

## First Corinthians—Heap or Building?

**I**s 1 Corinthians, to echo Frederic Godet's question, a heap or a building (27)? Including, as it does, Paul's dealings with eleven successive and seemingly heterogeneous problems, this Epistle challenges its readers to find some logical or thematic structure. Apparently, the apostle wrote the letter in response to reports that he had received as well as from the Corinthians' own correspondence with him (1:11; 5:1; 7:1). But Paul did not address every matter before him (11:34). From the writer of Romans and Ephesians, the steward of the mysteries of God, ought we not to anticipate some divine and revelatory purpose in his selection of these matters and in the way he orders them?

There are two things that we can expect of such a purpose. First, it will be consistent with the commission Paul received as an apostle of Christ. Second, in identifying this purpose we will obtain the key to understanding how the apostle dealt with practical issues in a local church. The converse of this is that, if we fail to understand why Paul selected and sequenced these eleven problems in the way he did, we risk depreciating his ministry. Furthermore, we are likely to be misled as to how to address similar problems in a local church today.

In his selection and ordering of his response to the Corinthians, Paul uses the eleven problems to comprehensively set forth the revelation of God's economy in the New Testament. Even though the issues Paul deals with here are intensely practical, he employs them to bring out the central matters of this economy in a way that is richly illustrative even though not dogmatic.

To develop this point, we will first look at what others have made of Paul's composition of 1 Corinthians. Then we will examine what Paul says concerning his ministry in his other writings in order to consider the context of his composition of 1 Corinthians. Our conclusion will be that in dealing with these eleven problems, Paul is carrying out in full the stewardship of God's economy that is the hallmark of his ministry.

### First Corinthians and the Bible Dictionaries

The place where one expects to find a statement on the theme of the book as a whole, and that by a specialist, is

the Bible dictionary article. Of thirteen such articles, only three attempt to identify a thematic structure to the Epistle.<sup>1</sup> The others all assume that Paul's construction was primarily responsive, governed by what he had heard and read.<sup>2</sup> While some identify great themes that emerge as Paul deals with these issues, such as the gospel, the cross, resurrection, and the Christian principle of love, they treat his ordering of the problems as of no significance other than grouping into moral/ethical and ecclesiastical/liturgical categories.

T. & T. Clark's dictionary, however, perceives an "inner line" running through the successive matters (177). This is the "Christ-event" (177), which, though not explicitly spelled out in the article, we may take to be His incarnation, death, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Thus, the letter becomes an "eschatological proclamation"; each question is answered in the light of Christ's resurrection, which both gives the believers hope and determines how they behave, that is, their ethical decisions.

Holman's article, with the exception of what is to be considered a genuine doctrinal inquiry in chapter fifteen, sees all the problems as evidence of the self-centered attitude of the Corinthians. The Epistle, thus, is seen as portraying the contrast between their egocentric life and a Christocentric one, the former characterized as "getting" and the latter as "giving."

Anchor's entry sees the entire Epistle as a deliberate letter to convince the Corinthians to be reconciled and end their factionalism. The theme of unity extends from the first four chapters on through the remaining sections: 5:1—11:1 concerns specific problems which divide the community, and in 11:2—14:40 are the manifestations of Christian divisiveness when coming together for Christian worship. Throughout, Paul's appeal is for unity.

**W**hile offering useful insights into the relationship between the eleven problems dealt with in 1 Corinthians, these three efforts do not take adequate account of the apostle's ministry in the New Testament. So, while recognizing the centrality of Christ and the importance of resurrection in the Epistle as a whole, and that unity is a recurring theme, they cannot identify how Paul uses these eleven issues to serve his proclamation of

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the gospel. Paul does not just deal with a number of practical issues and, in doing so, bring out theological nuances on subjects such as the cross, eschatology, and resurrection. Nor is he merely setting forth new standards in ethics for Christians vis-à-vis the Greeks. Rather, the apostle of the Gentiles, commissioned with making the riches of the glory of the hidden mystery known among the nations, takes the occasion of this letter to the Corinthians, as in all his others, to further confirm his stewardship of the mysteries of God. In order to perceive this, however, we must examine what Paul says concerning his ministry in Ephesians and Colossians.

### The Ministry of the Apostle Paul

Paul describes his ministry in Ephesians 3:8-11. In this passage there are two clearly identifiable components of his ministry of the gospel, conjoined by the word *and* at the beginning of verse 9:

To me, less than the least of all saints, was this grace given to announce to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel *and* to enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things, in order that now to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies the multifarious wisdom of God might be made known through the church, according to the eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord. (emphasis added)

The unsearchable riches of Christ on the one hand and the church as the expression of the multifarious wisdom of God on the other compose the message which Paul's ministry conveys. The former is the content of God's economy, and the latter is the goal. Paul's purpose in announcing the unsearchable riches of Christ was the producing of the church through which God's economy, or plan, is fulfilled. The two aspects bear an organic and intrinsic relationship, as Witness Lee states in a footnote to verse 10:

As revealed in v. 8, the church is produced from the unsearchable riches of Christ. When God's chosen people partake of and enjoy the riches of Christ, they are constituted with those riches to be the church, through which God's multifarious wisdom is made known to the angelic rulers and authorities in the heavenlies. (Recovery Version, note 3)

This organic relationship between the announcing of Christ and the producing of the church is found in Paul's placing of his ministry in Ephesians 3:2 and in Colossians 1:25 within the framework of the stewardship of God. The term *stewardship* implies not only the idea of arrangement or management, but even more, the thought

of the dispensing of food by a steward to the members of a household. Hence, when Paul says, "It is sought in stewards that one be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2), he is speaking about this dispensing service. Indeed, this word points to the Lord's definition of faithfulness in Matthew 24:45, the distribution of food at the proper time to the master's household by the designated slave. Since the church is the household of God (Eph. 2:19), the steward's function within that house is to dispense the riches of the Householder—all that God is and has as being embodied in Christ and realized as the Spirit—to the members of His house. The stress of Paul's writing of 1 Corinthians is precisely this, namely, to give them the food at the proper time in order to constitute them organically to be the church as God's expression.

These two aspects of Paul's ministry are further seen in his use of the term *mystery*, a word that he frequently employs. According to the revelation Paul received and conveyed, Christ is the "mystery of God" (Col. 2:2), because in Him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily (v. 9) and in Him all the treasures of God's wisdom and knowledge are hidden (v. 3). The church, as the subject of the book of Ephesians, is the "mystery of Christ" (3:4), because she is His fullness, that is, His full expression, as His Body (1:22-23). To know God, we must know His mystery, Christ, and to know Christ, we must realize His mystery, the church. These two mysteries together become a "great" mystery (5:32), the completion of the word of God as announced through the apostle's ministry (Col. 1:25-29).

First Corinthians is, in fact, a practical illustration of how Paul carried out his ministry to complete the word of God. The eleven problems—division (1:10—4:21), an evil brother (5:1-13), lawsuits (6:1-11), the abuse of freedom (vv. 12-20), marriage (7:1-40), eating idol sacrifices (8:1—11:1), head covering (11:2-16), the Lord's supper (vv. 17-34), spiritual gifts (12:1—14:40), resurrection heresies (15:1-58), and gift collection (16:1-9)<sup>3</sup>—are ordered in two distinct groups, which mirror the two sections of the apostle's ministry of Christ and the church:

In dealing with the first six problems, which were in the realm of human life, the apostle stressed Christ as God's unique portion to us; in dealing with the last five problems, which were in the realm of the divine administration, he emphasized the church as God's unique goal for us. The Corinthians were not only void of Christ but also ignorant of the church. The apostle's completing ministry (Col. 1:25) is composed of Christ as the mystery of God (Col. 2:2) and the church as the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:4). However, the Corinthians missed both, even though they were under the apostle's ministry. They were pitifully in themselves, blind and ignorant. (Recovery Version, 1 Cor. 14:12, note 3)

## Living as Christ Crucified or Living Christ?

A full understanding of Paul's ministry is needed to perceive the structure of 1 Corinthians, and all the important themes in this Epistle must also be interpreted in the light of Paul's ministry in the stewardship of God. An example of what can happen when this is not done is H. H. Drake Williams, III's recent article, "Living as Christ Crucified: The Cross as a Foundation for Christian Ethics in 1 Corinthians" in *Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol. 75, No. 2, April 2003, which examines Paul's use of the cross throughout the Epistle in relation to his dealing with the different problems among the Corinthians.

Williams looks at the theme of the cross beyond its explicit use in the first two chapters. He examines its role in Paul's writing on Christian stewardship (ch. 4), community exclusion (ch. 5), civil litigation (ch. 6), weak and strong brothers (chs. 8–10), and the Lord's supper (ch. 11). Unfortunately, he ultimately concludes that "1 Corinthians is filled with a variety of ethical commands" and that Paul uses the cross "to support [his] ethical injunctions" (119). The cross's support turns out to be in its reminder to the divided Corinthians that they share a common calling, its portrayal of sacrifice as seen in Christ's death and the cruciform life of Paul, and its connection with the future hope of Christians. For Christian ethics, supposedly, it serves as a motivation for Christian unity and a living of self-sacrifice on behalf of others in view of the Lord's return. Williams's analysis betrays a limited view of the cross as being only objective to the believer. The cross in such a view is primarily an eschatological event (or historical fact) through which God accomplished redemption through Christ, what we may call the substitutionary aspect of the cross. Its power in the lives of the believers in this aspect is in its witness only; it relies on the believers' effort to respond to and emulate such a witness.

In Paul's ministry, however, as in God's New Testament economy, there is a subjective aspect to the cross, the identificatory aspect (Rom. 6:2-4, 6-8; Col. 2:20). Not only does Christ die in our place, but we die with Christ in His death. The significance of this aspect is the complete termination of the person who dies in order that he may be replaced by Christ, who lives in him. Watchman Nee distinguishes the latter aspect from the former by using two different prepositions, *for* and *with*: "When the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross, not only did He die *for* the sinners, opening a

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## Problems in the Realm of Human Life

The importance of Christ and the church is established by Paul at the very outset of the book. Christ is "theirs and ours" (1:2), denoting the common portion of the believers. Indeed, they have all been called into the fellowship of, the joint participation in, God's Son (v. 9). The church is "of God," universal in its nature, yet it exists "in Corinth," a definite locality for its practical expression in the lives of its members (v. 2).

Christ as God's unique portion to the believers means two things: first, that He is all-inclusive, able to meet every need of ours—we need not seek anything other than Him for the problems in human life; second, that the believers should participate in Him by partaking of Him, because a portion is something to be partaken of.

In the April 2003 issue of *Affirmation & Critique*, "Touchstones" argued that the cause of the first problem, divisions (1:10—4:21), lay in the Corinthian believers' elevation of Greek philosophy, that is, their cultural background, in place of Christ ("Christ Not Divided," pp. 69-74). Culture is the basis for human living. Differences in culture, as expressed in the ordinances by which we live, are the major source of division between different peoples. Hence, Paul presents Christ, not merely objectively as our Redeemer, but One who, as God's wisdom in a mystery (2:7) and the depths of God (v. 10), is all-inclusive to be everything to the believers. The Corinthians not only needed to hold to the centrality of Christ, for one party was claiming to do so, though in a narrow way only (the *I am of Christ* party in 1:12), but also to see His universality, namely, His inclusiveness, so that they might let go of their cultural backgrounds and hold uniquely to Him.

In 5:1—11:1, Paul continues to present Christ as God's unique portion to the believers to solve the problems in the realm of human life. Although the problems he is dealing with may appear shallow, the solution he presents is by no means shallow, but emphasizes the central line of God's New Testament economy. The crucial verses concerning Christ as our portion in these chapters are as follows:

First Corinthians 5:7 says, "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." Here we should note that Christ is not just the Passover Lamb but the entire Passover. Every detail of the keeping of the Passover portrays an aspect of the believers' experience of Christ. In the type of the Passover, the children of Israel not only employed the blood of the lamb for their salvation from the destruction of the angel of death but also ate the flesh of the lamb to be strengthened to journey from Egypt.

First Corinthians 5:8 says, “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.” Witness Lee, in his footnote to this verse, interprets the significance of keeping the feast in relation to Christ as our portion:

The feast here refers to the Feast of Unleavened Bread as the continuation of the Passover (Exo. 12:15-20). It lasted for seven days, a period of completion, signifying the entire period of our Christian life, from the day of our conversion to the day of rapture. This is a long feast, which we must keep not with the sin of our old nature, the old 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, such an enjoyment of Christ as our banquet, the rich supply of life. (Recovery Version, note 1).

The word *feast* implies eating and enjoyment. Paul’s charge to keep the feast is one that emphasizes the uniqueness and richness of Christ and also the need for the believers to enjoy Him by eating Him.

First Corinthians 10:3-4 says, “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.” The spiritual food that the children of Israel ate in the wilderness refers to the manna which, according to John 6:31-35, typifies Christ as our daily life supply. The spiritual drink is also Christ who, in resurrection, became the life-giving Spirit as our drink (1 Cor. 15:45; John 4:10, 14). The rock that was cleft and flowed out the water for drinking is the crucified Christ into whom the thirsty believers must believe in order to drink (Exo. 17:6; John 7:37-39).

In all these passages, the enjoyment of Christ through participation in Him is central. Here, Paul is not merely requiring the believers to trust in Christ, pray to Him, or even acknowledge Him as Lord. He is conveying the central thought of God’s economy, namely, that by our eating Christ we receive His riches into us subjectively in order to be subjectively one with Him. Eating causes a metabolism to take place. By eating food, our bodies receive nourishment, and spontaneously the negative things are discharged. Metabolism is a process whereby the new replaces the old. By eating Christ, all the riches of His person and work become our organic constituent, and all the negative elements of our fallen nature are replaced. The above portions clearly demonstrate that this was Paul’s concept in dealing with the negative situation of the church in Corinth. He did not attempt

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living way for sinners to obtain eternal life and to come to God, He also died *with* the sinners on the cross” (italics added, from the “The Word of the Cross,” *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*. Vol. 2. Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1992, p. 1). Both aspects of the cross are needed for salvation to be complete:

When the Lord Jesus died for the sinners on the cross, He delivered man from the punishment of sin—the eternal fire of hell. When the Lord Jesus died with the sinners on the cross, He delivered man from the power of sin—the old man is dead, and man is no longer a slave of sin. (Nee 1)

The substitutionary aspect of the cross is for unbelievers to receive God’s redemption in order to be reconciled to Him. The identificatory aspect of the cross is for the believers to be saved, after their reconciliation, in the life of Christ (Rom. 5:10). At best, the substitutionary aspect can serve as a testimony to the love of Christ that constrains us to live to Him and as a pattern for us to follow in His steps. The identificatory aspect of the cross provides the power that terminates our natural life in order that we may live by the indwelling Christ as our life (Col. 1:27; 3:4). Paul’s ministry to the Corinthians primarily is in the second aspect, although it is based on the first. In presenting Christ to the Corinthians as God’s unique center and their portion (1 Cor. 1:2, 9), Paul ministers the cross as the power of God that can “bring to nought the things which are” (v. 28), that is, the Corinthians themselves, their natural life, natural ability, and cultural background. Following this, throughout the remainder of the letter, he emphasizes partaking of Christ by eating Him (5:7-8; 10:3-4, 16-18), a charge that implies the subjective experience of the cross in the life of Christ.

By considering the charges in 1 Corinthians as ethical in nature, Williams misaims concerning Paul’s ministry. The consequence of this is a reversal of what Paul intends. The basis of the living of a Christian is not “living as Christ” as Williams’s title suggests, but “living by Christ,” or simply stated, “living Christ” (Phil 1:21). Christ Himself, not the believer, is the element for such a living. Moreover, Paul’s emphasis on eating Christ in 1 Corinthians no doubt reminds us of the Lord’s word that “he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me” (John 6:57), confirming that the living of a Christian is based on an organic union with Christ through subjectively partaking of Him.

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simply to modify their inappropriate behavior. Rather, he led them to see that they needed to enjoy Christ as God's unique portion to them through eating Him.

But Paul still has something more to say on this. The Passover, unleavened bread, manna, and spiritual rock are items of the history of Israel in their exodus from Egypt. This history is a type of the believers' full salvation. In chapter ten Paul continues to interpret this history in its negative aspect as a warning to the Corinthians (vv. 5-13) related to their involvement with idolatry through eating idol sacrifices. Apparently he leaves the history of Israel to take up the matter of the Lord's table (v. 16). Yet two verses on, he draws a parallel between the believers' fellowship at the Lord's table and Israel's fellowship at the altar of sacrifices (v. 18). By introducing the altar here, Paul is no doubt referring to the final stage in Israel's journey, the full possession of the good land for the building of God's temple and the establishment of His kingdom. When all the inhabitants of Canaan were finally subdued, near the end of his reign, David acquired the site for the altar, the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite (2 Sam. 24:18-25). This was the site for the temple to be built in Solomon's reign (2 Chron. 3:1). Likewise, after their return from captivity, when they took possession of the land again, the remnant of Israel first built the altar and began the daily offerings before laying the temple's foundation (Ezra 3:1-6). In both cases, the altar represented the possession of the good land for the enjoyment of its riches and also heralded the coming temple. Now Paul in 1 Corinthians 10 uses the altar as a type of the believers' fellowship, that is, their joint participation, at the Lord's table.

Therefore, the Lord's table is not merely a commemoration of Christ's redemptive work. It is the participation in the riches of the all-inclusive Christ, as typified by the riches of the good land<sup>4</sup> (Deut. 8:6-10; cf. Col. 1:12). When the believers partake of the Lord's table, they are participating in Christ as their all-inclusive portion for their enjoyment. Furthermore, through the table, Paul once more emphasizes the enjoyment of Christ by eating and drinking Him. This is the key to solving all the problems in the realm of human life.

### Problems in the Realm of the Divine Administration

Beginning with the matter of head covering in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, Paul deals with five more problems in the second section of this Epistle. All these problems concern not the human life but the divine administration. Though the word *administration* is not used by Paul, the facts of the divine administration are seen in the universal headship of God (v. 3), the discipline of the Lord (vv. 30-34), His placing of the gifts (gifted members) in the church (12:28-31), and His subjecting of all things to Christ (15:24-28).

God's throne is the center of the universe (Rev. 4:2). From this throne God executes His administration to accomplish His eternal plan (5:1). God's government has two aspects: The first concerns the universe in general. All authority in the universe issues from Him, and He has ordered the universe by establishing authorities within it. Despite Satan's rebellion and the fall of man, God is still ordering all events in the universe for the accomplishment of His purpose. The second concerns the church, God's own house (1 Pet. 4:17). God is executing His administration in the church through Christ the Head in order to obtain His corporate expression for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose (Eph. 4:15-16; 3:10-11).

These two aspects are closely related. God's government of the universe is with the purpose of gaining the church. God's government in the church gives Him the ground to execute His ultimate judgment on all things, for judgment begins first from the house of God (1 Pet. 4:17). Moreover, the prayer of the church, signified by the bowls containing the incense in Revelation 5:8, is the precursor to Christ's execution of God's administration in the universe from resurrection to eternity, signified by the opening of the seven seals (vv. 6-7; 6:1, 3, etc.). Hence, we may say that the church as the Body of Christ is the means for God to carry out His administration. If there is no church, God lacks the vital component and ground for His government in the universe, and there is no way, according to His economy, for His purpose to be fulfilled.

What was at stake in these five problems was a matter as serious as the divine administration. This is the reason Paul interrupts his dealing with the matter of the Lord's table at the end of chapter ten of 1 Corinthians to address the matter of head covering. Head covering, which Paul deals with in relation to both man and woman (11:4-7, 10, 13-15), concerns God's headship (v. 3). The headship here refers not to Christ's headship of the church, as in Ephesians 1:22-23, but to His headship of every individual. Regarding this headship, God has established a governmental order in the universe. The believers, when they pray and prophesy in the church, can testify of their submission to this order by the matter of head covering.

Once the matter of headship has been resolved, Paul can then return to the matter of the Lord's supper. In this aspect of the table, it is the remembrance of the Lord for His satisfaction that is the emphasis (1 Cor. 11:24) rather than the believers' fellowship, that is, their participation in the Lord's body and blood (10:16). Whether or not it is a celebration of the Lord's supper depends on whether the participants at the supper are worthy or not (11:27-28). So first they must prove themselves, and second

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they must “discern the body” (v. 29). The context of this charge to discern the body is the parties and divisions that were present when the Corinthians came to this supper (vv. 18-19); hence, the body here refers not only to the Lord’s physical body as represented by the bread but even more to His mystical Body, also signified by the bread. The Lord’s supper is a matter of the reality of the Body of Christ. If there are divisions and parties among the participants, their coming together “is not to eat the Lord’s supper” (v. 20). Conversely, if the believers prove themselves and exercise to discern the body by having a proper relationship with all the members of the Body of Christ, their eating of the supper constitutes a remembrance of the Lord and is satisfying to Him.

**H**ead covering touches the headship, which is the foundation of God’s administration. The Lord’s supper touches the Body of Christ, which is the means for God to carry out His administration. The misuse of spiritual gifts, which Paul deals with in chapters twelve to fourteen, concerns the function of the members of the Body of Christ. This is critical for the function of the Body in God’s administration. God operates through the services (ministries) of the Lord by the gifts given by the Spirit (12:4-6), and this operation takes place in all the members for the direct building up of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:16). Losing sight of the purpose of the gifts, though, leads to their misuse. Paul corrects this in these chapters by elevating the gifts of greater importance for building the Body, such as love and prophecy (1 Cor. 14:1), and depreciating those with a minimal importance, which are the miraculous gifts, in particular, speaking in tongues.

Two matters frustrate the members’ function according to their spiritual gifts for the building up of the Body of Christ: not functioning and a disorderly functioning. On the one hand, not to speak in the church meetings is not to function. Paul touches this in 12:1-3, where he contrasts the normal speaking of the Christian worshipper with the dumbness of an idol worshipper. Thus, for a believer to be silent in a church meeting is absolutely contrary to the principle of the spiritual gifts. Paul emphasizes this in 14:26: each one who comes together should have something to speak in the meeting.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, to be wrongly zealous of spirits (v. 12), to be excessive in the matter of speaking in tongues (v. 19), and not to exercise love in the practice of the gifts (13:1-3) is to function in a disorderly manner (14:40). Moreover, while not forbidding the use of some gifts, Paul certainly presents some gifts as superior to others. Those gifts that derive from the believers’ maturity in the divine life, such as the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, and prophecy,<sup>6</sup> will cause the Body of Christ to be built up, while speaking in a tongue builds up only an individual. In correcting the misuse of the gifts, Paul

points the Corinthians to the church as God’s goal, encouraging the believers to pursue gifts that are profitable for her building up rather than those for their own benefit.

Heresies that deny the resurrection or claim that the resurrection has already passed threaten all three of the foregoing matters in God’s administration. To deny the resurrection is to deny the living God Himself, whose name speaks forth resurrection (Matt. 22:31-32), and Christ who, in His incarnation, is the resurrection (John 11:25). More particularly, to deny the resurrection is to deny the church, the new creation brought forth in resurrection (Eph. 2:5-6; 2 Cor. 5:17), and to deny the Spirit who gives the gifts, for in resurrection the Spirit is consummated as the transfiguration of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:6, 17). In other words, without the resurrection, there is no God and Christ in the headship, no Body of Christ, and no Spirit to give the gifts for the services in the Body. So God’s administration is simply annulled.

Whether in ancient time or modern, heresies of resurrection not only overthrow the faith of individual believers; more crucially, they render the Body of Christ useless for God’s administration. Equally damaging, however, is to hold resurrection as a mere doctrine while denying its power (cf. 2 Tim. 3:5), that is, Christ becoming the life-giving Spirit as the consummation of the processed Triune God to be mingled with the spirit of the believers (1 Cor. 6:17). This also renders the headship of God, the Body of Christ, and the function by the gifts of the Spirit inaccessible to the believers.

**S**eemingly, the last matter in 1 Corinthians, the collection of the gift for the needy saints in Jerusalem, does not concern God’s administration. Yet it does, in fact, in two ways: First, the reality of the Body of Christ cannot be realized by a local church in isolation from other local churches. The Body of Christ is universal, and one way that this universality is practiced is by the fellowship of concern among all the members of the Body, regardless of their place. By participating in this gift, the Corinthian members of the Body of Christ were demonstrating that there is one Body of Christ on the entire earth with only one fellowship.

Second, the collection of the gift requires the givers to overcome material possessions. This is a practical manifestation of the working of resurrection in the believers as living members of Christ’s Body. In 16:2, Paul says that each one should set aside his offering “on the first day of the week.” The first day of the week was the day that the Lord resurrected and initiated the first meeting of the church (John 20:1, 19). The early church’s custom of meeting on this day, rather than on the Sabbath, arose

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from this fact. To offer on the first day indicates that we offer in resurrection, in the new creation, and not in ourselves, in the realm of the old creation.

Resurrection is the power of the divine life to overcome the greatest and last enemy, death. This power, rather than God's creative power, enables the church to cooperate with God in His administration. The believers experience the resurrection power in its inner strengthening of them into their inner man so that Christ may make His home in their hearts (Eph. 3:16-17). Nothing tests our experience of resurrection as much as giving, for this requires us to overcome mammon and material possessions. When the rich young ruler stumbled at the Lord's word to sell everything, having kept all the commandments of the law, he demonstrated that the strongest natural resolve is impotent to overcome the power of mammon (Matt. 19:22). The believers' weekly giving for the Lord's interests is an enduring testimony of the power of resurrection. For such a consistent giving, the Corinthians needed to live Christ daily by His resurrection power. Then, rather than retaining their prosperity for their own use, they would release it from their hand for God's purpose.

### Conclusion

First Corinthians is no heap—it is a building. The eleven problems that Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians provide him the opportunity to compose an Epistle that richly illustrates the contents of his gospel. For the six problems in the realm of human life, beginning with division and ending with improper eating, he ministers Christ to the Corinthians by means of the types in the history of Israel, from the Passover to the good land. In doing so, he demonstrates that Christ is the believers' center and their portion, and that enjoying Him as the all-inclusive One by eating Him is the solution to all the problems in the human life.

However, God carries out His economy for His eternal purpose by means of His administration. Headship, the Lord's supper, the spiritual gifts, resurrection, and the collection of the gift are matters that concern the divine administration, in which the church as the Body of Christ is the focus. In 1 Corinthians, after bringing the believers to Christ, Paul then directs them to take care of God's goal by caring for the headship first and then the church. Thus, Paul, in a marvelous way, includes the full scope of God's New Testament economy—Christ and the church, the mysteries of God and of Christ—in composing this letter to the divided, confused, and disorderly believers at Corinth.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>These three include: *Dictionary of the Bible*. Ed. James Hastings. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963; *Holman Bible Dictionary*. Ed. Trent C. Butler. Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991; and *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Ed. David Noel Freedman. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

<sup>2</sup>These include: *Dictionary of the Bible*. Ed. W. R. F. Browning. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997; *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*. Eds. R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden. London and Philadelphia: SCM Press and Trinity Press International, 1990; *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*. Ed. John H. Hayes. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999; *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne. Downers Grove and Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 1993; *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Ed. David Noel Freedman. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000; *Harper's Bible Dictionary*. Eds. Madeleine S. Miller and J. Lane Miller. New York: Harper & Row, 1952; *Illustrated Dictionary & Concordance of the Bible*. New York and London: MacMillan and Collier MacMillan, 1986; *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Ed. Geoffrey W. Bromily. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979; *New Bible Dictionary*. 2nd ed. Ed. J. D. Douglas. Leicester and Wheaton: InterVarsity Press and Tyndale House, 1982; and *The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*. Ed. Henry Snyder Gehman. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970.

<sup>3</sup>This division of the sections in 1 Corinthians is based on the outline in the Recovery Version of the New Testament. Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1991.

<sup>4</sup>For the significance of the good land as a type of Christ, see "Touchstones of God's Economy: Colossians" in *Affirmation & Critique* VI.2 (October 2001): 73-78.

<sup>5</sup>A psalm is for speaking as well as singing (Eph. 5:19).

<sup>6</sup>Prophesying in 1 Corinthians 14 denotes speaking for the Lord, speaking forth the Lord, and speaking the Lord into others. A careful reading of this chapter will confirm that it is not used here in the miraculous sense of prediction, as commonly conceived today (vv. 3, 6, 24, 31).

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