

# THE HEAVENLY MINISTRY OF THE ASCENDED CHRIST IN EPHESIANS

BY DAVID YOON

In their consideration of Christ, many believers tend to focus on the past or the future. They look back in appreciation to a historical Jesus, recalling His miraculous incarnation, virtuous human living, redeeming death, and victorious resurrection, or they look forward in anticipation to the coming Christ, awaiting His triumphant return. However, Christians largely overlook what Christ is doing today. This is because they are still veiled concerning the crucial matter of the heavenly ministry of the ascended Christ. Many Christians are misled to believe that, following His ascension, Christ, who was a carpenter when He lived on earth, is now busy constructing physical mansions for His believers in heaven, a notion that has no support in the Scriptures. Others, with more biblical understanding, may recognize that Christ's ascension was a momentous event that signaled His manifold accomplishments, including the completion of His ministry on earth, His return to glory following His earthly humiliation, and His exaltation as the Lord of all, and that it marked the commencement of His heavenly intercession. Regrettably, even this uplifted view relegates the present ministry of Christ to a faraway, doctrinal realm, confining His activities to the heavenlies, where they remain detached from the daily life of the believers. In order to comprehend the full scope of Christ's heavenly ministry and for it to become an experiential reality in our Christian life and church life, we must receive a spirit of wisdom and revelation to apprehend the truth concerning Christ's heavenly ministry as presented in Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians.

Among the books in the New Testament, Ephesians reveals the present ministry of the ascended Christ from a unique perspective, unveiling the believers' union with the ascended Christ and their participation in His heavenly ministry. According to this Epistle, the consummate goal of God's eternal economy is to head up all things in Christ, the God-appointed Head over all things, through the church, His mystical Body. In other words, God ultimately intends to bring all things in the universe into order under the headship of Christ through His Body as the means of His divine administration. However, before the universe can be headed up through the Body of Christ, the believers themselves as members of the Body must be headed up in Christ. This leads to a key revelation in Ephesians, one that brings Christ's ascension into the realm of the believers' experience: the heading up of the members of the Body is accomplished by the ascended Christ's transmission of God's surpassingly great power toward the believers, which is nothing less than God in Christ as the Spirit to be enjoyed as life and grace. Thus, the ultimate goal of Christ's heavenly ministry in ascension as the Accomplisher of God's economy is the building up of the Body of Christ for the heading up of all things in Christ. Toward this end the essential work of Christ in His heavenly ministry is the transmission of the power of the divine life as grace into the believers' tripartite being. It is also the basic responsibility of every believer to coordinate with the heavenly ministry of Christ for the building

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up of the Body by partaking of the riches of God's grace in order to grow in the divine life and to participate in a stewardship of grace to minister these riches to others and thus cause the growth of the Body. Finally, the integral means by which all of the above is practically realized in the believers' experience is the regenerated human spirit joined to the Spirit of Christ.

### **The Body of Christ—the Means by which the Ascended Christ Heads Up All Things**

The intimate role that the believers play in Christ's heavenly ministry is seen in the way that God accomplishes His economy, which is "to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him" (1:10). According to Paul's understanding, the Christ in whom God will head up all things is not simply the individual Christ but the corporate Christ—the one new man, a corporate God-man composed of the resurrected and ascended Christ as the Head and the church as His Body (2:15; 1 Cor. 12:12). For this reason, Ephesians 1:19-23 says that God's surpassingly great power that operated in Christ not only resurrected Him from the dead, seated Him at His right hand in the heavenlies, and subjected all things under His feet but also "gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all." We need to note the unmistakable parallel between God's operation in His economy "to head up all things" in Christ in verse 10 and God giving the ascended Christ to be "Head over all things" in verse 22. Both the Greek word translated "to head up" in verse 10 (ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι) and the Greek word translated "Head" in verse 22 (κεφαλὴν) are derived from the same root (κεφαλή). There is substantial support for the connection between the two verses. In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* Heinrich Schlier points out that although the expression *to head up* "is to be derived from κεφάλαιον rather than κεφαλή,...it is most likely that what is meant by the designation of Christ as [the Head] led the author of Eph. to choose this relatively infrequent but rich and varied term which agrees so well with his intention" (682).

Similarly, in his commentary on Ephesians Ernest Best suggests that "summing up in Christ" implies that "Christ is the 'head' of the All," which, in his own words, is "undoubtedly...true" (26). In *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Charles J. Ellicott argues that "the full meaning of this expression [*to head up all things in Christ*] is 'to gather again under one head' things which had been originally one, but had since been separated," and he asserts that "in these words St. Paul strikes the great keynote of the whole Epistle, THE UNITY OF ALL IN CHRIST" (18). Furthermore, it is significant that in verse 22, after declaring that God gave the ascended Christ the headship over all things in God's creation as a gift, Paul added the expression *to the church*. If Paul had concluded Ephesians 1 by saying that God gave Christ to be Head over all things, Christ's universal headship would have been understood as merely an objective attainment of the ascended Christ, having nothing to do with the church. However, the inclusion of the crucial expression *to the church, which is His Body* reveals that all that the resurrected and ascended Christ, the Head, has accomplished, attained, and obtained is transmitted to the church, His mystical Body.

**T**he deeper significance of Ephesians 1:22 is not merely that Christ has been appointed as Head over all things for the benefit of the church but that the resurrected and ascended Christ with all His attainments, such as His resurrection from the dead, His being seated at the right hand of God, the subjection of all things under His feet, and His headship over all things, is actively transmitted to the church. This is supported by verse 23, where the church is identified as Christ's Body, the recipient of all the attainments of the resurrected and ascended Head. The thought of transmission is also confirmed in verse 19, which says that God's exceedingly great power that operated in Christ in raising Him from the dead and exalting Him at His

right hand in the heavenlies is “toward us who believe,” that is, toward the believers who are members of the Body of Christ. Therefore, the eternal economy of God to head up all things in Christ is carried out by the ascended Christ who, as the Head over all things, is united with the church as His organic Body.

God’s intention in His economy is to head up all created things in Christ, the Head, through the church, His Body. Even though the church in and of itself is not the Head over all things, the church may and must participate in Christ’s headship over all things because she is the mystical Body of the ascended Christ as the universal Head. This notion is held by Schlier, who states that the heading up of all things in Ephesians 1:10 “obviously consists in [giving Christ to be Head over all things to the church]” (682) in verse 22. He asserts, “The summing up of the totality [the heading up of all things] takes place in its subjection to the Head. The subjection of the totality to the Head takes place in the co-ordinating of the Head and the Church. As the Church receives its Head the totality receives its [heading up]” (682). According to Schlier’s comments, it is by being the Head of the church, His Body, that the ascended Christ subjects all things under His authority, that is, heads up all things in Himself. In other words, all things in the universe can be subject to Christ only to the extent that the church as His Body coordinates with Christ as the Head and is subject to Christ as her Head. This highlights the indispensability of the Body of Christ as the instrument through which God carries out His economy.

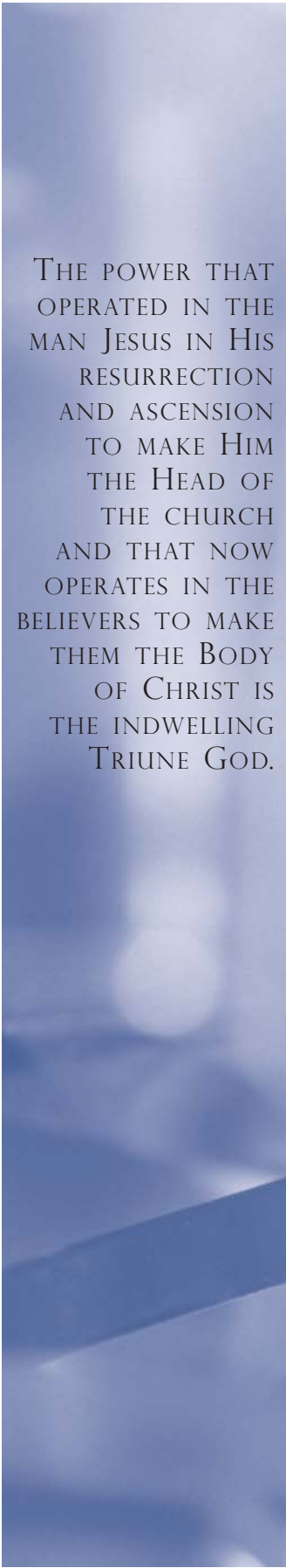
#### The Body of Christ—the Issue of the Transmission of the Ascended Christ

According to Ephesians 1:19-23, it was in His ascension that Christ was made not only the Head over all things but also the Head of the Body. Apart from Christ’s ascension, there would be no church, no Body of Christ. For this reason, after Paul speaks of Christ’s ascension in which God seated Christ at His right hand in the heavenlies, subjected all things under Christ’s feet, and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, Paul presents the church as the Body of Christ, implying that Christ is the Head of the church—a fact that is corroborated explicitly in 5:23. The Body of Christ is not a human organization but a divine-human organism in resurrection and ascension; it is “the issue of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ, who has come into the church” (Lee, Recovery Version, 1:23, note 1). The organic Body of Christ, the organism of the resurrected and ascended Christ, is not the issue of doctrinal teachings, miraculous gifts, human culture, or religious rituals; it is the product of the ascended Christ transmitting God’s incomparably great power to the believers, whereby the Triune God Himself is dispensed into them. The expression *to the church* in 1:22 points to the source of the church, which is the transmission into the believers of the exceedingly great power of God.

If we see that the church as the Body of Christ is the recipient of God’s great four-fold power—resurrection, ascension, subjection, and heading up—we, as the members of the Body, will be able to participate in the same power that God caused to operate in the resurrected and ascended Christ. By partaking of the power of resurrection, we will conquer spiritual death in our offenses and sins, overcome the law of sin and of death as well as the might and fear of death (Phil. 3:10; Eph. 2:1, 5; Rom. 5:17; 8:2; 1 Cor. 15:55-56; Heb. 2:14-15), and experience the God of resurrection who is able to deliver us from every death situation and usher us into the realm of resurrection by imparting Himself as resurrection life into our tripartite being (2 Cor. 1:9-10; Phil. 3:10; Rom. 8:6, 10-11). By enjoying the power of ascension, we as the Body of the ascended Christ, seated together with Him in the heavenlies, will transcend all authorities human and angelic, earthly and heavenly, including Satan as the ruler of the authority of the air and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:2, 6; 6:12). By experiencing the power of subjection, we will be under the power and authority of God in Christ alone and will not be brought under the power or

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authority of anything or anyone (1 Cor. 6:12); moreover, we will share in the Lord's subjection of all things to Himself unto the transfiguration of our body and experience the God of peace crushing Satan under our feet corporately (Phil. 3:21; Rom. 16:20). And by participating in the power of headship, we will cooperate with Christ, the universal Head, in executing the divine economy to head up all things, and we will rule with Him over the works of His hands (Psa. 8:5-6).

Since the immeasurably great power of God operated *in* Christ, this power should not be understood as a force that existed outside of Him but as the very Triune God, as the essence of Christ's divinity residing within Him. Likewise, this divine power not only is "toward us who believe" (Eph. 1:19) but also "operates in us" (3:20), indicating that this power is not merely an outward power that falls on us but an inward power that works within us. It is "the power of an indestructible life" (Heb. 7:16), the power of the eternal, uncreated life of God imparted into us at our regeneration. According to Paul's understanding, the exceedingly great power at work within the believers is God Himself "who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). The entire Triune God—the Father in the Son as the Spirit—works in the believers to be their divine energy. First, God the Father is the source of the divine power (cf. 2 Cor. 4:7; Mark 14:62; 16:19). In Ephesians 3:16 Paul prays to the Father as the origin, the One who can grant the believers to be strengthened with power into their inner man. Second, God the Son is the embodiment of the divine power (1 Cor. 1:24; 1 Tim. 1:12; Phil. 4:13). In Ephesians 6:10 Paul exhorts the believers to "be empowered in the Lord," pointing to the Lord Jesus as the sphere in which and the element with which they may be strengthened with the divine power. Third, God the Spirit is the application of the divine power (Rom. 1:4; 15:13; Luke 1:35). In Ephesians 3:16 it is "through His Spirit" that God strengthens the believers with divine power. The power of God that operated in the man Jesus in His resurrection and ascension to make Him the Head of the church and that now operates in the believers to make them the Body of Christ is nothing less than the indwelling Triune God—the Father who is embodied in the Son and realized as the Spirit.

The Body of Christ is the issue not only of the ascended Christ but also of the divine dispensing of the Triune God processed in Christ and consummated in the life-giving Spirit. This is because the Body of Christ is not only the fullness of Christ, the corporate expression of Christ (1:23), but also the fullness of God, the organism of the Triune God (3:19). Ephesians 4:4-6 says, "One Body and one Spirit, even as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." These verses reveal that the Body of Christ is the organism of the processed and consummated Triune God, taking the Father as its divine source (John 5:21; 1 Pet. 1:3; 2 Pet. 1:4), the Son as its divine element (Col. 1:18; Eph. 5:23), and the Spirit as its divine essence (1 Cor. 12:12-13). Since the Body of Christ is an organism constituted with the processed Triune God as its inward content and the regenerated and transformed believers as its outward framework, the producing of the Body depends on the dispensing of the Divine Trinity into the believers. Thus, it is crucial to see that the dispensing of the Triune God in Ephesians 1:4-14 is included in the transcending Christ's transmission of the fourfold power of God in Ephesians 1:19-23.

In Ephesians 1:3-14 Paul delivers an extended praise of the Triune God according to His triadic operation in His economy to dispense Himself into the believers. This dispensing is carried out through three successive steps in the divine economy: the Father's choosing and predestinating, the Son's redeeming to make us God's inheritance, and the Spirit's sealing and pledging. Immediately after speaking concerning the Divine Trinity's operation to dispense Himself into the believers in Ephesians 1:4-14, and before offering up his thanksgivings and prayers for the believers in

Ephesus in verses 15 through 23, Paul uses the word *therefore*, providing a semantic link between his praise of the Triune God and the following supplication concerning the believers' knowledge of the hope of God's calling, the riches of the glory of God's inheritance in the saints, and God's power toward the believers. Burdened for the accomplishment of the grand economy delineated in verses 4 through 14, Paul prays that the Father of glory would enlighten the eyes of the believers, enabling them to see and experience the transmission of God's surpassingly great power, which dispenses the processed Triune God into them, thereby fulfilling the hope of God's calling, imparting Christ as God's glorious inheritance into them, and ultimately producing them as the Body of Christ, the corporate expression of the resurrected and ascended Christ. Christ is the embodiment of the Triune God, for in Him "dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). The ascended Christ's transmission of God's exceedingly great power enables the believers to not only participate in the attainment of the resurrected and ascended Christ but also partake of the divine dispensing of the Triune God so that they may be produced as the organic Body of Christ, the organism of the processed and consummated Triune God.

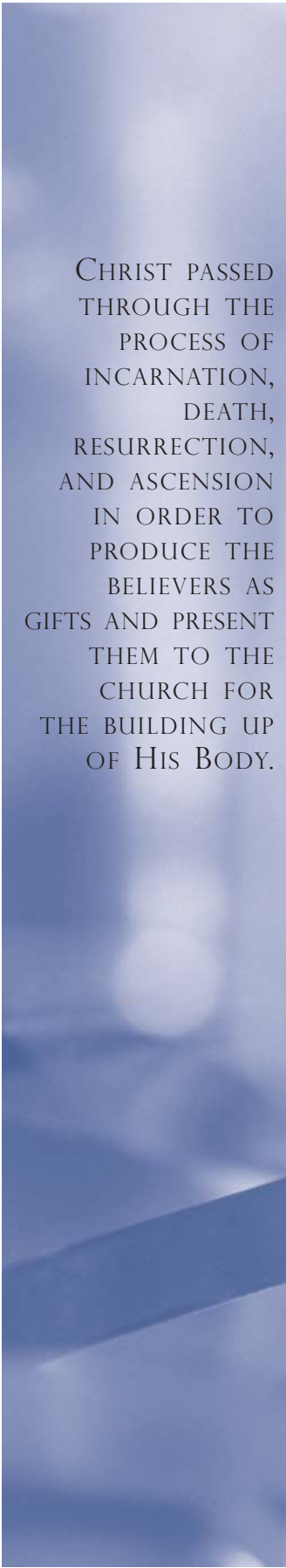
### The Body of Christ—the Fullness of the All-filling Christ

The fact that the Body of Christ is the organism of the resurrected and ascended Christ is further indicated by Ephesians 1:23, where Paul speaks of the Body of Christ as "the fullness of the One who fills all in all." This expression *the One who fills all in all*, identified with *His Body*, should be interpreted in view of 4:9-10, which says that the purpose of Christ's descension and ascension was for Him to fill all things: "Now this, 'He ascended,' what is it except that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended, He is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things." These verses reveal that Christ underwent a lengthy process, passing through the highest and lowest places in the universe, in order to be the One who fills all in all. Formerly, Christ as God was in the heavens, the highest place in the universe. In His incarnation Christ "descended out of heaven" to earth, thereby becoming "the Son of Man," a God-man (John 3:13; cf. 1 Cor. 15:47).

Then, after His crucifixion, Christ in His death descended into "the lower parts of the earth," referring to Hades (Acts 2:27)—an interpretation almost unanimously supported by the church fathers, including Irenaeus, Origen, Tertullian, John Chrysostom, and Jerome (Best 195). This fulfilled Christ's prophecy in Matthew 12:40 that He as the Son of Man would be "in the heart of the earth three days and three nights." After three days, in His resurrection Christ not only ascended from Hades to earth (Eph. 2:5-6) but also became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). Then, He further ascended from earth to heaven, eventually ascending "far above all the heavens," having passed through the heavens and becoming higher than the heavens (Eph. 4:10; 2:6; Heb. 4:14; 7:26). Through this process of incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension, He cut the way for Him to fill all things in the universe. Today the ascended Christ as the life-giving Spirit is omnipresent and not limited by time and space (Nee 27: 131; 59: 93). He can be in the heavens and on the earth simultaneously. Therefore, the ascended Christ is truly all-transcending and all-extensive, for He is above all things in the universe and fills all things therein.

Since the resurrected and ascended Christ is unlimitedly great and universally vast, He needs an immense Body as His fullness for His complete expression. Both Marvin R. Vincent and Peter T. O'Brien assert that the Greek word translated "fullness" in Ephesians 1:23 does not have an active significance (i.e., "that which fills") but a passive significance (i.e., "that which is filled") (Vincent 373; O'Brien 150). In keeping with this interpretation, F. F. Bruce suggests that "the church may be viewed as that which is filled by Christ with his life, attributes, and powers"

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(276). Likewise, O'Brien identifies *the fullness* as referring to "the church which is filled or completed by Christ" (150). Similarly, in Henry Alford's view, the word *fullness* indicates that "the Church is the special receptacle and abiding place of Him who fills all things" (1212). The Body of Christ as the fullness of Christ is a corporate vessel filled with the universal Christ; it is an organic corporate expression of the all-filling Christ constituted into the believers, that is, the overflow of the unsearchably rich Christ who has been wrought into them (3:8). The Christ who fills all things in the universe certainly intends to fill all the members of His Body by imparting Himself with His unsearchable riches into them, until they grow in life unto maturity and thereby "arrive at...the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (4:13). As a result, the Christ who fills all in all with respect to the universe will be all and in all with respect to the new man (Col. 3:10-11; Eph. 2:15-16); that is, in the new man as the Body, He will fill all the believers, the constituents of the new man, and be in all the believers. This filling is achieved only through the transmission from the ascended Christ to the members of His Body. "It is in the divine transmission from the Head to the Body that the Body of Christ is the fullness of the One who fills all in all, because the Christ who fills all in all is in this transmission. The transmission connects us to the all-filling Christ. In this way the church becomes the Body, the fullness, of the all-filling Christ" (Lee, *Conclusion* 2271). If the believers would be filled with Christ in order to arrive at the stature of His fullness, they need to continually receive the transmission of the ascended Christ, in which He transfuses Himself with His untraceable riches, including all His accomplishments and attainments, into them.

#### **The Goal of Christ's Heavenly Ministry—the Building Up of His Body**

Ephesians 4:9-10 is a parenthetical remark inserted within verses 7 through 16, where we see the ascended Christ presenting gifts to His Body for its building up. This implies that Christ passed through the process of incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension in order to produce the believers as gifts and present them to the church for the building up of His Body. In verse 8 Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 in reference to Christ's ascension: "Therefore the Scripture says, 'Having ascended to the height, He led captive those taken captive and gave gifts to men.'" The expression *those taken captive* "refers to the redeemed saints, who were taken captive by Satan before being saved by Christ's death and resurrection" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Eph. 4:8, note 2). Originally, these saints were God's elect, chosen to be holy and predestinated unto sonship. However, through the fall they became Satan's captives, coming under the reign of sin and death (Rom. 5:14, 17, 21; 6:6). Yet in His incarnation Christ partook of blood and flesh, and through His all-inclusive death He not only redeemed them by His blood but also took away the sin of the world, destroyed Satan who has the might of death, and thus nullified death in order to liberate them from the bondage of sin and death (Eph. 1:7; John 1:29; Heb. 2:14; 2 Tim. 1:10). In His resurrection Christ as the life-giving Spirit imparted the divine life into them in order to regenerate them (1 Pet. 1:3), and in His ascension He led them as "a train of vanquished foes" in a triumphal procession to the heavens in order to demonstrate His victory over Satan, sin, and death (Eph. 4:8, *Amplified Bible*). When Christ ascended, He presented to the Father a corporate offering composed of all the saints whom He had captured as fruits of His resurrection (cf. Heb. 2:13; Isa. 8:18). The Father then returned these captured ones to Christ, making each of them a gift to Christ (cf. 53:12; John 3:35; 17:2), who, in turn, received these rescued saints (Psa. 68:18) and gave them as gifts to men (Eph. 4:8).

Following the parenthesis in Ephesians 4:9-10, verses 11 and 12 may be considered the direct continuation of verse 8. In these verses Paul reveals the ultimate goal for which Christ passed through His universal journey to fill all things and bestow gifts to men—the building up of the Body of Christ: "He Himself gave some as

apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as shepherds and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ.” According to these verses, the ascended Christ gave gifts not only in a general sense to be a blessing to the world but also specifically to His Body for its building up.

**I**n order to grasp the intrinsic significance of verse 12, we need to consider three particular phrases mentioned in this verse—for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of the ministry, and unto the building up of the Body of Christ. The ascended Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers to the church for the immediate purpose of perfecting the saints. The perfecting of the saints then issues in the work of the ministry. Since the phrase *unto the work of the ministry* is in apposition to *unto the building up of the Body of Christ*, the two should be understood to be equivalent. This implies that the perfecting of the saints, for which Christ gave gifts to the church, ultimately issues in the building up of the Body of Christ. Therefore, the overall thought of Ephesians 4:8-12 is that through His descending and ascending, through which Christ accomplished His incarnation, His redeeming and devil-destroying death, His life-imparting resurrection, and His triumphant ascension, Christ turned sinners into gifts whom He bestowed to the church for the perfecting of the saints unto the building up of the Body of Christ. This clearly indicates that the goal of Christ’s ascension and His heavenly ministry is the building up of the church as the Body of Christ.

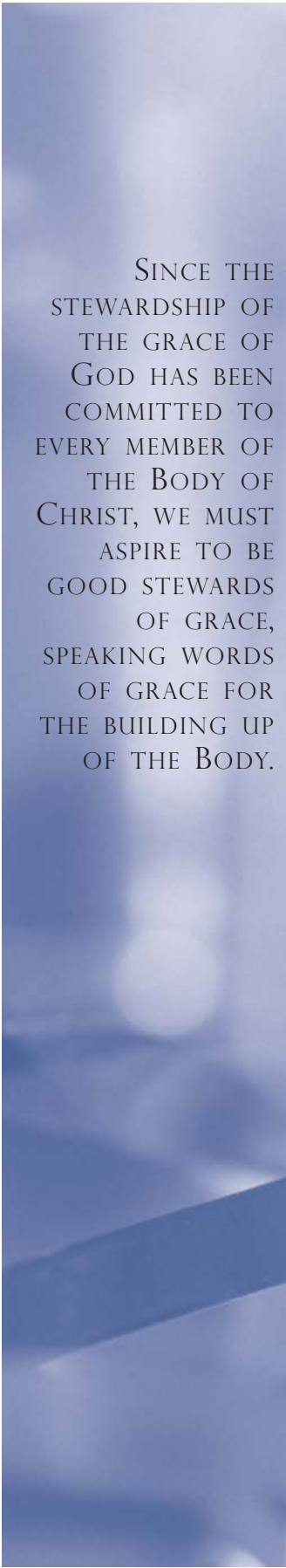
However, those whom the ascended Christ presented as gifts to the Body do not refer only to a special category of believers mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 but to all the believers. Verse 8, which speaks concerning the ascended Christ presenting gifts to men, begins with the word *therefore*, linking this verse to the previous verse, which says, “To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” Here *the gift of Christ* does not refer to a spiritual ability, as spoken of in Romans 12:6, or a miraculous gift, as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, but to the person gifted to the Body as a member of the Body of Christ. Moreover, the expression *each one of us* in Ephesians 4:7, which certainly refers to each member of the Body, further strengthens the case that every member of the Body is a gift given by the ascended Christ to His Body. In Paul’s understanding, every member of the Body is an indispensable gift to the Body, each having been given grace according to his measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (v. 13), and every member of the Body should therefore function according to his measure to contribute to the building up of the Body lest he nullify the grace given to him (v. 16; cf. Gal. 2:21).

#### **The Ascended Christ Building Up His Body in Cooperation with the Believers’ Stewardship of the Grace of God**

Contrary to what many Christians are taught, the ascended Christ is not building a literal mansion in heaven for the believers. Today He is fulfilling His prophecy in Matthew 16:18 concerning the building of the church. However, this building relies to a great degree on the believers’ exercise of the stewardship of the grace of God, a portion of which has been allotted to every believer in Christ. Although the four kinds of gifts spoken of in Ephesians 4:11 are special gifts to the Body of Christ, every believer is nonetheless a genuine gift to the Body. The gifts who serve in a greater measure as joints of supply are not meant to be a replacement for the rest of the believers and their function (v. 16); in fact, their particular commission is to perfect the saints to do the work of the ministry by helping them to grow in the divine life and to develop their organic function for the building up of the Body. It is vital to see that all the perfected saints are qualified to participate in the work of the New Testament ministry for the building up of the Body.

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The unique ministry in God's New Testament economy, which is intrinsically related to and incorporated with the ascended Christ's heavenly ministry, is to dispense Christ as life and the supply of life to the members of the Body for the growth of the organic Body of Christ, which growth issues in the building up of the Body (vv. 12-16). This ministry is not carried out by Christ alone but by all the believers in cooperation with Him as the ascended Christ, in which case it is referred to as "the stewardship of the grace of God" (3:2). The same Greek word translated "stewardship" in Ephesians 3:2 is rendered "economy" in verse 9 and 1:10. With respect to God, this word denotes an economy, an administrative arrangement; with respect to the believers, it denotes a stewardship, a dispensing ministry. In other words, when the economy of God is revealed and entrusted to the believers, this economy becomes the stewardship of the grace of God committed to them.

The apostle Paul was commissioned with the stewardship of the grace of God in order to carry out God's New Testament economy, which is to impart Christ into the members of His Body for the building up of the Body. Thus, he said, "To me, less than the least of all saints, was this grace given to announce to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel and to enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things" (3:8-9). Just as God in Christ causes the riches of His grace to abound to us, enlightening the eyes of our heart to know Him and His economy and making known to us the mystery of His will concerning His economy (1:7-10, 17-18), so also Paul, as a steward of God's grace, ministered the riches of Christ to others, enlightening them to see the economy of the hidden mystery and making known to them the mystery of the gospel concerning the divine economy (6:19). In coordination with the heavenly ministry of Christ to build up His organic Body, Paul, a faithful steward of the mysteries of God, dispensed the unsearchably rich Christ as the abounding grace of God into the members of the Body for the growth of the Body (1 Cor. 4:1-2). Every believer should follow Paul's pattern to be a "faithful and prudent slave," giving spiritual food to the members of God's household by ministering Christ as grace to the members of the Body of Christ (Matt. 24:45).

That all the saints are stewards of the grace of God agrees with Paul's view that the special gifts are responsible for perfecting the saints to do the same work that they themselves do. This thought is also found in 1 Peter 4:10, which says, "Each one, as he has received a gift, ministering it among yourselves as good stewards of the varied grace of God." This verse reveals that every believer is a minister entrusted with the stewardship of God's grace. Since the stewardship of the grace of God—the unique ministry in the New Testament—has been committed to every member of the Body of Christ, we must aspire to be good stewards of grace in order to minister Christ to others, speaking words of grace to supply them with grace for the building up of the Body (Eph. 4:29).

**T**he believers' exercise of the stewardship of the grace of God, through which the ascended Christ carries out His heavenly ministry to build up His organic Body, is dependent on their participation in the transcending Christ's transmission of the divine power. This is revealed in Ephesians 3:7-8, where Paul, referring to the gospel, says, "I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God which was given to me according to the operation of His power." It was the gift of the superabounding grace of God that transformed Saul of Tarsus, who was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor of the believers, and the foremost of sinners, into a minister of the gospel concerning the unsearchable riches of the all-inclusive Christ (1 Tim. 1:13-15). The source of Paul's stewardship was not his natural ability or human learning but the gift of grace, that is, the ability and function that issues from partaking of the grace of God as the divine life (1 Cor. 15:10). Moreover, this gift of grace was imparted to Paul according to the operation of God's power, which is "the power of the resurrection



life (Phil. 3:10)...[operating] within the apostle and...within all the believers ([Eph.] 1:19; 3:20)" (Lee, Recovery Version, Eph. 3:7, note 3). This power is nothing less than the processed and consummated Triune God operating in the believers as the divine power through the transmission of the ascended Christ. It was according to the inner operation of this immeasurably great power that Paul was constituted with the grace of God and thus became a competent minister of the gospel, announcing the untraceably rich Christ to the believers for their growth in life unto the building up of the Body of Christ.

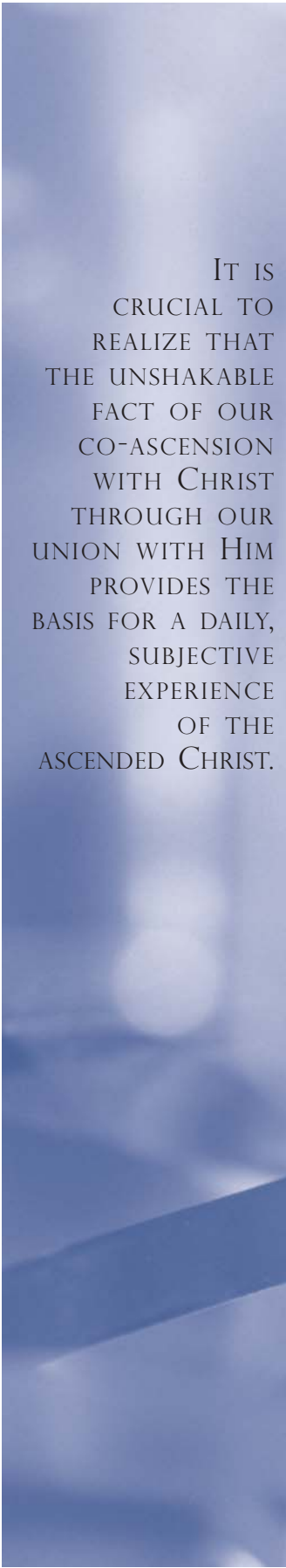
The same God who operated in Paul as the power of the eternal life for his apostleship operates also in all the believers for their function in the Body of Christ. Ephesians 4:16 says, "All the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love." Here the expression *the operation in the measure of each one part* refers to the functioning of each member of the Body of Christ according to his measure. F. F. Bruce notes that the Greek word translated "operation" in this verse also appears in 1:19 and 3:7, both of which refer to the "[operation] of divine power" (353). This implies that the exceedingly great divine power, which God caused to operate in Christ in His resurrection and ascension and which operated in the apostle Paul for his ministry, now operates in all the members of the Body to constitute them with the grace of God for their organic function in the Body, which causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love (cf. Col. 1:29). In order for us to carry out our stewardship of the grace of God for the building up of the organic Body of Christ, we need to receive the ascended Christ's transmission of the Triune God as the exceedingly great power of the divine life.

### **The Basis of the Believers' Experience of the Ascended Christ—Organic Union**

The believers' enjoyment of the ascended Christ and their participation in His heavenly ministry to build up His organic Body are based on their mystical union with Him. Since the eternal purpose of God is executed in Christ (Eph. 3:11), only by being in Christ can we participate in accomplishing God's eternal purpose to build up the Body of Christ for the heading up of all things in Christ. The truth concerning the believers' union with the ascended Christ is implicitly woven into the book of Ephesians (1:6, 19-20; 2:5-7, 10, 20-21; 3:6; 4:1, 17, 21; 6:10). The Christ with whom we are united is not only the crucified Redeemer and the resurrected Life-giver but also the ascended Head of all things. It is in such a Christ that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies (1:3), including all the accomplishments, obtainments, and attainments of the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ. Through one faith, by which we have believed into Christ, and one baptism, by which we have been baptized into Him, we have been joined to Him as one Lord in a vital union (4:5). The Body of Christ is the corporate issue of the believers' organic union with the resurrected and ascended Christ. In order to experience the present operation of the ascended Christ to build up His organic Body, we need to abide in Christ, maintaining our organic union with Him by remaining in ceaseless fellowship with Him.

**E**phesians 2:5-6 not only furnishes proof of Christ's resurrection from the dead and ascension into the heavens but also reveals the believers' co-resurrection and co-ascension with Christ through their union with Him, proving that the immeasurably great power that God caused to operate in Christ was applied to the believers at the time of His resurrection and ascension. These verses say, "Even when we were dead in offenses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised us up together with Him and seated us together with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." Here both Paul's signature phrase *in Christ Jesus* and his repeated use

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of the prefix *with* in the phrases *made us alive together*, *raised us up together*, and *seated us together* emphatically indicate that it is only by virtue of our union with Christ that we have been made alive, raised up, and seated in the heavenlies once for all by God. In fact, through our mystical union with Christ in the divine life, all that Christ has passed through, including His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, has become our own spiritual history; He is “the means by which, the sphere in which, and the element with which God has enlivened us, raised us up, and seated us in the heavenlies” (Lee, *Conclusion* 3357). Apart from our incorporation into Christ, His being made alive, raised up, and seated in the heavenlies would remain historical facts with little bearing on our experience. However, because of our organic union with Christ, we can participate in His resurrection, through which we have been made alive with the divine life and raised up from the position of death, and His ascension, through which we have been seated in the heavenlies.

According to Ephesians 2, when we were apart from Christ, we were without God in the world, having no hope, for we were under the power of deadness, the age of the world, the authority of Satan, and the lusts of our flesh (vv. 1-3, 12). However, as a result of God’s salvation, in which we were united with Christ, we were not only delivered from the dominion of all negative things but also seated together with Christ in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, far above all God’s enemies. In Ephesians 1 and 2 the expression *the heavenlies* “refers not only to the third heaven, the highest place in the universe, where God dwells, but also to the state and atmosphere of the heavens, in which Christ was seated by God’s power” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Eph. 1:20, note 4). Hence, to be seated in the heavenlies is to be transferred to the highest peak in the universe and into a heavenly atmosphere with a heavenly, nature, state, and characteristic. It is altogether possible for the historical fact of Christ’s ascension to become our own by virtue of our organic union with Him. We may live a heavenly life on earth, assuming a heavenly position and living in a heavenly state and atmosphere because we are joined to the ascended Lord. Today our experience of the ascended Christ should not be limited merely to adoring our Lord enthroned in heaven from our lowly position on earth; we should realize our co-enthronement with our exalted Lord, soaring above all negative and earthly things and reigning in life with Him over the entire universe (Rom. 5:17). It is crucial to realize that the unshakable fact of our co-ascension with Christ through our union with Him provides the basis for a daily, subjective experience of the ascended Christ and that the unique way to experience this spiritual reality is to remain in our life union with the resurrected and ascended Christ by abiding in Him as the Spirit of Christ.

### **The Spirit—the Realization of the Ascended Christ in the Believers’ Experience**

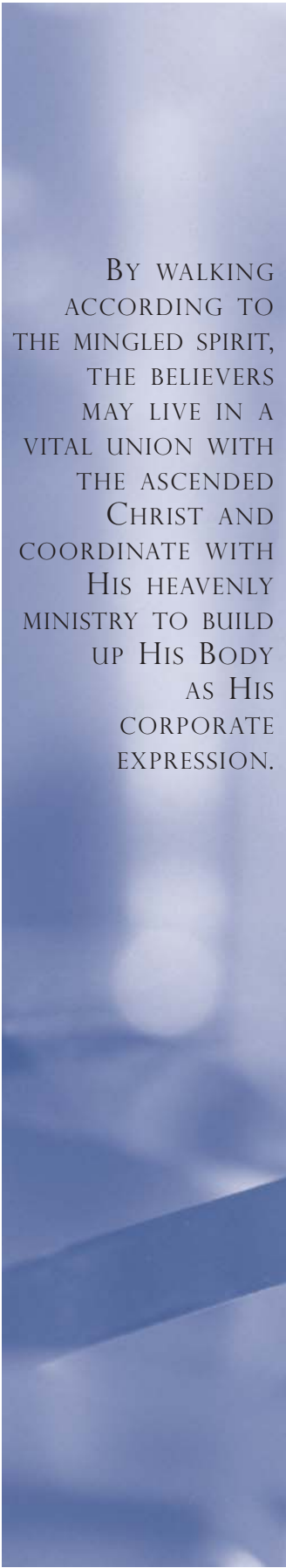
The resurrected and ascended Christ is realized in the believers’ experience as the Spirit, and their enjoyment of Christ cannot be separated from their participation in the Spirit. This is demonstrated throughout the book of Ephesians, but especially in three crucial passages. In Ephesians 1:13 Paul reveals the mutual operation of the ascended Christ and the Holy Spirit to make the believers God’s inheritance, stating that by believing in Christ, the believers are “sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise.” In the context of the preceding verses, the One in whom we believe refers to the resurrected and ascended Christ, who is not only the universal Head of all things but also the One in whom we were designated as an inheritance. This indicates that the resurrected and ascended Christ is the sphere in which and the divine element with which the believers are produced as God’s inheritance. When we entered into an organic union with Christ by believing into Him, we simultaneously received the Spirit as a seal, a “mark of ownership” (Fee 669), indicating that we are God’s treasured possession. When God dispenses the Holy Spirit as a living seal into us, this Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ, permeates us, imparting to us the reality of Christ as the divine element so that we may be constituted with Christ. As a result of the

Spirit's operation to transmit Christ as the divine element into us, we are transformed from pieces of worthless clay into a precious treasure worthy of God's inheritance.

In Ephesians 2:18 Paul reveals the inseparable operation of the ascended Christ and the Spirit in bringing the believers to the Father: "Through Him [Christ] we both have access in one Spirit unto the Father." The incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ affords us access unto the Father by His redemptive work (Heb. 10:19-20). Christ accomplished redemption on the cross, shedding His precious blood (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:20), and He obtained an eternal redemption when in His ascension He entered once for all into the heavenly Holy of Holies through the redeeming blood, that is, when He brought His redeeming blood to offer it before God (Heb. 9:12). It is in Christ and in His redeeming blood that we who were once "far off" from God have now become "near" to Him (Eph. 2:12-13). Moreover, the resurrected and ascended Christ Himself is the access to the Father. By His own admission, Christ is the unique way to the Father, and apart from Christ no one can come to the Father (John 14:6). This is not only because the ascended Christ alone has access to the Father, as the One seated at the right hand of God in the heavenlies and appearing there before the face of God for us (Eph. 1:20; Heb. 9:24), but, more profoundly, because Christ and the Father mutually indwell one another (John 14:10). Thus, we can be in God the Father only by being in the resurrected Christ (17:21, 24; 14:20). Ultimately, the heavenly ministry of Christ to provide access to the Father is executed through the Spirit, who is the realization of the resurrected and ascended Christ. As the Spirit of reality, He guides the believers into the reality of Christ, who, as the embodiment of the Father, manifests the Father to the believers and brings them to the Father (16:13; 1:18; 14:9-10; cf. Matt. 26:30; Heb. 2:11-12). The indwelling Spirit is the element and sphere of the mutual indwelling of God and the believers; it is by the Spirit of God that we know that we abide in God and He in us (1 John 4:13). Therefore, the believers' sole access unto the Father for their enjoyment of Him is the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ, who is realized as the life-giving Spirit within them.

Perhaps nowhere in Ephesians is the truth concerning the mutual operation of the ascended Christ and the Spirit in the experience of the believers more intrinsically presented than in 4:4-5, which says, "One Body and one Spirit, even as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism." Through one faith and one baptism the believers have been joined to the *one Lord*—the ascended Christ, who is not only the Head over all things but also the Head of the Body—in order to be the members of Christ individually and the mystical Body of Christ corporately (1 Cor. 6:15, 17; 12:12, 27). Nevertheless, it is the *one Spirit*—the realization of Christ—who brings the believers into an actual union with Christ, thereby making them the *one Body* of Christ in reality. In Paul's mind, the resurrected and ascended Lord with whom we are united through faith and baptism is "the Spirit of the Lord," "the Lord Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:17-18; 1 Cor. 15:45). Moreover, in Paul's understanding, both faith and baptism are intrinsically connected to the work of the Spirit within us. Our believing into Christ by faith is vitally related to our being sealed with the Spirit, and the reality of our baptism into Christ (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3) is our baptism in the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). It is only by the believers' being baptized in the *one Spirit* that the *one Body* of Christ was formed, and it is only by drinking the *one Spirit*, the essence of the Body, that the believers are filled with Christ, the element of the Body (vv. 12-13). As a result, believers from diverse cultural, religious, social, and racial backgrounds may truly become constituted as the one Body of Christ in its intrinsic reality, which marks the ultimate fulfillment of the one hope of their calling (Eph. 4:4). The execution of the heavenly ministry of Christ to build up His Body depends on the operation of the indwelling Spirit of reality to saturate the believers, which, on the believers' side, must be matched by their continual partaking of the Spirit.

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### The Mingled Spirit—the Means of the Believers' Participation in the Ascended Christ and His Heavenly Ministry

Ephesians reveals not only that the believers' participation in the ascended Christ and His present ministry is based upon their organic union with Him as the life-giving Spirit but also that the locus of this union is the mingled spirit, the human spirit regenerated by and mingled with the divine Spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). It is by walking according to the mingled spirit that the believers may live in a vital union with the ascended Christ and coordinate with His heavenly ministry to build up His Body as His corporate expression and representation for the fulfillment of the divine economy to head up all things in Christ (Rom. 8:4).

The mingled spirit pervades every chapter of Ephesians, highlighting its crucial importance in the practical execution of Christ's heavenly ministry among the believers. In Ephesians 1:17-23 Paul prays for "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory" to give to the believers "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him" so that with the enlightened eyes of their heart they may know the hope of God's calling, the glory of God's inheritance in the saints, and God's power toward them. A spirit of wisdom and revelation, which refers to the believers' regenerated human spirit indwelt by the Spirit of God, is the spiritual organ whereby we may receive divine wisdom and revelation in order to know God and His economy. It is by the exercise of our mingled spirit that we can know and attain to the hope of God's calling. It is also by the exercise of our mingled spirit that we can receive the element of Christ into our being in order to become God's glorious inheritance as well as perceive the rich inheritance of God constituted into the saints. And it is by the exercise of our mingled spirit that we can both see and appropriate the surpassingly great power of God that is transmitted from the ascended Christ to the believers for the producing of the church as the Body of Christ, the fullness of the all-filling Christ.

In Ephesians 2:21-22 Paul refers to "the Lord" as the One "in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit." According to the context, the expression *in whom* points to the believers' union with the resurrected and ascended Lord as the cornerstone that joins the Gentile and Jewish believers together for the building of God's house (v. 21; Acts 4:10-12; 1 Pet. 2:4-6). The word *spirit* in Ephesians 2:22 denotes the believers' human spirit regenerated and indwelt by the Spirit of God. The fact that Paul refers to both the ascended Lord and the believers' mingled spirit as the location of God's dwelling place implies that the mingled spirit is the reality of their union with Him, forming the realm in which the building of the church as the house of God takes place (1 Tim. 3:15). In order for us to coordinate with Christ in His present ministry to build His church, His Body, we need to maintain our vital union with the Lord by remaining in our mingled spirit.

In Ephesians 3:5 Paul tells us that the mystery of Christ concerning the church as the Body of Christ has been revealed to the "apostles and prophets in spirit." Here the word *spirit* refers to the human spirit of the apostles and prophets, born of and indwelt by the Spirit of God. This mingled spirit is the means by which the mystery of Christ is revealed not only to the apostles and prophets but also to all the believers in Christ. By living in the mingled spirit, we, like Paul, may receive the revelation of the mystery of Christ so that we may carry out our stewardship of grace in coordination with Christ's heavenly ministry to dispense Christ into the believers for the building up of His Body (v. 2).

In Ephesians 3:17-19 Paul prays that the Father would grant the believers to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man so that Christ may make His home in their hearts and that they may be filled unto all the fullness of God. The expression *the inner man* denotes the believers' regenerated spirit



(1 Pet. 3:4). The Father strengthens us with power *into* the inner man, implying transmission. This indicates that the power of God, which is nothing less than His Spirit, is transmitted toward us who believe not merely in a general sense but specifically toward our inner man, our spirit. When we are strengthened into our spirit with the fourfold power of God, Christ makes His home in our heart, spreading from our spirit into every part of our heart, until He permeates our whole inner being and occupies it as His permanent residence. As a result, we are filled unto all the fullness of God as the expanded expression of the Triune God in Christ (cf. Eph. 1:23). Thus, by living in our mingled spirit, we render Christ the highest cooperation in carrying out this most intrinsic work in His heavenly ministry.

In Ephesians 4 Paul instructs the believers to “be renewed in the spirit of your mind” (v. 23). Gordon D. Fee identifies the spirit in verse 23 as “yet another instance where 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 Fee’s insightful remark, the spirit in verse 23 should be understood as the mingled spirit, the believers’ regenerated human spirit joined to the indwelling Spirit of God. We need to allow such a mingled spirit, the Spirit in our spirit, to enter, permeate, and renew our mind to the extent that this spirit becomes the spirit of our mind, enabling us to have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). By being renewed in the spirit of our mind, we cooperate with Christ’s heavenly ministry to bring about the practical existence and manifestation of the one new man that He created on the cross—until we arrive at a full-grown man, the corporate man in maturation that expresses God’s image and exercises God’s dominion (Eph. 2:14-15; 4:13, 24; Gen. 1:26).

In Ephesians 5:18-30 Paul points to our mingled spirit as an organ for us to be permeated with Christ as the Spirit, encouraging us to be “filled in spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and psalming with your heart to the Lord” (vv. 18-19). To be filled in spirit is to be saturated with the all-filling Christ as the Spirit in our regenerated spirit unto all the fullness of God (3:19), and the expression *spiritual songs* indicates that “the Spirit is the very essence of our psalms, hymns, and songs” (Lee, *Living* 57). It is by exercising our mingled spirit that we touch the Spirit as the essence of our psalms, hymns, and songs and are constituted with Him, singing and psalming with our heart to the ascended Lord. The mingled spirit is the key to participating in Christ’s heavenly ministry to fill us with Himself as the Spirit with respect to His nourishing, sanctifying, and cleansing the church as His glorious bride to be presented to Him for His satisfaction at His second coming (5:26-30). If we would be nourished with the riches in the word and be sanctified and cleansed by the washing of the water in the word, we need to exercise our mingled spirit to contact the Spirit of life embodied in the word (6:17; John 6:63). When we do so, Christ as the life-giving Spirit will metabolically wash away our every natural blemish and saturate us with His holy element, thereby beautifying us and making us His holy, glorious counterpart (Eph. 5:26-27).


Lastly, in Ephesians 6:10-20 Paul presents the Body of Christ as a corporate warrior and shows the crucial role of the believers’ mingled spirit in waging spiritual warfare against the enemy of God. After exhorting the believers to take up the whole armor of God to stand against the stratagems of the devil, Paul issues an imperative that identifies prayer in the mingled spirit as the unique means by which this armor is applied: “Receive the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which Spirit is the word of God, by means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time in spirit” (vv. 17-18). Therefore, it is only by praying in our mingled spirit that we can appropriate every item of God’s complete armor in order to withstand and defeat the enemy and coordinate with the ascended Christ in accomplishing the divine economy to head up all things in the universe.

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## Conclusion

Ephesians reveals that the ascended Christ is the One appointed by God to carry out His economy to head up all things in the heavens and on the earth in Christ. The fulfillment of this economy is predicated upon the building up of the Body of Christ as the indispensable means by which the ascended Christ heads up all things in the universe. The building up of the Body as the fullness of Christ and the organism of the Triune God is carried out through the believers' partaking of the ascended Christ's transmission of the surpassingly great power of God, whereby the Triune God dispenses Himself in Christ as the Spirit into the believers in order to be life and grace to them. Christ's heavenly ministry to build up the Body of Christ is executed primarily in cooperation with the believers' stewardship of the grace of God. In carrying out this stewardship, the believers need to enjoy the ascended Christ's transmission of the exceedingly great power of God, which constitutes them with the riches of God's grace so that they may in turn minister these riches to other members of the Body for the growth of the Body unto its building up.

Ultimately, in order for the believers to enjoy the transmission of the ascended Christ and participate in the heavenly ministry of Christ to build up His Body, they need to live in an organic union with the ascended Christ by remaining in their mingled spirit, their human spirit regenerated by and joined to the Spirit of Christ. May we, by God's rich mercy and abounding grace, walk according to our mingled spirit to maintain our union with the ascended Christ, partaking of the transmission of the divine power, enjoying the grace of life, and ministering this grace to others for the building up of His organic Body, so that the ascended Christ may at last accomplish the economy of God to head up all things in Christ through His Body. 

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