiritual persons focused on the building up of the Body of Christ.

## The Background of Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians

The ancient city of Corinth, the Roman capital of Achaia, lay on the Isthmus of Corinth, which joins the Peloponnesus to the mainland of Greece, between the Ionian and Aegean Seas, serving as a place of portage between the two. As such, it was particularly favorable for commerce and highly important for the defense of Greece. Being thus positioned as a marketplace for Asia and Europe, it amassed great wealth and became

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distinguished by its refinement, learning, and literature. Because of its luxury, however, it also came to be known for its dissipation, amusements, and licentiousness. It was the “Vanity Fair of the ancient world” (Barclay 2), hosting the Isthmian Games and maintaining a temple to Aphrodite that employed over a thousand prostitutes (Strabo 8.6.20).<sup>1</sup>

Paul came to Corinth on the second journey of his ministry and remained there with Aquila and Priscilla, reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath, persuading Jews and Greeks (Acts 18:1-4). Being rejected by the Jews, he preached in the house next to the synagogue, and the ruler of the synagogue with his household and many other Corinthians believed and were baptized. The Lord confirmed Paul’s speaking, and he remained in Corinth for a year and six months (vv. 5-11), the longest he stayed in any city that he visited, except for Ephesus. On his third ministry journey Paul returned to Ephesus, from where he wrote his first letter to the Corinthians (19:1, 21-22; 1 Cor. 16:3-8, 19), sending it by the hand of Timothy (4:17), after which he visited the Corinthians a second time. In between his two visits a number of negative issues and matters arose among the Corinthians, which were reported to Paul both by Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus and by the household of Chloe (16:17; 1:11). Moreover, the Corinthians themselves had written to Paul with certain questions and concerns (7:1). Paul responded by writing his first Epistle to them in a firm, bold, desperate, yet humble and tender spirit of shepherding and feeding care.<sup>2</sup>

### The Church of God in Corinth

Through Paul’s first visit to Corinth, the church was established, and many from that philosophical yet sinful and dissipated city were saved and added to it, “a signal illustration of the grace of God, and the power of the gospel” (Barnes vi). After hearing of the problems there, Paul wrote to minister the unique solution to all their problems—Christ and His cross (2:2). Paul’s greeting to the Corinthians is unique among all the sixty-six books of the Bible. He addressed them as “the church of God which is in Corinth, . . . those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, the called saints, with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, who is theirs and ours” (1:2). By the organic operation of the Spirit, the church was “of God.” In spite of all the division, sin, confusion, abuse of gifts, and heretical teaching in the church in Corinth, the apostle still called it “the church of God,” because the divine and spiritual essence that makes the assembled believers the church of God was actually there. Such a spiritual address by the apostle was based on his spiritual view in looking upon the church in Christ. “Such a simple address alone should have eliminated all the division and confusion in both practice and doctrine” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 2, note 1). Furthermore, the church is sanctified “in Christ Jesus.” *In Christ* means in the element and sphere of Christ. Christ is the element and sphere that separates the believers unto God, making them holy, at the time they believe into Him and are brought into an organic union with Him through faith.

The Corinthian believers were called saints—not merely called *to be* saints—sanctified in position with a view to sanctification in disposition. Moreover, they called upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is theirs and ours. The American Standard Version renders verse 2 as, “All that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, their Lord and ours.” J. N. Darby notes that *theirs and ours* refers to “every one that owned Jesus as Lord” (206). John Calvin concurs: “Since he had referred to ‘all who everywhere call on the name of Christ our Lord,’ he adds, ‘both theirs and ours,’ in order to make it quite clear that Christ is undoubtedly the common Lord of all who call upon Him, whether they are Jews or Gentiles” (19). Christ as the all-inclusive One belongs to all believers. He is our allotted portion given to us by God (Col. 1:12). The apostle added *theirs and ours* at the end of 1 Corinthians 1:2 to stress the actual fact that Christ is the unique center of all believers in every place and every situation.

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Paul goes on to say, “God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (v. 9). In this Epistle the apostle’s intention was to solve the problems among the saints in Corinth. For all the problems, the only solution is the all-inclusive Christ. We have been called into the fellowship of, the participation in, Him. Witness Lee says, “All believers should be focused on Him, not being distracted by any gifted person, any overstressed doctrine, or any particular practice” (Recovery Version, v. 2, note 9). We have been called to partake of the fellowship of the union with God’s Son, Jesus Christ, and of the participation in Him. God has called us into such a fellowship so that we may enjoy Christ as our God-given portion. He is the unique center of the believers for the solving of the problems among them.

### Paul’s Burden to Bring the Distracted Believers Back to Christ

Paul continues,

I thank my God always concerning you based upon the grace of God which was given to you in Christ Jesus, that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you do not lack in any gift, eagerly awaiting the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. (vv. 4-7)

It seems remarkable that Paul commends the believers, whose condition was the cause of so much grief to him, as having been enriched and not lacking in any gift. His thanksgiving to God was based upon the grace of God given to them in Christ, not upon their condition in themselves. The Corinthian believers were enriched by the grace of God in all the expression, the λόγος, of the divine thought concerning Christ and in all the apprehension and realization of knowing Christ, whom they had received through Paul’s testimony. The gifts mentioned in verse 7 do not refer to the outward miraculous gifts dealt with in chapter 12. Rather, they are the inward gifts issuing from grace, such as the free gift of eternal life (Rom. 6:23) and the gift of the Holy Spirit, the heavenly gift (Acts 2:38; Heb. 6:4). These inward gifts are the constituents of grace, the initial things of the divine life that are received of grace. We may compare these gifts to the functions of a newborn baby. At birth a baby has a complete set of human faculties that allow him to exist and function. These faculties, however, need to grow, develop, and mature. In commending the Corinthian believers for not lacking in any gift, Paul was acknowledging simply that they had received the initial bestowments of the grace of God.

**H**ere we begin to touch Paul’s heart and see his deep burden in writing to the Corinthians. In 3:1 through 3 he says, “I, brothers, was not able to speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to fleshly, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, for you were not yet able to receive it. But neither yet now are you able, for you are still fleshly.” The Corinthians had received the initial gifts of grace, but these gifts needed to grow to their full development and maturity. The Corinthian believers were not lacking in the initial gifts in life, but they were desperately short of the growth in life. However much they had been initially enriched in grace, they were still infants in Christ—soulish, fleshly, and even fleshly. Even though they had been enriched in Christ in all utterance and in all knowledge, the initial gifts of grace had not been developed. In this sense, the Corinthians were typical of many believers today, who being educated are able to grasp the thought of the New Testament gospel without possessing much of its reality, a reality gained by growing in the grace that they have received. This was the situation of the Corinthian believers as perceived by Paul. Because they were cultured, educated, and philosophical, they could understand the words that conveyed the thought of Paul’s ministry, but they did not have the reality of this thought. They had received the divine life and the Holy Spirit, but they did not live by these gifts. Instead, they lived a life according to their natural, old, Greek culture, a life

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This was the source of all the problems among the Corinthians. Because of their worldly wisdom and philosophy, they had different minds and opinions. They spoke different things and had different preferences (1:10-12). These differences opened the door for many evil things to come into the church life, such as divisions, strife, fornication, lawsuits, taking the Lord's supper improperly, practicing the outward gifts in a disorderly manner, and outright heresy. This is what stirred Paul and evoked his desperate, strident, earnest, and solicitous response to them. Paul was burdened to guide the distracted, natural, worldly, and philosophical Corinthians back to the Christ whom he had testified to them.

### Knowing Jesus Christ, and This One Crucified

Paul's burden is especially evident in the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians. For this reason, the exposition of these chapters in particular may be considered a touchstone by which to evaluate any attempt to explicate this Epistle. R. C. H. Lenski writes in the godly and refreshing introduction to his study,

The danger we must guard against is that we may fail to follow the mind of Paul as it meets the needs that existed at Corinth. It would be quite fatal to follow our own imagination and, instead of penetrating into the heart of the letters themselves, to find in them ideas of our own that never entered the apostle's mind. (8)

The main point in these two chapters is that in his spirit Paul was "endeavoring to bring the distracted philosophical believers back to Christ" (Lee, *Corinthians* 61). For this reason, Paul does not emphasize the Lord who resurrected in glory and ascended in exaltation (Luke 24:46; Acts 2:33, 36). Instead, he emphasizes the crucified Christ, the One who in His living, action, work, and way suffered humiliation and abasement. Paul says, "I did not determine to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and this One crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). The crucified Christ is the unique subject, the center, the content, and the substance of the apostle's ministry. The fact that Christ was crucified implies that He was despised, rejected, and even defeated. Through crucifixion Christ suffered man's rejection. He was able to avoid death, but He chose not to; He was willing to be killed. Such a willing death silences the entire universe. The Greeks pursued power and superiority both in mind and in body, but Paul points the Corinthian believers to the crucified Christ, who displayed the ostensible "foolishness of God" and the "weakness of God" (1:25).

Paul says, "The word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God...For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know God, God was well pleased through the foolishness of the preaching to save those who believe" (vv. 18, 21). The crucifixion of Christ was a display not of outward power but of apparent weakness, not of prideful victory but of obedient defeat. Christ, though

existing in the form of God, did not consider being equal with God a treasure to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of a cross. (Phil. 2:6-8)

What a testimony to the puffed-up and power-exalting Greek believers! Such a testimony should have silenced the Corinthians and simplified the complicated situation among them. Many voices among them were speaking different things. Some said, "I am of Paul," and others said, "I am of Apollos," "I am of Cephas," and even, "I am

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of Christ” (cf. 1 Cor. 1:12). The Christ whom Paul preached, however, was the One who did not speak His own words in His living and did not open His mouth in His dying (John 14:10; Isa. 53:7). Deep in his spirit, Paul knew that all the dissenting and dividing voices could be silenced only by Christ, and this One crucified.

According to their proud tradition and preference, the Jews required a sign, a miraculous token, and according to their puffed-up estimation of philosophical speculation, the Greeks sought wisdom. The apostles, however, preached Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness (1 Cor. 1:22-23). Paul realized that the Corinthians were, according to the nature of their Greek culture, a philosophical people who had been born into a philosophical environment and raised under its influence. His burden was to deliver the Corinthians from the heritage of their natural culture and constitution. Because of this, he came to them not with philosophy and excellent speech but with Christ and the cross, preaching in a simple way the crucified Christ as God’s power and God’s wisdom (v. 24). Christ and the cross are the unique solution to all the problems in the Christian life and church life. As C. A. Coates says, “There is nothing more needful today than the preaching of the cross, especially among those who believe” (8). To see this is to know the mind of Paul and the burden in his spirit in his ministry to the Corinthians believers.

### A Spiritual Man Receiving Spiritual Things

Chapter 2 of 1 Corinthians incisively touches Paul’s burden for the immature and distracted Corinthian believers. It is both profound and basic in its revelation of God’s economy. Because it is deep and mysterious, however, it is a cause of stumbling to the natural, human understanding and has proved to be a difficult passage to accurately exposit. In this portion Paul speaks of God’s wisdom in a mystery, of those who are able to receive the word of this wisdom, and of the way to receive it. God’s wisdom in a mystery is Christ as the embodiment of God and the church as the expression of Christ. Paul’s gospel was the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery of the ages, which has now been made known to all the Gentiles for the obedience of faith (Rom. 16:25-26). This mystery, which God willed to make known among the Gentiles, is the indwelling, inwrought Christ, who is our hope of glory (Col. 1:26-27; 2:2). Such a Christ has now made the believing Gentiles fellow members of the Body of Christ and fellow partakers of the promise through the gospel (Eph. 3:4-6). This is the mystery, the wisdom, that Paul testified.

Paul goes on to establish that both the contents of this mystery and the way to communicate them are not in the realm of the natural understanding and philosophical speculation cherished by Greek culture. He says, “I, when I came to you, brothers, came not according to excellence of speech or of wisdom, announcing to you the mystery of God” (1 Cor. 2:1). Paul in his preaching had no intention to display excellent, superior speech or philosophical wisdom. He purposely avoided philosophical speculation and excellence of speech so that in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling he could preach the simple word of the cross. His speech and proclamation were not in persuasive words of wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power (vv. 3-4). This testimony should have helped the Corinthians to drop their speculations and opinions, flee from the vanity of the mind, and pursue Christ alone as the center of God’s economy and their portion for their enjoyment (1:2, 9).

Concerning the deep and hidden things that God has prepared for those who love Him, Paul says, “To us God has revealed them through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God” (2:10). The depths, the deep things, of God are Christ in many aspects as our eternal portion, foreordained, prepared, and given to us freely by God. Such things are revealed, not merely taught. To be taught is related to our mind, but to have something revealed to us is related to our regenerated

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human spirit. To realize the deep and hidden things of God, our spirit is more necessary than our mind. "When our entire being becomes one with God through loving Him in intimate fellowship, He shows us, in our spirit through His Spirit, all the secrets of Christ as our portion" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 10, note 1).

Paul says, "We do speak wisdom among those who are full-grown" (v. 6). To adequately receive, apprehend, and appreciate the word concerning Christ as the deep things of God requires that the initial gifts of grace and of the Spirit that we received at the time of our regeneration grow and develop to a certain level of maturity. Paul refers to those who exercise and apply the divine life in this way as "spiritual" men (v. 15). The deep and hidden things of God that have never arisen in man's heart (v. 9) are revealed to us in our spirit by God's Spirit. Paul says,

For who among men knows the things of man, except the spirit of man which is in him? In the same way, the things of God also no one has known except the Spirit of God. But we have received not the spirit of the world but the Spirit which is from God, that we may know the things which have been graciously given to us by God. (vv. 11-12)

In this short chapter of only sixteen verses, *spirit* (πνεῦμα), referring either to the Holy Spirit or the human spirit, is mentioned eight times; *spiritual* (πνευματικός) occurs three times as a pronominal adjective, and *spiritually* (πνευματικῶς) once as an adverb. This brief yet profound passage has everything to do with the Spirit of God, the spirit of man, and the spiritual man.<sup>3</sup> The spirit of man is the deepest part of man's being (1 Thes. 5:23; Zech. 12:1; Job 32:8). It has the ability to penetrate the innermost region of the things of man, whereas the mind of man is capable of knowing only superficial things. So also, only the Spirit of God can know the deep things of God. The proper realization and experience of these two spirits are essential for the proper Christian life and the practice of the church life.

### Distinguishing between the Spirit and the Soul of the Believers

In 1 Corinthians 2:13 through 15 Paul says,

Which things also we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things with spiritual words. But a soulish man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he is not able to know them because they are discerned spiritually. But the spiritual man discerns all things, but he himself is discerned by no one.

In order to understand the meaning of the expressions *spiritual man* and *soulish man*, we need to see the distinction in Paul's understanding of man related to the human spirit and the soul, which informed his feeling and intention in dealing with the believers at Corinth.<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere he says, "The God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thes. 5:23). Hermann Olshausen comments,

The ὀλόκληρον [complete] refers to every single one of the three parts of human nature named...The juxtaposition of the three terms, πνεῦμα, ψυχή, σῶμα [*spirit, soul, body*], is not a mere rhetorical amplification for the idea of the totality, nor yet that πνεῦμα can be understood of the Divine Spirit, but denotes the *human* spirit...As the distinguishing of πνεῦμα and ψυχή here cannot surely be merely accidental, a difference in the use of the two expressions can be proved to exist elsewhere also. (296)

Man is of three parts—spirit, soul, and body. "The spirit as our inmost part is the inner organ, possessing God-consciousness, that we may contact God (John 4:24; Rom. 1:9)" (Lee, Recovery Version, 1 Thes. 5:23, note 5). The faculties of the soul include the

mind (Psa. 13:2; Prov. 2:10; Lam. 3:20), the emotion (S. S. 1:7; 2 Sam. 5:8; Isa. 61:10; Deut. 14:26), and the will (Job 6:7; 7:15; 1 Chron. 22:19).

The soul is our very self (cf. Matt. 16:26; Luke 9:25), a medium between our spirit and our body, possessing self-consciousness, that we may have our personality. The body as our external part is the outer organ, possessing world-consciousness, that we may contact the material world. The body contains the soul, and the soul is the vessel that contains the spirit. In the spirit [of the believers], God as the Spirit dwells; in the soul, our self dwells; and in the body, the physical senses dwell. (Lee, Recovery Version, 1 Thes. 5:23, note 5)

**I**t is in the human spirit, not the soul, that the believer is regenerated and indwelt by the divine Spirit (John 3:6; Rom. 8:16). Heinrich Meyer states, “The ψυχή [soul] cannot be the seat and sphere of operation of the Divine Spirit, which is to be found rather in the human πνεῦμα [spirit], and consequently must be conceived as specifically *distinct* from the latter” (57). H. A. Ironside describes anecdotally the situation of the fallen, tripartite man:

When God created man, somebody has well said, he was like a three-story house; the lower story, the body; the second-story, the soul, the seat of his natural instincts and emotions; and the third-story, the spirit, the highest part of man by which he could look up to God. But when man sinned, there was a moral earthquake, and the top-story fell down into the basement, and that leaves him a psychical man, it leaves the soul in the preeminent place instead of the spirit. (108)

Mary E. McDonough provides another illustration:

Do not say “soul” when “spirit” is meant and *vice versa*. Avoid the phrase “body, soul and spirit,” as it inverts the Divine order of arrangement. In a normal condition the powers of the spirit control the powers of soul and body. To illustrate, the spirit may be compared to the mistress; the soul, to the housekeeper; the body, to the servant. Invert this order and the result is a disordered household. (17)

### The Spiritual Man and the Soulsh Man

Paul realized that the Corinthian believers were neglecting the Spirit of God in their human spirit, turning instead to live in their mind by their shallow, ineffectual, and vain philosophy. At the heart of Paul’s burden are the terms *spiritual* and *soulsh*. One who is able to discern and receive the things of the Spirit of God is a spiritual man (1 Cor. 2:15), one who lives according to his regenerated human spirit mingled with the Spirit of God. “Such a man is dominated, governed, directed, moved, and led by the mingled spirit” (Lee, Recovery Version, 3:1, note 1).

**P**aul’s term for those who are not able to receive the things of the Spirit is ψυχικός, the adjective form of ψυχή, *soul*. Birger Pearson notes, “The term ψυχικός as it occurs in 1 Corinthians 2 and 15 has been a notoriously difficult one to interpret” (7). Henry Alford says similarly, “We have no English word for ψυχικός; and our biblical psychology is, by this defect, entirely at fault” (540). Many versions of the Bible exhibit this defect by translating this word as “natural,” which fails to bring out its full meaning. Alford retains *sensual*, although he is not satisfied with this word. Anthony Thiselton approximates the word as *earthly-worldly* (269). Meyer uses *psychical* (56-57), which is true to the Greek letter but prone to be misunderstood, and Ironside suggests *soulual* (108), which despite its awkwardness leads to the true meaning. It is sufficient simply to render the word as “soulsh.”

According to God’s creation of man, man’s spirit was the leading, preeminent part of his being. As a result of the fall, however, the spirit of man was deadened and darkened,

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and the soul was corrupted with the satanic nature. Moreover, the corrupted soul became the predominant part of man; man's spirit "fell down into the basement," and his tripartite being became a "disordered household." Thus, man became a soulish person. Concerning the soulish man, Alford writes,

The ψυχή [soul] is the centre of the personal being, the "I" of each individual. It is in each man bound to the spirit, man's higher part, and to the body, man's lower part; drawn upwards by the one, downwards by the other. He who gives himself up to the lower appetites, is σαρκικός [fleshly]: he who by communion of his πνεῦμα [spirit] with God's Spirit is employed in the higher aims of his being, is πνευματικός [spiritual]. He who rests midway, thinking only of self and self's interests, whether animal or intellectual, is the ψυχικός, the selfish man, the man in whom the spirit is sunk and degraded into subordination to the subordinate ψυχή. (540)

"A soulish man is a natural man, one who allows his soul...to dominate his entire being and who lives by his soul, ignoring his spirit, not using his spirit, and even behaving as if he did not have a spirit (Jude 19)" (Lee, Recovery Version, 1 Cor. 2:14, note 2).

It is not adequate to say that to receive the Spirit with His initial gifts of grace makes a man "spiritual," implying that the soulish man is simply the one who has never received the Spirit. In the first chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul commends the believers as possessing grace and knowledge and not lacking in any gift (vv. 4-7), yet in chapter 2 he admonishes them as being soulish and unable to receive the deeper things of the Spirit. W. E. Vine notes rightly that the "spiritual" state of the believer is the normal one but that

to this state all believers do not attain, nor when it is attained is it always maintained. Thus the apostle, in 1 Cor. 3:1-3, suggests a contrast between this spiritual state and that of the babe in Christ, i.e., of the man who because of immaturity and inexperience has not yet reached spirituality, and that of the man who by permitting jealousy, and the strife to which jealousy always leads, has lost it. The spiritual state is reached by diligence in the Word of God and in prayer; it is maintained by obedience and self-judgment. Such as are led by the Spirit are spiritual, but, of course, spirituality is not a fixed or absolute condition, it admits of growth; indeed growth in "the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," 2 Pet. 3:18, is evidence of true spirituality. (595)

As Vine explains, being a spiritual man is a state and condition to which a true believer may not attain or, once attaining to it, may not maintain. Whether a believer is a spiritual man or a soulish man depends simply on whether his regenerated spirit or his natural soul predominates his being. "According to the predominance of the one or the other principle in man he appears either as πνευματικός [spiritual] or ψυχικός [soulish], or even σαρκικός [fleshly]" (Olshausen 297).

In Matthew 16 Jesus said, "If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his soul-life shall lose it; but whoever loses his soul-life for My sake shall find it. For what shall a man be profited if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul-life?" (vv. 24-26). In Luke 9:25 He said, "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world but loses or forfeits himself?" *Soul-life* (ψυχή) in Matthew 16:26 is replaced with *himself* (ἑαυτοῦ) in Luke 9:25, indicating that our soul-life is our self. The self is the embodiment of the soul-life; the soul-life is lived out by the self. To take up the cross is to lose the soul-life; this is the reality of denying the self. The believers need to remain under the killing of the death of Christ subjectively for the terminating of the self, the natural life of the soul. This terminating takes place in our regenerated human spirit, which is indwelt by and one with the divine Spirit (Rom. 8:4-6, 16). Hence, we need to exercise our spirit, set our mind on the spirit, and walk according to the spirit. Only then will we be spiritual men. This is the burden of 1 Corinthians 2.

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James Moffatt notes, “It was Paul who introduced the word spiritual into the vocabulary of Christianity, and this is the epistle where it occurs most frequently” (35). In his spirit Paul realized that the Corinthians, although having received the Spirit and the initial gifts of grace, were living, walking, and conducting themselves—and even conducting their church life—as soulish men. Among them there were divisions, sects, lawsuits, jealousy, and strife—all characteristics of a soulish life, one that inevitably gives ground to the flesh with its baser sins. In their church life there were a puffed-up attitude, manifested by disdain toward the apostle (4:3, 6-9); abuse of freedom (6:12-20); disregard for one another, manifested in the inadvisable eating of things sacrificed to idols (8:1-13; 10:23-30); an improper fellowship with regard to the Lord’s table (vv. 14-22); despising of the church of God in coming together wrongly for the Lord’s supper (11:17-34); and the abuse of spiritual gifts, particularly those that build up the individual rather than the whole church (chs. 12—14). All these indicate that the Christian life and church life of the Corinthians were soulish, even fleshly. Paul’s intention in writing to the Corinthians was to bring them back to the enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ as the life-giving Spirit (15:45) in their regenerated human spirit.

God reveals Christ to us through these two spirits. If we do not care for the two spirits, we are soulish men, men who live in the soul. God requires us to forsake our soul and turn to our spirit so that we may be spiritual men, those who live, walk, and do things in their spirit. (Lee, *Enjoyment* 12)

By caring for the enjoyment of Christ through the two spirits, and thus becoming spiritual men, the Corinthians would have been able to have a proper, spiritual church life for the building up of the Body of Christ. This was Paul’s burden.

### Being Fed with Christ for the Growth in Life

Chapter 3 is a direct continuation of Paul’s thought in chapter 2. He says,

And I, brothers, was not able to speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to fleshly, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, for you were not yet able to receive it. But neither yet now are you able, for you are still fleshly. For if there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly and do you not walk according to the manner of man? (vv. 1-3)

Paul speaks here of food and drink. In the Gospels the Lord Jesus told His disciples that they needed to eat Him and drink Him (John 6:35, 48, 51, 57; 4:14; 7:37-39). According to the revelation of the entire Scriptures, the bread of life in John 6 is the Triune God embodied in Christ and transfigured as the Spirit to be life to man in the form of food (cf. “the tree of life,” Gen. 2:9; Rev. 22:2). Similarly, the living water in John 4 and 7 is the Spirit of life as the transfiguration of the incarnated, crucified, and resurrected Christ (Rom. 8:2; 1 Cor. 15:45). To eat and to drink are to take food and drink into us so that they may be assimilated organically into our body. God desires so that man receive Him as his life by eating and drinking Him organically and assimilating Him metabolically so that He might become the constituent of man’s being.

**I**n 1 Corinthians there are several passages related to eating and drinking. In 3:2 Paul says that he gave the believers milk to drink, although he would rather have given them solid food. Milk signifies the word of God as spiritual nourishment for man (Matt. 4:4; Jer. 15:16). Peter says, “As newborn babes, long for the guileless milk of the word in order that by it you may grow unto salvation, if you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Pet. 2:2-3). The milk of the word is not milk for the body but for the inner being. It is conveyed in the word of God to nourish our spirit, our inner man (Eph. 3:16), “through the understanding of our rational mind and is assimilated by our mental faculties” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, 1 Pet. 2:2, note 3). Feeding is a matter of life; it differs

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from teaching, which is a matter of knowledge. Although what the apostle ministered to the Corinthian believers seemed to be knowledge, it was actually milk for their nourishment. In particular, *milk* refers to the “rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God,” which is more suitable for infants than is solid food (Heb. 5:12-14).

**P**aul condemns the Corinthians’ behaving in jealousy and strife as fleshly, as being under the influence of their fleshly nature and partaking of the character of the flesh. As such, he says, they were infants in Christ. Although the Corinthian believers had received all the initial gifts in life and were lacking in none of them, they did not grow in life after receiving them but remained infants, those who were not spiritual but fleshly. The apostle here points out their deficiency and their need, which was to grow in life to maturity, to be full-grown. He says, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth” (1 Cor. 3:6). Paul realized that the only way for the believers to grow out of infancy was to feed them. Thus, he planted something in the Corinthians, and Apollos followed to water what Paul had planted so that God would honor the planting and the watering by causing the believers’ growth in the divine life. Growth comes only by feeding.

### Eating Christ as the Passover Feast

The matter of feeding and eating is further conveyed in chapter 5 in Paul’s speaking of Christ as our Passover feast. Paul tells the Corinthians,

Purge out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened; for our Passover, Christ, also has been sacrificed. So then let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (vv. 7-8)

Paul considered the believers in Corinth to be God’s chosen people, who had their Passover, as typified by the one in Exodus 12. This latter passage says,

On the tenth of this month each man shall take a lamb according to his father’s house, a lamb for a household...And you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole congregation of the assembly of Israel shall kill it at twilight. And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. (vv. 3, 6-7)

**T**he passover as portrayed in Exodus is an all-inclusive type of Christ as our redemption to begin our experience of God’s salvation. As our Passover, Christ was sacrificed on the cross so that we might be redeemed and reconciled to God (Mark 14:12; John 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:19). However, redemption is only the beginning of our Christian experience. Exodus 12 continues,

And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread with bitter herbs...And this is how you shall eat it: with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste. It is Jehovah’s passover...Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread...You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. (vv. 8, 11, 15, 17)

The passover has two aspects: the aspect of the blood for redemption and the aspect of the meat for eating. At the passover the people of Israel first sprinkled the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of their house, and then they ate the lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Christ is not only the Passover lamb but also the entire Passover. Thus, we may enjoy Him as a feast before God.

The feast mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5 refers to the Feast of Unleavened Bread as the

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continuation of the Passover. In typology, the seven days of the feast signify our entire Christian life, from the day of our conversion to the day of rapture or departure from the body (Lee, *Corinthians* 323).

This is a long feast, which we must keep not with the sin of our old nature, as signified by leaven, but with unleavened bread, which is the Christ of our new nature as our nourishment and enjoyment. Only He is the life supply of sincerity and truth, absolutely pure, without mixture, and full of reality. The feast is a time for the enjoyment of the banquet. The entire Christian life should be such a feast, an enjoyment of Christ as our banquet, the rich supply of life. (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 8, note 1)

Here we can see Paul's spirit in shepherding the distracted Corinthian believers. Witness Lee summarizes in this way:

The spirit of this book is that the Corinthians needed the feeding. They needed eating, the proper food, not knowledge, skills, or gifts. Mothers know that the way to help their children to grow is not by teaching them but by feeding them three or more times a day. Little babies need many meals a day. If we feed children, they grow. This was exactly what Paul was doing in this book. Paul, as a spiritual mother, was feeding his children. (*Riches* 87)

### Christ as the Spiritual Food and the Spiritual Drink

In chapter 10 Paul emphasizes not only eating but also drinking, saying,

I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank of a spiritual rock which followed them, and the rock was Christ. (vv. 1-4)

Once again, as he did in chapter 5, Paul takes the history of the children of Israel as a background for his Epistle. This history is a full type of the Christian life in the church. After eating the passover, the children of Israel left Egypt and began to wander in the wilderness, where they were supplied day by day with manna (Exo. 16:14-18). This spiritual food typifies Christ as our daily life supply for the Christian journey.

The spiritual drink from the spiritual rock refers to the living water that flowed out of the cleft rock. Jehovah told Moses, "I will be standing before you upon the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it so that the people may drink" (17:6). Moses' striking of the rock with his staff is a clear and full picture of Christ's crucifixion. Moses signifies the law, and the staff represents the power and authority of the law. The striking of the rock by Moses' staff signifies that Christ was put to death on the cross by the authority of God's law. The water flowing out of the smitten rock typifies the Spirit (John 7:37-39) (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Exo. 17:6, note 2). When Christ was crucified, His side was pierced, and living water flowed out for God's people to drink (John 19:34). Christ is our spiritual rock not only to be the solid foundation of our redemption but also to be the source of living water, the water of life in resurrection, which is the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit as the ultimate issue of the Triune God. In the resurrection of Christ, the Spirit of God became the Spirit of the incarnated, crucified, and resurrected Jesus Christ, as the living water for the believers to drink, that they may be supplied with all the riches of the divine life. (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Exo. 17:6, note 3)

Paul tells the Corinthians, "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). To drink the Spirit is to take the Spirit in and to have our being saturated with

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Him. By identifying themselves with the smitten Christ and being baptized into His one Body, the believers are positioned to drink the Spirit. Drinking the Spirit is the way to be watered for the growth of the divine life within us (3:6).

### Eating and Drinking the Lord at His Table

In chapters 10 and 11 Paul extends his thought concerning eating and drinking to the practice of the Lord's table, saying,

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the fellowship of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the fellowship of the body of Christ? Seeing that there is one bread, we who are many are one Body; for we all partake of the one bread...For I received from the Lord that which also I delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread, and having given thanks, He broke it and said, This is My body, which is given for you; this do unto the remembrance of Me. Similarly also the cup after they had dined, saying, This cup is the new covenant established in My blood; this do, as often as you drink it, unto the remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you declare the Lord's death until He comes. (10:16-17; 11:23-26; cf. Matt. 26:26-28; Luke 22:19-20; Mark 14:22-24)

The bread denotes the eternal life of God (John 6:35). The cup is the new covenant, comprising all the rich blessings of the New Testament, which is chiefly God Himself as the believers' portion (Psa. 16:5). The bread and cup are the constituents of the Lord's supper, which is a table (1 Cor. 11:20; 10:21), a feast, set up by Him so that His believers may remember Him by enjoying Him as such a feast. The sentiments expressed by C. A. Coates indicate a living and genuine appreciation for the Lord's supper. He writes,

The Lord's supper...is the fresh start of our spiritual life every first day of the week. The loaf and the cup are not set before us that we may merely look, but that we may eat and drink, and we eat and drink our way into divine love...The thought of eating and drinking comes in in this epistle and it is much emphasized in chapter 11. (81)

The expressions of Adolph Saphir are equally inspiring. He says, "If I wish to avoid sin, to become like unto Christ, and to do the works which Christ did—what is my only method? The only method is this, 'Take, eat! This is My body.' This is the divine method of growth" (48). To eat, he indicates, is to abide in Christ, through which we may bring forth fruit. However, even such godly and touching utterances do not fully elucidate the real significance of the Lord's table. To eat the Lord is more than an apropos metaphor; it is to contact the Lord subjectively, take Him in intrinsically, and assimilate Him into our inner being metabolically. The genuine remembrance of the Lord at His table is to participate in and enjoy the Lord, who has given Himself to us through His redeeming death, and who—through incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection—has become the life-giving Spirit to indwell us organically, subjectively, and intrinsically to be our portion, our life, and our inward blessing. The following stanzas of a hymn on the Lord's table are helpful:

By resurrection Thou didst change  
Thy form and as the Spirit come;  
Thou wouldst that I be filled with Thee  
That all Thy riches mine become...

We eat the bread and drink the wine,  
And to Thy sweetness we are led;  
In spirit each receiving Thee,  
Our spirits with Thyself are fed.

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We long to eat and drink e'en more,  
To take Thyself in spirit thus,  
Till Thou shalt all our being fill  
And true remembrance have from us. (*Hymns*, #233)

By partaking of the bread and the cup at the Lord's table, we testify of our daily life of receiving and being fed by the riches of the Triune God—God in Christ transfigured to be the Spirit—sweetly and subjectively in our regenerated and indwelt human spirit. If such a living is our daily reality, then our enjoyment of the Lord's table becomes a true remembrance and expression of Christ.

### Christ, the Firstfruits

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul says, "Now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (v. 20). *Firstfruits* (ἀπαρχή) is the equivalent of the Old Testament term denoting the first-ripe fruit of the harvest that was to be offered to Jehovah (Exo. 23:16; Lev. 23:10; Thayer 54; Vine 241). The firstfruits were of the produce of the ground. Thus, *firstfruits* implies eating, indicating enjoyment. Paul, in his inspired writing, did not use the term loosely, and no doubt the picture of the firstfruits of the field was also brought to the Corinthians' mind. Even in his transcendent, unparalleled polemic on the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, the thought of Christ as nourishment for God and for man did not escape the apostle's mind. In resurrection Christ became the life-giving Spirit (v. 45) for us to drink and the firstfruits for us to eat. The resurrected Christ is to be eaten by the believers for their enjoyment and supply.

The passages concerning eating and drinking Christ in 1 Corinthians are strong and strategic. When we read them, we can sense Paul's particular tone and utterance. As a servant of Christ, Paul was a steward of the mysteries of God (4:1). A steward is a household administrator who dispenses the household supply to its members. As a dispensing steward, the apostle ministered Christ as food and drink to the Corinthians, and as a mother to her own children, he nourished them by feeding them with the riches of Christ. This is the shepherding spirit of Paul revealed in 1 Corinthians.

### The Enjoyment of Christ Issuing In the Church Life

As expressed in several passages of 1 Corinthians, Paul's intention in writing to the saints was to bring them into the realization, consciousness, and experience of the corporate aspect of the Christian life. Although Paul's tone in this Epistle is seemingly corrective, his repeated stress on eating and drinking Christ demonstrates that the way to have the proper church life is not merely to receive doctrinal teachings or practical adjustments. Rather, the church, particularly in its organic aspect as the Body of Christ, is produced only out of the organic enjoyment of Christ. Hence, this Epistle reveals that the issue of the eating and drinking of Christ—the subjective enjoyment of and participation in Christ in many aspects—is the church life.

From his first acknowledgement of the church in Corinth as "the church of God" (1:2), Paul directs the believers to consider themselves as a corporate entity. Coates writes, "What we find in Scripture is that God has an assembly; Paul addressed the Corinthians as the church or assembly of God, and all through his epistle he takes it for granted that they would come together in assembly" (175). For this reason, Paul's first mention of a problem among them is related to divisions caused by differences of opinions and preferences (vv. 10-13), which damage the church life. Paul exhorts them to be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion so that they might return to the genuine oneness of the Body of Christ.

Paul's subsequent word concerning Christ and His cross can be seen as applying first

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AND AS A MOTHER  
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HE NOURISHED THEM  
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THE RICHES OF CHRIST.

TO PARTAKE OF  
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AND BODY ONE WITH  
THE LORD. MOREOVER,  
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ONE ALSO WITH  
ONE ANOTHER.

to the problem of the Corinthians' loss of harmony and consciousness of the Body. The cross of Christ is the center in the accomplishment of God's New Testament economy, which is to produce the church through the redemption of Christ. In dealing with the divisions among the Corinthian believers, which came mainly from the background of Jewish religion and Greek philosophy, the apostle stresses Christ and His cross. When Christ replaces religious opinions and philosophical wisdom, and when His cross deals with the flesh attached to any natural background, divisions are terminated.

In 3:9 and 10 Paul says, "We are God's fellow workers; you are God's cultivated land, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation, and another builds upon it." In verse 2 Paul says, "I gave you milk to drink," and in verse 6 he continues, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth." Paul's intention was to feed the Corinthians so that they might grow in the divine life. The result of this growth is transformation into the precious materials for the building of God's temple—gold, silver, and precious stones (vv. 12, 16-17). The temple of God in verses 16 and 17 is the building mentioned in verse 9. God's building is not an ordinary building; it is the sanctuary, the inner temple (*ναός*), of the holy God, the temple in which the Spirit of God dwells. Paul cautions the Corinthian believers to be careful to build not with the worthless materials of wood, grass, and stubble but with the precious materials of gold, silver, and precious stones, which correspond with God's nature and economy.

In dealing with the Lord's table, Paul says, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the fellowship of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the fellowship of the body of Christ? Seeing that there is one bread, we who are many are one Body; for we all partake of the one bread" (10:16-17). "*Fellowship* here refers to the believers' communion in the joint participation in the blood and body of Christ...Eating and drinking make the eaters and drinkers one with what they eat and drink" (Lee, Recovery Version, 1 Cor. 10:16, note 1). Therefore, to partake of the Lord's table makes the participants in the Lord's blood and body one with the Lord. Moreover, this fellowship, communion, and joint participation makes the partakers one also with one another. The one bread signifies the one Body of Christ. The believers are all one Body because they all partake of the one bread. The Christ of whom we all partake constitutes us as His one Body (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 17, note 1). Concerning the Lord's supper, Coates writes,

There is a difference between having an affectionate remembrance of the Lord all the week and remembering Him collectively as come together in assembly. Every one who loves Him in incorruption carries a sense of His love all the time. But His precious word, "This do in remembrance of me", is addressed to His own collectively; it contemplates movements of affection which have assembly character...If saints really eat the Lord's supper they must take the church character. (146, 149)

### The Corporate Christ—the Body-Christ

Chapters 12 through 14 are Paul's highest expression in this Epistle of the church as the Body of Christ. He makes it clear that all the spiritual gifts and functions of the believers are for the Body. He says,

There are distinctions of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are distinctions of ministries, yet the same Lord; and there are distinctions of operations, but the same God, who operates all things in all. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for what is profitable. (12:4-7)

Here the Triune God is involved with gifts, ministries, and operations. The gifts by the Spirit are to carry out the ministries for the Lord, and the ministries for the Lord

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manifest the operations of the gifts, produced by God's operating. "This is the Triune God moving in the believers for the accomplishing of His eternal purpose to build up the church, the Body of Christ, for the expression of God" (Lee, Recovery Version, 1 Cor. 12:6, note 1). Verse 12 continues, "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." "The Christ refers to the corporate Christ, composed of Christ Himself as the Head and the church as His Body with all the believers as members" (Lee, Recovery Version, 12:12, note 2). By eating and drinking Christ, all His members are organically united with Him and constituted with His life and element. Thus they become His Body, an organism, to express Him. Hence, according to Paul's deep thought, Christ is not only the Head but also the Body; He is the Body-Christ.

Verse 13 says, "In one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body." The Spirit is the sphere and element of our spiritual baptism, into whom we were all baptized to be one organic entity, the Body. Baptism ushers the believers into an organic union with Christ and the Triune God, making them living members of the Body of Christ. Coates observes, "The baptism of the Spirit is made by many entirely an individual matter, but in Scripture it is not individual at all; we are merged into one body, and according to God it is a perfect organism. We cannot improve on the operations of the Spirit in the body" (73). In verses 14 through 22 Paul speaks concerning the indispensability of the members of the Body, and in verses 23 through 27 he speaks of the blending together of the members, emphasizing their care for one another. Verse 25 says, "That there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the same care for one another." Then in chapter 13 he shows the gift-seeking Corinthians the excellent way for exercising the gifts, the way of love, which is the expression of God as life.

The Corinthians were pursuing the outward gifts, but they neglected love, the expression of God's life. Hence, they were still fleshy, fleshly, or soulish (3:1, 3; 2:14). They needed to grow in life (expressed by their love in caring for the Body of Christ), pursuing love, not the outward gifts, that they might be spiritual (2:15). (Lee, Recovery Version, 13:4, note 1)

**B**ecause Paul's concern is for the building up of the church, he uplifts the functions of speaking. In 12:8 he mentions the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge. The word of wisdom is the word concerning Christ as the deeper things of God (1:24, 30; 2:6-10), and the word of knowledge is the word that imparts a general knowledge of things concerning God and the Lord (8:1-7). The word of wisdom and the word of knowledge are listed as the first gifts and the topmost manifestation of the Spirit because both are the most profitable ministries for the edification of the saints and the building up of the church (Lee, Recovery Version, 12:8, note 1).

### Seeking to Excel for the Building Up of the Church

In chapter 14 Paul uplifts prophesying as the most profitable gift. He says, "Pursue love, and desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy" (v. 1). Paul emphasizes prophecy since it builds up the church more than tongues and the interpretation of tongues. He continues,

For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one hears, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries. But he who prophesies speaks building up and encouragement and consolation to men. He who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but he who prophesies builds up the church. (vv. 2-4)

Later in the chapter Paul says,

If therefore the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak in tongues, and

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AFTER SPEAKING OF THE GIFTS, MINISTRIES, AND OPERATIONS OF THE TRIUNE GOD, PAUL GIVES A LONG DISCOURSE CONCERNING THE BODY IN ORDER TO RESCUE THE INDIVIDUALISTIC CORINTHIANS FROM THEIR SELF-SEEKING BACK TO A CONCERN FOR THE BODY.

some unlearned in tongues or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are insane? But if all prophesy and some unbeliever or unlearned person enters, he is convicted by all, he is examined by all; the secrets of his heart become manifest; and so falling on his face, he will worship God, declaring that indeed God is among you. What then, brothers? Whenever you come together, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. (vv. 23-26)

Again, Paul's goal is the building up of the church. In verse 31 he concludes, "You can all prophesy one by one that all may learn and all may be encouraged." This latter word is particularly remarkable, considering that Paul has just established that not all the members are prophets (12:28-29). Prophecy, in chapter 14, is not primarily foretelling or predicting, which are miraculous gifts, but speaking for God and speaking forth God, which are gifts developed by the growth in life. Because prophesying in the latter sense is related to the growth in life, it is suited to Paul's burden and intention in writing this Epistle, much more so than the miraculous gifts that the soulish Corinthians were pursuing.

**A**lthough not all are prophets, all can prophesy for the building up of the church. Again, Coates is helpful. He envisions a meeting of the church convened specifically for the exercise of prophesying (89). He says,

I have something precious about the Lord or about God, God gave it to me, and He gave it to me by His Spirit for the good of the assembly...I believe there are lots of brothers amongst us who have never said a word in public, but they have the preciousness in their hearts, and if they would pray the Lord would give them utterance, and they would speak in the assembly perhaps for five minutes. "Five words," Paul says [1 Cor. 14:19]. Nobody would get weary of that address...I believe we are far more wealthy than we have any idea of. We have come under the blighting influence of christendom; in christendom nobody may speak but a minister. Perhaps we are more under the influence of that idea than we have any idea of...We must not minimise the exceeding preciousness of what we have in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. We should think, "Now this is precious to me, and what is precious to me is precious to the whole assembly, and I would like to bring it out"...

Every brother should take up this exercise. Scripture does not contemplate a silent brother. (91-93, 99)

Such a proposal captures Paul's burden in chapter 14 that the believers would pursue prophesying, seeking that they might excel for the building up of the church (vv. 1, 12). In his correction, exhortation, and encouragement to the Corinthian believers, Paul was burdened that they would all care firstly and mainly for the church.

**I**n 12:7 Paul says that the manifestation of the Spirit is for what is profitable. What is profitable, in the context of this Epistle, is the building up of the church as the Body of Christ. All the gifts, as the manifestation of the Spirit distributed to the individual believers by the Spirit, are for the profit, the building up, of this Body. The apostle was very conscious of this. He was Body-conscious, Body-centered, unlike the Corinthians, who were self-centered concerning spiritual gifts (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 13, note 2). Hence, after speaking of the gifts, ministries, and operations of the Triune God, Paul gives a long discourse concerning the Body, a passage which is unique in all the Scriptures. Clearly, his intention was to rescue the individualistic Corinthians from their self-seeking back to a concern for the Body, that they might no longer be for their individual profit but for the building up of the Body of Christ.

### Knowing Paul's Burden concerning Christ and the Church

First Corinthians reveals that a believer may be one of three kinds of men: a spiritual

man, living in his spirit under the anointing of the Holy Spirit; a soulish man, living in his soul under the direction of the soul, the natural life; or a fleshy and fleshly man, being of the flesh and living in the flesh under the influence of the nature of the flesh. Paul's goal in writing to the Corinthians—who were soulish, fleshy, and fleshly—was to motivate them to aspire to the growth in the divine life so that they might become spiritual. The believers were called by God into the fellowship of Christ (1:9), who is now the life-giving Spirit (15:45), and were even one spirit with Him (6:17). As such, they could experience and enjoy Him only by living in their spirit under the leading of the Holy Spirit. Knowing this, and seeing that the Corinthian believers were desperately short of the growth in life, Paul labored to bring them back to Christ as their portion so that they might participate in and enjoy His riches.

**T**he Corinthians were not only void of Christ but also ignorant of the church. In this Epistle, therefore, Paul is fully occupied with the consideration of building up the church. He is fully church-conscious and church-centered, altogether different from the self-seeking Corinthians. In dealing with the first six problems addressed in this book—divisions, an evil brother, lawsuits, the abuse of freedom, questions on marriage life, and the eating of things sacrificed to idols—which were in the realm of human life, the apostle stresses Christ as God's unique portion to the believers. In dealing with the last five problems—head covering, the Lord's supper, the gifts, resurrection, and the collection of a gift—which are in the realm of the divine administration, he emphasizes the church as God's unique goal. Paul's ministry is altogether composed of Christ as the mystery of God (Col. 2:2) and the church as the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:4). The Corinthians missed both, even though they had been under the apostle's ministry. If we see this, we will enter into Paul's burden and intention in writing this Epistle. **AC**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>It is worth noting that Paul wrote his most vivid description of ungodly vice while residing in Corinth (Rom. 1:18-32).

<sup>2</sup>First Corinthians is a particular, unique, and practical word of ministry in the New Testament. Archibald Robertson identifies a number of Greek terms that express Paul's particular ministry to the Corinthians (xliv-liv). Among the over one hundred words and phrases in 1 Corinthians that are used nowhere else in the New Testament are [Christ, who is] *theirs and ours* (1:2), *demonstration of the Spirit and of power* (2:4), *God's fellow workers*, *God's cultivated land* (3:9), *wise master builder* (v. 10), *keep the feast* (5:8), *remove the evil man* (v. 13), *wait on the Lord without distraction* (7:35), *make [my body] my slave* (9:27), *cup of blessing* (10:16), *the Lord's cup* (v. 21), *the Lord's supper* (11:20), *the remembrance of Me* (vv. 24-25), *distinctions of gifts*, *distinctions of ministries*, *distinctions of operations* (12:4-6), *more abundant comeliness* (v. 23), *consolation* (παράκλησις 14:3), *in malice be babes* (v. 20), and *in the twinkling of an eye* (15:52). Among the over one hundred terms used elsewhere in the New Testament but by Paul only in this Epistle are *spiritual* [things], *taught by the Spirit* (2:13), *soulish* [man] (v. 14), *precious stones* (3:12), *consumed* [by fire] (v. 15), *unleavened* (5:7), *bought with a price* (6:20), *prophecy* (11:4-5; 13:9; 14:1, 5, 24, 31, 39), *come together* (11:17-18, 20, 33-34; 14:26), and *victory* (15:54-55, 57).

Paul's care for the Corinthians was particular, in some ways unique, and always intensely practical. His first letter presents the individual Christian life, the corporate church life, and the organic Body life, not in an abstract or doctrinal way but by means of a typical, practical illustration. Albert Barnes notes, "The epistle has never been made the subject of theological warfare. No system of theology has been built on it, and no attempt made to press it into the service of abstract dogmas" (xi). C. I. Scofield concludes that this Epistle, unlike Romans or Hebrews, "is not a treatise" but an outflow of the Spirit "through the apostle's grief, solicitude, and holy indignation" (1211). It is "Christianity applied to the details of ordinary life" (Robertson qtd. in Lias 17), a practical theology as an outgrowth of Paul's experience (Stobo 213), which is "corrective of behavior rather than of doctrine" (MacArthur 1562). S. MacLean

PAUL'S MINISTRY IS ALTOGETHER COMPOSED OF CHRIST AS THE MYSTERY OF GOD AND THE CHURCH AS THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST. THE CORINTHIANS MISSED BOTH. IF WE SEE THIS, WE WILL ENTER INTO PAUL'S BURDEN AND INTENTION IN WRITING THIS EPISTLE.

SOME HAVE ATTEMPTED TO UNDERSTAND THE TERMS *SPIRITUAL MAN* AND *SOULISH MAN* BY RECONSTRUCTING THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF 1 CORINTHIANS. MANY SUCH ATTEMPTS HARM THE PURPOSE AND INTENT OF THE SPIRIT IN PAUL'S MINISTRY.

Gilmour writes that because Paul's letter deals so frankly with the needs of a typical church, it is "one of the most illuminating documents in all Christian literature" (684), casting a flood of light on the typical problems in the church. As such, Robertson calls it an "inexhaustible mine" of help for the Christian life and church life (xxxviii). The letters to the Corinthians contain "the very *pectus Paulinum*, the mind and heart of the great apostle of the Gentiles" and are "palpitating human documents, with the ring of reality from first to last" (Shaw 711-712). As for dealing with the practical church life, Henry Goudge tells us that 1 Corinthians stands preeminent among all the Epistles (xxxvi). Frederic Godet calls 1 and 2 Corinthians the "monument of the hottest conflict, but also of the greatest victory, in the whole career of St. Paul" (492).

<sup>3</sup>The Greek text of 1 Corinthians 2 contains twelve instances of *pneuma*-based words, associated with either the divine or human spirit. Verse 13 alone uses three: "Words taught by the Spirit (πνεύματος), interpreting spiritual things (πνευματικῶς) with spiritual words (πνευματικῶς)." (πνευματικῶς).

Before 1 Corinthians (chronologically), Paul used the word *spiritual* only once in writing (Gal. 6:1). *Spiritual* (πνευματικός) or *spiritually* (πνευματικῶς) are used three times both in Romans and in Ephesians, twice in Colossians and 1 Peter, and once in Galatians and Revelation. In contrast, these words are used sixteen times in 1 Corinthians, more than in all the other books combined.

(*Spiritual* does not appear in the Old Testament. *Ish ha-ruach* in Hosea 9:7 is rendered in the LXX as πνευματοφόρος—"Spirit-bearer," "inspired.")

<sup>4</sup>Some have attempted to understand the terms *spiritual man* and *soulish man* by reconstructing the historical context of 1 Corinthians, with the goal of identifying Paul's antagonists, the source of the confused teachings that influenced the Corinthian believers. Many such attempts do much harm to the purpose and intent of the Spirit in Paul's ministry. The first to make much to do of this historical reconstruction was Ferdinand Christian Baur, founder of the Tübingen School of "higher criticism," followed by Schenkel, Lütgert, and others in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Betz 1141; Schmithals 117). Lütgert, grasping on the terms *spiritual man*, *soulish man*, and *spiritual things*, posited that Paul's opponents were teachers of Gnosticism, a syncretism composed of Egyptian, Babylonian, Jewish, Greek, and, later, even Christian philosophies. More recently, Walter Schmithals developed this thought elaborately with the thesis that in this Epistle Paul was debating with Corinthian "Pneumatics," adherents of a "Christian Gnosticism" (151). He asserts that *spiritual man* and *soulish man*, as well as *full-grown* and *infants* (v. 6; 3:1) are all Gnostic terms that Paul turns against the Gnostics. Thus, Paul's speech is Gnostic in origin and nature, although "retroactively de-gnosticized" for his purposes (154). Schmithals concludes,

We not only have been able but have also been obliged to explain all the larger sections of the Corinthian epistles in terms of the situation which developed because of the penetration of the Gnostics into the Corinthian community...There was only *one* battlefield in Corinth and...Paul also takes a stand only against this *one* heresy. (286, 288)

Paul's polemic, Schmithals says, is unified around the theme of Gnosticism, "into which every passage which can at all be adduced for this topic fits without difficulty" (289). Birger A. Pearson states that this conclusion is overreaching, saying, "It is not justifiable to argue that since the term ψυχικός [*soulish man*] occurs in gnostic texts it is therefore a gnostic term, and that therefore it is used in a 'gnostic' way in 1 Corinthians" (9). Charles H. Talbert argues that the problems among the Corinthians were due not to Gnosticism but to an "overrealized eschatology," a premature appropriation of the statuses of the age to come, in which the believers considered themselves sufficiently enriched and mature so as not to be subject to limitations and proscriptions against the flesh (10, 15, 30). Lenski rejects this direction of exposition, particularly the attempt to identify Gnostic sources and issues in the apostle's argument. He notes,

Both pagan and Jewish apocalyptic literature is scanned with painful effort and the assurance is given that here lie the sources for many of Paul's teachings and for many of the terms he employs. He is credited only with using some of this source material "in his own way"...For our purpose they are arid territory. (16-17)

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A digression into this “arid” territory would not be necessary if not for the assertion that “it has become almost standard now to refer to the opponents of Paul in Corinth as ‘Gnostics’” (Pearson 1). To be sure, Paul refuted the teaching and opposed the influence of Gnosticism, but his polemic to this effect is found in Colossians, not in 1 Corinthians. The church in Colossae was invaded by religion in the form of asceticism related to Judaic ordinances and observations (Col. 2:16, 20-21) and by philosophy in the form of mysticism related to Gnosticism and the worship of angels (vv. 8, 18). However, the situation of the church in Corinth was very different from that of the church in Colossae. Although typical philosophical thought informed the culture of every Greek city—and in that sense the Corinthians can and should be called philosophical—Corinth was not particularly known for its philosophers, nor is the name of any outstanding philosopher from that city known to us today (Lenski 12). Corinth was better known for its profligacy than for its philosophy. By Paul’s time, the Greek verb κορινθιάζεσθαι (“Corinthianize,” “to live like a Corinthian”) had been coined to mean “to consort with harlots” (McClintock 508; Gilmour 685). Paul characterizes those in the church in Corinth as mostly not wise according to flesh, as coming from the lowborn and despised ranks of society (1 Cor. 1:26-28).

To associate such persons with a systematized and scholastic school of philosophical thought is inaccurate and distracts the student of 1 Corinthians from the true nature and intent of this Epistle. The problems in Corinth were altogether of a different source and kind. In the church in Corinth there were divisions, envy, and strife; some saints were involved in lawsuits, some even in fornication. Hence, the believers there were simply typical, immature “infants in Christ” (3:1), who were desperately short of the growth in life, and this, not a concerted philosophy, is what Paul addressed. For this reason, he did not speak with philosophical jargon or sophistry, and he did not engage in speculation or technical debate. In 1 Corinthians Barnes points out, “There are fewer complicated sentences, and fewer parenthesis, less that is abrupt and broken, and elliptical, less that is rapid, mighty, and overpowering in argument” (xi). Rather, Paul spoke with demonstration of the Spirit and of power, using words taught by the Spirit, in order to lead the immature believers back to Christ as their portion for their enjoyment in their spirit. Lenski rightly affirms that the expositor of 1 Corinthians should

discard the enormous ballast of false opinions and ephemeral notions and not lose himself in hopeless efforts to clear up little historical details. He should seek as the palm of his effort to penetrate with heart and mind into the “demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor. 2:4) which is presented in Paul’s letters for the spiritual upbuilding of the Corinthian congregation in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. (17)

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