

THE NEW TESTAMENT BELIEVERS' INCORPORATION OF THE TRIUNE GOD IN THEIR BEING THE BODY OF CHRIST (2)

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*Pursue love, and desire earnestly spiritual gifts,
but especially that you may prophesy.
(1 Cor. 14:1)*

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

I feel that there is much value in the new term as it precisely expresses the mode by which the inseparability of operations among the three of the Divine Trinity occurs. When the Father acts, He does so by working in the Son by the Spirit (e.g., Gen. 1:1-3; Heb. 1:2; John 1:3; Col. 1:16; Psa. 33:6). Likewise, when the Son acts (e.g., Matt. 12:28) and when the Spirit acts (e.g., Rom. 8:9), each incorporates the operations of the other two. While it is certain that the New Testament assigns differing agency of action to each of the three of the Trinity and thereby establishes clearly the distinction between Them, we should never make the mistake that any one of the three acts separately. Rather, each incorporates the operations of the other two in His every action. In every action of God each of the three operates distinctly according to the realities that make each distinct in the Godhead, but what we may assign to the Father as His action, for example, incorporates the operations of both the Son and the Spirit. Perhaps a simple example will suffice. When God created the universe, He did so in a very particular way. While we could expect Him to have simply willed all things into existence, this is not how He created all things. Rather, He created first one thing and then another in this way: "And God said..." (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26). Both the will and the word were present, and these two point to the distinct operations of the Father and of the Word (the Son) in each single action of God. Because They mutually indwell one another, They incorporate the operations of one another when either of Them acts. It is the same with the actions of the Spirit. This inseparability of operations, which issues eternally from the mutual indwelling of the three in the

Divine Trinity, occurs by way of each incorporating the operations of the others in His actions and not by each acting independently or even successively. It is true that we can find successive actions of God throughout the New Testament, but we should understand that each action in succession is in itself an incorporation of the operations of all three; not one of these actions is to be taken as the separate work of only one of the Divine Trinity, for such an understanding goes against the very intrinsic existence of the Divine Trinity as the one God, which is sustained by the mutual indwelling of the three.

While we can almost grasp the outline of this mystery in the Divine Trinity, we are almost stumbled when we attempt to consider that the believers are likewise an incorporation of the Triune God in their life and service. But the Lord Jesus Himself guides us into this realization when we read Him saying, “In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you” (John 14:20); and, “That they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us” (17:21); and, “As the living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me” (6:57); and, “Truly, truly, I say to you, He who believes into Me, the works which I do he shall do also; and greater than these he shall do because I am going to the Father” (14:12). Here we see the believers’ mutual indwelling with the Triune God as well as their mutual living and working together as one with Him. Again, *incorporation* describes the precise way that they should live and serve as God’s New Testament believers, not independently from Him nor in reverent imitation of Him but by way of incorporating His life and operation in their living and action. This, of course, requires a very narrow understanding of the Christian life. If the Triune God is not operating within a believer’s action, then the action is not genuinely of God, regardless of what a believer may think that he or she is doing. This narrow understanding matches the Lord’s word to His disciples in John 15:5: “I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing.” This mutual indwelling and mutual working together as one by way of incorporation is the reality of the genuine Christian and church life, and such a life of incorporation annuls the merely moral, ethical, and behavioral understanding of the Christian life that characterizes much of modern Christian thought today.

Though mutual indwelling and mutual working together as one have been recognized clearly and taught forcefully (off and on) since at least the fourth century (Ayes, *Augustine* 72-92), to my knowledge no thorough study of this compound notion as found in the New Testament exists. Thus, it seemed good to me to try to tease out the many instances of incorporation from the text of the New Testament, particularly from the Gospel of John, Acts, and the Epistles. This I have done in a series of eleven articles in this journal, beginning in 2004. The first two articles dealt with the incorporation of the operations of the Triune God in Himself and with His believers in the Gospel of John. My point in these two articles was to show that John’s Gospel is not simply concerning the incarnate God but more precisely concerning the incarnate incorporate God. All that Christ does in the Gospel of John He does by incorporating the Father, and He is quite forceful in making that clear throughout John’s narrative. But in addition to this, the Lord makes it clear that the believers are to enter into a similar kind of living and serving through His eventual coming to them in the actions of the Spirit of reality. Thus, the Johannine Jesus serves as both the bridge and model for the believers’ incorporation of the Triune God in their Christian and church life. He is not merely an exemplar, though indeed through His living as narrated by John He models what it means to incorporate God in a human life, but through His own indwelling of the believers through His Spirit He becomes the organic bridge into such an incorporate living.

Of course, it is in Acts and the Epistles that we would expect this bridge and model

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of incorporation to be fully developed, and thus, I turned my attention there to see what could be found. In nine articles I examined in sequence the incorporation of the Triune God first by Christ (85 instances, covered in one article), then by the Spirit (61 instances, covered in two articles), then by the believers (368 instances, most covered in six articles; the others to be covered in this final article). Over 70% of all the textual instances of incorporation in Acts and the Epistles relate to the believers, and this fact in itself is a quite telling indication that the writers of the New Testament envisioned the Christian life not as a mere ethical life but as a life that incorporates the operations of God in all that the believers are and do. Among the instances of incorporation by the believers, there emerges a subset related particularly to the character and service of the apostles (115 instances), and these instances clearly indicate that in their function to establish and build up the churches of God the apostles rely not on their natural constitution and ability but on the operations of the Triune God within them. I devoted two of my last six articles to this. These instances of incorporation by the New Testament apostles are in stark contrast to the many Christian ministries today that rely on the charm and influence of naturally gifted persons. In the next three articles in this series I focused on the incorporation of the Triune God by the believers generally in their full salvation, in their virtues, walk, and practical service, and in their spiritual functions. Again, the overriding impression that we are left with after examining all these instances is that the Christian life is not something that believers live out by their own natural effort and ability. Rather, it is a living that incorporates the operations of the Triune God within them; that is, it is a living out of the God who operates in them. Thus, it is in every way the continuation of the Son's incorporation of God in His own human living on the earth.

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

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

is working within them. His working within, His divine operation, effects both the believers' inward willing and inward acting (here Paul uses the verb *energeō* a second time in this verse) for them to work forth their salvation to its ultimate goal of glory, which is God's good pleasure (Heb. 2:10). Thus, the believers work forth their salvation by incorporating God's operation within them. While it is certainly their endeavor, it is not merely their endeavor, for the endeavor incorporates the God who operates within them.

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

In the first ten articles in this series, I focused on the "personal" aspect of incorporation, showing, for example, how Christ incorporates the Father, how the Spirit incorporates the Son, or how the believers incorporate the Triune God. I have deliberately adjusted the viewfinder of my readers to put the Son in distinct focus in one scriptural instance and the Spirit in distinct focus in another and the believers in distinct focus in yet another. Of course, my intention in this was to show in every instance that while the subject of the focus is distinct, there is a necessary incorporation of operations that actually defines the whole reality of each one in focus. Thus, while we can distinguish the Son in His actions, we should understand that He is no Son at all without the Father or apart from the Father, that He incorporates the Father in all that He is and does. The same is true for the Father and for the Spirit and for the New Testament believers in their most intrinsic existence. Thus, while I have focused on the distinct activities of the Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the believers, the full reality of each action is that there is one God in operation or, with respect to the believers, there is one Body of Christ in operation. Perhaps ironically, it may be easier to appreciate that there is one God in operation in every distinct action of the Father, the Son, or the Spirit than to appreciate that there is one Body of Christ in operation in every distinct action of the individual believers. But this seems to be the message of the apostles concerning the believers' life and service at its deepest level. I am convinced that the personal instances of incorporation that I have examined in my first ten articles are valid and genuine. But in a real sense it is easy to take the slant as the only true perspective. It is certainly not wrong to say that God desires all human beings to be holy, spiritual, and ultimately glorious. But it is also certainly not right to say that this is all that He desires. In Himself He is an incorporation, and all that He does He does by way of incorporation. Likewise, He has long intended that human beings would be an incorporation and that they would do all things by way of incorporation. He has had a corporate reality in mind for humankind since the very beginning: "And God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created

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them" (Gen. 1:27). Though the fall has frustrated His intention temporarily and even damaged human beings to the extent that their individualism is now the norm, through His economy He is recovering His chosen people through regeneration and transformation back to His original intention that they would be in His very image. He is an incorporation in Himself, and they will be an incorporation in Him through His salvation. The fullest manifestation of this incorporation is not in the individual Christian lives of His many believers (though each transformed believer is without doubt a wonderful testimony of His incorporate operation in him or her) but in the corporate reality of the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (Eph. 1:23).

A part from the self-evident semantic truth that the Body of Christ is an incorporation of Christ, there are clear passages in the New Testament that relay this fact with explicit reference to the operations of the Triune God. In my previous article I examined passages in Acts and the Epistles that show (1) that the Body of Christ relies on the operations of the Triune God for its coming into existence (Eph. 2:10, 15-16; Acts 20:28), (2) that it takes the Spirit as its essence (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:3-4), (3) that its organic building up is out from Christ as its Head (Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:15-16), and (4) that Christ is all members of the Body and in all the members of the Body (Col. 3:11; 1 Cor. 12:12; 6:15, 17). These are the real operations of the Triune God to make the church the Body of Christ in reality. Unlike the understanding of many today, Paul's understanding of the Body of Christ is far from metaphorical. If anything, he uses our human bodies as the metaphor for the reality that he not only saw but also lived in. What makes the church as the Body of Christ a reality is not simply the lofty view that was communicated to Paul in spirit; he did not simply receive a special metaphorical view of the church and pass it on to the churches. Rather, there is a real operation of the Triune God at work within and among the New Testament believers to genuinely make them the Body of Christ. When the believers, who are indwelt by the Triune God in their spirit, live out His operation within, that is, when they incorporate His operation in all that they do, they are all brought into function according to that operation to be the Body and to build the Body. In this last article I will examine some further portions that show this incorporation by the believers as the Body of Christ.

As I have done in all these articles, I will follow a catalog-and-commentary format in presenting the instances of the believers' incorporation of the Triune God in their being the Body of Christ. For each aspect of this topic I will list the scriptural passages that support the aspect, and then I will offer commentary on the passages that will, I hope, make the significance clear. Also, as I have done in my previous articles, I should note at the outset that I am not claiming that the particular aspects of my topic that I will present below are definitive. The challenge that has accompanied this study all along has been to find some sort of believable logical order to the many instances of incorporation that I have ascertained. To be honest, it was a much easier challenge when I focused on the incorporation of the Triune God in Himself, though even then I could not easily be excused of forming ad hoc categories. When my attention turned to the believers' incorporation of the Triune God, the instances could be clustered safely, I felt, into large bundles, like the believers' participation in God's full salvation, or their Christian walk, or their renewed virtues, etc. But within each bundle I found the further discrimination of sub-categories less safe and less satisfying, and I lamented that there ever was a William of Ockham, whose frequent admonitions finally inspired someone to say, *Pluralitas non est ponenda sine necessitate* ("Plurality should not be posited without necessity"). But, I contend, there *was* necessity. Presenting scores of scriptural passages in each bundle without some sort of organization among them would have been even less satisfying and probably less safe. So, for each bundle I reluctantly offered categories and trusted the kindness and largeness of my readers' hearts to pay attention less to the tenuousness of the categories and more to the simple evidence of incorporation. I certainly was not hoping to establish or even suggest a systematic theology of incorporation, but

I had to hazard some sort of organization for all the instances that I found. I approach this article with the same trepidation, with the same apology, and with the same trust in my readers.

By the Many Members as the One Body of Christ

Of course, the church is composed of the many believers in Christ. But as the Body of Christ the church is not simply a collection of many believers, as, let's say, a club is a collection of its many members. Rather, there is a divine operation within all the believers that makes them as the many the one Body of Christ. In the following passages Paul indicates that the believers, though many, incorporate Christ as His Body through God's operation within them:

So we who are many are one Body in Christ, and individually members one of another. (Rom. 12:5)

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

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the fellowship of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the fellowship of the body of Christ? Seeing that there is one bread, we who are many are one Body; for we all partake of the one bread. (1 Cor. 10:16-17)

Paul tells the saints in Rome that the many believers are one Body in Christ. In using his signature phrase *in Christ*, he indicates that the many being one Body is not something in the natural realm but something divine and mystical. The reality of the one Body relies on the common union with Christ that all believers share. Through this union all the believers enjoy the one life of Christ, and this makes them His one Body as well as organic members one of another (Lee, Recovery Version, Rom. 12:5, note 1).

We should pause for a moment and consider the full impact of this phrase *in Christ*. As we have seen throughout this series of articles on incorporation, being in Christ implies a few important notions. First, there is the simple notion of location, that is, of Him incorporating all His believers in Himself and thereby bringing them into the same obtainments and attainments that He has achieved. Thus, Paul declares that the believers died with Him (Rom. 6:3, 8; Col. 2:20), that they were raised with Him (Eph. 2:6; Col. 2:12; 3:1), and that they are seated in the heavenlies with Him (Eph. 2:6). These realities obtain because the believers have been placed into Christ. But also in the phrase *in Christ* is the additional notion of Christ living forth through the believers, which Paul sometimes refers to when he uses the phrase. For example, he says that he speaks in Christ (2 Cor. 2:17), that his bonds are in Christ (Phil. 1:13), that the believers' hearts and even thoughts are in Christ (4:7), and that they can live godly in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:12). In other places he uses the pronominal form of his signature phrase to say that he is even weak in Him (2 Cor. 13:4) and that the believers should have their entire Christian walk in Him (Col. 2:6). Paul's own earnest desire is that in everything he does he would be found in Him (Phil. 3:9), and he declares that he is able to do all things in Him (4:13). These instances of the phrases *in Christ* and *in Him* do not refer merely to the believers' being mystically located in Christ, though that is at the base; rather, there is the further notion of the operation of Christ within the believers through which they are able to do the various things mentioned in these instances. Thus, because the believers are located in Christ by His incorporation of them, they enjoy His operation within and live His operation forth for their incorporation of Him. This double meaning in Paul's phrase is akin, and I should say probably deliberately reflective of, the Lord's words in John 15:4: "Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide

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in Me.” *In Christ* mimics *abide in Me*, but it also bears in its meaning the whole rest of the Lord’s words here. The believers’ being in Christ brings with it His being in them, with all its attendant benefits. These benefits, as the Lord goes on to say, are the fruit that the believers as His branches bear. It is the branches that bear the fruit, but they cannot do so unless they remain in the vine. Thus, what comes forth from them as fruit derives from the double reality of the vine incorporating them and, in consequence, of them incorporating the vine. The believers have been mystically placed in Christ by God (1 Cor. 1:30), and through this reality Christ is now able, insofar as He is allowed by them, to live and operate in them. They abide in Him, and He abides in them. But it is His abiding in and through them that produces the “fruit,” for it is through their incorporation of His living and operating within that they bring forth their genuine Christian life and service.

Thus, when Paul says that in Christ the many believers are one Body and additionally members of one another, it seems that he is referring not just to the locative sense of the phrase but even more to the effective sense, if I may call it such. Certainly the many believers are one Body insofar as they are mystically located in Christ. But in the context of Romans 12, which deals with the very practical church life of the believers, the one Body is something that the believers can and should experience in their living. Thus, the effect of the one Body is at issue, not simply the mystical reality of it, and for this effect to be real in the experience of the many believers, that is, for the oneness of the Body of Christ to be lived out among the many believers, the many believers must incorporate the one Christ who lives within them, taking Him as their one life, their one living, and their one expression. Through their incorporation of Christ, the many believers make the mystical reality of the one Body their practical experience and even daily living. Likewise, through their incorporation of Christ the many believers are able to experience in their daily living the mystical reality that they are members of one another. According to their natural (and fallen) disposition, all the believers are individualistic and do not much need nor much care for others. But in Christ they all have entered into a new mystical reality where they are defined by their relationship to the other members of Christ’s Body. And more significantly, through their living out of Christ within them, they become dependent on the other members experientially for their true function as Christ’s believers, that is, to care for and build up the other members of His Body in love (Eph. 4:16).

In 1 Corinthians 12:12 there is another reference to many believers being one Body through their incorporation of Christ. In this instance the incorporation is not stated directly as in Romans 12:5, but Paul implies it by identifying the one Body and its many members with Christ Himself. For Christ to be identified with the many members of His Body implies that the many members make Christ manifest in their living. This they do, not through pious emulation but through incorporation of His moment-by-moment operation within them. As Paul considers our physical human body, he points out that the many members have a dual identity—what they are individually and what they are as one body. But what is primary here is what they are as one body, and in that identity the many members live out the body, not just what they are as individual members. Thus, in this sense the many members incorporate the whole body. Applied to the reality that exists between Christ and His many believers, the many believers incorporate the whole Christ that is expressed as His Body. In the Bible there are a number of models that describe the relationship between God and His people (house, vine, kingdom, priesthood, etc.). Some of these are metaphorical (e.g., house, vine), and some are real in themselves (e.g., kingdom, priesthood). But none of them is so intimate to Christ as the reality of the many believers being His very corporate Body. He is Christ through each one of them, and He identifies with each one of them as any of us identifies with our fingers or our arms or our shoulders. When our fingers move, they move for the whole body and particularly for the head and out from the head. In this sense the fingers incorporate the head. So also is the Christ, as Paul says.

But this can be true only when the believers as the members of Christ actually incorporate Christ in their living and moving; it cannot be true when they live in their natural fallen condition or according to their own concept and will or even by pious moral and ethical religious principles, separate from Christ. Through His many members Christ is again on the earth physically, but this time universally not just locally, this time into eternity not just for three decades. The many members, whom we should identify as Christ Himself, live Him forth for all time and in all places through their incorporation of Him as His Body.

The third passage above, 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, also refers to the many believers being the one Body, but this time there is no explicit textual connection between the Body and Christ. That being the case, it may not be appropriate to include this in my collection of instances of incorporation. But this portion can survive as yet another instance once we understand the word *Body* as a direct, though abbreviated, reference to the Body of Christ. In verse 16 Paul mentions the physical “body of Christ,” but in verse 17 the word *Body* does not refer to that, since the Body here is identified as the “we who are many.” Without rehearsing the logic for incorporation that was applied to 1 Corinthians 12:12, we can follow the same line of reasoning to say that the many are the one Body of Christ through their incorporation of Him in their living and serving together.

Where there may be somewhat more of an indication of incorporation is in the fellowship that is mentioned in verse 16. Paul says that the elements of the Lord’s table, the cup and the bread, are the believers’ fellowship with Christ’s own blood and body. Of course, this touches the very thorny issue concerning the intrinsic significance of the elements—transubstantial, consubstantial, communal, or commemorative—but for the sake of my argument, we need not settle the issue here. One thing is for sure: when the believers partake of the elements, they enter into some sort of fellowship not only with one another, as the physical action of eating and drinking would clearly demonstrate, but more significantly with Christ, as the believers’ prayers, praises, and singing in the table meeting would clearly lead to. Thus, even according to the mildest view of the intrinsic significance of the elements, the commemorative view, there is the genuine potential for the believers to partake of Christ spiritually and to enter into a real communion, a real fellowship, with Him. How that fellowship is understood to be accomplished varies among the differing traditions in the Christian church, but regardless of how one understands it, it happens nonetheless, thankfully. Through this fellowship with Christ, the many believers are made His one Body, and through this fellowship with one another, they are made members one of another. I do not mean to say that it is only during their participation in the elements of the Lord’s table that the many believers are both the Body of Christ and members one of another, but it is the case that they are certainly such at that time in the clearest of ways. To my mind, the participation in the elements is first a clear and actual instance of the fellowship that makes the many the one Body (regardless of the intrinsic significance of the elements), but it is also at the same time the believers’ testimony of that reality in all other times, a remembrance of their past week and an aspiration for their week to come. This fellowship—past, present, and future—is what makes the many believers the one Body because the many believers incorporate the Christ in whom they have this fellowship. Thus, the Lord’s table is not trivial at all, especially insofar as it relates to the reality that the many believers are the one Body of Christ. It is lamentable that this view of the Lord’s table has been so often neglected by Christians. For many believers the Lord’s table, regardless of the tradition in understanding it that they follow, is an individual experience, and many do not perceive the greater significance that through participation in the bread and the cup they enter into a spiritual fellowship with Christ and with one another and that this fellowship causes the many to be one Body. By that fellowship, both in the moment of the Lord’s table and as a testimony to all other times, the many believers incorporate Christ to be His one Body.

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INCORPORATE.

In Their Spiritual Functions for the Body of Christ

In the previous article as well as in the foregoing section of this article, the portions in the Epistles that I have examined relate mainly to what we might call the constitution of the Body of Christ. In the previous article we saw that God in Christ operated to bring the one Body of Christ into existence (Eph. 2:10, 15-16). Further, by dwelling in the regenerated spirits of all the believers, God the Spirit becomes the very one essence of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:3-4), bearing the reality of Christ to all the believers to make them the genuine members of His Body. Hence, all things of the Body are out from Christ as the Head (Eph. 4:15-16; Col. 2:19); thus, the many members incorporate Him even in simply being His Body. In this way, we can say that Christ is all the members of His Body and in all the members of His Body (Col. 3:11). Then, in the foregoing section of this article we saw how the many individual believers become the one Body of Christ and members one of another through their incorporation of the fellowship with Christ that they enjoy daily and testify to regularly in the Lord's table meeting. These operations of the Triune God, which the believers incorporate through His indwelling within them, serve mainly to make the church what it is intrinsically, that is, the Body of Christ. But the full revelation concerning the Body of Christ in the Epistles also includes the dynamic and ongoing functioning by the many members to maintain and even build up the Body. Just as the believers become the Body not through their own natural endeavor or by their natural constitution but through the operations of the Triune God within them, so also they function in an ongoing way to maintain the reality of the Body and to cause the Body to grow not through their own endeavor or by their own constitution but through the operations of the Triune God whom they incorporate. In the remaining portions in this article we will examine the precise way in which the believers incorporate the Triune God for their function to maintain and build up Christ's Body.

In my previous article in this series I considered in detail Ephesians 4:16, which presents a comprehensive view of how the Body builds itself up through the incorporation of the operations of the Triune God. I will not repeat those details here, but it may be worthwhile to summarize the main points that I developed there. The verse reads,

Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.

We should note that the primary notion in this verse is the building up of the Body of Christ ("unto the building up of itself in love"). This building is accomplished by the functioning of the Body itself ("all the Body...causes the growth of the Body"). The Body accomplishes this through the functioning of its many members, which fall into two classes ("through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part"). But this action of the Body is not something merely of the Body itself but rather one that incorporates the operation of Christ ("out from whom," that is, "the Head, Christ," v. 15). What is out from Christ the Head becomes what is through every joint and through each one part. Thus, all the Body incorporates Christ the Head through His many members. Further, in mentioning "the rich supply," Paul is probably alluding to the operation of the Spirit since in other contexts where he uses this word and its cognate verb form he refers to the operation of the Spirit (Gal. 3:5; Phil. 1:19). Hence, what is out from Christ the Head is the Spirit as the rich supply, which operates both in the gifted ones as joints and in the common members as the many other parts. Finally, through this highly incorporated action—Christ in the Spirit through the members—all the Body is finely joined together and knit together continually (as the Greek present participles indicate), which are the condition and the means by which "all the Body...causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love."

This view is indeed comprehensive and includes in detail all the agents (Christ, the Spirit, the Body, the joints, and the many other parts) and all the operations (joining, knitting, supplying, operating, causing growth, and building up) needed for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ. Yet, though the details are many, the practicality of the details is obscure. How do the gifted ones as the joints practically provide the Spirit as the rich supply, even to the extent that they can be called the joints of the rich supply? How do the common believers as the many parts practically function by the inner operation of God according to their varying measures? How do some members of the Body practically join the Body together? How do some practically knit the Body together? How do these actions practically cause the growth of the Body? How does the growth of the Body practically result in the building up of the Body in love? There can be no higher and no more detailed view of the building up of the Body of Christ through the incorporation of the Triune God than what we find in Ephesians 4:16, and certainly when the building up of the Body of Christ genuinely occurs, it occurs according to all the incorporate realities expressed in this one divine and mystical relative clause. But just as certainly the believers are left to wonder how to practically live out all these realities in their church life and how to practically enter into the building up of the church as the Body of Christ.

Paul does not offer the practicality of this view in Ephesians. Perhaps because he had spent so much time in the church in Ephesus, there was no need to. Perhaps he felt that among those whom he had served in so practical a way for so long a time he needed to offer the highest view to what they had observed in him so that they would, in turn, appreciate the significance of the practical matters of the proper church life. There is no doubt that Paul never shrank back from delivering the highest perspective of God's economy to the saints (Acts 20:27). But neither did he shrink back from delivering the practical carrying out of this high view of the building up of the Body. This he did in 1 Corinthians 12 through 14.

By Speaking

First Corinthians 12—14 forms a large unified response to the problems that were caused by the exercise of spiritual gifts in the church in Corinth. Of course, in that the gifts are addressed, at issue is really the proper functioning of the believers in the church. Paul's response does not discourage the spiritual gifts, but it does clearly encourage their proper exercise, which, as the three chapters together make clear, depends on a proper realization, appreciation, and aspiration for the church as the Body of Christ. In chapter 12, as we have seen above, he speaks extensively concerning the Body. In particular, he addresses the constitution of the Body (vv. 12-13), the indispensability of the members of the Body (vv. 14-22), the blending together of the members of the Body (vv. 23-27), and the placing of the members as gifts in and for the Body (vv. 28-31) (Lee, Recovery Version, outline). In chapter 13 he shows the most excellent way for the many members of the Body to function according to their spiritual gifts (12:31), which is the way of love for all the members of the Body. Then, in chapter 14, in an almost jarring transition, he shows how to practically express that love and how to practically exercise the gifts in the most proper way, that is, for the building up of the church through prophesying (v. 1). The practicality of prophesying is so stark that it can be, and actually has been, dismissed as a triviality of worship practice. But "love, as in 8:1 ['love builds up'], is expressed in the language of 'building up' the church ([14:]3-5, 12, 17, 26)" (Fee 214), and the practicality of that building up is by prophesying in the church meetings. It borders on irony that for many Christians today Paul's presentation of the building up of the Body of Christ in Ephesians 4 is so lofty as to be dismissed as impractical and unattainable while his presentation of the same matter in 1 Corinthians 14 is so practical as to be ignored as trivial and dispensable. In the end, sadly, for many Christians there is no building up of the church and therefore no practicality of love.

THERE IS NO HIGHER AND MORE DETAILED VIEW OF THE BUILDING UP OF THE BODY OF CHRIST THROUGH THE INCORPORATION OF THE TRIUNE GOD THAN IN EPHESIANS 4:16. BUT THE BELIEVERS ARE LEFT TO WONDER HOW TO LIVE OUT ALL THESE REALITIES IN THEIR CHURCH LIFE.

THE ADJECTIVE
SPIRITUAL ALWAYS
REFERS DIRECTLY
TO THE SPIRIT
AND POINTS TO
THE BELIEVERS'
INCORPORATION OF
THE SPIRIT'S OPERATION
IN THE EXERCISING OF
THEIR GIFTS FOR THE
BUILDING UP OF
THE CHURCH AS THE
BODY OF CHRIST.

With this overview of 1 Corinthians 12 through 14 in mind, we can now consider the particular passages in these chapters that show the believers' incorporation of the operations of the Triune God insofar as it relates to the practical building up of the Body of Christ.

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. (1 Cor. 12:1)

Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking in the Spirit of God says, Jesus is accursed; and no one can say, Jesus is Lord! except in the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 12:3)

But there are distinctions of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are distinctions of ministries, yet the same Lord; and there are distinctions of operations, but the same God, who operates all things in all. (1 Cor. 12:4-6)

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for what is profitable. For to one through the Spirit a word of wisdom is given, and to another a word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit; to a different one faith in the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing in the one Spirit, and to another operations of works of power, and to another prophecy, and to another discerning of spirits; to a different one various kinds of tongues, and to another interpretation of tongues. But the one and the same Spirit operates all these things, distributing to each one respectively even as He purposes. (1 Cor. 12:7-11)

Pursue love, and desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. (1 Cor. 14:1)

But if all prophesy and some unbeliever or unlearned person enters, he is convicted by all, he is examined by all; the secrets of his heart become manifest; and so falling on his face, he will worship God, declaring that indeed God is among you. (1 Cor. 14:24-25)

And the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for God is not a God of confusion but of peace. (1 Cor. 14:32-33)

In 1 Corinthians 12:1 Paul turns to the topic of “the spirituals,” as the Greek text reads literally. What the Greek plural adjective refers to exactly is open to debate since the genitive form here is ambiguous as to gender, and thus, either spiritual persons or spiritual things (i.e., gifts) could be intended. As Fee points out, there are good indicators elsewhere in 1 Corinthians for either view (152). In 2:15; 3:1; and especially 14:37, in using the masculine form of the adjective, Paul speaks explicitly of spiritual persons, while in 14:1, in using the neuter form, he refers to spiritual gifts. Probably the latter is to be preferred in view of the whole argument in chapters 12 through 14. But Fee also suggests that the adjective in 12:1 be translated “the things of the Spirit,” which would refer primarily to manifestations/gifts from the perspective of the Spirit's endowment; at the same time, the expression also points toward those who are so endowed” (153). Thus, he comprehends both possible views while additionally maintaining the reference to the Spirit Himself. It is important to note that in the New Testament the Greek adjective πνευματικός (*pneumatikos*, from Πνεῦμα, *Pneuma*) “functions primarily as an adjective for the Spirit, referring to *that which belongs to, or pertains to, the Spirit*” (29). It never has the notions commonly associated with our English word *spiritual*, such as “religious” or “nonmaterial” (32). Thus, in speaking of “the spirituals” in 12:1, Paul is making a direct reference to the Spirit Himself, who is in operation in the gifts that are properly exercised in the church by the believers. Fee often makes his point clear by capitalizing the adjective (e.g., “Spiritual gifts,” 153) in his commentary on these three chapters. I will do the same in my comments below on these three chapters. That this adjective always refers directly to the Spirit points to the believers' incorporation of the Spirit's operation in the exercising of their gifts for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ. *Now concerning spiritual gifts,*

as a kind of heading over this section of 1 Corinthians, serves to frame these three chapters as commentary on the Spirit's operation in the believers for the church. In fact, Fee points out that these three chapters are "the single largest block of Spirit material in the Pauline corpus" (146), and the fact that so much Spirit material is presented in a section on the believers' exercise of the gifts in the church indicates how important the Spirit's operation is for the believers' practical functioning in the church as Christ's Body.

In verse 3 Paul goes on to offer the general characteristics of those exercising the proper spiritual gifts; that is, they are "speaking in the Spirit of God" and declaring Jesus as Lord "in the Holy Spirit." There are three important characteristics here. First, the gifts that are needed are mainly speaking gifts, as is clear in verses 7 through 11 later and throughout chapter 14. Second, these speaking gifts incorporate the operation of the Spirit in the believers. For the believers to speak "in the Spirit of God" and to declare things "in the Holy Spirit" requires that the Spirit, who indwells them, operate in their speaking and declaring. It is akin to what we find in John 14:10, the archetypal verse on incorporation: "The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works." In the church the words that the believers speak, they should not speak from themselves, but the Spirit who dwells in them should do His works and fill their speaking with His operation. This is the kind of speaking that genuinely makes the major building gifts Spiritual. Only speaking that incorporates the operation of the Spirit can render the functioning of the believers profitable for the building up of the Body in love. Third, the quality test of these speaking gifts is that Jesus is manifested as Lord. "This—to speak 'Jesus is Lord!'—is the main function of all the spiritual gifts" (Lee, Recovery Version, 1 Cor. 12:3, note 1). Much is implied in this simple declaration, as Fee points out:

Paul's point, of course, is that just as formerly they had been "led about and carried away" to mute idols, so now the one who is indwelt by the Spirit of the living God is led to the ultimate Christian confession: "Jesus (the crucified One) is (by his resurrection) Lord (of all the universe)." As in 2:10-13, only one who has the Spirit can truly make such a confession, because only the Spirit can reveal its reality. (157)

As He always does, the Spirit declares the things of the Son (John 16:13), and when the believers properly exercise their Spiritual gifts, they incorporate the Spirit's operation within them to also declare the things of the Son. In Greek this simple declaration is just two words Κύριος Ἰησοῦς (*Kyrios Iēsous*), but they encompass the bedrock faith of the Christian church in crystal form, as Fee implies. The phrase is notoriously difficult to render properly in translation. Literally, it reads, "Lord Jesus," but given the nominative form of the two nouns, the phrase is not vocative (as if calling out to Him), as the literal English translation may suggest, but most probably declaratory. Yet in this declaration what is being predicated is *Lord*, not *Jesus*, and this is very difficult to bring across properly in translation. "The Lord is Jesus" fails to make much sense in English, and thus, almost all English versions are forced to opt for the less than fully accurate "Jesus is Lord." *Lord* refers at once both to the Lord of all the universe, as Fee mentions, and, more significantly, to Jehovah in the Old Testament, which is rendered Κύριος (*Kyrios*) in the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. Thus, to declare that *Kyrios* is Jesus is to declare Jehovah's incarnation as well as human living in the person of the Son. But to all who make this declaration the historical facts are well-known that Jesus was killed by Rome with Jerusalem; thus, His crucifixion is implied. That He is being declared *Kyrios* in the churches by the believers indicates first that He is no longer dead but lives on, which points strongly to His resurrection from the dead, then that He has obtained the lordship over all, which depends on His ascension to the throne of His Father (Rev. 3:21). In the context of the church, where the declaration is made, His headship is affirmed, for what He is as Lord to the whole universe generally He is as Head to the church, His Body, particularly

THE WORDS THAT THE BELIEVERS SPEAK, THEY SHOULD NOT SPEAK FROM THEMSELVES, BUT THE SPIRIT WHO DWELLS IN THEM SHOULD DO HIS WORKS AND FILL THEIR SPEAKING WITH HIS OPERATION. THIS KIND OF SPEAKING GENUINELY MAKES THE MAJOR BUILDING GIFTS SPIRITUAL.

(Eph. 1:22-23). Even the future judgment, as the procession to eternity, is implied in this declaration, for *Kyrios* not only indicates that Jesus rules and reigns today but also implies that Jesus is the One to whom we all will give account in the future (John 5:22, 27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8).

Elsewhere Paul offers this same simple phrase as the declaration of what the believers should hold in their hearts for their salvation: “That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9). The confession is the same difficult Greek phrase *Κύριος Ἰησοῦς* (*Kyrios Iēsous*, here accusative as the direct object of *confess*): “The Lord is Jesus.” Again, the difficulty of the original Greek has to be smoothed out in translation as “Jesus as Lord.” But all the same implications concerning the faith obtain, and for this reason Paul says that this declaration, reflecting what is understood and believed in the heart, saves those who confess it. J. N. D. Kelly calls this declaration the briefest one-clause Christology in the New Testament (14) and possibly one of the few phrases that can be said to function as “creed, confession or formula of faith” in the New Testament (23).

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This confession that first saves the believers later becomes the template for all the speaking gifts exercised by the believers for the building up of the church as Christ’s Body. Speaking in the churches in a way that bears forth and unpacks this declaration builds up the believers as well as the Body of Christ. What we see here is analogous to what we read in Matthew 16:16-18. First, Peter confesses what he believes in his heart concerning who Christ is (“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”); then, Christ indicates that He will use this confession, with all the revelation that it encompasses, to build His church (“Upon this rock I will build My church”). The simple declaration *Kyrios Iēsous*, however we may translate it, becomes the rock upon which the church as Christ’s Body is built through the exercise of the believers’ Spiritual gifts by speaking. Yet according to His own words, Christ Himself builds His church, and thus, we must understand that He does so through the exercise of the believers’ Spiritual gifts. When they exercise the proper gifts through their speaking in the church, the believers incorporate Christ in His operation in the Spirit to build the church as His Body.

While 1 Corinthians 12:3 presents the unitary principle that characterizes all the Spiritual gifts for the building up of the Body, verses 4 through 6 show that the actual exercise of those gifts by the believers is diverse. The contrast between this unity and this diversity is signaled by the initial sentence conjunction *but* in verse 4 (Alford 2: 577; Lee, Recovery Version, note 1). The most striking point in these three verses is that the diversity among the gifts is something that originates from the Triune God (Fee 159, 161); it is not something of the believers. The diversity is of the same Spirit, the same Lord, the same God, who operates in each believer when he or she exercises a Spiritual gift. This is not simply theological framing for all that follows (*pace* Fee 161). Rather, this verse seems to indicate how profound and how important the variety among, as well as the exercise of, the gifts is. The Triune God, in all His distinct subsistences, is invested in the believers’ exercise of the Spiritual gifts. This revelation by Paul serves to sober the believers and to encourage them not only to respect the exercise of the gifts by others but also to treasure their own exercise of the gifts according to this high revelation. What is needed in the church is not the exercise of the natural gifts of the believers—these do not profit or build up—but the exercise of the Spiritual gifts that manifest the operations of the Triune God.

In the exercise of every Spiritual gift, the operation of all three of the Divine Trinity is involved. At the same moment, every Spiritual gift is at once a gift, a service or ministry, and an effectual operation, and each of these facets is related to the operation of each of the Divine Trinity, respectively. Witness Lee offers this comment:

The gifts are by the Spirit; the ministries, the services, are initiated by the Lord and are for the Lord; and the operations are of God. Here the Triune God is involved in these three matters—the gifts, the ministries, and the operations. The gifts by the Spirit are to carry out the ministries for the Lord, and in the ministries for the Lord are manifested the operations of the gifts, produced by God’s operating, God’s working. This is the Triune God moving in the believers for the accomplishing of His eternal purpose to build up the church, the Body of Christ, for the expression of God. (Recovery Version, v. 6, note 2)

These verses offer perhaps one of the clearest expressions of the believers’ incorporation of the operations of the Triune God in all the New Testament, and here this incorporation is directed at the building up of the Body of Christ. Paul says that the gifts that the believers exercise are of the same Spirit, which is in line with the whole theme of these three chapters, the Spiritual gifts. Yet in the exercise of these Spiritual gifts, at the same time the same Lord functions within the believers for the carrying out of the ministries or services that bring about the goal of these gifts. Elsewhere Paul refers to this as what the believers do “unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12), and this is the latent notion here. But further, in the exercise of the Spiritual gifts for the ministries of the Lord, the same God is operating (or, inwardly working, as the Greek participle ἐνεργῶν [*energōn*] can literally be translated) to render the Spiritual gifts their effectual results (as the Greek word for operations can also be translated—ἐνεργήματα, *energēmata*). Thus, the Spiritual gifts are the ministries of the Lord as well as the operating effectual results of and from God. God “operates all things in all,” meaning that He operates in all the ministries of the Lord and all the Spiritual gifts in all the believers in the church (Fee 162). This is intense incorporation—God the Father as source operating in Christ the Lord as Executor through the Spirit as gifts in all the believers as building members.

Like his presentation of the building up of the Body in Ephesians 4:16, Paul’s revelation of what happens intrinsically in the believers’ exercise of the Spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 is lofty and almost abstract. It is certainly something that has to be revealed in spirit and apprehended by faith (cf. Eph. 3:5; Col. 1:26; 1 Tim. 1:4). When I stand up in the meetings of the church, large or small, and exercise one of the speaking gifts, which we will examine below, it is easy to get carried away with what I am doing and to naturally rely on my native capabilities, skills, schemes, and habits. It is not so easy to see that the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—intends to operate in my functioning to make it distinctly Spiritual, Lordly, and even Godly, and it is not so easy to enter into that incorporation experientially. But I must, and all the believers must, if indeed the actual building up of the church as the Body of Christ is to take place. As lofty as it is and as abstract as it may seem, the incorporation of the operations of the Triune God in the believers’ exercise of the Spiritual gifts can be experienced through the revelation in these verses mixed with the faith that the believers possess.

Paul begins to touch the practicality of this incorporation in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11. Moving from the unitary principle of all the gifts in verse 3 and the diversity of the triune operations in all the gifts in verses 4 through 6, he narrows his focus to the actual and practical functions of “each one,” “another,” and “a different one” in these verses. Three points regarding the divine incorporation should be made. First, what Paul has so deeply and fully described in verses 4 through 6 he now succinctly calls “the manifestation of the Spirit.” The genitive here is probably not objective (the *genitivus objectivus*), indicating that the Spirit is what is manifested, but subjective (the *genitivus subjectivus*), indicating that the Spirit is the One who is manifesting something. Alford glosses it as “the *manifestation by which the Spirit acts* (gen. subj.); it is a general term including χάρισματᾶ [‘gifts’], διακονίαι [‘ministries’], and ἐνεργήματα [‘operations’]” (2: 578). What the Spirit manifests are the simultaneous operations of all three of the Divine Trinity as, at once, gifts, ministries, and operations. While in

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verses 4 through 6 Paul mentions each of the three of the Divine Trinity explicitly and distinctly, in verses 7 through 11 he mentions only the Spirit not because the Spirit's work is separate from that of the Lord and God but because in application for the believers' practical function in the Body the Spirit incorporates all three of the Divine Trinity. This is according to His existence in the Godhead and in His function in God's economy as the Spirit of reality (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 5:6).

Second, what the Spirit manifests through the believers' exercise of the proper Spiritual gifts is "for what is profitable." In 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 Paul does not spell out what exactly is profitable, but throughout his letter to the Corinthians what is profitable is a recurring standard in all his considerations and exhortations (6:12; 7:35; 10:23-24; 12:7; 13:3; 14:6; 15:32). In 6:12 he gives a general maxim that should govern every believer: "All things are lawful to me, but not all things are profitable; all things are lawful to me, but I will not be brought under the power of anything." At first glance, this principle seems to be only for the individual believer, but in every context in this Epistle, the larger concern is not simply the individual but all the church in which the individual lives. This is so even in 6:12, where the maxim is strongly worded in individualistic terms. But the abusive eating that Paul is addressing, something related to the use of the physical body, is abusive in that it can damage the very members of Christ (v. 15). What is profitable is not simply for the individual believer but more importantly for the church as the Body of Christ. In 12:7 Paul has this same profit for the Body in mind. "He anticipates the concern of chs. 13 and 14, that in community the Spirit manifests himself for the building up of the entire community, not primarily for the benefit of the individual believer" (Fee 164). In 14:6 Paul expands his thought on what is profitable when he asks, "But now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you, unless I speak to you either in revelation or in knowledge or in prophecy or in teaching?" Here the profit is clearly not for the individual who exercises the gift but for all the believers who receive what is ministered through the gift. This profit comes "in revelation or in knowledge or in prophecy or in teaching."

Third, what is profitable is firstly and mainly through speaking. The many manifestations of the Spirit that Paul lists here are difficult to categorize, and among commentators there is wide disagreement (see Alford 2: 578 and Fee 165 for good catalogs of attempted categorizations). Regardless of what Paul may have intended as groupings, two points are incontrovertible. The speaking gifts are first in his mind and in his utterance. Thus, while all manifestations of the Spirit are indeed profitable, the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge are more profitable to the building up of the church, which is where Paul is going in these three chapters. What he says in 14:6, as we have seen above, confirms this. Wisdom and revelation, as in Ephesians 1:17, are closely tied together, as are, of course, knowledge and teaching. These particular gifts are the mainstay for the building up of the church. Why then does Paul mention the other gifts? Probably because here in chapter 12 his main point is the diversity of the divine operations in the proper exercise of the Spiritual gifts. This diversity, because it is divine in origin, must be recognized and respected. Though Paul is leading the Corinthians closer and closer to his general goal of making clear what the proper Spiritual gifts are for, that is, the building up of the church as the Body of Christ, here he wishes to also make the point, as forcefully as possible, that the gifts should have a divine operation in them. Thus, the second incontrovertible point is that each gift—given to each one, to another, and to a different one—is through the Spirit, according to the same Spirit, in the same Spirit, in the one Spirit. What is visible is the activity of the believers in giving a word to the church, in exercising faith, in healing others, in performing works of power, in giving a prophecy, in discerning spirits, in speaking in tongues, in interpreting tongues. But "the one and the same Spirit operates all these things," and that is what is intrinsically important and what offers any profit at all. The believers' incorporation of the Spirit's operation is very explicit here. The gifts that the

believers exercise are Spiritual and are manifestations of the Spirit because the Spirit operates within the believers to make the gifts such.

One additional indication of incorporation should be noted in verse 11. Here it is the Spirit who “operates all these things,” but in verse 6 it is God who “operates all things in all.” Obviously, for Paul there is no contradiction. “The one and the same Spirit” is “the same God” because the Spirit incorporates the operation of God in all that He does. In Paul’s realization the Spirit is what the believers experience and incorporate directly. But the Spirit never acts on His own or separably from the Father and the Son. Thus, when the believers experience the Spirit directly, they experience the Spirit’s incorporation of the Father’s operation and the Son’s operation. This is in line with what the Lord says in John 16:13-15, that what the Father has is the Son’s, that what the Spirit has is received from the Son, and that the Spirit of reality guides the believers into all the reality by His speaking, no doubt, within the believers. Nowhere is this triadic incorporation more true and more operative than in the believers’ exercise of the proper Spiritual gifts.

In what follows 1 Corinthians 12:11, Paul turns to an extended and detailed consideration of the one Body with its many members (vv. 12-27). In my previous article I examined what Paul presents in verse 13, that the Spirit is the intrinsic essence of the Body. The Spirit as the reality of Christ (John 14:6, 17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 5:6) first ushers the believers into Christ as the Body (“the Christ” in verse 12) by baptizing them into Him and then supplies the believers continually as the constant drink to maintain their experience of Him for the Body. This relates both to the Spirit’s incorporation of Christ and to the believers’ incorporation of the Spirit. In verses 14 through 22 Paul then speaks of the indispensability of the members, and in verses 23 through 27, of the blending together of the members. There are in these two last spans of text slight implications of incorporation in God’s actions of placing the members (v. 18) and of blending the Body together (v. 24). But while the divine operations are clearly stated, the believers’ manifest actions are difficult to perceive textually. Thus, I can hardly offer these two operations as further evidence of the believers’ incorporation of God. But I am inclined to at least wonder how God places the members and how He blends the Body insofar as these operations relate to the believers practically. These operations cannot be done apart from some experience that the believers have for the first operation, and some functions that the believers exercise for the second operation. For the placing of the members we might expect that in verse 18 Paul is talking about *where* the members have been set, and this could be the reading of the clause *God has placed the members...even as He willed*. But based on the finer detail that he offers in verses 28 through 31, it seems that Paul is talking about *how* the members have been set, not where. In verses 28 through 31 God’s placing of the members is according to what they are, based on the Spiritual gifts that Paul has previously listed. The list of gifts and the list of members are not fully correspondent or perfectly aligned, but it seems clear that God places the members according to the Spiritual gifts that each believer exercises. Thus, perhaps we can say that this is incorporation by association. For the blending of the members Paul offers some few details that more directly suggest incorporation. Through God’s operation of blending, the members have the same care for one another, suffer with one another, and rejoice with one another (vv. 25-26). It is easy to dismiss these matters as simple kindnesses that the believers on their own express for each other. But Paul is clear to say that God is in operation here. Thus, what the members do to care for each other are not simply their own actions but their incorporation of God’s operation.

We could pass over chapter 13 in its entirety since, like the second half of chapter 12, the believers’ incorporation of God does not seem to be textually indicated. But this all depends on what we understand *love*, as the subject of the clauses in 13:4-8, to mean. Paul’s personification of love can be regarded as mere rhetorical eloquence; he

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is certainly not without this skill. But even if we accept this, the fact remains that it should be the believers who actually suffer long, are kind and not jealous, do not brag and are not puffed up, etc. Thus, in chapter 13 the believers' actions are highlighted as their incorporation of love. The question, then, is what, or better, who is love. John, of course, says that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16), and Paul and John speak of the love of God in the sense of God as love (2 Cor. 13:14; 1 John 4:9). Thus, I am inclined to think that Paul has God in mind when he speaks of love in 1 Corinthians 13. If that is the case, then for the most part this chapter refers to the believers' incorporation of God's operation within them as the love they have for one another.

In chapter 14 Paul comes to the practicality of what he has been saying in the previous two chapters: "Pursue love [ch. 13], and desire earnestly spiritual gifts [ch. 12], but especially that you may prophesy [ch. 14]" (v. 1). As stated here and in view of what we have seen above, the believers' incorporation of God as love and of the Spirit for their gifts should especially be directed toward their prophesying in the meetings of the church. God as love and the Spirit as the gifts should fill what the believers do when they prophesy for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ. Thus, prophesying in its most intrinsic sense is the believers' incorporation of the Triune God. In verse 3 Paul explains why prophesying encompasses both love and the gifts: "But he who prophesies speaks building up and encouragement and consolation to men." Prophesying, as the chief Spiritual gift, ministers God as love to the believers in the form of building up, encouragement, and consolation.

This kind of speaking, as an incorporation of God and of the Spirit, builds up the church (v. 4). Here is the practicality of what Paul has elsewhere expressed in more lofty ways in Ephesians 4:16 and 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 and of what the Lord declared concerning His own work in Matthew 16:18. Again, in view of these other presentations concerning the building up of the church as Christ's Body, the significance of prophesying is that it is both the believers' activity and the Triune God's operation. It is the practical way that the Body builds itself up out from Christ as the Head and the practical way that every joint supplies the Spirit to operate in each one part for that building up. It is the practical way that the Triune God operates in the believers' exercise of the gifts for the building up of the church. It is the practical way that Christ builds His church based on the revelation of who He is. Prophesying is not common and mere human speaking in the church. Rather, it is a kind of speaking by the believers that manifests God's operation in the Spirit. Of course, to many believers this may seem unreachable, and that is probably why Paul indicates that it is something that requires pursuit, earnest desire, and seeking (vv. 1, 12). But at the same time, Paul makes it clear that all the believers can do this (vv. 24, 31). While many believers, including some in Corinth as exemplars, have attended to so-called spirituality for their own benefit and self-glorification, Paul exhorts all the believers to seek to excel for the building up of Christ's Body through their divine-human speaking to one another (v. 12). This Loving, Spiritual, Body-building incorporate speaking should be the highest aspiration of all the believers, and with time and exercise it should become their normal functioning in the church.

This kind of speaking also manifests God even to the unbelievers and unlearned who encounter it when they visit the meetings of the church, with the result that through it they are led to salvation. In verse 24 Paul stresses the prophesying of all the believers, and the effect that this has on the unbeliever is his or her conviction and examination by all the believers. This, of course, is how the unbeliever perceives the effect of this overwhelming display of divine-human speaking; there is nothing to suggest that the believers should deliberately convict and examine the unbelieving and unlearned who visit the meetings of the church, though the text can be read and abused this way. Rather, the true Agent of the convicting and examining is the God who searches hearts and lays bare every human intention (v. 25; cf. Jer. 17:10; Rom.

8:27; Heb. 4:12-13; Rev. 2:23). Seemingly, all the believers who prophesy are speaking the words that pierce the heart of the unbeliever, so that he or she will think, "They are talking about me!" But just as in John 14:10, the words that the believers speak, they do not speak from themselves, but God who dwells within them does His works, and just as in verse 11, the unbeliever believes because of the operation of these works in the believers, not simply because of the action of their speaking. What is uncanny about this is that the unbeliever perceives the operation of God in the prophesying by all. The effect on him or her is profound: "And so falling on his face, he will worship God, declaring that indeed God is among you" (1 Cor. 14:25). Fee sees in Paul's description an unmistakable reference to the salvation of the unbeliever since it is loosely based on Isaiah 45:14 (246):

Thus says Jehovah,
The wealth of Egypt, and the merchandise of Cush,
And the Sabians, men of stature,
Will pass to you and will be yours.
They will walk behind you; they will come over in chains
And bow down to you and petition you, saying,
Surely God is with you, and there is no one else;
There is no other God.

To this we can add the next verse in Isaiah to further show that salvation is in Paul's thought: "Surely You are a God who hides Himself, / O God of Israel, the Savior." Alford likewise sees that "the greater achievement of prophecy, the conviction and conversion of the ἀπίστος ['unbeliever'], is chiefly in view" (2: 597). Hence, through the prophesying by all in a church meeting, the unbeliever becomes a believer, one who believes in God, worships God, and confesses God. "This final confession of the unbeliever is thus the 'sign' that prophecy is for 'believers' [1 Cor. 14:22]" (Fee 246). What the new believer confesses and even declares is not that the believers are anything in themselves but "that indeed God is among you," and he or she perceives God among the believers through their incorporation of Him in their speaking. Alford points out that the adverb *indeed* implies "that previously [the unbeliever] had regarded the presence of God among them as an idle tale." Now the presence of God among them, or as Alford allows, "or in each of you: by His Spirit" (2: 597) is manifest openly to the unbeliever through the believers' incorporation of God, and this manifestation infuses him or her with the faith to believe in God. Witness Lee comments:

This implies that prophesying, speaking for God and speaking forth God with God as the content, ministers God to the hearers and brings them to God. This also indicates that the church meeting should be filled with God, and that all its activities should convey and transmit God to people that they may be infused with God. (Recovery Version, v. 5, note 1)

The final verse that we should examine in these three chapters on the Spiritual gifts is 1 Corinthians 14:32, where Paul mentions the spirits of prophets. The reference is directly to the human spirits of the prophets, but as is common in Paul's writings, the reference also includes the Divine Spirit who indwells the believers' regenerated human spirits, "i.e. their own spirits, filled with the Holy Spirit" (Alford 2: 599). Fee sees a more direct reference to the Divine Spirit: "The phrase 'the spirits of the prophets' means 'the prophetic Spirit' by which each of them speaks through his or her own spirit" (254). Either way, the believers' incorporation of the Spirit is indicated, and the Spirit as the reality within their prophesying is again confirmed. But what is striking in this verse is that in this incorporation the believers are in control; the Spirit who indwells their spirits is subject to them, not the other way around, as would be expected in purely ecstatic speaking, such as speaking in tongues. We need not read in this something theologically perverse. Rather, this control is in itself an

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incorporate action, as Paul indicates in the next verse: "For God is not a God of confusion but of peace." When the believers exercise their human spirits, which are regenerated by God the Spirit, in the way of order and peace in the church meetings, they incorporate the very God of peace. It is not a matter of the believers' subjecting God to their whim; it is a matter of allowing the God of peace to be manifested through their decisions when to speak for the building up of the church. Fee offers a very good explanation:

His point is that the utterances are subject to the speakers in terms of timing: the content is understood to be the product of the Divine Spirit who inspires such utterances. Thus Paul justifies their speaking one at a time [vv. 26-27], being silent with regard to tongues when no interpreter is present [v. 28], and ceasing for the sake of another when a prophetic revelation is given to someone else [v. 30]. All of this is possible because "the S/spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." (254)

Likewise, Witness Lee:

This means that the prophets are not under the control of their spirits, but their spirits are under their direction. Thus, they can determine when to prophesy and when to cease prophesying, to maintain good order in the church meeting. Their spirits are not their master but their means to function. They should learn how to exercise and use their spirits at their discretion. (Recovery Version, v. 32, note 1)

By Singing

While speaking is the main vehicle for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ, it is quite interesting that Paul pays particular attention also to singing. Singing has been an integral part of the communal life of God's people (Exo. 15:1; Deut. 31:19; Judg. 5:1; Ezra 2:41; Psalms; Matt. 26:30; 1 Cor. 14:15; Heb. 2:12; Rev. 14:3), but in the church, singing can and should be an incorporation of the Triune God, as the portions below indicate:

And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissoluteness, but be filled in spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and psalming with your heart to the Lord, giving thanks at all times for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to our God and Father, being subject to one another in the fear of Christ. (Eph. 5:18-21)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God. And whatever you do in word or in deed, do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Col. 3:16-17)

For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of One, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, "I will declare Your name to My brothers; in the midst of the church I will sing hymns of praise to You." (Heb. 2:11-12)

In Ephesians 5:18-21 Paul contrasts two types of filling—that with wine and that in spirit. This contrast continues and concludes the several contrasts that he offers as details for putting off the old man and putting on the new man in 4:22-24. The filling that he encourages is "in spirit." The translation quoted here (Recovery Version) offers *spirit* in lowercase, against all other major English translations. This is again another place where it is difficult to relay by the presence or absence of capitalization what Paul probably means. If the Recovery Version is correct (and I think that it is), then the reference is certainly to the regenerated spirit of the believer indwelt by the divine Spirit. But either way, the divine Spirit is indicated, and His filling of the believers is

accomplished by their incorporation of His operation in the four actions next mentioned: speaking, singing and psalming, giving thanks, and being subject. What Paul may be referring to are four modes of Christian life: in the meetings of the church, in private times before the Lord, in general living in the world, and in human ethical relationships among the believers (which he further develops in 5:22—6:9). Related to the first of these, both Alford (3: 134) and Fee (722) recall the younger Pliny’s letter to the Roman emperor, in which he speaks of the Christians assembling before dawn and singing hymns antiphonally to Christ as to God (10.96.7). This could very well be the practice of “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” To the modern reader this may seem hardly realistic, but no doubt Paul had a very vivid and practical experience in mind. Perhaps the closest we can come in modern practice is an exercise not merely of singing stanzas out of a hymnbook but of also singing and declaring to each other and the whole congregation the rich utterances in the hymnody of the Christian church. In this way the believers speak by singing and thereby edify each other. The songs themselves, Paul says, are spiritual, and again we should hold to this word its proper meaning in the New Testament, that is, as a reference to the Spirit Himself. Alford says that these songs are “inspired by that fulness of the Spirit which is in [the believer]” (3: 135). What the believers sing becomes an incorporation of the indwelling Spirit, who fills their spirits as well as their singing.

In Colossians 3:16-17 there is a parallel to Ephesians 5:18-21 but with some important differences. First, the believers’ actions mentioned in Colossians 3 provide the way for the word of Christ to dwell richly in the believers, while in Ephesians 5 the same actions provide the way for the Spirit to fill the believers’ spirits. We should not think that Paul is referring to two separate experiences in these two passages but rather that he is viewing the same experience from two distinct operations of the Triune God. The equivalence of the word of Christ indwelling the believers with the Spirit filling the believers is striking. *The word of Christ* can be read as either subjective or objective, as either the word that Christ speaks or the word that speaks of Christ. Alford opts for the former and apparently understands it to refer to the word of the gospel, which Christ spoke on earth (3: 237). The subjective sense is probably right, but perhaps the extent of Christ’s speaking is greater than just what is in the Gospels. In view of what Paul says in Ephesians 5, it would seem that the meaning also includes a more dynamic and current component. In other words, the word of Christ is not simply historical but something that at the moment fills the believers with the Spirit. It is akin to what Christ says in John 6:63 (Lee, Recovery Version, Col. 3:16, note 1): “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.” In this case, the teaching and the admonishing of one another provide the way for Christ to speak within the believers in a rich way. Elsewhere Paul says that Christ is in the believers (Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Col. 1:27); hence, as the believers hear the teaching and the admonishing from one another, Christ is able to speak richly within them. Just as speaking in Ephesians 5 is the way for the Spirit to fill the believers, so also teaching and admonishing in Colossians 3 is the way for Christ’s speaking to dwell in them richly. From both perspectives, the believers incorporate the divine operation.

In Ephesians 5:19 Paul refers simply to speaking, but in Colossians 3:16 he refers more particularly to teaching and admonishing, and this teaching and this admonishing are carried out “in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” If we found speaking by singing odd in Ephesians, we would find teaching and admonishing by singing even stranger. But this is clearly the sense that Paul has in mind, and it no doubt reflects an understanding that was accepted in the early church. While we moderns prefer to limit singing to a more sentimental and emotional function in Christian worship, the additional didactic function of singing is clear in the Bible. Fee points to the Old Testament Psalter as the background for this two-dimensional use of singing and offers this comment on hymn fragments in the New Testament:

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AS WELL AS
THEIR SINGING.

The use of hymns in the NT documents indicates how clearly they also function in this two-dimensional way for the early church...Unfortunately, many contemporary Christians do not think of their singing in these terms and consequently miss out on one of the significant dimensions of our reason for singing. (656-657)

Certainly what Paul is exhorting the believers to do is now out of vogue in Christian assemblies, but that does not mean that we should surrender the possibility of a recovery of this matter. Probably many believers are being taught unintentionally by the hymns that they sing in Christian gatherings, perhaps to the chagrin of those who view hymnody and theology as separate domains, and a great many Christian hymns reflect very solid biblical truth. Thus, such a recovery is only a matter of deliberately attending to what Paul exhorts the believers to do. Perhaps rather than simply singing stanzas out of a hymnbook and leaving any possible impact solely to an appreciation within the individual, the believers can re-sing and re-speak the choice utterances in the hymns, declaring, even in singing, the points of truth to each other corporately. This savoring of the truth in their hymns corporately, vocally, and even musically would no doubt have great impact not only on the believers' sentiments but also on their grasp of the divine truth. This seems to be what Paul is referring to in Colossians 3:16.

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WITHIN THE BELIEVERS,
WHO IS SENT FORTH
BY THE FATHER
AS THE SOURCE OF
THE WHOLE INNER
OPERATION.

In the third portion above, Hebrews 2:11-12, the believers' singing of hymns in the meetings of the church is shown to incorporate Christ's singing to the Father. The quotation from Psalm 22 at the end of this portion is applied clearly to Christ and the church, and Christ is understood to be "in the midst of the church" not as a separate presence among the believers but as indwelling each of them and operating in their corporate singing. Thus, as the believers sing hymns to the Father, what is happening is that the Son is operating within the believers as the reality of their being sons as well. The believers are not merely creatures nor merely God's people (as in the Old Testament) but genuine sons of God through Christ the Son's operation within them. He is within them declaring the Father's name to them, and this declaration is not simply to His creatures nor to His people but to His brothers. It began on the day of His resurrection (John 20:17) because through His resurrection all His believers, then and now, were regenerated (1 Pet. 1:3), and it continues throughout the believers' Christian life. This is similar to what Paul speaks of in Galatians 4:6: "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father!" In Hebrews it is Christ who is declaring the Father's name to the believers as His many brothers, while in Galatians it is the Spirit of the Son who is declaring the Father's name in the hearts of the believers as sons. These can hardly be viewed as two separate matters, and thus, we should understand that when the Son declares the Father's name to His brothers, He is doing so by being incorporated in the work of the Spirit within the believers, who is sent forth by the Father as the source of the whole inner operation. Fee classes the cry in Galatians 4:6 with similar "Spirit-inspired prayer" and points out that "even though the *Abba*-cry is very much the realized experience of individual believers, the cry itself is most likely to be heard in the gathered worship of the community" (409 and note 142 there). Thus, in practicality the declaration in Galatians is more commonly expressed as the corporate prayer of the believers in a meeting of the church, probably in the Lord's table meeting (1 Cor. 10:16-17, 21; 11:20, 24-25; cf. Matt. 26:30). In Hebrews the declaration is clearly set in the context of the meetings of the church and again probably in the Lord's table meeting.

The writer of Hebrews offers this quotation from Psalm 22, now applied to Christ and the church, as testimony to the fact that Christ's believers are His genuine brothers in the divine life and therefore the many sons that Christ is leading into glory (Heb. 2:10). What makes the believers both sons of God and brothers to Christ is the reality that "both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of One" (v. 11). The One is the Father, of whom Christ as the firstborn Son and the believers as the many sons and brothers are begotten (Acts 13:33; 1 Pet. 1:3). The reference to

Christ is not to His status as the eternal only Begotten before time but to His status as the Firstborn in time after His resurrection, for only in this status can He be said to have brothers (John 20:17). Thus, “He who sanctifies” in this verse is the incarnate Christ in resurrection. The believers are characterized as “those who are being sanctified,” and thus, this action of sanctifying is being clearly related to the believers’ status as sons of God and brothers of Christ and to their being led into glory. Alford ties the context together nicely by saying, “Sanctification is glory working in embryo: glory is sanctification come to the birth and manifested” (4: 45). In leading many sons to glory, Christ the Firstborn must sanctify the many believers, and He does so through that basis that causes both Him and them to be “of One,” that is, the divine life of the Father who generates both Him and them as sons. What is interesting in this is that while the Son is clearly called “He who sanctifies,” elsewhere from the New Testament we know that sanctification is typically associated with the action of the Spirit (Rom. 15:16; 2 Thes. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2), as even His full title *Holy Spirit* indicates. (In Greek the verb for *sanctify* [ἁγιάζω, *hagiazō*] is formed from the adjective for *holy* [ἅγιος, *hagios*]. English suffers from a lack of a good verb that means “to make holy,” to match what the Greek verb means.) Alford notices the connection between the Son and the Spirit: “[The word *sanctification*] as every where, when used in allusion to Christ’s work on His people, involves that transforming and consecrating process, of which His Spirit is the actual agent” (4: 45). As we saw above in the Son’s declaring of the Father’s name, we see also in His sanctifying of the believers as sons that He does so by being incorporated in the work of the Spirit within the believers. While the Spirit is not explicitly mentioned in these two verses, we know from the rest of the New Testament that what the Son does in these two verses He does through the Spirit’s working within the believers.

There is much in these two verses related to the believers’ incorporation of the Triune God. First, the Father’s divine life generates Christ and the believers as His sons, and both Christ and the believers incorporate the Father’s divine life to be sons genuinely, with Christ as Firstborn and the believers as many brothers. (Again, Christ as the eternal Son is not directly in consideration in these verses.) Further, based on this divine life and sonship, Christ is sanctifying the believers in order to bring them into full glory as the many sons. But He does not do so independently; rather, He operates in the Holy Spirit within the believers to accomplish this sanctifying in the Father’s divine life. While this process goes on in the entire Christian life of the believers, it is especially manifest and particularly prominent in the meetings of the church, where He declares the Father’s name to them and sings hymns of praise to the Father within them. In declaring the Father’s name to the believers, again He operates in the Spirit, as the Spirit of the Son, within the hearts of the believers when they themselves incorporate this divine incorporation in their corporate cry, Abba, Father! While it is not said explicitly, we should expect that these hymns of praise are very much the same as the spiritual songs that Paul speaks of in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, and thus, the Son’s singing in the believers is as well through His operation in the Spirit within the believers. These instances of cascading incorporation—the Father in the Son as the Spirit in the believers—are expressed in the lovely singing of the believers in the meetings of the church. How simple and yet how profound.

While the points above can be viewed as mere trivialities or as lost practices of a different age, they also can easily be seen as very practical helps to the actual building up of the church as the Body of Christ. Sadly, the hallmark of modern Christianity is silence among the majority of its adherents. But from what we have seen above, the character of the church as the Body of Christ is speaking and singing by all the believers as members. We should see that the function of a Christian as a member of Christ’s Body is to build up the Body, as Paul indicates in Ephesians 4:12 and 16. But without speaking to one another, the believers cannot build each other up for the growth of the Body, and the speaking that is necessary cannot be anything but that

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THIS DIVINE
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THEIR CORPORATE
CRY, ABBA, FATHER!


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OF OPERATIONS
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HERESIES.

which incorporates the operation of the Triune God. It cannot be the natural and fallen speaking that fills the mouths and hearts of the unbelievers, nor can it be the religious and ethical speaking that fills the mouths and ears of so many Christians today as it has for millennia. The only speaking that prevails for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ is that which is Spiritual, of the Lord, and from the Father. Simply put, it must be divine speaking, even though it is spoken by the believers as human beings. Certainly this will be dismissed as unattainable by some, but only by those who have experienced no other kind of speaking than what is natural, fallen, religious, or ethical. I believe that every genuine believer has touched this divine speaking to some small degree at least, whether it be in prayer, in singing, in announcing the gospel, in shepherding the saints, or even in speaking in the meetings of the church. If it can be done in even the smallest way for edifying oneself or ones close by, it can be perfected over time for even the largest goal of building up the Body of Christ. This divine speaking aligns almost perfectly with those words that the Lord spoke concerning His own incorporation of the Father: "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works" (John 14:10). If the Lord of all did not speak words from Himself, then certainly the believers today should not speak words from themselves; and if in the speaking of the Lord of all, the Father who abides in Him was the One who was doing the works, then certainly in the speaking of the believers today there needs to be the works of the One who abides in them. When the believers enter into the experience and even habit of this kind of speaking among themselves, then the Lord's subsequent words will be fulfilled: "Truly, truly, I say to you, He who believes into Me, the works which I do he shall do also; and greater than these he shall do because I am going to the Father" (v. 12). Through their speaking that incorporates the Triune God, the believers also do the works of incorporation that the Lord did and, amazingly, do works greater than His own in the flesh, for now that He has gone to be once again with the Father, He now operates with the Father and as the Spirit within all the believers throughout the ages and throughout the earth to build up the church as His very Body.

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I cannot conclude this article, the last in a series of twelve, without some reflection on my whole past endeavor. What began in 2004 as an examination of the Lord's words in John 14:10-11 insofar as they relate to the rest of the Gospel of John has turned into a reconsideration of everything from Acts through Jude in light of those words. What has become abundantly clear is the strong testimony in the New Testament of how God operates, that is, always in His Trinity and never separately as Father alone or as Son alone or as Spirit alone. This is the inseparability of operations that was strongly promoted and vigorously defended particularly in the fourth century A.D. by those writers who prevailed against the threats of the various Trinitarian and Christological heresies. While those writers fully established the principle of inseparability of operations in order to safeguard the truth concerning the oneness of God, both the principle and the truth have eroded in the modern era of the Christian church. Sadly, for many common believers and for many of their teachers, the Trinity of God is an idle doctrine that can be either ignored or even denied. While many outwardly profess faith in a Triune God, in their concept and in their utterances they express the deep-seated notion that there are three separate Gods. They speak of the Father separably creating the heavens and the earth; of the Son separably becoming a man in incarnation and separably dying on the cross for our sins; and of the Holy Spirit separably coming to the believers as the distant representative of the Father and the Son. They bristle at the notion that when the Son came, the Father was in and with Him and that therefore the Father actively operated in the Son's incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension. They insist that the Father and the Son are not in the believers at all and that only the Spirit dwells in them as some Holy Deputy.

Of course, when challenged, they insist that they hold to one Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—but believe that their notion of separableness is the true faith that was handed down to them. But it is not. Tertullian, Irenaeus, Hilary, Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Didymus, Ambrose, and Augustine would condemn this notion, not to mention the hundreds of other great teachers since the fourth century. But more importantly, the Scripture itself condemns this notion, as hopefully I have shown in these articles over the past ten years. The truth that the Scriptures present and that the church across the ages has protected and conveyed is that whenever the Father, the Son, or the Spirit act, all three operate in that action because the three are inseparable in being, nature, will, and work. In every action of the one there is to be found the incorporation of the operations of the other two.

But what I did not expect to find in this study and what has constantly astounded and impressed me along the way is the equally strong testimony in the New Testament of how the believers should live, serve, and even be. Certainly, after some reflection with the help of the Spirit, we can accept that God always works in the way of incorporation. But we do not easily see that He expects His New Testament believers to work in the same way of incorporation, doing all things as the manifestation of His triune operation within them. Too much of our natural and fallen disposition clouds our view, and it is always easier to live, serve, and be according to what comes to us through long habit. But the text of the New Testament is imbued with the language of incorporation, and it is hard to escape the conclusion that the writers of the New Testament always had this perspective in mind as they wrote about both the deep and the apparently mundane. We tend to wonder at words like “To me, to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21) or “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20) and to pass over as simply phatic words like “If I have forgiven anything, it is for your sake in the person of Christ” (2 Cor. 2:10) and “Aquila and Prisca greet you much in the Lord” (1 Cor. 16:19) and even Paul’s signature phrase “in Christ.” But as I hope that I have shown—admittedly to the point of belaboring the matter—what the writers of the New Testament seem to be saying is that what makes the believers different from all other human beings is not their mental belief in God nor their outward behavior and demeanor to represent God; rather, it is God Himself operating within them (Phil. 2:13). While they can always act apart from His operation, it is only when they live forth His operation within them that they are manifestly His people, His sons, and His members. The Triune God who indwells them is their real virtue and genuine merit. He is also their effectiveness and usefulness. Thus, the Lord’s words in John 15:5 take on their full meaning when we recognize this incorporation: “Apart from Me you can do nothing.” 

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