

# “Christ in You the Hope of Glory”— the Believers’ Union with Christ as Revealed in Colossians

by David Yoon

In Colossians 1 Paul states that he became a minister according to the stewardship of God in order to complete the word of God, that is, to unveil the mystery hidden from the ages and from the generations, which mystery is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (vv. 25-27). The mysterious economy of God—His plan and endeavor to fulfill His eternal purpose made in Christ (Eph. 3:9-11)—is encapsulated succinctly in the expression *Christ in you, the hope of glory*. The mystery of the divine economy concerning Christ in the believers as the hope of glory constitutes not only the focus of Paul’s ministry to complete the word of God but also the heart of the divine revelation in the New Testament. In the divine economy God in Christ was processed and consummated to become the life-giving Spirit so that He might dispense Himself as life into the believers for the producing and building up of the church as the Body of Christ for His corporate expression.

*Christ in you* implies Christ passing through the process of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection to become the Spirit of life so that He may dwell in the believers and bring them into an organic union with Him. *The hope of glory* has at least three organic implications: first, a hope of the divine glory based upon the impartation of the eternal life as the seed of glory sown into the believers; second, a gradual process by which this seed grows in them to maturity; and third, the fulfillment of this hope in the mature expression of the divine life from within them. Therefore, *Christ in you, the hope of glory* implies regeneration as the initiation of an organic union between Christ and the believers; transformation as the expansion of this union throughout their inward parts; and glorification as the consummation of such an expansion for the full manifestation of this union. The essence of Paul’s message in Colossians concerns the union of Christ with the believers, which involves His dwelling

within them as their life for His enlarged expression through the church. This Epistle unveils that such a union is a union in the divine life; a union of coinherence in which Christ and the believers mutually indwell one another; a union of identification in which the believers are one with Christ in His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension; a developing union in which Christ as the divine life grows within the believers; and a corporate union, which issues in the church as the Body of Christ and the new man for the corporate expression of the Triune God in Christ.

## An Organic Union

The union that the believers enjoy with Christ characterizes Paul’s writings. In *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, Adolf Deissmann points out that “the formula ‘in Christ’ (or ‘in the Lord’),” indicating union with Christ, “occurs 164 times in Paul’s writings,” and that “it is really the characteristic expression of his Christianity” (140). In Colossians Paul expresses the organic nature of this union most clearly in two significant expressions: *Christ in you, the hope of glory* and *Christ our life* (1:27; 3:4).

## *Christ in You, the Hope of Glory*

In Paul’s view, Christ’s indwelling of us is made possible through His process of becoming a man, dying on the cross, and resurrecting to become the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). The Epistle to the Colossians reveals this process. In 2:9 Paul declares that in Christ “dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” This implies that Christ as the eternal Word became flesh and put on a physical human body (John 1:14). Because all the fullness of the Father, Son, and Spirit—the full expression of the Triune God’s riches—came to dwell in the human body of the

incarnated Christ, He is the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead (Col. 1:19). Furthermore, verse 15 refers to Him both as “the image of the invisible God” and “the Firstborn of all creation.” This implies that Christ in His incarnation is both God and man, both divine and human. In His divinity He is the image of God, the Son of God’s love, the effulgence of God’s glory, and the impress of God’s substance for God’s expression (v. 13; Heb. 1:3). In His humanity He is the Firstborn of all creation, a genuine man, a part of creation, and, hence, a creature. According to Colossians 1:14-15, this God-man is also the One “in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” This points to Christ’s crucifixion, through which He accomplished His redemptive death not only to provide God a judicial basis to forgive all our offenses but also to reconcile all things to God, having made peace through the blood of His cross (2:13; 1:20). This crucified God-man was subsequently made alive, resurrected to be the Firstborn from the dead (2:13; 1:18), and became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). As the Spirit, the resurrected Christ is able to join with us in an organic union (2 Cor. 3:6, 17;

Moule expresses the wonder of this indwelling in his comments on the phrase *Christ in you* in Colossians 1:27:

Nothing less than this is His relation to His “saints.” He makes reconciliation for them. He presides over them. He is their unifying Centre. But within all these operations, the innermost fact is this—He is in them. By His Spirit, who unites the member and the Head, so that “he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor. vi. 17). He is so present to all His own that nothing less than this word “in” satisfies the revealed thought. (103-104)

Concerning the relationship between the indwelling Spirit and the indwelling Christ implied in Colossians 1:27, F. F. Bruce remarks that “the indwelling Christ and the indwelling Spirit are practically interchangeable thoughts for Paul” (86). Deissmann goes even further, stating, “The living Christ is the Pneuma. As Pneuma, as Spirit the living Christ is not far off, above clouds and stars, but near, present on our poor earth as he dwells and rules in His own” (138). Deissmann further explains,

The formula ‘in the Spirit,’ which occurs in Paul’s writings only nineteen times, is in almost all these places connected with the same specifically Pauline fundamental ideas which elsewhere he connects with the formula ‘in Christ’...The Christian...is...‘in Christ who is the Spirit.’ Therefore also the technical expressions ‘fellowship of the Son of God’ and ‘fellowship of the Spirit’ are parallel in Paul’s use. For it always refers to the same experience whether Paul says that Christ lives in him, or that the Spirit dwells in us, and whether he speaks of Christ making intercession for us with the Father, or of the Spirit who helps us in prayer. (138-139)

Paul’s Epistles identify the indwelling Christ with the Spirit. In Romans 8:10 Paul speaks of Christ being in us, yet in verses 9 and 11 he refers to the Spirit of God dwelling in us. Lewis B. Smedes comments on this passage:

To live in the Spirit and to live in Christ are one and the same...Paul makes no distinction between having the Spirit in us and having Christ in us. They are one and the same...Paul does not make a distinction between our life in the Spirit and our life in Christ. And if we recall that “The Lord is the Spirit” and that Christ “has become a life-giving Spirit,” we have further evidence that in terms of Christian experience there is no difference. (43, 45)

Hence, in Paul’s understanding, the Spirit of God indwelling us is equivalent to Christ being in us. Here we need to bear in mind the unalterable trinitarian principle

Because Christ as the embodiment of the Triune God underwent a process to become the Spirit, we now enjoy Christ dwelling within us as our hope of glory and will eventually be manifested with Him in glory.

1 Cor. 6:17). Because Christ as the embodiment of the Triune God underwent a process to become the Spirit, we now enjoy Christ dwelling within us as our hope of glory and will eventually be manifested with Him in glory (Col. 3:4).

The revelation concerning the indwelling Christ is central to Paul’s Epistles, where references to Christ’s indwelling us are abundant. In 2 Corinthians 13:5 Paul indicates that our realization that Jesus Christ is in us qualifies us to be believers approved in the faith. In Galatians Paul declares that God revealed His Son in him, that Christ lives in him, and that Christ is being formed in the believers (1:15-16; 2:20; 4:19). In Ephesians 3:17 he prays that Christ may make His home in our hearts. These verses affirm that Christ’s indwelling is not merely metaphorical or representative but actual and genuine.

We have been brought into union with Christ through His indwelling us as the Spirit. In *Colossian and Philemon Studies: Lessons in Faith and Holiness*, Handley C. G.

revealed in the Bible that the three of the Godhead—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—are eternally distinct yet never separate both in essential existence and economic operation. In light of this revelation, it is not that the Christ in the heavens indwells us vicariously through the indwelling Spirit as His representative. Rather, Christ actually indwells us through and as the Spirit, who, as the application of the resurrected Christ, makes Him real to us. F. F. Bruce echoes this thought in his remarks concerning Romans 8:9-11: “In principle the indwelling Christ and the indwelling Spirit are distinguishable, but practically and in experience they cannot be separated” (28). Bruce further reinforces the notion of an intimate association between the indwelling Christ and the indwelling Spirit, stating that whereas in Colossians 1:27 Paul speaks of the indwelling Christ as the hope of glory, elsewhere he presents “the indwelling Spirit” as “the hope or guarantee of coming glory” (86; cf. Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 5:4-5; Eph. 1:13). In view of Paul’s close identification of Christ and the Spirit in our experience of the resurrected Christ, the phrase *Christ in you* in Colossians 1:27 refers to the pneumatic Christ in the stage of resurrection, the last Adam becoming the life-giving Spirit to be joined to us and thus to dwell within us subjectively (1 Cor. 15:45; 6:17; 3:16).

### *Christ Our Life*

Colossians also refers to our union in life with Christ with a second marvelous expression—*Christ our life* (3:4). This expression demonstrates that the union between Christ and us goes beyond intimate communion with Him, complete submission to Him, or emulation of Him as a paragon of moral excellence. It is not a sacramental union initiated with baptism and sustained through holy communion, nor is it “a union of essence, which destroys the distinct personality and subsistence of either Christ or the human spirit—as held by many of the mystics” (Strong 799). The union between Christ and us is much more than a forensic union in which the righteousness of Christ is imputed objectively to us. It is not merely an intellectual union in which we are to have the same thoughts as He has by acquiring extensive knowledge of theological doctrines concerning Him. Rather, as Augustus Hopkins Strong asserts in *Systematic Theology*, the nature of the union between Christ and us is organic, vital, spiritual, indissoluble, and inscrutable (800-801). In his commentary on Colossians R. C. H. Lenski takes a similar stance, stating that Christ being our life is not a mere “rhetorical” flourish; it is for us to be “joined spiritually to Christ”; that is, “he is in us, and we in him, i.e., in a living connection by which he, the Life, fills us with spiritual, eternal life” (155). If we do not take the phrase *Christ our life* at face value and explore its significance,

we strip our union with Christ of its reality and vitality and relegate it to the realms of liturgy, metaphor, morality, legality, and philosophy.

Christ, the Son of God, is the embodiment of the divine life and even is the divine life (John 1:4; 14:6; 1 John 5:12). He came to give life to the world so that those who believe into Him may possess Him as life (John 6:33, 51; 10:10). For this purpose He passed through death and resurrection and became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). In our regeneration Christ as the Spirit of life dispensed Himself as the divine life into our human spirit, thereby producing a mingled spirit—our regenerated human spirit indwelt by and joined to Him as the divine Spirit (6:17; John 3:6). In the mingled spirit the divine Spirit is inextricably joined to the human spirit without producing a third entity in which the distinctive characteristics of the divine and human spirits are not retained and in which the human is completely absorbed into the divine, thereby losing its distinct identity (cf. Rom. 8:16; John 4:24). The mingled spirit is the reality of our organic union with Christ, and

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the formation of the mingled spirit constitutes the initiation of our life union with Christ. Because Christ as the life-giving Spirit has been organically joined to our spirit, He, who is life and in whom is life, is now life to us and in us. In brief, Christ our life is the indwelling Christ as the Spirit of life mingled with our spirit (cf. Rom. 8:2). For Christ to be our life means that He is imparted into us and joined to us organically, thereby becoming one with us in such a way that He and we are inseparable yet still distinguishable. This organic union, formed through the impartation of Christ as the divine life into us, progressively renews, sanctifies, transforms, conforms, and glorifies us, thus constituting us sons of God and members of Christ’s Body.

### **A Coinhering Union**

Colossians reveals that the organic union between Christ and us is a coinhering union, in which we dwell in Him and He dwells in us. This union is not a novel notion propounded by Paul but the fulfillment of the Son’s prayer in John 17 that just as He is in the Father, and the Father

is in Him, so also the believers would be in the Father and the Son, and the Son would be in them (vv. 21, 23). Just as the Father and the Son mutually abide in each other by virtue of Their inseparable union in the divine life without losing Their distinction, so also Christ and we may mutually abide in each other by virtue of our indivisible union in life with Him without losing our distinct characteristics (14:10; 5:26; 3:16). James Gifford affirms this thought in *Union with Christ: A Third Type of Perichoresis*, pointing out that the union among the three of the Godhead, the union of the divine and human natures of Christ, and the union between Christ and us are all types of coinherence, or perichoresis, in which different persons or natures are “in union and distinction without either absorption or separation” (204). Christ’s coinherence with us was made possible through His transfiguration from the flesh into the Spirit by passing through death and resurrection. Going away from the disciples through crucifixion as a man in the flesh, the Lord came back to them in resurrection as the Spirit of reality (14:3, 16-19). Christ in the flesh could not coinhere with us, but Christ as the Spirit can. For this reason

tendency to stress the objective aspect of Christ while neglecting the subjective. Yet the Lord cannot be satisfied with mere objective adoration but desires to enter into an intimate, subjective relationship through His organic union with us (cf. Gal. 4:19). The experience and development of this organic union requires the foundation of a thorough appreciation for the indwelling Christ. We should worship the wonderful Jesus who is enthroned in heaven as the Lord of all objectively, yet we must also enjoy and partake of the Christ who is joined to our spirit as the Lord Spirit subjectively (Acts 10:36; Phil. 2:9-11; 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Cor. 6:17).

Colossians speaks concerning the experience of the indwelling Christ in several passages. In 2:6 Paul reminds the Colossians that they have “received the Christ, Jesus the Lord.” William B. Barclay notes, “Context and semantic similarities suggest that ‘Christ in you’ and ‘receiving Christ’ point to the same reality” (45). In *The New Testament for English Readers* Henry Alford offers a similar interpretation of this verse: “In faith we receive not only the doctrine of Christ, but Himself, into us: in faith He Himself dwells in us” (1295). In 3:15 Paul exhorts us to let the peace of Christ arbitrate in our hearts. We should allow Christ as peace to make His home in our hearts and bring our hearts completely under His rule (Eph. 2:14; 3:17; cf. Prov. 21:1). Christ dwells and operates within us as peace to exercise His rule over us and to thus arbitrate an end to our disputes and join us together as our uniting bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). The arbitrating peace of Christ refers to an inner operation of the Christ indwelling us, just as the word of Christ dwelling in us should be understood as Christ embodied in His word inhabiting us (Col. 3:16).

The truth concerning the indwelling Christ is also revealed in Paul’s proclamation in 1:29: “I labor, struggling according to His operation which operates in me in power.” As with the peace of Christ arbitrating in our hearts and the word of Christ dwelling in us, Christ’s operation in us should be interpreted as the inward working of the indwelling Christ through His organic union with us. In Colossians Paul’s revelation concerning the indwelling Christ reaches its apex with his statement that in the new man Christ is in all, meaning that Christ dwells in all the members of the new man (3:11). This indicates that the church as the new man issues from our experience of our life union with the indwelling Christ.

#### *The Believers Being in Christ*

In Colossians Paul underscores not only that Christ is in us but also that we are in Him. Paul addresses the greeting of

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He indicated that on the day of His resurrection we would know that we are in Him and He in us (v. 20). Because we are in Christ as the Spirit and He is in us, we can live a life of coinherence with Him by practicing to live one spirit with Him, thereby fulfilling His command in John 15:4: “Abide in me and I in you.”

#### *Christ Being in the Believers*

In Colossians Paul highlights Christ’s indwelling. In Paul’s view Christ is both objective and subjective to us. He is not only our Master in heaven but also our life within (4:1; 3:4). Colossians 3:1 declares that Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, whereas 1:27 reveals that He is dwelling within us as the hope of glory. Although many believers stand in awe of the Christ seated at the right hand of God in heaven, regrettably few express wonder at the Christ dwelling within them as the Spirit. Augustus Hopkins Strong observes, “The majority of Christians much more frequently think of Christ as a Savior outside of them, than as a Savior who dwells within” (795). This may stem from contemporary theology’s imbalanced

his Epistle to “the saints in Colossae and faithful brothers in Christ” (1:2); he says that his labor was to “present every man full-grown in Christ” (v. 28); he exhorts the believers to walk in Christ (2:6); he also states that the believers have been rooted in Christ, are being built up in Christ, have been made full in Christ, and have been circumcised in Christ (vv. 7, 10-11).

Paul’s word that we have been rooted in Christ and may walk in Him is rich with significance. Christ being the soil into which we have been rooted implies that Christ is the reality of the land of Canaan. The thought of Christ being the reality of the good land in chapter 2 is corroborated by Paul’s declaration in the previous chapter that God has qualified us for a share of the allotted portion of the saints in the light by delivering us out of the authority of darkness and transferring us into the kingdom of the Son of His love (1:12-13).

James D. G. Dunn points out that for those familiar with the Old Testament, the expression *a share of the allotted portion* “would immediately evoke the characteristic talk of the promised land” (75-76). The authority of darkness out of which we have been delivered—corresponding to the authority of Satan mentioned by Paul in Acts 26:18—is equivalent to Pharaoh’s slavery of the Israelites in Egypt, a realm of darkness (Exo. 10:21). Just as Jehovah intended to bring the children of Israel out of “the affliction of Egypt” to “a land flowing with milk and honey” (3:17), so also God the Father intends to deliver us out of the authority of darkness and bring us into Christ as the “allotted portion of the saints,” the reality of the promised land (Col. 1:12). Just as Jehovah planted the Israelites into the good land (Psa. 44:2; Jer. 32:41), so also God planted us into Christ as the reality of the good land so that we may absorb His riches for our spiritual nourishment (1 Cor. 1:30). Just as Abraham walked through the promised land to possess the land (Gen. 13:17; cf. Deut. 11:24-25), so also we must walk in Christ as the good land to enjoy and possess His unsearchable riches.

As Andrew T. Lincoln says, the stress of the phrase *walk in Him* is “not so much obedience to this Lord as it is living out of the resources of a relationship of incorporation into him, which is the force of the phrase ‘in him’” (620). The good and exceedingly spacious land as the blessing promised to Abraham for all the nations of the earth typifies Christ with His unsearchable riches and His immeasurable dimensions (Eph. 3:8, 18). The all-inclusive and extensive Christ revealed in the New Testament fulfills the type of the good land in the Old Testament. In Galatians 3:14 Paul indicates that the blessing promised by God to Abraham concerning the

land of Canaan is fulfilled by the Spirit of the promise (Gen. 12:3, 7; 13:15). Christ as the reality of the good land in Colossians is realized as the Spirit of the promise in Galatians. Because the Christ into whom we have been rooted is the Spirit and because the locus of our union with Him as the Spirit is our human spirit, our being rooted in Christ is equivalent to our being joined to Him as one spirit. Similarly, we walk in Christ as the good land by walking according to the mingled spirit, our human spirit indwelt by the divine Spirit (Gal. 5:16; Rom. 8:4). Hence, our absorbing the nourishing elements of Christ as the good land and our walking in Him as our territory and sphere require the exercise of our spirit to contact Him as the life-giving Spirit.

Soon after telling the Colossians that they have been rooted in Christ and should walk in Him, Paul says, “You have been made full in Him” (Col. 2:10). In Henry Alford’s understanding, being in Christ refers to our “union with Him,” in which we “have been once grafted into Christ,” and our being made full implies that we are “filled up” in Christ as our perfection with “all divine

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gifts” so that we “need not any supplementary sources of grace” (1296). Peter T. O’Brien agrees, stating that this verse draws attention to “the motif of incorporation—it is in union with Christ alone that they possess this fullness already” (113). In a similar vein F. F. Bruce provides insight into the organic implications of verse 10:

Christians by their union with him participated in his life. If the fullness of deity resided in him, his fullness was imparted to them...Without him his people must remain forever *diseiecta membra*—incomplete, unable to attain the true end of their existence. But, united with him, incorporated in him, they are joined with him in a living bond in which he and they complement each other (although they are not essential to his fullness as he is to theirs). (101)

The Christ in whom we have been made full is the Head of all rule and authority, the mystery of God, the One in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily, and the One in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (2:2-3, 9-10). Having been brought into

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an organic union with this Christ, we are filled with His unsearchable riches; hence, we lack nothing in Him and need no other source. Through our coinhering union with the all-inclusive and inexhaustibly rich Christ, we partake of all that He is, all that He possesses, and all that He has passed through and are thus utterly supplied, enriched, satisfied, and perfected.

### A Union of Identification

Having revealed our union in life with Christ in our being rooted in Him, walking in Him, and being made full in Him, Paul is able to speak of our identification with Christ in His crucifixion, burial, resurrection, ascension, and manifestation (2:11—3:4). Robert Govett observes that between Colossians 2:12 and 3:4 “the believer’s union with the Christ comes out very strongly,” as expressed by the repeated use of the preposition *with* in reference to the believers’ oneness with Christ (190). This indicates that our organic, coinhering union with Christ enables us to be one with Him in all the steps of the divine economy.

Through our union with Christ we have passed through all His processes with Him. We died with Him in His crucifixion; we were buried with Him in His burial; and we were raised with Him in His resurrection and ascension.

Through our union with Christ we have passed through all His processes with Him. We died with Him in His crucifixion; we were buried with Him in His burial; and we were raised with Him in His resurrection and ascension. Now the Spirit of life actualizes our union with Christ, bearing and communicating to us through faith the effectiveness of all that He has accomplished, obtained, and attained in His processes. Based upon the fact of our union with Christ in His processes and through the Spirit’s application of Christ’s accomplishments, obtainments, and attainments, Christ’s history can be our present experience. This section of Colossians concludes with our being manifested with Him in glory (3:4), indicating that our living and identification in union with the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ throughout our Christian life will eventually climax in our being manifested with Him in glory at His second coming.

### Identified with Christ in His Crucifixion

Colossians presents the astounding revelation that when Christ died on the cross, we too died with Him. In 3:3

Paul unveils the Colossians’ co-death with Christ in simple yet clear words: “You died.” In 2:20 he says, “You died with Christ from the elements of the world.” These elements are “the elementary principles of outward, material things, the childish teachings of externalism, such as asceticism” (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 20, note 3), specifically the rudimentary teachings of Jews and Gentiles, including ceremonial observances concerning “meats, drinks, washings, Essenic asceticism, pagan symbolic mysteries and initiatory rites” (Vincent 486). Through His being lifted up in crucifixion, the Lord judged the world and cast out its ruler (John 12:31-32; Heb. 2:14). Now we are dead to the elements of the world through our union with Christ. As one who lived in union with Christ in His world-judging death, Paul could boast in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world was crucified to him and he to the world (Gal. 4:3; 5:1; 6:14).

Paul elaborates on his thought concerning our co-crucifixion with Christ in Colossians 2:11-12, which states that in Christ we “were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ, buried together with Him in baptism.” This circumcision—referring to proper baptism as the putting off of the body of the flesh—is not a physical circumcision made by hands but a spiritual circumcision accomplished in the crucifixion of Christ. In Paul’s understanding, Christ’s death was the real universal circumcision that cut off all the negative things, including the flesh, the old man, and sin (Rom. 6:6; John 1:29). Paul furthermore asserts that *in* Christ and in the circumcision *of* Christ we too were circumcised. According to Henry Alford, “the root and cause of this circumcision without hands is Christ, the union with whom is immediately set forth,” and in union with whom the putting off of the flesh may be realized (1296-1297). As Peter T. O’Brien notes, the phrase “‘put to death’...recalls the union with Christ in his death...Because they have died with him, then they are to put to death whatever belongs to their earthly nature” (194).

It is crucial for us to understand that in Paul’s view, union with the crucified Christ is possible because Christ, in whom we died and were circumcised and buried, entered into resurrection and became “a life-giving Spirit,” thereby bearing and communicating to us the element of His all-terminating death (1 Cor. 1:23; 15:45). Based upon our co-death and burial with Christ, realized through our participation in the life-giving Spirit, we are able to “put to death” our members which are on the earth: “fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and greediness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5).

This putting to death is not an attempt to crucify the flesh by self-effort. Such would be the asceticism condemned by Paul as one of the elements of the world to which we died with Christ (2:20-21). Paul makes clear that asceticism, the “severe treatment of the body,” is “not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh” but may actually nurture the ascetic’s flesh by establishing “a reputation of wisdom in self-imposed worship and lowliness” (v. 23). Although we bear the responsibility to put to death our evil members, the God-ordained way to carry out this responsibility is the application of Christ’s all-inclusive death on our members through faith by the power of the Spirit in our spirit. In order to experience our union with Christ in His death, we must first see the revelation of the accomplished fact that we have been crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20). We then need to apply Christ’s death to the flesh by walking according to the spirit and minding the things of the Spirit (Rom. 8:4-5).

### *Identified with Christ in His Resurrection*

In Colossians 2:12, having spoken concerning our identification with the crucified and buried Christ in the termination of our flesh, Paul goes on to speak concerning our identification with the resurrected Christ through the regeneration of our spirit: “Also you were raised together with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who raised Him from the dead.” In verse 13 Paul continues, “And you, though dead in your offenses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our offenses.” In the fall Adam’s transgression resulted in the deadening of his spirit (Gen. 2:17). Through Adam, the father of the human race, sin entered into the world, and through sin, death, and thus “death passed on to all men because all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12). As Adam’s descendants, we were born sinners, dead in spirit—dead in our offenses and sins and alienated from the life of God (1 Cor. 15:21-22; Psa. 51:5; Eph. 2:1, 5; 4:18). However, through Christ’s substitutionary death on the cross, God gained the judicial base to forgive all our offenses, and in Christ’s resurrection He enlivened us together with Christ by imparting His eternal life into our deadened spirit, regenerating it and making it life (2:5-6; Rom. 8:10).

Colossians 3:17 presents a noteworthy experiential reference to our union with the resurrected Christ as the Spirit: “Whatever you do in word or in deed, do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Commenting on this verse, Witness Lee instructively notes, “The name denotes the person. The Lord’s person is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17a). To do things in the name of the Lord is to

act in the Spirit” (Recovery Version, Col. 3:17, note 1). Doing all things in the name of the Lord Jesus is to walk by the Spirit as the person of the resurrected Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 6:11; 12:3; John 14:26). Immediately after exhorting the believers to do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus in Colossians 3:17, Paul, in 3:18 to 4:1, charges wives to be subject to their husbands, husbands to love their wives, children to obey their parents, fathers not to vex their children, slaves to obey their masters, and masters to grant to their slaves that which is just and equal. Paul’s instructions in these verses constitute a continuation of his word in 3:17; hence, all these charges can be fulfilled only in our union with the resurrected Christ as the Spirit. In this section Paul twice uses the expression *in the Lord* in order to make clear that we can express Christ in ethical relationships only by living in union with Him: “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (v. 18); “Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing in the Lord” (v. 20). The genuine Christian life is not the conscious effort of our natural life to glorify God in our ethical human relationships but to live continuously in union

**Paul’s exhortation to seek the things which are above is predicated upon our organic union with Christ in His ascension. When we contact the Spirit of the ascended Lord in our spirit, we are one with Him in His ascension.**

with the resurrected Christ by walking by the Spirit so that Christ may be expressed through all the details of our human life.

### *Identified with Christ in His Ascension*

Paul continues his discourse concerning our identification with Christ in His processes in Colossians 3:1-4, which speaks of our experience of Christ in His ascension:

If therefore you were raised together with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things which are above, not on the things which are on the earth. (vv. 1-2)

Paul’s exhortation that we seek the things which are above is predicated upon our organic union with Christ in His ascension. We who are on earth are joined to the Lord in the heavens. When we contact the Spirit of the ascended Lord in our spirit, we are experientially one with Him in His ascension, sitting with Him in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:6). By contacting the Lord Spirit, we

live in an organic union with the ascended Christ, sitting with Him in the heavenlies far above all, living out His all-transcendent life in our daily walk, and participating in the exercise of His authority over all things (1:19-22; 1 Pet. 3:22; cf. Matt. 28:18-19). Because we were raised with Christ in His resurrection and ascension, we are now where He is, seated in the heavenlies with Him. With this glorious objective fact as the basis, we should seek the things which are above by seeking the ascended Christ and the matters pertaining to His heavenly ministry, and we should set our mind on the things which are above by setting it on our regenerated spirit, which has been mingled with the Spirit of the ascended Christ (Rom. 8:6).

To set our mind on the things which are above is to respond to Christ's heavenly ministry by exercising our spirit to contact Him as the Lord Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18). In our daily walk we need to be one with the ascended Christ in His intercession, administration, ministering, and shepherding. If we would be one with Him in His intercession, we, like the apostle Paul, need to pray always concerning the fellow believers, making mention

**Christ will come objectively. As the Lord of glory now concealed within us, however, He will also come forth subjectively from within us, transfiguring the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of His glory.**

of them unceasingly in our prayers (Heb. 7:25; Col. 1:3; Rom. 1:9; cf. Col. 4:2). The ascended Christ as the Head of all things, the Lord of all, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth executes God's universal administration (Eph. 1:22; Acts 2:36; 10:36; Phil. 2:11; Rev. 1:5). If we would be one with Him in His administration, we should exercise His authority over all things by praying in His mighty name and binding on the earth the things that have been bound in the heavens and loosing on the earth the things that have been loosed in the heavens (Matt. 18:18-20). The ascended Christ as the Minister of the new covenant ministers the riches of God as the law of the Spirit of life to the believers (Heb. 8:2, 10; Rom. 8:2). If we would be one with Him in His ministering the divine riches to the believers, we need to minister the Spirit who gives life and thereby give life to one another (2 Cor. 3:6; 1 John 5:16). The ascended Christ as the great Shepherd of the sheep and the Chief Shepherd cares for the believers as the flock of God (John 10:10-16; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 5:4). If we would be one with Him in His shepherding work, we need to feed and shepherd one another as fellow sheep in the flock of God (v. 2; John 21:15-17).

### *Identified with Christ in His Manifestation*

If we are faithful to live a life in union with Christ in His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, we will enter into a complete union with Him in His manifestation at His second coming. In His resurrection the Lord Jesus entered into us as life and was concealed within us, and in His ascension He was taken away from the world's sight. Today we are united with Christ, who is the embodiment of God, in the heavens; thus, our life is hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:4). Today Christ, the firstborn Son of God, is veiled from the world, while we "eagerly" await "the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 1:7); and today our identity as the many sons of God is also veiled from the world, while the creation "eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:19). One day Christ, who is our life, will be manifested, and we too will be manifested with Him in glory (Col. 3:4). Just as we are one with Christ in His crucifixion, burial, resurrection, and ascension, so also we will be one with Him in His manifestation. Second Thessalonians 1:10 states that when Christ is manifested in glory, He will come "to be glorified in His saints and to be marveled at in all those who have believed." This indicates that Christ's manifestation in glory has both an objective aspect and a subjective aspect. On the one hand, Christ will come objectively "in His glory" from the heavens and will "sit on the throne of His glory" (Matt. 25:31; cf. Rev. 10:1; 18:1). On the other hand, He, as the Lord of glory now concealed within us, will come forth subjectively from within us, transfiguring the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of His glory (Phil. 3:21). Our life union with Christ, though now veiled, will be manifested in glory when He returns. This manifestation will be the culmination of the development of our organic union with Christ throughout our entire tripartite being (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:16-17). F. F. Bruce states that the realization of the hope of glory at Christ's return is "the grand consummation of the union between Christ and his people" (136). In this regard, it is significant that the Christ with whom we will be manifested in glory is referred to in the same breath as the Christ who is our life, the One with whom we are organically joined. This speaks of a close association between our participation in Christ as our life and our manifestation with Him in glory. Christ as the hope of glory is not merely a symbolic surety of admission into an objective realm of glory; much more, as the seed of life sown into our spirit through regeneration, He is growing in our soul through transformation and will blossom forth from our body in transfiguration. The hope of glory, which is the hope of eternal life mentioned in Titus 1:2, is fulfilled through the cultivation of our life union with Christ in our spirit, soul, and body. Thus, if we desire to

be manifested with Him in glory at His second coming, we need today to allow our life union with Christ to spread into all our inward parts until we are “full-grown in Christ” (Col. 1:28; cf. Phil. 1:8). Only by cooperating with Christ to develop our organic union with Him in our entire inner being over the course of our entire Christian life can He be glorified in us and we be glorified with Him at His return (cf. Rom. 8:10, 6, 17, 23; 2 Thes. 1:12).

### Cultivating Our Union with Christ

As we live in an organic union with the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ, we need to cultivate this union in our inner being and thereby grow in the divine life. We should progress from being infants and children to being sons and heirs of God (1 Cor. 3:1; Heb. 5:13; Rom. 8:14, 16-17). This progression occurs as the divine life received in regeneration permeates our inward parts until this divine life within us reaches full growth and maturity (Col. 2:19; 1 Pet. 2:2; Eph. 4:15-16; Heb. 5:14; 1 Cor. 14:20). Colossians reveals that the development of the union in life between Christ and us is an organic process that involves growth and maturity in the divine life. In this Epistle Paul indicates that we have been rooted in Christ as the good land in order to absorb His divine riches so that we may grow with “the growth of God,” that is, with the increase of God as life (2:19). Paul declares that he and his co-workers labored to announce, that is, minister, the indwelling Christ as the hope of glory so that they might “present every man full-grown in Christ” (1:28). Paul also testifies that his fellow slave of Christ Jesus, Epaphras, struggled in his prayers that the believers in Colossae would stand mature (4:12). It is crucial that we not remain in spiritual infancy but allow the divine life to fully develop in us through the experiential enlargement of our union with the indwelling Christ.

The cultivation of our organic union with Christ, the spreading of this union from our spirit into our heart, progresses as we let the word of Christ dwell in us richly (3:16). Significantly, Colossians 3:16 describes the word of Christ as a person dwelling in the believers. *The word of Christ* refers to Christ Himself as the Spirit of life embodied in His word (Rom. 8:2). This thought is indicated through a comparison of Colossians 3:16 with its sister passage, Ephesians 5:18-20. In Colossians 3:16 our teaching one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs and our singing with grace in our hearts to God issue in our being filled with the word of Christ. In Ephesians 5:18-20 our speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs and our singing with our heart to the Lord issue in our being filled in our spirit with the Spirit. These passages demonstrate that in Paul’s view

the word and the Spirit are virtually synonymous. In Ephesians 6:17 the apostle explicitly identifies the word with the Spirit, telling us that the “Spirit is the word of God.” These verses point to the realization that the word of Christ embodies Christ Himself as the life-giving Spirit.

Christ, as the Spirit joined to our spirit, seeks to penetrate and saturate our heart—our conscience, mind, emotion, and will—so that our entire inner being may be brought into oneness with Him. It is by the word of Christ, the embodiment of Christ as the Spirit, that Christ makes His home in our heart. In other words, the word of Christ inhabiting us richly is equivalent to the unsearchably rich Christ making His home in our heart (3:8, 17). If we allow the word of Christ to dwell in us richly, our union with Christ as the Spirit will expand from our spirit into our heart so that our Christ-saturated heart may become His residence.

Colossians reveals that as the word of Christ richly inhabits our inner being, the union in life that we share with

**It is crucial that we not remain in spiritual infancy but allow the divine life to fully develop in us through the experiential enlargement of our union with the indwelling Christ.**

Christ in our spirit spreads into our mind, the principal component of our soul. Through the fall we were alienated from God and became His enemies in our mind (Col. 1:21). Such a corrupted mind is set on “the things which are on the earth,” such as, culture, religion, and philosophy (3:2). However, as our organic union with Christ spreads from our spirit into our mind, we will increasingly set our mind on the things which are above, that is, on the things related to the ascended Christ and His heavenly ministry (v. 2). We will grow by the full knowledge of God, we will be filled with the full knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, and we will be fully assured in all the will of God (1:9-10; 4:12). No longer deluded by persuasive speech, we will not allow anyone to carry us off as spoil through his philosophy and empty deceit, “according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world”; we will see through the delusion and deception, estimating and evaluating everything “according to Christ” (2:4, 8). All the above conditions arise as the result of our possessing the riches of the full assurance of understanding, unto the full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ, in whom all

the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (vv. 2-3). Ultimately, such a Christ-permeated mind is for the practical expression of the church as the corporate new man, which is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Christ (3:10). For Paul, the growth in Christ as life through the furtherance of the organic union with Him is not merely for the advancement of our personal spirituality but for the growth of the Body of Christ, His corporate expression (2:19). Paul's view is that we mature in the divine life in order to arrive at a full-grown man, that is, a fully perfected universal new man, which is the church as the built-up Body (Eph. 4:13).

### A Corporate Union

The development of the life union that we enjoy with Christ produces a corporate expression of God in Christ. In Colossians this corporate expression is presented as the Body of Christ and the new man. The goal of our cultivation of and living in the union with Christ is the building up of the church as the organic Body of Christ.

**The goal of our living in the union with Christ is the building up of the church as the organic Body of Christ. The Body of Christ is an organism of Christ produced and maintained by our union with Him in the divine life.**

The Body of Christ is an organism of Christ produced and maintained by our union with Him in the divine life. It is in Christ that we who are many are one Body (Rom. 12:5), and it is in Christ that we are fellow members of the Body (Eph. 3:6). Hence, both the existence of the Body of Christ and our attachment as members rest upon our vital union with Christ. As we continually receive the dispensing of the divine life into our inward parts and grow in this life, the development of our organic union with Christ matures into the reality of His Body, His enlarged organic expression.

### A Corporate Union of Christ with His Believers

The expression *Christ our life* in Colossians 3:4 indicates that Christ is life to His entire mystical Body corporately. Christ as the divine life does not belong solely to any individual believer; rather, He is a life that belongs to the entire mystical Body of Christ and that unites each believer with all the other members of the Body. F. F. Bruce echoes this view, stating that in Paul's thought, Christ being our life is not "something which is true of

himself alone," for "Christ is the life of all those who are united to him by faith, members of his body" (136). Hence, we need to experience Christ as life not only in our personal daily walk but also in the church as the Body of Christ.

In Colossians 1 Paul speaks of the church as the Body of Christ and of Christ as the Head of the Body (vv. 18, 24). The Body of Christ is not merely an apropos metaphor for the oneness of the believers in the church; instead, it is an organic reality, a corporate union of Christ with His believers in the divine life. No doubt, there exists a distinction between Christ as the Head of the Body and the believers as the Body of the Head. In 1:18, after referring to Christ as the Head, Paul declares that Christ is also "the Firstborn from the dead," that He might have the first place in all things. This clearly establishes Christ's inviolable preeminence in God's new creation produced in resurrection and His unique priority in the Body of Christ, the new man (Eph. 2:15-16). Christ possesses an unequaled status as the Head of the Body, to which we, even while organically joined to Him, will never be elevated. As "the Firstborn of all creation," He has the first place in the old creation (Col. 1:15); as "the Firstborn from the dead," He has the priority in the new creation (v. 18); and as "the Head of all rule and authority," He has the supremacy over all angelic powers (2:10). Christ as the Head of the Body is the unique object of worship, and as the Body of the Head, we are His fullness, His expression, and should take the lead to worship Him. The Body of Christ is, indeed, Christ Himself constituted into the believers organically (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-13). Hence, the Body is not a figure of speech for the extrinsic assembly of the believers; rather, it is a spiritual reality—the intrinsic aggregate of the Christ united with and expressed through us. Such an organic Body comes into being not through human organization but through the divine dispensing of Christ as life into us as members of the Body.

### Holding the Head

In Colossians 2:19 Paul reveals certain crucial corporate aspects of the union between the Head and the Body in the divine life: "Not holding the Head, out from whom all the Body, being richly supplied and knit together by means of the joints and sinews, grows with the growth of God." According to this verse, the Body is richly supplied and grows with the growth of God out from Christ as the Head. This indicates that Christ the Head is the unique source of the Body's life supply for its growth. The drawing of the rich spiritual supply from the Head requires that the Body hold the Head continually. For the members to hold the Head means not only to

acknowledge Him as our unique authority and to submit to Him in all things but also to remain intimately connected to Him in the organic union, not allowing ourselves to be severed from Him. In his commentary on Colossians, Robert Govett suggests that to not hold the Head is to “move away from union with Christ, the Head,” and that conversely to hold the Head is equivalent to abiding in the Lord according to His words in John 15:4-5 (155). Our holding Christ the Head requires us not only to come under the Head as our authority but also to abide in Him, take Him as our life, and thereby live in an organic union with Him. The fact that Colossians 2:19 speaks of not holding the Head indicates that although we as the Body are joined to Christ the Head in an inseparable union of life with Him in our mingled spirit, it is possible for our experience of this union to be disrupted when we do not abide in the Lord by failing to remain in our spirit. Accordingly, Peter T. O’Brien notes that he who “does not depend on the head has no contact with the source of life and nourishment...The community must realize that they must remain in living union with Christ as the head” (148). Thus, the reality of the Body of Christ as an organism of Christ is sustained by our continuous experience of our life union with the Head through our constant walk according to our spirit.

### *Growing with the Growth of God*

In Colossians 2:19 Paul declares that the Body of Christ grows with the growth of God. Here *the growth of God* refers to “the growth of His own life in the church” (Johnson 115). It is certainly not possible for God to grow in Himself, for in Himself He is perfect and complete. Nevertheless, it is vital that God grow in the members of the Body by saturating them with Himself. God, as the source of life, is embodied in Christ, for in Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (John 5:26; Eph. 4:18; Col. 2:9). This Christ is the unique element constituting the Body, since this Body is the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:12). Hence, the growth of God in the Body is equivalent to the growth of Christ in us. R. C. H. Lenski underlines that in Colossians 2:19 “Paul is not speaking of numerical growth” but of “inner, spiritual growth” (136). Since the growth of the Body is “the growth of God,” it does not principally refer to swelling numbers of converts won through prevailing gospel outreach; rather, it refers to the increase of Christ within the members of the Body through the development of our organic union with Him until we all arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:13; 1:22-23). Without the growth of God, the increase of God in Christ within us, the organic Body of Christ cannot grow (4:15-16). The goal of the

New Testament ministry, the building up of the Body, is nothing less than the growth of the Body, which is the increase of Christ within us through the development of our union with Him (v. 12). Thus, the growth and building up of the Body depends upon the development of our union with the indwelling Christ.

### *Living in the Consciousness of the Body*

According to Colossians 2:19, all the Body, holding the Head, is richly supplied and knit together by means of the joints and sinews (cf. Eph. 4:16). If we live in an organic union with Christ, holding Him as the Head, and expand this union, growing with the growth of God, we will come to realize that as the members of the Body we are joined not only to Christ as the Head but also to one another as fellow members of the Body. We are members not only of Christ but also of one another (1 Cor. 6:15; Rom. 12:5). By seeing this corporate dimension of our union with Christ, we will be brought into the consciousness of the Body. Colossians portrays how Paul and his co-workers lived in such a consciousness in the organic

**We are members not only of Christ but also of one another. By seeing this corporate dimension of our union with Christ, we will be brought into the consciousness of the Body.**

mutuality and interdependence between all the members. This is seen in their unceasing prayer for the Colossian believers coupled with their realization of the need for the Colossians to pray for them. On the one hand, Paul and his co-workers spiritually supplied the believers in Colossae by unceasingly praying that the believers in Colossae would be filled with the full knowledge of God’s will, would walk worthily of the Lord to please Him in all things, and would bear fruit in every good work, growing by the full knowledge of God and being empowered with all power (1:3, 9-11). On the other hand, Paul, seeking a spiritual supply, asked the Colossians to pray for him and his co-workers that God would open a door for the word and enable them to speak and make manifest the mystery of Christ (4:3-4). Paul’s request that the Colossians would remember his bonds, which were for the manifestation of the mystery of Christ, demonstrates that he had a highly developed consciousness of the Body (v. 18; cf. Rom. 12:5, 15; 1 Cor. 12:25-26; Heb. 13:3). In the consciousness of the Body Paul could attest that by their love “in the Spirit” the Colossian believers could love “all the saints,” and he

desired that their hearts would be knit together in such a divine love (Col. 1:8, 4; 2:2). In this way Paul, his co-workers, and the believers in Colossae could live in the reality of Paul's word in 2:19, in which all the Body is richly supplied and knit together by means of the joints and the sinews.

### *Filling Up That Which Is Lacking of the Afflictions of Christ for His Body*

Colossians 2:19 reveals that the spiritual supply of the Body of Christ flows not only from the Head but also through the joints. A joint of the rich supply is a member of the Body who ministers the life supply to the Body by being one with Christ in His life-releasing death. Paul serves as an example of such a joint, testifying in Colossians 1:24, "I now rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His Body, which is the church." In the Ryrie Study Bible, Charles C. Ryrie insightfully points out that "because of the union of believers with Christ, Paul's sufferings for the sake of the

Christ's sufferings became so rich and constant that he could testify that he always bore about in his body the putting to death of Jesus so that through the ceaseless operation of the cross within him, Christ's resurrection life might continually flow through him into his fellow members (2 Cor. 4:10-12). The building up of the Body requires the ministry of Christ as life into the believers, and this ministry, in turn, requires the believers' experience of union with Christ in His life-releasing death.

### *The New Man*

Having unveiled the Body of Christ as the organic corporate expression of Christ produced and sustained by our union with Him in Colossians 2:19, Paul goes on in 3:10-11 to reveal an even higher aspect of this corporate expression—the new man. Here *the new man* does not refer to "the new self" as "the new nature, or capacity, received when one is saved with which one may serve God and righteousness" (Ryrie 1900). Such an interpretation oriented toward individualistic spirituality runs contrary to Paul's thought concerning the new man as a corporate entity—the church as the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; 2:15-16). The new man is a corporate man bearing God's image for His glorious expression and representing Him with His dominion for His unshakable kingdom on earth, thereby fulfilling God's original intention in creating humankind (Gen. 1:26). Strictly speaking, the new man is the corporate Christ—a universal new man composed of Christ, the firstborn Son of God, as the Head, in life union with us, the many sons of God, as the Body (Rom. 8:29).

**The new man is the corporate Christ—a universal new man composed of Christ, the firstborn Son of God, as the Head, in life union with us, the many sons of God, as the Body.**

church can be called *Christ's afflictions* as well" (1898). Christ's afflictions consist of two categories: those for accomplishing redemption and those for producing and building up the church as His Body. Christ as the Lamb of God suffered a vicarious death on the cross to obtain an eternal redemption, shedding His precious blood for the forgiveness of sins (John 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:12, 22). Because He alone was the Lamb "without blemish and without spot," He alone was qualified to die a substitutionary death in which He "suffered once for sins, the Righteous on behalf of the unrighteous" (1 Pet. 1:18-19; 3:18). Christ's afflictions for the accomplishing of redemption were accomplished once for all, and in these sufferings there is no deficiency (cf. Heb. 7:27; 10:10). As sinners standing in need of redemption, we may benefit from Christ's redemption through faith, but we can never share in His afflictions related to redemption. Paul, a former persecutor of the church, eventually aspired to enter into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings to suffer with Christ on behalf of His name for the sake of God's elect (Phil. 3:8, 10; Rom. 8:17; Acts 9:16; 2 Tim. 2:10). Paul's participation in

In Paul's understanding, the Christ to whom we are organically joined is the constituent of the new man as a corporate divine-human person. The new man is the church as an organic and corporate entity constituted with Christ as our life. Shortly after speaking of "Christ our life" (Col. 3:4), Paul speaks of the new man: "Where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all" (vv. 10-11). The expression *Christ is all and in all* is profoundly significant. *All* refers to all the believers who compose the church as the new man. Hence, Christ being all in the new man means that Christ is all the members of the new man. According to Henry Alford in *The New Testament for English Readers*, *Christ is all* implies that the believers' identification with Christ is a consequence of their union with Him: "Every distinctive category of humanity is done away as to worth or privilege, and all have been absorbed into and centre in this one, to be Christ's, yea to be Christ—His members, in vital union with Him" (1305). In the new man we are all vitally joined to Christ to such an extent

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that we become Him in life, nature, constitution, and expression but not in the Godhead. In such a union Christ is us, and we are Christ.

*Christ is all* in the new man means that He is the unique person of the new man. This is seen in Paul's thought that "Christ is all" in conjunction with the thought that "there cannot be" natural persons with identities based upon the natural distinctions of race (Greek and Jew), religious ordinance (circumcision and uncircumcision), culture (barbarian, Scythian), or social status (slave, free man). According to Frederick Brooke Westcott in *Colossians: A Letter to Asia*, in the new man, in Christ, "all these differences and distinctions vanish. All are lost, obliterated in one prodigious union" (150). *There cannot be*, according to Marvin R. Vincent, signifies "not merely the fact but the impossibility: there is no room for" (503). This means that "not only is there no natural person in the new man, but there is no possibility and no room for any natural person to exist" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 11, note 2). In the new man there is room only for Christ because He alone is the person of the new man. The crucial truth implied in Colossians 3:11 is not that the new man is a corporate person in whom every distinctive category of humanity is *included* but that it is a corporate person in whom every natural distinction is *annulled*, replaced by Christ as the unique content and person. In experience this requires us to be constituted with and replaced by Christ so that we may take Him as our person and live Him, not ourselves with our natural identities.

In the new man "Christ is all" and "there cannot be" any natural persons, because the creation of the new man is the issue of the death of Christ wherein He abolished all ordinances, every factor of division among humanity, and released His divine life to the believers. On the negative side, in Christ's crucifixion God wiped out and nailed to the cross the handwriting in ordinances, which are the forms of living and worship that engender enmity among humankind (2:14). On the cross Christ broke down the middle wall of partition, the enmity between the Jews and the Gentiles, by abolishing in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances, the most prominent of which was the ordinance of circumcision (Eph. 2:14-15). Through such an ordinance-abolishing death Christ annulled the differences in race, religion, culture, and social class. On the positive side, in His crucifixion Christ created the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers into one new man "in Himself," thus making peace between them (v. 15). The Greek word translated "in" (ἐν) in verse 15 also has the elemental significance of *with*. Through His death Christ released the divine life from within Himself, and

dispensed it to the believers in resurrection, thus creating the new man in Himself. Despite the reality of Christ's work on the cross to create the new man, many believers today take pride in their natural distinctions, cling to and impose their separating ordinances on others, and fail to live Christ, not taking Him as their person. This is symptomatic of a tremendous paucity of the believers' living in union with Christ in His ordinance-terminating death. If the new man is ever to find practical expression on the earth, we must be willing to remain in union with Christ in His all-terminating death and live by Him as the unique essence and person of the new man.

In Colossians 3:11 Paul states not only that "Christ is all" but also that "Christ is...in all." In Alford's view, Christ being in all means that He is "living in, working through and by" all the members of the new man (1305). In our union with Christ, He is our life and content, and we are His living, His expression. We are Christ's unique means through which He can manifest Himself and carry out God's eternal purpose. The new man is Christ being wrought into, operating within, and being expressed

The manifestation of the new man on earth in a practical way requires us, who compose the new man, to be renewed in our inward parts through the expansion of our organic union with the indwelling Christ.

in us. The new man is the enlargement of Christ in redeemed humanity through a relationship of life union.

In the sight of God, the new man brought forth through Christ's work on the cross now exists as a spiritual reality. Nevertheless, the manifestation of the new man on earth in a practical way requires us, who compose the new man, to be renewed in our inward parts through the expansion of our organic union with the indwelling Christ. Colossians 3:10 clearly reveals this thought, saying that the new man "is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him." Here Paul speaks both of the creation and of the renewing of the new man. This indicates that although the new man has been created in Christ as an organic reality, there is still the need for it to undergo a process of renewal in practicality. After Christ accomplished the creation of the new man in His crucifixion, the Spirit applied this spiritual fact to us personally when we believed into Christ, experienced regeneration, and entered into an organic union with Him. Although our spirit is a new creation and thus part of the universal new

man, our soul and body remain in the old creation and are still in need of renewing through saturation with Christ as the life-giving Spirit. The renewing of the new man is the expansion of our organic union with the pneumatic Christ from our spirit through our soul and into our body.

The renewing of the new man mentioned in Colossians 3:10 is not an instantaneous event accomplished once for all; instead, it is a “process of continuous renewal” (Vincent 503). Henry Alford, quoting Meyer’s *New Testament Commentary*, characterizes the renewing of the new man as a gradual process of development: “The new man is not any thing ready at once and complete, but ever in a state of development [by the Holy Spirit, Tit. iii. 5], by which a *new* state and nature is brought about in it, specifically different from that of the old man” (1305). Gordon Fee agrees with this view, adding that to “effect a continual renewal” of the new man is “the work of the Spirit” (647). Fee puts forward the idea that in Paul’s view the Greek verb translated “being renewed” in Colossians 3:10 “has the closest kind of association with the Spirit”; for instance, “in Titus 3:5 Christian conversion

Thus, in our experience, the renewing of the new man is the enlargement of our union with the indwelling Christ as the Spirit from our spirit into our mind as the leading part of our soul. Paul’s utterance in Colossians 3:10 that the new man “is being renewed unto full knowledge” confirms that this renewing takes place primarily in our mind. Because the mind governs and directs the soul, the renewing of the mind spontaneously issues in the renewing of the soul in its entirety, including the emotion and the will. This thought is echoed in Romans 12:2: “Be transformed by the renewing of the mind,” which indicates that the renewing of the mind serves as a base for the transformation of the soul into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). F. F. Bruce states that it is “by the renewing of their minds” that the believers, “through their union with Christ,” are “transformed” (148). Colossians 3:10 conveys the thought of transformation into the image of Christ, stating that the new man is being renewed “according to the image of Him who created him,” that is, according to the image of Christ, the Creator of the new man (Eph. 2:15). By allowing the pneumatic Christ to pervade our mind, we progress in our organic union with Him and are conformed

to His glorious image until we “arrive...at a full-grown man,” the corporate new man in full maturity, for its practical manifestation on earth (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 4:13). Therefore, the organic constitution and practical expression of the new man is altogether dependent upon the expansion of our life union with the indwelling Christ through the spreading of the mingled spirit into our soul.

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### Conclusion

is explicitly called a regeneration, a ‘making new’ by the Holy Spirit” (647). Fee argues that “lying behind this ‘renewing’ activity is God the Holy Spirit,” who is “the unexpressed subject”; hence, “believers are to understand themselves as continually being made new by the Holy Spirit” (647).

In Ephesians 4:23-24 Paul shows the Spirit’s function in the renewing of the new man by joining his word concerning putting on the new man with the imperative: “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.” Fee interprets the word *spirit* here as “the spirit/Spirit” (709), positing that “we should recognize the human spirit as the first referent, but be prepared also to recognize the Holy Spirit as hovering nearby, since in Paul’s own theology, such renewal is indeed the work of the Spirit” (712). In light of Paul’s emphasis on the mingling of the divine Spirit and the human spirit in his writings, *the spirit of your mind* should be understood as the mingled spirit—our regenerated spirit indwelt by and joined to Christ as the Spirit—entering and saturating our mind and thereby renewing it (1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:16; cf. v. 4; 2 Cor. 4:13; Eph. 1:17; 2:22; 3:5).

Colossians reveals that the economy of God, as the mystery once hidden in God from the ages and from the generations but now manifested to His saints, is the indwelling Christ as the hope of glory. The revelation concerning the indwelling Christ as the hope of glory embodies the primary contents of God’s eternal economy: the Triune God’s passing through a process in Christ that enables Him to impart Himself as life into us in order to be united with us in our tripartite being for the producing of His expanded expression. Christ being in us implies that God in Christ passed through the process of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection to become the life-giving Spirit for the purpose of entering into and indwelling us in an organic union with us. The indwelling Christ being the hope of glory implies the expansion of this union through an organic process in which He, the Spirit of life, is sown into us as a seed of life through the regeneration of our spirit, grows within us through the transformation of our soul, and will blossom forth from within us through the transfiguration of our body. The revelation concerning the believers’ life union with Christ is the key to unlocking the divine truths in Colossians,

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and the revelation concerning the mingling of the divine Spirit with the human spirit as the reality of our organic union with Christ is an implicit premise that is foundational to the experience of this union as described in this Epistle.

In Colossians Paul refers to the indwelling Christ as our life, indicating that this union is an organic union based upon our participation in Him as the divine life. Paul also underscores both Christ's being in us and our being in Him, revealing that the union between Christ and us is a coinhering union in which there is a mutual abiding in each other. Moreover, Paul speaks of our being identified with Christ in His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, showing that we may live in a union of identification with the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ so that His history becomes our spiritual experience. Furthermore, Paul highlights our need to grow unto maturity in Christ, indicating that our union with Christ is a developing union, which needs to spread from our spirit into our entire tripartite being. Ultimately, Paul reveals that our union with Christ is corporate in nature, involving our union with Him as the Head of the Body and with one another as fellow members of His Body. Our experience of this union issues in God's enlarged expression in the church as the Body of Christ and the new man. Consequently, the building up of the Body and the manifestation of the new man, made possible through the cultivation of our organic union with Christ, signals the consummate fulfillment of the indwelling Christ as the hope of glory (Eph. 4:4-6). May we allow the Christ who is our life to grow in us unto maturity through the expansion of our organic union with Him from our spirit, through our soul, and into our body, thus hastening the realization of the hope of glory on the day of His manifestation when we also will be manifested with Him in glory as His organic corporate expression, His one Body in reality. **LFC**

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