

# THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PNEUMATIC CHRIST IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

by Ron Kangas

As we pointed out in a previous article, in carrying out God's eternal economy, the Lord Jesus Christ took two steps (see "The Pneumatic Christ in the Gospel of John," *A & C*, Vol. II, No. 4, pp. 14-29). First, He took the step of incarnation to become a man in the flesh to declare God to humankind, to accomplish redemption, and to manifest the Father. Second, He took the step of crucifixion and resurrection to be transfigured into the Spirit that He might impart Himself into His believers as their life, their life supply, and their everything for the producing and building up of the church, His Body, which consummates in the New Jerusalem. These two steps are the two becomings of Christ revealed in the Gospel of John. By incarnation Christ became flesh to be the Lamb of God, and in resurrection He became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b), the pneumatic Christ. *The pneumatic Christ* refers to Christ as the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17), the holy *pneuma* breathed into His disciples on the day of His resurrection (John 20:22). When Christ came in His incarnation, He came as the Lamb of God. When He came again (14:3, 18, 28) in resurrection, He came as the *pneuma*, the life-giving Spirit. Now in our experience of Him, Christ comes to us as the pneumatic Christ, even as the Lord Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18).

*Our experience of Him:* These words embody the central concern of this article on the experience of the pneumatic Christ in the Gospel of John. Although the revelation of the pneumatic Christ presented in this Gospel is marvelous, we need to be deeply impressed with the fact that the revelation of Christ is for the experience of Christ. If we see this, we will realize that those who love the Lord Jesus and earnestly pursue Him should endeavor to know Him not only through revelation but also through experience (Gal. 1:15-16; Phil. 3:8-10). We surely need to understand the revelation of the pneumatic Christ in the Gospel of John, yet we also need to experience this wonderful, all-inclusive Christ.

According to the New Testament there should be no conflict

in the lives of believers between divinely revealed truth and divinely ordained experience. Life and truth go together; experience and revelation are complementary. There is no need to choose between them—we need both. On the one hand, all spiritual experiences must correspond to the divine truth, be tested by the divine truth, and be interpreted and understood in light of the divine truth. A particular experience cannot be of God if it is contrary to the truth of God. On the other hand, the divine truth should not remain mere information but should be realized by the believers in their experiences of Christ, experiences which have been ordained by God for their growth and maturation in the divine life for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. The Bible reveals both the truth of God and the experiences of this truth ordained by God. Since the Bible has this twofold emphasis, we need both reflection upon the truth and experience of the truth. R. K. Johnston makes this very point in his article on the theology of experience: "Experience and reflection must therefore be understood as complementary and interactive" (397). We may say that a balanced Christian life involves both reflection upon the Word and the experience in the Spirit. Johnston is surely correct when he says, "Experience and reflection must not become isolated from each other. Word and Spirit must remain complementary expressions of the Trinity" (398).

In reflecting upon the experience of the pneumatic Christ revealed in the Gospel of John, I will remark on the believers' need for spiritual experience, consider four particularly significant aspects of the believers' experience of the pneumatic Christ unveiled in John, and then discuss the requirements for experiencing the pneumatic Christ.

## The Need for Spiritual Experience

"Experience can be understood as a source of knowledge deriving from a direct perception or apprehension of reality..."

Experiencing something is to be distinguished from reflecting about it or hearing a report on it” (Johnston 397). This certainly was Job’s situation when, under the sovereignty of God, he made a decisive turn from report to personal encounter: “I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; / But now my eye sees Thee” (Job 42:5). Job’s word of confession, uttered after God manifested Himself to him, illustrates the believers’ need for spiritual experience, for “a direct perception or apprehension of reality,” as distinguished from “hearing a report on it.” I follow *Webster’s Third Unabridged Dictionary* in using the word *experience* to denote “an actual living through something and coming to know it firsthand rather than through hearsay or report”; “it is something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through.” Many believers have a hearsay religion; they have heard and believed what others have said about the Lord, but they have no direct, personal, subjective experience of Him as the all-inclusive, indwelling, life-giving Spirit. They have heard of Him “by the hearing of the ear,” but they do not behold His glory with an unveiled face in order to be metabolically transformed into His image (2 Cor. 3:18). Such ones have God in theology but not in reality; they have Christ as a doctrine but not as a living person.

**F**or some believers, such as Gordon H. Clark, this is sufficient. In Clark’s opinion, as expressed in his commentary on 1 John, to know theology is to know God Himself and to study theology is to have a Christian experience. “Studying the doctrine of the incarnation,” he insists, “is certainly Christian experience. At least, study is an experience; and if anyone studies theology for the purpose of increasing his faith, it is a Christian experience” (117). Studying theology may be a Christian experience, but it is not an experience of Christ, just as studying a recipe is not an experience of eating the food prepared according to the recipe. According to Clark’s theology of Christian experience, the relationship between the believer and the Lord Jesus is purely cognitive and cannot rise above a mental level:

The idea of the indwelling Christ and our indwelling him is a theme mystics love to dilate upon....Now, the New Testament does indeed teach a mutual indwelling of Christ and the believer. There is a very real sense in which minds interpenetrate....Christ dwells in us and we in him by our thinking and believing his doctrines. (120)

Clark goes on to say that intimacy with God and fellowship with Him involve not oneness or mutual love or the flowing of the divine life but knowing theology. “This intimate fellowship consists of having the same ideas, of thinking alike, of being in extensive agreement. Hence, intimacy with God, too, consists in knowing what God thinks. That is to say, in knowing a good bit of theology” (143). It comes as no surprise, then, that in Clark’s mind a person’s “only way of knowing God is by the reception of theological information” (128). “If God is in us,” Clark maintains, “it is because we keep the Scripture in mind” (130). According to this view, to have Bible knowledge is to have God, and to be filled with verses is to be filled with God. Those who know God both in revelation (Eph. 1) and in experience (Eph. 3) know that Clark’s view is wrong.

If we want to know and experience a certain kind of food, it is not sufficient merely to study the recipe; we must actually taste, eat, digest, and assimilate the food prepared according to that recipe. The principle is the same with knowing and experiencing the Triune God. If we would truly know the infinite God and genuinely experience Him, we must see Him, grasp Him, receive Him, and digest Him. This view, which stands in sharp contrast to Clark’s notions, is expressed by Witness Lee in his *Life-study of First John*:

As we come to the Epistles of John, it is not our goal merely to learn things about God. We come to these Epistles in order to see the things of God. We want to grasp, receive, and even digest the things of God. How great this is!...In these messages on the Epistles of John our purpose is to see God, grasp God, receive God, and digest God. When some hear about digesting God, they may be bothered and ask how it is possible for God to be digested by us. I can testify that I am very happy with this expression “digest God.” Daily I receive God and digest Him....Through the digesting of the infinite God, I am what I am, and you are what you are. The revelation of the divine things in John’s writings is given so that we may receive God and digest Him. (4)

As I will try to make clear, in the Gospel of John Christ is revealed as the pneumatic Christ not simply that we might receive information about Him but that we might receive Him and digest Him. For those who are content

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with information and with “knowing a good bit of theology” and who suppose that knowing about God theologically is the same as having God experientially, this article has very little, if anything, to offer. I write for those who are convinced that there is a difference between doctrine and reality and who are no longer satisfied merely with receiving information about God but hunger for Him and long to receive and digest Him. In other words, I write for believers of any and every theological persuasion who are prepared to admit that what they need is genuine spiritual experience, in particular the experience of the pneumatic Christ revealed in the Gospel of John.

The Christ in John is all-inclusive and unsearchably rich, altogether beyond human understanding and utterance, yet because He is the Spirit we may experience and enjoy Him in all that He is and in all that He has accomplished for us. In order to give the reader a taste of such a Christ, I would like to concentrate on four crucial aspects of the pneumatic Christ in the experience of the believers—Christ as life, as the life supply, as the resurrection, and as the Shepherd. (For other aspects please consider the sidebar *A Hymn on the All-inclusive Christ in the Gospel of John*.)

### Experiencing the Pneumatic Christ as Life

The Triune God is a God of life, and the Gospel of John is the Gospel of life. The Father has life in Himself (5:26); the Son has life in Himself and is Himself life (1:4; 5:26; 11:25; 14:6); and the Spirit is the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2) who gives life (John 6:63; 2 Cor. 3:6). The Gospel of John as the Gospel of life was written that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ and that believing, we “may have life in His name” (20:31). In this Gospel we are told that Christ, who is life, came that we might have life (10:10)—the divine, eternal, uncreated life of God, the life that is “really life” (1 Tim. 6:19). In 1 John 5 this life is called *the* life and is ours only in Christ the Son: “God gave to us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life” (vv. 11b-12). The words of Christ are life (John 6:68), and we need to come to Him that we may have life (5:40). This life, which is Christ Himself dispensed into us, meets every spiritual need: the need of the moral—life’s regenerating (2:23—3:36); the need of the immoral—life’s satisfying (4:1-42); the need of the dying—life’s healing (4:43-54); the need of the impotent—life’s enlivening (5:1-47); the need of the hungry—life’s feeding (6:1-71); the need of the thirsty—life’s quenching (7:1-52); the need of those under the bondage of sin—life’s setting free (7:53—8:59); the need of the blind in religion—life’s sight and life’s shepherding (9:1—10:42); and the need of the dead—life’s resurrecting (11:1-57). The issue of the believers’ experience of this life is the multiplication of life

### *A Hymn on the All-inclusive Christ in the Gospel of John*

- 1 O Lord, how rich Thou art to us, / Thy love reveals the measure!  
The boundless riches of Thyself, / In spirit here we treasure.
- 2 Thou art the Word, e’en God Himself, / With God in the beginning;  
Incarnate in the flesh with us, / And God to us defining.
- 3 Thou art the tabernacle true, / In Thee we see God’s glory;  
For God Thou art the temple too, / In Thee is God’s full story.
- 4 Thou art the only Son of God, / The Father e’er declaring,  
That we may have the life divine, / God’s very nature sharing.
- 5 Thou art the Son of Man like us, / And truly share our nature,  
That we may be the sons of God / And grow to Thy full stature.
- 6 Thou art the Christ, the Lord of all, / By God Thou art anointed;  
The One who is the All in all, / For God and us appointed.
- 7 Thou art the Savior crucified, / Whence issued blood and water,  
That we might be redeemed to God, / And life divine may enter.
- 8 Thou now art Jesus glorified, / From whom descends the Spirit;  
The all-inclusive Spirit comes / To us with all Thy merit.
- 9 Thou art the very light of life / That shineth in the darkness;  
The light divine that shines with God / Within our hearts in fulness.
- 10 Thou art the very life divine, / Which all our spirits quickens;  
The life which brings us out of death / And all our being strengthens.
- 11 Lord, Thou art God’s reality, / The truth that meets God’s pleasure;  
The truth that brings Thyself to us, / That we may know Thy measure.
- 12 Thou also art the way of life, / Which unto glory leads us;  
The way of Thy reality, / Which into vict’ry speeds us.
- 13 Thou art the resurrection too, / All death Thy life doth swallow;  
Tis by Thy resurrection pow’r, / We bear the cross and follow.
- 14 Thou art the spotless Lamb of God, / Who died for our redemption;  
Thou art the Spirit-giver too, / For our regeneration.
- 15 Thou art the serpent made of brass, / Who saveth us from evil;  
Thou on the tree wast lifted up, / To crush for us the devil.
- 16 Thou art the Shepherd and the door, / For us to leave the sheepfold,  
By Thee we have full liberty / And share the pasture freehold.
- 17 Thy washing keeps us always clean, / In function like the laver;  
Thus we are kept in fellowship, / Partaking of Thy favor.
- 18 Thou art the heav’nly riven rock, / With living water flowing;  
We drink of this refreshing stream, / Thy quenching power knowing.
- 19 Thou art the heav’nly well, in Thee / Is living water ever;  
We drink of Thine eternal life, / And thirst no more forever.
- 20 Thou art the heav’nly bread of life, / Thy food divine doth flourish;  
With all Thy riches bountiful / Our spirits Thou dost nourish.
- 21 Thou even art our breath of life / Thyself we breathe in spirit;  
By Thee we live, in Thee we walk, / Thy riches we inherit.
- 22 Thou art the grain of wheat divine, / That died and rose with glory,  
To bring forth us as many grains / To form Thy glorious Body.
- 23 Thou art the true and heav’nly vine, / And we in Thee are branches;  
In Thee abiding, Thou in us, / We share in all Thy riches.
- 24 Thou art the Bridegroom from above / To take the Bride, Thy Body;  
That we may be with Thee as one, / In life and love and glory.
- 25 Thou art the ladder Jacob saw, / By Thee the heav’n is open;  
In Thee we are the house of God, / And earth is joined to heaven.
- 26 O Lord, Thou art the great “I AM,” / Who all our need doth furnish;  
Enjoying Thee as all in all, / God’s purpose we accomplish.

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for the corporate expression of the Christ who is life shown in a miniature of the church life portrayed in chapter twelve.

Because we have believed into Christ and have received Him as the One who is life, Christ is now our life. We have the Son, and thus we have the life which is in the Son. This took place when we were regenerated, born of God, in our spirit, at which time we received another life, the life of God, in addition to our natural, human, created life. Through regeneration we became genuine children of God with the life and nature of God, and God became our genuine Father in life, not merely our Father by legal adoption. Now as children of God, we have the same life that God has, the very life that Christ Himself is in His own person. Hence, in actuality and as an experiential reality, Christ is our life (Col. 3:4).

Having life is a subjective matter, a matter of intrinsic constitution. Nothing is more subjective to us than our life, and nothing is more intrinsically related to us than our life. It is impossible to separate our life from our person, for our life is actually we ourselves. If we did not have life, we would cease to exist. To say that Christ is our life is actually to say that He has become subjective to us to such an extent that He has been wrought into our being. Since our life cannot be separated from us and since Christ is our life, He cannot be separated from us. As life, He has become part of our intrinsic constitution.

**T**his brings us to the crucial point concerning the pneumatic Christ as life: Christ can be our life because, and only because, He is the life-giving Spirit. The Christ in the flesh may die for us and may live in the heavens to intercede for us, but He cannot live in us or be life to us. Only the pneumatic Christ, the Christ who is the Spirit, can dwell in us and impart Himself to us as life and then become our life. Our experience of Christ as life is in direct proportion to our experience of Him as the Spirit. Those who know Christ as the life-giving Spirit know Christ as life. Those who deny that Christ is pneumatic, that He is the Spirit, deprive themselves of the experience, enjoyment, and reality of Christ as life.

This is not merely a theological issue—it is a matter of life and death. If we experience Christ as the life-giving Spirit, allowing Him to dispense Himself into us, to live in us, and to grow in us, we will be rich in the experience

of life. If we have Christ only as a doctrine, we will abide in a state of spiritual death. To a great extent, today's formal Christianity is saturated with death because Christ is not honored and received as the pneumatic Christ that He truly is. By contrast, God's economy is carried out in life, with life, by life, and through life, a life that is the pneumatic Christ Himself.

### Experiencing the Pneumatic Christ as the Life Supply

The pneumatic Christ is not only our life but also our life supply. If we would maintain our spiritual existence and advance in the growth of life, we must know and experience the pneumatic Christ as the breath of life, the water of life, and the bread of life.

John 20:22 tells us that the resurrected Christ “breathed into them [the disciples] and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit here is the holy *pneuma*, the holy breath. This breath, which is actually the pneumatic Christ Himself, includes all that Christ is and all that He has accomplished for us in His redeeming and life-releasing death and in His death-conquering and life-imparting resurrection. Our spiritual life as well as our physical life are maintained by constant breathing. If we see this, we will begin to realize that we are dependent upon the resurrected Christ for our spiritual existence and that we cannot live without Him. “Because I live, you also shall live” (14:19b). Our relationship with Him is one of utter

dependence. How much we need the pneumatic Christ! How desperately we need the resurrected Christ as the breath of life! A. B. Simpson understood this and, unashamed of his dependence upon the Lord for every spiritual breath, he testified of his experience in one of his lesser-known hymns. I include only the first and last stanzas and the chorus (*Hymns* 233):

O Lord, breathe Thy Spirit on me,  
Teach me how to breathe Thee in;  
Help me pour into Thy bosom  
All my life of self and sin.

*Chorus:*

I am breathing out my sorrow,  
Breathing out my sin;  
I am breathing, breathing, breathing,  
All Thy fulness in.

Christ can be our life  
because He is the life-giving Spirit.  
The Christ in the flesh  
may die for us and may live  
in the heavens to intercede for us,  
but He cannot live in us  
or be life to us. Only the  
pneumatic Christ can dwell in us  
and impart Himself to us as life  
and then become our life.

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I am breathing every moment,  
Drawing all my life from Thee;  
Breath by breath I live upon Thee,  
Lord, Thy Spirit breathe in me.

If we would experience Christ in this way, we must have a deep and thorough realization of two vitally important matters: that Christ is the life-giving Spirit and that we need Him every moment. Only a pneumatic Christ is breathable, and only those who know Christ as the Spirit and who know that they need Him will experience Him as the breath of life, appropriating the vast wealth of His being breath by breath and moment by moment.

The pneumatic Christ is also the water of life for us to drink. One day the Lord Jesus said to a Samaritan woman, "If you knew the gift of God...you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water" (4:10). After the woman expressed her interest, He went on to say, "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever; but the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water gushing up into eternal life" (v. 14). In John 7 the Lord spoke again about living water, calling the thirsty ones to come to Him and drink:

Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water. But this He said concerning the Spirit, whom those who believed into Him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified. (vv. 37-39)

**T**he water of life that we may drink to quench our thirst was released by the Lord's death and is dispensed into us by Him as the pneumatic Christ in resurrection. Verse 19:34 says, "One of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water." The actual blood and water that flowed out of the Lord's pierced side carry tremendous spiritual significance. Blood is for redemption, to deal with sins; water is for imparting life, to deal with death. The redemptive aspect of His death, signified by the blood, is for the life-releasing aspect, signified by the water. The Lord shed His blood to fulfill the righteous requirements of God so that He could dispense Himself into us as life. Based upon Christ's judicial redemption

accomplished through the shedding of His blood, we may now receive Him as the water of life by drinking of Him as the life-giving Spirit.

When Christ was on earth in the flesh, the living water was within Him. When He was crucified, the water of life was released. Now in His resurrection He dispenses Himself as the Spirit to be the living water for us to drink. Whereas Christ in the flesh shed His blood for redemption, Christ as the Spirit now desires that we come to Him and drink of Him. Only a pneumatic Christ is drinkable, and only those who are thirsty will daily drink of Him.

In addition, the pneumatic Christ is the bread of life for us to eat. As every reader of the Gospel of John knows, it is in chapter six that the Lord reveals Himself as bread—the bread of life (vv. 35, 48), the living bread (v. 51), the bread of God (v. 33), the bread out of heaven (vv. 32-33, 50), and the true, or real, bread (vv. 32, 55). Eating Christ as the bread of life is not a theological activity—it is a necessary life practice. Just as eating our physical food is a practical, not a theoretical, exercise, so eating the pneumatic Christ as the bread of life is an experiential, not a theological, exercise.

Eating Christ changes our inner being. As the bread of life, Christ nourishes us, sustains us, and strengthens us with Himself as our life supply and works Himself into us as life. As the living bread, Christ makes us living and vital in our spiritual condition. As the true, the real,

bread, Christ constitutes us with His divine reality, making us sincere and genuine in Himself and causing us to become those who worship the Father in truthfulness (John 4:24). As the bread out of heaven, the heavenly bread, Christ supplies us to live a heavenly life on earth. As the bread of God, Christ feeds us with God, fills us with God, and constitutes us with God and thereby makes us God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. Dietitians tell us that we are what we eat. If we eat the One who is life, living, true, heavenly, and divine, we will become the same as He, and such is the Lord's desire.

We can eat Christ as the bread of life because He has become the pneumatic Christ, the life-giving Spirit. "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing" (6:63a). If Christ were still in the flesh, we could not eat Him, but now that He has been pneumatized, having become the Spirit who gives life, we can taste Him, masticate Him,

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digest Him, assimilate Him, be constituted with Him, and even become Him in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. However, not many Christians feed on the pneumatic Christ, because not many know Him as the Spirit. Only a pneumatic Christ is edible, and only those who know Him as the Spirit and who hunger for Him will actually feed on Him as the bread of life.

### Experiencing the Pneumatic Christ as Resurrection

If we breathe, drink, and eat the pneumatic Christ, we will eventually discover something marvelous concerning Him—that He is resurrection. To a grieving and opinionated Martha the Lord Jesus said regarding Lazarus, who had died, “Your brother will rise again” (11:23). To this assuring word Martha replied, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection in the last day” (v. 24). In response, the Lord declared, “I am the resurrection and the life” (v. 25). In Martha’s view resurrection was a future event, but according to the Lord’s word resurrection is a present reality because resurrection is the living person of Christ. The raising of Lazarus is a sign pointing to and unveiling Christ as resurrection. The Christ who raised Lazarus from the dead has become the pneumatic Christ, and as such He lives within us as resurrection life, seeking to apply Himself to us as resurrection and to bring our whole being into resurrection. “Today with His believers everything He accomplishes is the exercise of Himself as the resurrection. Regenerating, sanctifying, renewing, transforming, conforming, and even glorifying are the exercise of Christ as the resurrection” (Lee, *John* 82).

Resurrection is a life that conquers death, a life that can pass through death without being affected by it. Christ is resurrection, and now, for the producing of the new creation in which God is mingled and blended with His redeemed and regenerated people, we need to experience Christ as resurrection. This is why God allows us to encounter various forms of death. Only in resurrection can we become the new creation, and only in the death experiences can we truly know Christ as resurrection and learn for ourselves the truth expressed in the following stanzas of a great hymn (*Hymns* 587) on Christ as the resurrection life:

Death cannot hold the resurrection life,  
The life of God eternal manifest;  
’Tis uncreated, indestructible,  
’Tis Christ Himself, unconqu’rable, expressed.

Death cannot hold the resurrection life,  
Though all its force against it may combine;  
Death only gives it opportunity  
To show the boundless pow’r of life divine.

Oh, may I know this resurrection life,  
In every kind of death its pow’r outpoured,  
In my experience ever realize  
This life is nought but Christ my living Lord.

If we would know this resurrection life, if we would realize in our experience that this life is nothing less than Christ our living Lord, then we need to know Christ as the pneumatic Christ, as the life-giving Spirit, for the life-giving Spirit is the reality of resurrection. Apart from the Spirit, *resurrection* is merely a doctrine or a distant hope. When we are passing through our own death situations, walking through the valley of the shadow of death, what we need is not doctrine or theology; what we need at such a time is the pneumatic Christ as the One who is resurrection. We need Him to live in us as resurrection and thereby to shepherd us with Himself and into Himself as the realm and reality of resurrection for the fulfillment of God’s economy.

### Experiencing the Pneumatic Christ as the Shepherd

The pneumatic Christ is our Shepherd. Not only is He our Shepherd objectively in the heavens, supplying us through His heavenly ministry (Heb. 13:20-21); He is also our Shepherd subjectively, supplying us with

Himself as our life, our life supply, and our everything. Christ as the Lamb is the Shepherd on the throne (Rev. 7:17), and Christ as the Spirit is the Shepherd in our spirit. As such, He is the Shepherd of our souls (1 Pet. 2:25), taking care of our mind, emotion, and will in a tender, all-inclusive way. He ushers us out of the fold of religion into Himself as the nourishing pasture where we may experience Him as the divine life in which we become one flock under one Shepherd (John 10:10-16). Our Shepherd laid down His human life for us that we may have Him as the divine life, and as this life He shepherds us from within our regenerated spirit until we reach God’s goal—the corporate expression of Christ.

**I**t is profitable to reread Psalm 23 in this light, as Witness Lee does in his *Life-study of the Psalms*. Here we see Christ’s pneumatic shepherding in five stages.

The first stage is the enjoyment of Christ in the green

pastures and at the waters of rest. “He makes me lie down in green pastures; / He leads me beside quiet waters” (v. 2). Green signifies the riches of life, and the green pastures signify Christ as our place of feeding and as our nourishment. The quiet waters, the waters of rest, are the Spirit (John 7:39) after Christ’s resurrection. Both the pastures and the waters are the pneumatic Christ for our experience and enjoyment.

In the second stage of Christ’s pneumatic shepherding, we experience revival and transformation on the paths of righteousness. “He restores my soul; / He guides me in the paths of righteousness / For His name’s sake” (v. 3). To restore our soul is to revive us, to renew us (Rom. 12:2), and to transform us (2 Cor. 3:18). The paths of righteousness indicate our daily walk, a walk in which, through the pneumatic Christ as our subjective righteousness, we are right with all persons, things, and matters according to God’s requirements. In order to have such a walk, we need to be restored—renewed, balanced, corrected, and adjusted—in our mind, emotion, and will by Christ’s inward shepherding. The more we are restored by the pneumatic Christ, the more we will walk in the pneumatic Christ as our paths and according to the pneumatic Christ as our righteousness.

**T**he third stage is the experience of the resurrected, pneumatic Christ in the valley of the shadow of death. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, / I fear no evil; for Thou art with me; / Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me” (v. 4). Because the Lord is with us, we can enjoy His presence; we can experience His personal, intimate, invisible, pneumatic presence according to John 21 as He sustains us with Himself as resurrection life. As we make our journey through the valley of the shadow of death, we are under the Lord’s authority, signified by His rod, and we take the way marked out by Him for us, knowing that every negative thing is under His rule and control. Simultaneously, we are under His protection, signified by His staff, assured that He will guide, instruct, train, and direct us until we arrive at our God-appointed end, the place prepared for us in the corporate expression of God (14:2).

In the fourth stage of Christ’s subjective shepherding as the life-giving Spirit, we enter into a deeper and higher enjoyment of the resurrected Christ. “Thou dost prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; / Thou hast

anointed my head with oil; / My cup overflows” (v. 5). This stage involves a battle and a feast, for here we experience in the pneumatic Christ a life of feasting and fighting. On the battlefield (“the presence of my enemies”) and at the feast (“a table before me”), we enjoy the processed and consummated Triune God: the Father as the source of blessing—the cup; the Son as the feast—the table; and the Spirit as the anointing oil.

If we want to have this deeper and higher enjoyment of the pneumatic Christ, we must first be one with Him in His shepherding in the green pastures, at the quiet waters, in the paths of righteousness, and in the valley of the shadow of death. We enter this advanced stage not by knowing about it but by growing into it as we gradually and continually experience the pneumatic shepherding of the resurrected Christ as the indwelling life-giving Spirit.

As we make our journey  
through the valley of the shadow  
of death, we are under His  
protection, signified by His staff,  
assured that He will guide,  
instruct, train, and direct us  
until we arrive at our  
God-appointed end, the place  
prepared for us in the  
corporate expression of God

The fifth and final stage of the Lord’s pneumatic shepherding is the lifelong enjoyment of the divine goodness and kindness in the house of the Lord. “Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, / And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (v. 6). *Goodness* may refer to the grace of Christ and *kindness*, to the love of the Father, both of which are transmitted to us in and through the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14). The house of the Lord is the church, the Body of Christ, as God’s dwelling place (Eph. 2:21-22)—the mutual

dwelling place of the Triune God and His redeemed, regenerated, and transformed people in the all-inclusive, pneumatic Christ. Here in the house of God, which is the church of the living God (1 Tim. 3:15), we corporately enjoy the Son’s grace, the Father’s love, and the Spirit’s fellowship. From this we see that Psalm 23 reveals that the goal of Christ’s pneumatic shepherding is the goal of God’s economy—the corporate expression of Christ, initially as the church, the Body of Christ, in this age and consummately and eternally as the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth. If we want to experience all of this, we must experience the pneumatic Christ as He is revealed in the Gospel of John.

#### Requirements for Experiencing the Pneumatic Christ

In order to experience the pneumatic Christ, it is necessary that, through God’s rich mercy and sufficient grace, we fulfill a number of requirements, all of which are

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clearly revealed in the Word and some of which will be mentioned briefly below.

*If we would have the genuine experience of the pneumatic Christ, we need to desire Him and seek Him; that is, we need to hunger and thirst for Him.* Those who are cold and indifferent toward the Lord and those who are content with their progress in the Lord cannot experience Him as the pneumatic Christ, for they lack the desire that causes them to pursue Him. Those who are satisfied with theological information and thus mistake the menu for the meal simply are not hungry; they are filled and desire nothing further of Christ. It is a great blessing to be ever hungry for more of the all-inclusive Christ.

“The hungry He has filled with good things” (Luke 1:53). “Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters” (Isa. 55:1). “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink” (John 7:37). “Let him who is thirsty come” (Rev. 22:17). “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matt. 5:6). This hunger and thirst for spiritual reality are an expression of a divinely implanted longing within every human being. “He has also set eternity in their heart” (Eccl. 3:11b), “a divinely implanted sense of a purpose working through the ages which nothing under the sun, but only God, can satisfy” (The Amplified Bible). The God who can satisfy this longing, this hunger and thirst, is the One who, in Christ, took the step of incarnation to accomplish redemption and the step of death and resurrection to become the pneumatic Christ. Only this Christ can satisfy our thirst, and only the thirsty will be satisfied by Him as the Spirit.

*If we would experience Christ as the pneumatic Christ, we must know and believe that He is now the life-giving Spirit* (1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 3:17; 1 Cor. 6:17). If Christ had not been pneumatized in and through resurrection, He could not dwell in us, and we could not experience Him. If Christ were only the glorified and ascended Son of Man on the throne in the heavens, He could not dwell in us for our living experience and enjoyment of Him. In order to experience the all-inclusive, pneumatic Christ revealed in the Gospel of John, we need to see from this Gospel and from the Epistles of Paul that the Christ in whom we believe and whom we love is the pneumatic Christ, the Spirit of reality. Those who deny the biblical revelation of

Christ as the life-giving Spirit deny themselves the personal experience of this wonderful indwelling One.

*If we would experience the pneumatic Christ, we must take Him as our righteousness* (1 Cor. 1:30), recognize that we can be justified before God only by grace and through faith, and stand on the ground of God’s judicial redemption accomplished for us through Christ’s death on the cross. The holy, righteous, glorious God dwells in unapproachable light, and apart from His redemption we cannot contact Him and He cannot dwell in us. Only those who are clothed with Christ as their righteousness are justified by God—that is, approved by God according to the standard of His righteousness—and only such ones, whose spirit has become life because of righteousness (Rom. 8:10), can receive and digest the pneumatic Christ as their life, their life supply, and their everything.

**By faith  
we believe into the Lord  
and receive the Lord into us;  
by love we enjoy  
the One into whom we have  
believed and whom we have  
received. The more our faith  
in the Lord increases and the  
more our love for the Lord  
is developed, the more we  
will experience Him.**

*If we would experience the pneumatic Christ, we need faith in Him and love for Him.* Those who are unbelieving and unloving in heart cannot have any experience of Christ. By faith we believe into the Lord and receive the Lord into us (John 3:15; 1:12-13); by love we enjoy the One into whom we have believed and whom we have received. The more our faith in the Lord increases and the more our love for the Lord is developed, the more we will experience Him. Peter understood the need for faith and love and wrote concerning it in relation to the experience and enjoyment of Christ:

“Whom [Jesus Christ] having not seen, you love; into whom though not seeing Him at present, yet believing, you exult with joy that is unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet. 1:8). Perhaps not even theologians “exult with joy that is unspeakable and full of glory” at “knowing a good bit of theology,” but those who have believed into the Lord and love Him can exult with such joy at knowing and experiencing the pneumatic Christ.

*If we would experience the pneumatic Christ, we need to exercise our regenerated spirit.* The Lord who is the Spirit is with our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22), and one who is joined to the Lord through faith is one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). God created human beings with a spirit as the organ to contact God, receive God, contain God, and digest God. Since God is Spirit, we must worship Him with our spirit (John 4:24). Many believers are joyless because they are not filled in spirit with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), who is



the reality of Christ. The sense of meaninglessness that plagues many believers in their Christian life often comes from not caring for their regenerated spirit and not exercising their spirit to contact the Lord. Just as we cannot eat food with our eyes but only with our mouth, so also we cannot contact God with our mind but only with our spirit. Tragically, some believers, most of them theologians—dichotomists who deny the biblical distinction between soul and spirit—go so far as to actually deny the existence of the human spirit as a distinct organ and faculty. As a result, they not only fail to experience the pneumatic Christ themselves—they also hinder others from experiencing Christ as the indwelling Spirit. Contrary to the opinions of dichotomists, the Bible clearly and emphatically reveals that human beings are tripartite, that regeneration takes place in the human spirit, and that if we would experience the pneumatic Christ, we must deny the self and the natural life and exercise our regenerated spirit to contact the Lord. Failure to fulfill this requirement makes the practical application of the truth regarding Christ as the life-giving Spirit impossible.

*If we would experience the pneumatic Christ, we need to call on the Lord's name and keep His word.* In Revelation 3:8 the pneumatic Christ commended the church in Philadelphia for keeping His word and not denying His name. We cannot have the normal and genuine experience of the pneumatic Christ apart from His name and His word, for the life-giving Spirit is intrinsically related to both the name of the Lord and the word of the Lord.

The Gospel of John has much to say about the Lord's name and the Lord's word. We have life in His name (20:31); we believe into His name and receive Him and thereby become children of God (1:12); and we pray in His name (14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23). The name of the Lord denotes His person, and the reality of His person is the Spirit. When we call on the name of the Lord, He responds as the Spirit, and we receive Him as the Spirit, the pneumatic Christ. As we call on His name, we should keep His word (8:51-52; 14:23). The words which He speaks are spirit and life (6:63). We need to abide in His word (8:31) and allow His words to abide in us (15:7). We receive Christ as the Spirit by calling on His name and by contacting Him in His word and through His word. The more we call on His name and keep His word, the more we will experience Him as the Spirit, the pneumatic Christ.

*If we would have the normal and genuine experience of the all-inclusive Christ as the pneumatic Christ, we must care for God's goal—the corporate expression of Christ.* “Christian experience must never be viewed individualistically but nurtured and evaluated within the Christian community past and present” (Johnston 398). Individualism is versus the experience of the pneumatic Christ. According to the

divine revelation in the New Testament, spirituality is a Body matter, that is, a matter in, through, and for the building up of the organic Body of Christ. Those who do not care for the Body and honor the Body cannot have a full and adequate experience of the pneumatic Christ. The goal of our spiritual seeking should not be individual spirituality but the building up of the Body of Christ as the corporate expression of Christ.

God's ultimate goal is the New Jerusalem, the consummate, eternal corporate expression of the Triune God in Christ in the new heaven and new earth. Since the New Jerusalem is the consummation of the Body of Christ, God's goal in His economy today is to build up the organic Body of Christ in and through the proper church life. It is a shame for believers, especially for Christian teachers and workers, to have something other than the Body of Christ/the New Jerusalem as their goal. God's goal must be our goal. If not, we cannot have the adequate experience of the pneumatic Christ, because the aim of this experience is the fulfillment of God's purpose, that is, to bring us to God's goal for His satisfaction and delight. If we care for God's goal, embracing it as our own, the Lord will richly bless us with the experience of the pneumatic Christ, especially of Christ as our Shepherd in resurrection. Through His pneumatic shepherding He will lead us stage by stage, all the way from the green pastures and the quiet waters to the house of the Lord, the eternal corporate expression of the Triune God, where, with all the transformed and glorified sons of God, we will experience, enjoy, and express the pneumatic Christ forever and ever. If God's goal is our goal and if we seek the Lord for His glory and satisfaction, the pneumatic Christ will become real to us in our experience of Him. Then day by day we will experience and enjoy the Lord, the pneumatic Christ, the life-giving Spirit, who is with our spirit. LFC

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