

FIRST CORINTHIANS AS A TEMPLATE FOR MEASURING TODAY'S CHRISTIANITY

BY RON KANGAS

One day some Pharisees approached the Lord Jesus with the intention of testing Him with a question concerning marriage: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?" (Matt. 19:3). In reply the Lord said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall be joined to his wife; and the two shall be one flesh?'" (vv. 4-5). Following this, He went on to say, "So then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has yoked together, let man not separate" (v. 6). Crucial here is the Lord's mention of *from the beginning*, indicating that what God regards as normative in marriage (and in every other matter related to His intention for humankind) is what He ordained in the beginning. The Pharisees, evidently wanting to justify the practice of divorce, countered with another question, saying to Him, "Why then did Moses command us to give her a certificate of divorce and divorce her?" (v. 7). The Lord's authoritative response is striking and enlightening: "Moses, because of your hardness of heart, allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it has not been so" (v. 8). Here we have a sharp contrast between what God allows and what He has ordained. Because of the hardness of the religious heart, Moses, representing God, allowed divorce, and the Pharisees were quite satisfied to live in the realm of what God permitted. The Lord Jesus, however, cared for God's original intention, for what God ordained in the beginning. "From the beginning it has not been so"—these words unveil the Lord's heart concerning God's plan, purpose, and intention from the beginning.

Today, in a very real sense, there are two ways of living the Christian life. The first way, practiced by the vast majority of believers, including ministers and theologians, is to live in the realm of what God allows them to do. Due to serious problems in their heart toward Him, God temporarily allows them to do a great many things in the practice of the Christian life and church life. The second way, followed by a tiny minority of earnest, seeking believers, is to live in the realm not of what God permits but in the sphere of what God has ordained. Their heart is set, at any cost, to do the Father's will on earth. Such believers hearken to what was "from the beginning."

In the Lord's word in Matthew 19:8 we also see another matter—the principle of recovery. As used here, the word *recovery* means that something was there originally and then was damaged or lost; thus, there is a need to bring that thing back to its original state and to its normal condition. According to the Lord's speaking in Matthew 19, God's original plan for marriage was a life-long union of one male and one female, but because this view and practice of marriage were damaged or lost, there was the need of recovery, the need to return to the beginning.

As the New Testament emphatically reveals and teaches, with the coming of the Lord Jesus there was a beginning (Mark 1:1), and the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42)

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instructed the believers in all the aspects of this new beginning. However, as prophesied by the Lord Jesus Himself in Matthew 13 and Revelation 2 and 3, departure and degradation soon followed, and many precious, revealed divine things were lost or neglected or misunderstood. Regarding this sad development, believers now have a choice—to believe and practice what God allows or to believe and practice what God ordained from the beginning. To pursue the latter course is to take the principle of recovery.

I wish to openly acknowledge that this essay is written according to the principle of recovery and is an attempt to apply this principle to the reception of Paul's ministry in 1 Corinthians by believers today. To be sure, Paul wrote this Epistle with apostolic authority: "If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him fully know the things which I write to you, that they are the commandment of the Lord" (14:37). The fact that Paul's writing applies to us today is indicated by the fact that he wrote not only to the church of God which was in Corinth but to "all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, who is theirs and ours" (1:2). Furthermore, Paul taught the same thing "everywhere in every church" (4:17), and he could say, "So I direct in all the churches" (7:17), and "Just as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also do" (16:1). Since 1 Corinthians is universally applicable to all believers and its authority is not limited by space or time, I will in a very brief, perhaps even terse, way attempt to present its crucial contents as a template for measuring the beliefs and practices of today's Christianity. Attention will be given only to central matters, and even these will be presented simply in the way of a précis or sketch, not detailed exposition. The intention, I wish to emphasize, is to put certain central points together as a template that might be useful for students of the Word in determining to what extent they have the heart to be recovered to God's original purpose. If open, honest, seeking believers are willing to evaluate their beliefs and practices according to this template, maybe, under the Lord's mercy (to which we all are eternally indebted) they will receive light from the Word regarding what was "from the beginning."

The All-inclusive Christ

In 1 Corinthians Paul ministers Christ in His wonderful all-inclusiveness for our experience and enjoyment: "I did not determine to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and this One crucified" (2:2).¹ "The crucified Christ was the unique subject, the center, the content, and the substance of the apostle's ministry. For this he did not determine to know anything but the all-inclusive Christ, and this One crucified" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 2, note 1). It was so in the beginning, but what about today? Where are the preachers who instead of displaying their knowledge manifest Christ, supplying Him as life and everything to God's people?

If we trace the line concerning Christ throughout 1 Corinthians, we will see Him in His all-inclusiveness. "God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1:9). God's intention from the beginning is that we would be in Christ, partake of Christ, experience Christ, and enjoy Christ. This Christ is the portion given to us by God, and we experience Him as such by calling on His name (v. 2). Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God (v. 24). "Of Him [God] you are in Christ Jesus, who became wisdom to us from God: both righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (v. 30). As wisdom to us from God, Christ is righteousness to us for our past so that we may be justified by God; He is sanctification to us for our present so that we may be sanctified, renewed, and transformed in our soul—in our mind, emotion, and will; and He is redemption to us for our future with the hope for the transfiguration of our body. "It is of God that we participate in such a complete and perfect salvation, which makes our entire being—spirit, soul, and body—organically one with Christ and makes Christ everything to us" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 30, note 2). In 2:8 Paul speaks of Christ as the Lord of glory, whom we may experience as the indwelling One (Col. 1:27) as the hope of glory for

our future glorification. This Christ, the Lord of glory, is the depths of God searched out and revealed by the Spirit. These depths refer to “the deep things of God, which are Christ in many aspects as our eternal portion, foreordained, prepared, and given to us freely by God. These have never arisen in man’s heart but are revealed to us in our spirit by God’s Spirit” (Lee, Recovery Version, 1 Cor. 2:10, note 3).

“According to the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation, and another builds upon it. But let each man take heed how he builds upon it. For another foundation no one is able to lay besides that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (3:10-11). It is an undeniable fact that, in the beginning, Christ was the unique foundation for the church as God’s building, His dwelling place. What has happened throughout the course of church history related to this is grievous indeed, with religious workers not building properly upon the unique foundation (Matt. 16:16-18) but presumptuously laying other foundations.

In subsequent chapters of 1 Corinthians the apostle unveils other aspects of the all-inclusive Christ. Christ is our Passover (5:7), and Christ is our unleavened bread (v. 8). Christ is the spiritual food, the spiritual drink, and the spiritual rock (10:3-4). Christ is the Head (11:3), and Christ is the Body (12:12). Concerning Christ being the Body—a truly amazing revelation, comparable to the revelation of the corporate “Me” in Acts 9:4—Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:12, “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.” This refers to “the corporate Christ, composed of Christ Himself as the Head and the church as His Body with all the believers as members. All the believers of Christ are organically united with Him and constituted with His life and element and have thus become His Body, an organism, to express Him. Hence, He is not only the Head but also the Body” (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 12, note 2). Perhaps there is no greater aspect of the all-inclusive Christ revealed in the beginning through Paul, the unique apostle in speaking about the church as the Body, than the corporate Christ of chapter 12, the Christ who, in Himself, is the unique Head, and the Christ who, in us as life, is the Body.

Finally, in chapter 15 Christ is the firstfruits (vv. 20, 23), the second man (v. 47), and the life-giving Spirit (v. 45). As the first One raised from the dead (v. 12), Christ, fulfilling the type of the sheaf of the firstfruits in Leviticus 23:10-11, became the firstfruits of resurrection. As such, He is the Firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:18) in order to be the Head of the Body (Eph. 1:20-23). As the second man, Christ is the Head of the new creation, representing it in resurrection. The first man was created in God’s image to express Him and was charged to exercise dominion in order to represent Him and deal with His enemy (Gen. 1:26). Although the first man failed, Christ as the second man personally fulfilled God’s purpose, and now, based upon His creating and bringing forth the new man through death and resurrection, He is caring for the growth and perfecting of the corporate new man.

Probably, the most highly disputed aspect of Christ mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians is the assertion that, in resurrection, Christ became a life-giving Spirit. This declaration is related to God’s economy, not His eternal Godhead, and to our experience of Christ in God’s economy (2 Cor. 3:17-18). In and for our experience, the resurrected Christ is virtually identical to the Spirit, and it is as the Spirit that He entered into us and now dwells in our spirit (1 Cor. 6:17; 2 Tim. 4:22). Certainly, according to other Scriptures, the resurrected Christ has a body of flesh and bones, and with His glorified body He ascended and has been enthroned. The truth is twofold. Christ is at the right hand of God (Col. 3:1; Rom. 8:34), and Christ is in us (Col. 1:27; Rom. 8:10). As the One in the heavens, He has a glorified body, and as the One in us, He is the life-giving Spirit. Because He is the life-giving Spirit dwelling in us, the redeemed and regenerated believers, we may experience all that He is in 1 Corinthians—the portion given to us by God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption, Lord of

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The Church, the Body of Christ

When Paul met the resurrected and ascended Christ for the first time, he encountered Him not only as the personal Christ—the Lord of all—but also as the corporate Christ—the Body-Christ, the corporate “Me” that includes Christ as the Head and all the believers as the members of His Body. It is not surprising, therefore, that Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, would emphasize the unique, organic Body of Christ, the church: “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). Paul goes on to say that no member of the Body should think that because it does not have a function that other members possess, it is not of the Body, for in the Body there are many members. “God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, even as He willed” (v. 18). Although the members are many, the Body is uniquely one, and this oneness must be maintained, without any sense of either superiority or inferiority. In verses 24 through 26 Paul comes to the crucial matter of blending:

God has blended the body together, giving more abundant honor to the member that lacked, that there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the same care for one another. And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with it.

Addressing the believers in Corinth with all who call upon the name of the Lord, Paul declares, “Now you are the Body of Christ, and members individually” (v. 27). The unique mystical Body of Christ is the means for God to carry out His administration (Rom. 12:4-5; Eph. 1:22-23; 1 Cor. 12:12-13, 25, 27; 11:29). The Body of Christ is thoroughly and absolutely related to God’s administration; apart from the mystical Body of Christ, God has no means, no way, to carry out His administration. God’s eternal purpose is to have a group of saved and regenerated people who have become one to be His organic Body to carry out His administration (Eph. 3:10-11; 4:16; 1 Cor. 1:2). The mystical Body of Christ, the church, is for Christ’s move on earth; the Head is now operating God’s administration through the Body (11:3).

According to Paul’s strong word, divisions are intolerable and damage the Body of Christ with respect to the carrying out of God’s administration (1:2, 10-13; 12:25, 27). Satan’s subtle device is to cut the Body into pieces. For centuries God has not been able to carry out His administration because the unique means for this—the mystical Body of Christ—has been cut into pieces through division. Because we realize that the carrying out of the divine administration requires the unique Body, the mystical Body, we must hate division and be absolutely opposed to it (1:10; 12:25; Acts 20:30; Rom. 16:17-18; Titus 3:10). In order that God’s administration may be carried out, we must care for the oneness of the unique mystical Body of Christ (Eph. 4:3, 13; John 17:21-23); having such a concern will preserve us in the Body and keep us from any division.

We have pointed out that the Body of Christ is the corporate Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-13). It is needful to emphasize the fact that in verse 12 *the Christ* refers not to the individual Christ but to the corporate Christ, the Body-Christ, composed of Christ Himself as the Head and the church as His Body with all the believers as His members. All the believers in Christ are organically united with Him (Rom. 12:4-5) and constituted with His life and element (Col. 3:4, 11) and have thus become His Body, an organism to express Him; hence, Christ is not only the Head but also the Body. The Bible considers Christ and the church as one mysterious Christ (Acts 9:4-5). Christ is the Head of this mysterious Christ, and the church is the Body of this mysterious Christ; the two have

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The one Body is the one church of God, manifested in many localities as many local churches (1:22; 1 Cor. 10:32; 1:2; 12:27; Rev. 1:4, 11). For this reason, Paul addresses “the church of God which is in Corinth” (1 Cor. 1:2). The Body is uniquely one universally, and it should be uniquely one in its local expression, with one church, and only one church, in a locality (Rev. 1:11; 2:1). The local churches are many in existence but are still one Body universally in element (Eph. 4:4). When Paul speaks of “the church, which is in their house” (1 Cor. 16:19), he does not mean that a house is the unit of the church, with many churches in a locality, but that the church met in the house of certain believers. All the local churches are and should be one Body universally, doctrinally, and practically (4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33; 16:1). In the beginning there was one universal Body and many local churches as local expressions of the Body—one church in one city, one city with one church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

The Meetings of the Church

By its very character, a local church, a local expression of the Body of Christ, is an assembly, and as an assembly of believers called out by God and gathered into the name of the Lord Jesus, a church should have meetings, either in various homes throughout the city or, especially on particular occasions, in a larger facility when the whole church meets together. The principle of the church meetings in the beginning was mutuality, for mutuality is a basic principle of the Body. Instead of the ubiquitous present practice of having some kind of religious professional conduct a formal “service,” the church, in Paul’s understanding presented in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, should meet in the way of mutuality, with various members contributing their portions. This is the thought in 14:26: “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.” Please note the significance of *each one has*; not all have the same thing with which to supply the church, but each one has something. No one is empty-handed.

This is like the Feast of Tabernacles in ancient times. The children of Israel brought the produce of the good land, which they had reaped from their labor on the land, to the feast and offered it to the Lord for His enjoyment and for their mutual participation in fellowship with the Lord and with one another. (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 26, note 1).

What a beautiful picture of the rich enjoyment in mutuality of the all-inclusive Christ!

“Let all things be done for building up” (v. 26). Paul’s concern here is not individual spirituality but the building up of the church as a local expression of the Body of Christ. For this purpose he emphasizes love over knowledge: “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up” (8:1). In particular, love builds up the corporate Body of Christ (Eph. 4:16). Paul’s burden regarding the building up of the church extends to his teaching on the matter of prophesying, understood not as predictive but as declarative, that is, as speaking for God and as speaking God forth. “He who prophesies speaks building up” (1 Cor. 14:3). “He who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but he who prophesies builds up the church” (v. 4). Again and again, Paul’s concern is that “the church may receive building up” (v. 5). In verse 12 he continues to release his burden on the building up of the church: “So also you, since you are zealous of spirits, seek that you may excel for the building up of the church.”

The apostle was fully occupied with the consideration of building up the church. He was fully church-conscious and church-centered, altogether different from the self-centered Corinthians. Their problem with spiritual gifts was due to their self-seeking, their not caring for the building up of the church. (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 12, note 3).

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The Mingled Spirit

In 1 Corinthians 6:17 Paul unveils the mingled spirit, the divine Spirit united and mingled with the regenerated human spirit: “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.” The Lord is the resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit (15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17), who is now one with the regenerated spirit of the believers. The essence of the New Testament is the two spirits—the divine Spirit and the human spirit—mingled together as one spirit (Rom. 8:4). The word *joined* in 1 Corinthians 6:17 refers to the believers’ organic union with the Lord through believing into Him (John 3:15-16; 15:4-5). The expression *one spirit* indicates the mingling of the Lord as the Spirit with our spirit. The spirit, which is the mingling of our spirit and the Lord’s Spirit into one spirit, is both the Spirit of the Lord and our spirit (Rom. 8:4; 2 Cor. 3:17; 1 Cor. 15:45). All our spiritual experiences, such as our fellowship with the Lord, our prayer to Him, and our living with Him, are in this mingled spirit.

The union of God and man is a union of two spirits, the Spirit of God and the spirit of man (2:11-14); the union of these two spirits is the deepest mystery in the Bible. The focus of God’s economy is the mingled spirit, the divine Spirit mingled with the human spirit; whatever God intends to do or accomplish is related to this focus (Eph. 3:9, 5; 1:17; 2:22; 4:23; 5:18; 6:18). By being one spirit with the Lord, we can experience Him as the all-inclusive One (1 Cor. 1:2, 24, 30; 2:8, 10; 3:11; 5:7-8; 10:3-4; 11:3; 12:12; 15:20, 47, 45). We enjoy Christ by being joined to the Lord as one spirit. We can experience Christ and take Christ as everything because we have become one spirit with Him. When we are one spirit with the Lord, we enjoy the fellowship of God’s Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1:9). For anyone who is one spirit with the Lord, the supply is inexhaustible. The spirit of faith (2 Cor. 4:13) is the Holy Spirit mingled with our human spirit; we should exercise such a spirit to believe and to speak the things that we have experienced of the Lord.

The Holy Spirit is in our spirit (Rom. 8:16), and our spirit is within our body; hence, our body becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Furthermore, our organic union with the Lord makes it possible for our bodies to be members of Christ (v. 15). “Because we are organically united with Christ (v. 17), and because Christ dwells in our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22) and makes His home in our heart (Eph. 3:17), our entire being, including our purified body, becomes a member of Him” (Lee, Recovery Version, 1 Cor. 6:15, note 1). We urgently need to see the vision that our bodies are members of Christ, that we are one spirit with the Lord, and that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (vv. 15, 17, 19).

The mingled spirit is a spirit that is one spirit with God and that is the same as God in His life and nature but not in His Godhead (1 John 5:11; 2 Pet. 1:4). The divine Spirit and the human spirit are mingled as one within us so that we can live the life of a God-man, a life that is God yet man and man yet God (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:19-21). The God-man living is the living of the two spirits, the Spirit of God and the spirit of man, joined and mingled together as one. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul was truly a God-man living the life of a God-man in the mingled spirit.

The implications of 1 Corinthians 6:17 are marvelous and far-reaching. To be one spirit with the Lord implies that we are in Him and that He is in us. We and He have been mingled, blended, organically to become one in life. This verse reveals that we and Christ are one wonderful, living entity. We—our complete and entire person, our entire being—and the Lord are one spirit. To be proper Christians, we must know that the Lord Jesus today as the embodiment of the Triune God is the Spirit indwelling our spirit and mingled with our spirit as one spirit.

Ultimately, regarding our daily living as believers, the Bible requires only one thing of

us—that we walk according to the mingled spirit (Rom. 8:4). The key to everything is found in the wonderful Spirit, who is in our regenerated spirit and who has become one spirit with our spirit. To live in the spirit is to let Christ fill and saturate us until He permeates our whole being and is thereby expressed through us. Being close to the Lord or walking in His presence is not the same as being one spirit with Him. The mutual abiding in John 15:4-5 is the practice of being one spirit with the Lord. When we live in the spirit, we spontaneously bear the cross (Matt. 16:24). All the things that happen to us test us concerning whether we are living in the spirit or in the self.

The mystery and depths of 1 Corinthians are the two spirits—the divine Spirit and the human spirit (12:13; 4:21). God has revealed the hidden things by means of the two spirits (2:9-12). These two spirits are for our eating and drinking of the Lord; we eat the Lord and drink the Spirit in our spirit (10:3-4). God requires us to turn to our spirit so that we may be spiritual persons, who live and walk in the mingled spirit (2:14-15).

The Highest Spirituality

Believers hold differing concepts of spirituality, some childish and others actually bizarre. Rarely do readers of 1 Corinthians recognize that Paul's writing in chapter 7 is a manifestation of the highest spirituality—the spirituality of a divinely human person, a God-man, who lives in the mingled spirit and expresses God through his humanity.

First Corinthians 7 conveys the spirit of a person who loves the Lord, who cares for the Lord's interests on earth, who is absolutely for the Lord and one with the Lord, and who in every respect is obedient, submissive, and satisfied with God and the circumstances arranged by Him. Paul was absolutely one with God, and he wanted the Corinthian believers to be one with Him and not to initiate anything (vv. 17-24). Because Paul was utterly one with the Lord, in his instructions and answers he spontaneously and unconsciously expressed an absolute spirit. Paul had an excellent spirit, a spirit that was submissive, content, and satisfied. In his spirit he was very submissive and content with his situation. To him, every situation was of the Lord, and he would not initiate anything to change it. Having such a spirit, Paul could answer the Corinthians in a way that would help them also to become one with God in their situation (v. 24).

Because Paul was one with the Lord, when he spoke, the Lord spoke with him; thus, in 1 Corinthians 7 we have an example of the New Testament principle of incarnation (vv. 10, 12, 25, 40). The principle of incarnation is that God enters into man and mingles Himself with man to make man one with Himself; thus, God is in man and man is in God (John 15:4-5). In the New Testament the Lord becomes one with His apostles, and they become one with Him and speak together with Him; thus, His word becomes their word, and whatever they utter is His word. The Old Testament principle of speaking for God was "Thus says the Lord" (Isa. 10:24; Jer. 2:2); the New Testament principle of incarnation is "I [the speaker] charge" (1 Cor. 7:10), for the speaker and the Lord are one. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 7 in the principle of incarnation. The principle in verse 10 is the same as that in Galatians 2:20: the principle of incarnation—two persons living as one person. Because Paul was one with the Lord, he knew the Lord's heart and mind. Paul was one with the Lord to such a degree that when he gave his own opinion, he thought that he also had the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 7:40). In verses 25 and 40 we see the highest spirituality—the spirituality of a person who is so one with the Lord and permeated with Him that even his opinion expresses the Lord's mind. If we are saturated with the Spirit, what we express will be our thought, but it will also be something of the Lord because we are one with Him (6:17). This is the spirituality of a person living and walking in the mingled spirit, speaking according to the principle of incarnation, and being an expression of divinity in humanity according to the economy of God for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ.

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Spiritual Food and Spiritual Drink

As we have previously noted, in 1 Corinthians 10:3 and 4 Paul speaks of eating the same spiritual food and of drinking the same spiritual drink. In the Bible the basic principle concerning man's relationship with God is that man needs to eat and drink of God. In the Scriptures, eating and drinking are basic and crucial. At the beginning of the Bible, eating and drinking are presented with respect to the relationship between God and man; at the end of the Bible we also read of eating and drinking (Rev. 22:1-2, 14, 17). God was incarnated so that we may eat and drink of Him. By eating and drinking we, God's chosen people, take Him into us.

God's intention is to work Him into us to be our life and our everything; we need to be impressed with the fact that the way God works Himself into us is through our eating and drinking of Him. Oh, how we need to eat Him and drink Him! In both the ministry of Paul and the ministry of John, that is, in both the completing ministry and the mending ministry, the matters of eating and drinking are strongly emphasized.

To eat is to contact things outside of us and to receive them into us, with the result that they eventually become our constitution (Gen. 2:16-17). To eat is to take food into us that it may be assimilated organically into our body (John 6:48, 50). To eat the Lord Jesus is to receive Him into us so that He may be assimilated by the regenerated new man in the way of life (vv. 56-57). Eating implies both dispensing and mingling (Jer. 15:16). Eating is the way to experience God's dispensing for His expression (Gen. 1:26; 2:9). The food eaten, digested, and assimilated by us actually becomes us; this is a matter of mingling (Matt. 4:4).

The Bible is a book of eating (Gen. 2:16-17; Rev. 2:7; 22:14). The record regarding spiritual eating in the Bible is a strong indication that God intends to dispense Himself into us by the way of eating. God's placing man in front of the tree of life indicates that God wanted man to receive Him as life by eating Him organically and assimilating Him metabolically so that He might become the constituent of man's being.

In their experience of God's salvation, the people of Israel, typifying the church, passed through three stages of the enjoyment of Christ by eating Him. In the first stage they ate the passover lamb in Egypt, which strengthened them to walk out of Egypt and to be separated from the Egyptian world (Exo. 12:1-15). In the second stage they ate the manna in the wilderness, which reconstituted them with a heavenly element to be a heavenly people (16:13-15). In the third stage they ate the rich produce in the good land, which constituted them further to be an overcoming people; by enjoying the riches of the good land, the people of Israel conquered the tribes in the land, established the kingdom of God, and built up the temple as God's dwelling place on earth (Josh. 5:11-12).

These three stages typify the three stages of the believers' enjoyment of Christ by eating Him (John 6:51-57; 1 Cor. 5:7-8; 10:3-4; Phil. 1:19). By their eating in the first two stages, the believers are energized to leave the world and are constituted with Christ as the heavenly element. To reach the goal of God's economy, the believers need to progress until they enter into the highest stage of eating Christ as the rich produce of the good land, the all-inclusive Spirit, so that they may overcome the spiritual enemies, be built up to be God's dwelling place, and establish God's kingdom on earth (Phil. 1:19; Gal. 3:14). As we eat Christ and enjoy Him as the produce of the good land, we are constituted with Him, being made the same as Christ in life, nature, and expression for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ, the new man, and the kingdom of God (Josh. 5:11-12; Phil. 1:19-21; Col. 1:12-13, 18; 3:10-11).

The Lord intends to recover the matter of eating Him. In general, Christians have neglected the eating of the Lord and have lost sight of the fact that the believers have the

right to eat the Lord (Rev. 22:14). The Lord wants to recover the church back to the beginning—to the eating of the tree of life; eating the tree of life should be the primary matter in the church life (2:7). The Lord intends to recover our eating of the food ordained by God and typified by the tree of life, the manna, and the produce of the good land, all of which are types of Christ as food to us. In Revelation 2 and 3 the Lord came in to recover the proper eating of Himself as our food supply, and now we must eat Him not only as the tree of life and the hidden manna but also as a feast full of His riches (2:7, 17; 3:20).

Eating Christ as the bread of life (John 6:48) is intrinsically related to 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” (1 Cor. 10:17). The more we eat, partake of, Christ as the true bread, the more we are constituted with Christ to be the Body of Christ in reality.

The one bread signifies the one Body of Christ. We all are one Body because we all partake of the one bread. Our joint partaking of the one bread makes us all one. This indicates that our partaking of Christ makes us all His one Body. The very Christ of whom we all partake constitutes us His one Body. (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 17, note 1)

In Jeremiah 2:13 God reveals Himself as the fountain of living waters. God’s intention in His economy is to be the fountain, the source, of living waters to satisfy His chosen people for their enjoyment. The goal of this enjoyment is to produce the church as God’s increase, God’s enlargement, to be God’s fullness for His expression (Eph. 1:22-23). God needs to be the fountain of living waters to His elect because He has an economy, and His economy is to produce a counterpart, a bride, for Himself (John 3:29; Rev. 19:7-8). God’s economy is to dispense Himself as the living water to produce His increase, His enlargement, for His expression (Col. 2:19). Nothing apart from God as the fountain of living waters can quench our thirst and satisfy us; nothing apart from God dispensed into our being can make us His increase for His expression (John 4:13-14; 7:37; Rev. 22:17). God’s intention is to be everything to His chosen people so that they may trust in Him and rely on Him for everything; if they do this, they will receive God’s dispensing (Jer. 17:7-8). God’s intention is to dispense Himself into man as man’s satisfaction so that He might be enlarged (Rom. 8:11; 12:4-5).

Psalm 36:9 may be regarded as a reflection of Jeremiah 2:13: “With You is the fountain of life.” The divine life may be considered the first and the basic attribute of God (Eph. 4:18; John 5:26; 1 John 5:11-12; Rom. 8:2). According to the divine and eternal nature of the life of God, God’s life is the unique life; only the life of God can be counted as life (John 1:4; 10:10; 11:25; 14:6). Life is the content of God and the flowing out of God; God’s content is God’s being, and God’s flowing out is the impartation of Himself as life to us (Eph. 4:18; Rev. 22:1). Life is Christ, and life is Christ living in us and lived out from us (John 14:6; Col. 3:4; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21). Life is the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17; 1 Cor. 15:45; Rom. 8:2; 2 Cor. 3:6). Life is the Triune God dispensed into us and living in us (Rom. 8:10, 6, 11).

God wants us to take Him as the fountain, the source, of our life and our being (Jer. 2:13; Psa. 36:9). God’s intention in His economy is to be the fountain, the source, of living waters to His chosen people for their enjoyment. The Bible shows us that God is the source in every way; the principle in the Bible is that God does not want His chosen people to take anything other than Himself as the source (Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6; Matt. 15:13). We need to drink of God as the fountain of living waters so that He may increase for the fulfillment of His economy to have His expression through His counterpart (1 Cor. 12:13). When we drink of God as the fountain of living waters, He becomes one with us, and we become one with Him (Psa. 36:8-9). The more we drink of God, the more He is one with us and the more we are one with Him and constituted with Him in His life and nature.

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According to 1 Corinthians 10:4, we drink of the living water that flows out of Christ, who is typified by the cleft rock in Exodus 17:6. Christ as the living, spiritual rock was smitten by the authority of God's law so that the water of life in resurrection could flow out of Him and into His redeemed people for them to drink. The rock is a type of Christ, Moses signifies the law, the rod represents the power and authority of the law, the smiting of the rock by the rod signifies that Christ was smitten by the authority of God's law, and the water flowing out of the smitten rock typifies the Spirit (v. 6; John 7:37-39; 19:34). The living water is the water of life in resurrection, the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit as the ultimate issue of the Triune God (1 Cor. 15:45). Resurrection denotes something that has been put to death and is alive again; resurrection also denotes life that springs forth from something that has passed through death (John 11:25; Acts 2:24; Rev. 1:18). Because the water of life is in resurrection, it is victorious and transcends every negative thing (Eph. 1:19-22; 2:5-6).

When we drink the water of life in resurrection, we become persons in resurrection and of resurrection (1 Cor. 10:4; 2 Cor. 1:9; 4:14). The flowing of the water of life in resurrection is for the building up of the Body of Christ and the preparation of the bride of Christ, both of which will consummate in the New Jerusalem (1 Cor. 12:13; Rev. 19:7; 21:2, 9-10).

As believers in Christ, we need to drink and flow the water of life in resurrection (7:17; John 4:10, 14; 7:37-39; cf. Prov. 11:25). To drink of the water of life in resurrection, we need to be positioned to drink (1 Cor. 12:13), to be thirsty (John 7:37; Rev. 21:6), to come to the Lord (John 7:37; Rev. 22:17), to ask of the Lord (John 4:10), to speak to the rock (Num. 20:8), to believe in the Lord (John 7:38), and to call on the name of the Lord (Isa. 12:3-4; Acts 2:21).

If, like the Samaritan woman, we drink of the living water, we will become true worshippers, worshipping the Father in spirit and truthfulness and offering to Him the worship that satisfies His heart (John 4:10, 14, 23-24). We need to be identified with the smitten Christ; when we identify ourselves with the smitten Christ, the divine life as the living water flows out of us (Exo. 17:6; John 7:38; S. S. 2:8-9, 14; Phil. 3:10; Heb. 12:2). If we drink and flow the water of life in resurrection, we will be "the brook" (the overcomers) from which Christ will drink as He is taking the lead in the day of His warfare to fight through to the end (Psa. 110:7).

The Gospel Announced by Paul

"Now I make known to you, brothers, the gospel which I announced to you, which also you received, in which also you stand" (1 Cor. 15:1). If we make a careful study of Acts and of the Epistles of Paul, we will eventually realize the vast difference between the full, complete, and profound gospel announced by Paul and the gospel commonly preached today. The gospel that most Christians preach is shallow and low; most Christians have a limited, superficial, and mistaken view concerning the gospel (John 3:16; Eph. 2:8).

The gospel includes all the truths in the Bible; thus, the entire Bible is the gospel of God (1:13; Col. 1:5). We should not think that the gospel is one thing and that the truth is another thing; the truth is the gospel, and the light of the truth is the light of the gospel (Mark 1:1, 14-15; John 8:12, 32).

The unique commission of the church today is to preach the gospel, the content of which is the truth (Mark 16:15; 1 Tim. 2:4). Our preaching of the truth is the preaching of the high gospel. For the preaching of the high gospel, we have a strong burden to encourage everyone to pursue the knowledge of the truth; we should study the truth to the extent that we can expound the truth and announce the truth.

The gospel that we preach today should be the purest, highest, and most complete gospel (Mark 1:1; Rom. 1:1; Matt. 24:14; Eph. 2:17; 6:19-20; 1 Tim. 1:11; 2 Cor. 4:4; John 12:24). The gospel is the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament (Mark 1:14-15). The gospel is the fulfillment of the promises, prophecies, and types and is also the removal of the law (Gen. 3:15, 21). Christ is the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament; thus, the fulfillment of the promises, prophecies, and types and the removal of the law are a living person, Jesus Christ (Matt. 17:2-8; Rom. 10:4). Jesus Christ, the Son of God, with all the processes He passed through and all the redemptive work He accomplished is the content of the gospel; hence, the gospel is of Him (1:1-4).

We need to consider the contents of Paul's gospel. The gospel was planned, promised, and accomplished by God, and it is the power of God unto salvation to all believers that they may be reconciled to God and regenerated by Him to be His children; hence, the gospel is the gospel of God (vv. 1, 16). The gospel brings the believers into the realm of the divine ruling so that they may participate in the blessings of the divine life in the divine kingdom; hence, the gospel is the gospel of the kingdom of God (Matt. 24:14; 1 Thes. 2:12). The gospel of grace emphasizes the forgiveness of sins, God's redemption, and eternal life (Acts 20:24). The gospel of the kingdom, which includes the gospel of grace, emphasizes the heavenly ruling of God and the authority of the Lord (8:12). Christ Himself is peace, in His death He made peace, and as the Spirit He came to preach peace as the gospel; hence, the gospel is the gospel of peace (Eph. 2:15, 17; 6:15; Acts 10:36). The gospel is the gospel of the glory of the blessed God (1 Tim. 1:11). The gospel with which the apostle Paul was entrusted is the effulgence of the glory of the blessed God. By dispensing God's life and nature in Christ into God's chosen people, this gospel shines forth God's glory, in which God is blessed among His people. Because Christ, the image of God, is the effulgence of His glory, the gospel of Christ is the gospel of His glory that illuminates and shines forth (Heb. 1:3; 2 Cor. 4:4).

The gospel in the book of Romans is the gospel of the One who is now indwelling His believers as their subjective Savior (1:1, 9). The gospel of God, as the subject of Romans, concerns Christ as the Spirit within the believers after His resurrection (8:9-11). Christ has resurrected and has become the life-giving Spirit; thus, He is no longer merely the Christ outside the believers but the Christ within them (vv. 34, 10). Paul's gospel is the center of the New Testament revelation (16:25; 2 Tim. 2:8). Paul's gospel is a revelation of the Triune God processed to become the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 3:2, 5, 14). Paul's gospel is centered on the Triune God being our life in order to be one with us and to make us one with Him, that we may be the Body of Christ to express Christ in a corporate way (Rom. 8:11; 12:4-5; Eph. 1:22-23). The focal point of Paul's gospel is God Himself in His Trinity becoming the processed all-inclusive Spirit to be life and everything to us for our enjoyment so that He and we may be one to express Him for eternity (Gal. 1:4, 6; 3:13-14, 26-28; 6:15).

The highest point of God's gospel is that God became a man that man may become God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead so that, in Christ, God will have many sons for His corporate expression (Rom. 1:3-4; 8:3, 29). God became a man through incarnation and then passed through human living, death, and resurrection in order to have a mass reproduction of Himself (John 1:14, 29; 12:24). God's intention is to have, in Christ, a mass reproduction of Himself and thereby to produce a new kind—God-man kind. The one grain—Christ as the first God-man—through His death and resurrection has produced many grains—the many God-men; now these many grains are blended as one loaf, which is Christ's Body, His reproduction (1 Cor. 10:17). We should not preach a shallow and superficial gospel; we must preach the high gospel and announce the mystery of the gospel—Christ and the church for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose (Eph. 6:19; 5:32). This was Paul's gospel, and it should be our gospel today.

THE HIGHEST POINT OF GOD'S GOSPEL IS THAT GOD BECAME A MAN THAT MAN MAY BECOME GOD IN LIFE AND IN NATURE BUT NOT IN THE GODHEAD SO THAT, IN CHRIST, GOD WILL HAVE MANY SONS FOR HIS CORPORATE EXPRESSION.

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The Grace of God

"I consider my life of no account as if precious to myself, I order that I may finish my course and the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus to solemnly testify of the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). Paul testified of the gospel of the grace of God, and he bore this testimony by the grace of God. In the New Testament, grace is a subject of immense importance, and only two of its aspects can be mentioned here, both of which are intended to address the reductionist and simplistic definition of grace as mere "unmerited favor." When the Word became flesh, full of grace (John 1:14), was the Word full of unmerited favor? Ridiculous! When John 1:16 says that of the fullness of the incarnated God we have all received grace upon grace, are we being told about receiving unmerited favor upon unmerited favor? Absurd! When the Lord said to Paul in his affliction, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor. 12:9), was He assuring His servant that His unmerited favor was sufficient for him? Certainly not! According to the New Testament, grace is God Himself in Christ dispensed into us to be our supply and enjoyment. God is called the God of all grace (1 Pet. 5:10), Paul speaks of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (Philem. 25), and the Spirit is spoken of as the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29); thus, grace is the Triune God, not only the Triune God as He is in Himself but also the Triune God as He is dispensed into us, that is, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ with our spirit (Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23; 2 Tim. 4:22).

Furthermore, according to the wonderful revelation in 1 Corinthians 15, grace is actually the resurrected Christ living in us: "By the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace unto me did not turn out to be in vain, but, on the contrary, I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I but the grace of God which is with me" (v. 10). Once again, this grace can hardly be understood as unmerited favor. Grace is not a thing—grace is a wonderful person! "The grace that motivated the apostle and operated in him was not some matter or some thing but a living person, the resurrected Christ, the embodiment of God the Father who became the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, who dwelt in the apostle as his everything" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 10, note 2). It was this grace that enabled Paul to be a wise master builder, and it was with this grace that he blessed the church in Corinth.

The Fire Proving Each One's Work

Paul, the wise master builder, laid Christ as the unique foundation for the building of God's dwelling place (3:10-11, 16-17), and, he tells us, "Another builds upon it. But let each man take heed how he builds upon it" (v. 10). As we will see, what is at stake here is not one's eternal salvation but whether one will receive a reward or suffer loss at the judgment seat of Christ. In verse 12 Paul identifies two categories of building materials: the first category consists of gold, silver, and precious stones; the second, of wood, grass, and stubble. For now, it is sufficient to point out that the materials in the first category, being precious, are related to the Triune God experienced and ministered by us and that the materials in the second category, being worthless, are related to fallen, human, natural, earthy, and fleshly elements. At the judgment seat of Christ, the nature and character of our work will be manifested: "The work of each will become manifest; for the day will declare it, because it is revealed by fire, and the fire itself will prove each one's work, of what sort it is" (v. 13). Often religious leaders and their zealous followers care for how great or popular or successful a work is. The Lord's standard of evaluation is altogether different: He cares about "what sort it is." In His eyes a small amount of gold is immeasurably more precious than a huge pile of wood or stubble. The fire will prove everyone's work as to its sort, not as to its immensity. This fire is "the fire of the Lord's judgment (Mal. 3:2; 4:1; 2 Thes. 1:7-8; Heb. 6:8), which will cause each believer's work to be manifest and will try and test his work. All the work of wood, grass, and stubble will be unable to stand that test and will be burned" (Lee, Recovery Version, 1 Cor. 3:13, note 2).

As verses 14 and 15 indicate, there will be two kinds of results: “If anyone’s work which he has built upon the foundation remains, he will receive a reward; if anyone’s work is consumed, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.” The work that remains must be of gold, silver, and precious stones and thereby match Christ as the foundation and fit in with the holy nature of God’s temple. Whereas salvation is wholly a matter of grace through faith and, once received, eternal, the reward is based on one’s work as a believer and is related not to salvation nor to so-called degrees of blessedness in heaven but to one’s status in the millennial kingdom. Those whose works are consumed by fire will lose the reward, but they will by no means lose their salvation.

Recently, a number of books have been written about heaven and about eternal rewards in heaven. Rarely do we come across a volume that is faithful to Paul’s word in 1 Corinthians 3. Our works will be proved by fire as to what sort they are. Those whose works survive the test of fire will receive a reward in the coming kingdom; those whose works are consumed by the fire will suffer loss. This is the clear, pure word of the apostle. If we care for this word uttered from the beginning, we will be sobered by it and will seriously consider how and with what materials we are building upon Christ as the unique foundation. What is crucial is not what we say about our work but what the fire proves concerning it.

Paul’s Goal in Writing 1 Corinthians

When Paul was writing to the church in Corinth about so many precious matters related to Christ, the church, the Christian life, and the kingdom, he had a specific goal. Paul’s goal in this Epistle was to motivate the Corinthian believers who were soulish, fleshy, and fleshly to aspire to the growth in life so that they might become spiritual persons mature in life for God’s building (2:15; 3:1, 3; 14:32, 37).

First Corinthians reveals that a believer may be one of three kinds of persons. A believer may be a spiritual person, living in his spirit under the anointing of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:25; 1 Cor. 15:45; 6:17). A spiritual person is one who does not behave according to the flesh or act according to the soulish life but lives according to the spirit, that is, his spirit mingled with the Spirit of God; such a person is ruled and controlled by his spirit (2:15). A spiritual person denies the soul-life and does not live by the soul-life but allows the regenerated spirit, which is occupied and energized by the Spirit of God, to dominate his entire being. A spiritual person is dominated, governed, directed, moved, and led by his mingled spirit (5:3-5; 6:17; 2 Cor. 2:13-14).

A believer may be a soulish person, living in his soul under the direction of the soul, the natural life (1 Cor. 2:14). A soulish person is natural, one who allows the soul (including the mind, the emotion, and the will) to dominate his entire being and who lives by the soul, ignoring the spirit, not using the spirit, and even behaving as if he did not have a spirit (Jude 19). Such a person does not receive the things of the Spirit of God and is not able to know them; to such natural, soulish persons the things of the Spirit of God are foolishness (1 Cor. 1:22-23).

A believer may be a fleshy and fleshly person, being of the flesh and living in the flesh under the influence of the nature of the flesh (3:1, 3). *Fleshy* denotes being made of flesh; *fleshly* denotes being influenced by the nature of the flesh and partaking of the character of the flesh. The jealousy and strife among the Corinthian believers show that they walked according to the flesh of the fallen man and not according to the human spirit regenerated by God (vv. 3-4; 1:11-12; Gal. 5:19-21). The Lord desires that all His believers would receive grace to be spiritual persons, for only this kind of person can be transformed for and built up in the Body of Christ.

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Paul realized that, for the most part, the believers in Corinth were spiritual infants: “I, brothers, was not able to speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to fleshly, as to infants in Christ” (1 Cor. 3:1).

Although the Corinthian believers had received all the initial gifts in life and were lacking in none of them (1:7), they did not grow in life after receiving them but remained infants in Christ...The apostle here pointed out their deficiency and their need, which was to grow in life to maturity, to be full-grown (2:6; Col. 1:28). (Lee, Recovery Version, 1 Cor. 3:1, note 3)

Regarding tongue-speaking and its lesser value in comparison to prophesying, Paul wanted the believers to be full-grown in their mind, thinking, reasoning, and understanding: “Brothers, do not be children in your understanding, but in malice be babes and in your understanding be full-grown” (14:20). According to the context, an immature believer will care mainly for his own interests and spirituality, but one who is full-grown in his understanding will care for the building up of the church. Paul was burdened that the believers would become mature, spiritual persons for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ for the corporate expression of the Triune God.

In this essay a number of crucial matters revealed in 1 Corinthians have been identified, ranging from the all-inclusive Christ and the church as the Body of Christ to the mingled spirit, the highest spirituality, and the need to become spiritual persons who are mature in life for God’s building. These matters can be arranged in such a way that, in some sense at least, they form a template, a pattern, of God’s speaking as it was released through the apostles from the beginning. Today it may be that few experience and enjoy the all-inclusive Christ, but in the beginning this was not so. Today only a very small minority are committed to the truth that the unique, universal, organic Body of Christ is expressed as local churches, with one church per locality, but in the beginning it was not so. And this is the way it has been, and still is, with all the matters covered here. As we consider this, we should be reminded that the heart of our loving God is broad and rich in mercy. Our Father is ready to bless those who seek Him and honor His Word, desiring to apply it to their present situation, even if they do not have the heart to fully care for what was in the beginning. Nevertheless, in order to represent our Lord faithfully, we must testify on His behalf that if His purpose is to be fulfilled in the present age—the age of the church, the age of mystery—He needs some of His people to return to, live out in their Christian life, and practice in their church life what, according to the New Testament, was from the beginning. Whatever the situation may be among the people of God today, may all be blessed by the unveiling of the marvelous divine truths presented to us by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians. **LFC**

Notes

¹For a great deal of what follows I am deeply indebted to the ministry of Witness Lee, which I have been reading and studying for decades, absorbing and assimilating many precious points with the result that, to some extent at least, I have been constituted with the truth of the Word unveiled through his ministry. This forms the basis of my understanding of 1 Corinthians. Because the extent of influence is too extensive to cite, I wish to acknowledge my source with this brief note. Of course, the development and application of what I have learned and the use of it in this essay are my responsibility.

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