

## The All-inclusive Christ in 1 Corinthians

The content of Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians provides a template for measuring today's Christianity. Such a measurement is needed not for the sake of criticizing our proclivities to participate in the same wayward expressions of the flesh but for the sake of affirming and entering into the higher realities that Paul presents to counter the Corinthians' immature expression of the divine life that they had received in Christ through the life-giving Spirit. In 1 Corinthians Paul reveals an all-inclusive, experiential Christ as the remedy for every problem in the church. He conveys his burden to bring the distracted, natural, worldly, and philosophical Corinthians back to Christ through his revelation of this all-inclusive Christ. He appeals to the Corinthians to manifest this all-inclusive Christ by bearing the image of the second man. And he shows how such a manifestation is maintained through the believers' participation in the fellowship of God's Son, a fellowship that practically incorporates the Triune God in their functioning as the Body of Christ.

First Corinthians is unique in its unveiling of the all-inclusive Christ. The church in Corinth was full of serious problems, but Paul deals with them by ministering a unique solution—a wonderful person—the all-inclusive Christ. In 1 Corinthians Paul unveils at least twenty aspects of the all-inclusive Christ for the believers' enjoyment: the portion of the called saints; the power of God for the church to enjoy the resurrected and ascended Christ; the wisdom of God for the church to experience as righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; the Lord of glory for the church's expression; the deep things of God for the church to know; the unique foundation for the church to be built up; the reality of the Passover feast for the church to eat and enjoy; the reality of the unleavened bread for the church to be sanctified; the spiritual food, drink, and rock for the church to be supplied; the head of every man for the church to participate in God's administration; the corporate Body for the church to function; the firstfruits, the second man, and the last Adam for the termination of the old man and for the generation of the church; and the

life-giving Spirit for the organic application of all Christ's accomplishments for the full salvation of the church.

First Corinthians also reveals that the church's experience of the all-inclusive Christ occurs within a divinely delineated realm—the Body of Christ, which is manifested locally in the meetings of the church, in the reality of the mingled spirit. All the believers in Christ are organically

united with Him and constituted with His life and element and have thus become His Body, an organism to express Him. The one Body is the one church of God, manifested in many localities as many local churches. The Body is uniquely one universally, and it should be uniquely one in its local expression,

with one church, and only one church, in a locality. By its very character a local church is an assembly, and as an assembly of believers called out by God and gathered into the name of the Lord Jesus, a church should have meetings. The principle of the church meetings is mutuality, in which all the members contribute their portions for the building up of the church. All of the church's experience of Christ and all of the church's participation in the building up of the Body of Christ depend upon the mingled spirit unveiled in 1 Corinthians 6:17. The mingled spirit is the divine Spirit united and mingled with the regenerated human spirit. By being one spirit with the Lord, we can experience Him as the all-inclusive One. We enjoy Christ by being joined to the Lord as one spirit, and we can experience Christ and take Christ as everything because we have become one spirit with Him. To live in the spirit is to let Christ fill and saturate us until He permeates our whole being and is thereby expressed through us. Such a living produces the highest spirituality and supplies the church with spiritual food and drink for the church's growth.

In contrast to such a high vision of the church, 1 Corinthians also speaks of many problems related to divisions in the local church, a haughty attitude toward the apostle, fornication in incest, lawsuits among believers, the abuse of freedom, questions concerning marriage life, eating of things sacrificed to idols, the Lord's table, head

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covering, spiritual gifts, resurrection, and the collection of material offerings. In the face of these problems Paul was burdened only to feed the soulish and fleshly believers in Corinth with the spiritual riches in Christ so that they would become spiritual persons focused on the building up of the Body of Christ. The Corinthians had received the initial gifts of grace, but these gifts needed to grow to their full development and maturity. The Corinthian believers were not lacking in the initial gifts in life, but they were desperately short of the growth in life. However much they had been initially enriched in grace, they were still infants in Christ—soulish, fleshly, and even fleshy. Paul’s goal in writing to the Corinthians was to motivate them to aspire to grow in the divine life. Through the Corinthian believers’ growth in the divine life, the life of the all-inclusive Christ, Paul understood that their corporate manifestation of the image of the first man would be effaced by the image of Christ as the second man, and so he appealed to them with this view in mind.

**T**he first Epistle to the Corinthians, consequently, is also an appeal for the church in Corinth to manifest the corporate living of Christ as the second man in contrast to their evident manifestation of the corporate living of Adam as the first man. Their living, which should have manifested the heavenly image of the corporate Christ as the mystery of God, instead manifested only the haughty and vulgar elements of Adam’s earthy image. Knowing of their infantile living in Adam and their need for growth in Christ, Paul’s Epistle is a lengthy, personal appeal to the Corinthians to manifest the mystery of the corporate Christ, who is experienced as righteousness in a regenerated human spirit, as sanctification in a transformed mind, and as redemption in a glorified body. Although Paul addresses various expressions of the fallen humanity of the first man, pointing out the church’s corporate defilement in spirit, corporate reliance on human wisdom, and corporate abuse of the body, his primary focus is on the expression of the redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified humanity of the second man, pointing out the church’s corporate joining in one spirit, corporate attuning in the mind of Christ, and corporate identification as members of the Body of Christ. The structure and development of 1 Corinthians suggests this larger theme—the manifestation of the mystery of the corporate Christ.

The manifestation of the mystery is ultimately a matter of fellowship, and 1 Corinthians reveals that we have been called into the fellowship of God’s Son. The intrinsic significance of the fellowship of God’s Son frames the central message of 1 Corinthians. The fellowship of God’s Son is the enjoyment of Christ in an organic and coinhering union with Him, through which we become one with Him in our inner being, living, and service. In our experience, the fellowship of the Son is realized as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and the fellowship of the Body of

Christ. The fellowship of the Son is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, because Christ the Son passed through a process of incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection to become the life-giving Spirit, who is now mingled with our spirit in order to make the person and work of Christ real to us. The fellowship of the Son is also the fellowship of the Body of Christ, because through death and resurrection Christ produced His mystical Body. Thus, we are organically joined to Christ as the Head and to one another as fellow members of His unique and enlarged expression.

**T**his enlarged expression of Christ is ultimately an incorporate expression of the Triune God. This can be clearly seen in Paul’s speaking in 1 Corinthians concerning this incorporate expression—the Body of Christ. The church is an organic corporate entity, the corporate reality of the new creation in Christ. And what makes it a reality is that 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 can be seen in the believers’ spiritual functions for the building up of the Body of Christ as presented in 1 Corinthians.

The building up of the Body of Christ is accomplished by the functioning of the Body. The Body accomplishes this through its many members, who incorporate the operation of Christ the Head. These incorporated operations are presented in chapters 12 through 14. In chapter 12 Paul speaks extensively concerning the Body. In chapter 13 he shows the most excellent way for the many members of the Body to function according to their spiritual gifts—the way of love for all the members of the Body. And in chapter 14 he shows how to practically express this love and how to practically exercise the gifts for the building up of the church through prophesying, the speaking forth of God through the members’ incorporate utterances in the meetings of the church. The practicality of prophesying is so stark that it can be, and actually has been, dismissed as a triviality of worship practice. But love is needed for building up, 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.

If open, honest, seeking believers are willing to evaluate their beliefs and practices according to the template of 1 Corinthians, maybe, under the Lord’s mercy (to which we all are eternally indebted) they will receive light from the Word regarding what God desires to recover in the believers’ corporate experience in this age. **AFC**

*by the Editors*