

THE Subjective GOD

The Trinity in Christian Experience

by Ron Kangas

In *The Twofoldness of Divine Truth*, an important essay which argues that “opposite views of truth arise from different parts of the subject being viewed at different times” (9), Robert Govett says that it is not “to be wondered at, if two seemingly opposed principles are found placed side by side in the Scripture” (4). The principle of the twofoldness of biblical truth is that God has chosen to reveal the truth in a balanced, two-sided way, a way that sometimes involves apparently contradictory doctrines. Central to Govett’s position is the claim that it is not necessary to reconcile the two sides of the truth “before we are bound to receive and act upon the two. It is enough that the Word of God distinctly affirms them both” (6). For instance, as believers in Christ and as students of the Word, we should “receive what God has asserted, though in seeming inconsistency, concerning His sovereignty and unlimited power on the one hand, and concerning man’s freedom and responsibility on the other simply because God has testified it” (21).

In keeping with the principle of the twofoldness of divine truth, the Scriptures reveal both the transcendence and the immanence of God. Many verses speak of God’s transcendence. Jeremiah 23:23 says, “Am I a God who is near,” declares the Lord, / ‘And not a God far off?” Psalm 113:5-6 says, “Who is like the Lord our God, / Who is enthroned on high, / Who humbles Himself to behold / The things that are in heaven and in the earth?” Psalm 103:19 says, “The Lord has established His throne in the heavens; / And His sovereignty rules over all.” Ecclesiastes 5:2 says, “God is in heaven and you are on the earth.”

Verses such as these should cause us to be mindful of what has been called “the infinite qualitative difference” between God and humankind. We need to be deeply impressed with and constantly reminded of the fact that God is indeed “far off,” that His “sovereignty rules over all,” and that He, the Creator, is in heaven and we, the creatures, are on earth. This, however, is only one side of the truth. The twofoldness of the truth concerning God’s transcendence and His

immanence is presented in Isaiah 57:15: “Thus says the high and exalted One / Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, / ‘I dwell on a high and holy place, / And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit / In order to revive the spirit of the lowly / And to revive the heart of the contrite.’”

The Lord dwells “on a high and holy place”—this is His transcendence; He dwells “also with the contrite and lowly of spirit”—this is His immanence. As the New Testament makes abundantly clear, the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—not only dwells *with* the believers in Christ but actually dwells *in* them. God transcends us, yet He dwells in us: This is the divine revelation in the Word of God.

The Bible manifests not only the twofold nature of divine truth but also the balance between objective (doctrinal) truths and subjective (experiential) truths. These objective and subjective biblical truths often go in pairs. For example, Christ is at the right hand of God (Rom. 8:34)—an objective truth; Christ is also in us (v. 10)—a subjective truth. God manifested His love for the world in giving His only begotten Son (John 3:16)—an objective truth; God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5)—a subjective truth. Other pairs of objective and subjective truths are presented in the New Testament: our crucifixion with Christ as an accomplished fact (Gal. 2:20) and our experience of being conformed to Christ’s death (Phil. 3:10); Christ’s resurrection as a once-for-all event (1 Cor. 15:4) and as a power for our daily experience (Phil. 3:10); salvation by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8) and salvation in life (Rom. 5:10); regeneration as accomplished by God in the resurrection of Christ (1 Pet. 1:3) and as experienced by us in our spirit (John 3:6); sanctification as outward separation (Heb. 13:12) and as inward dispositional change (1 Thes. 5:23). With respect to the Divine Trinity, the term *objective truths* denotes truths related to the being, nature, attributes, and activities of the Triune God as these exist in themselves apart from human assent or experience; the term

subjective truths denotes truths related to the Triune God's living and operating in us and to our experience and enjoyment of the Triune God in Christ. God is eternal, self-existing, infinite, sovereign, transcendent, and immutable. This is an objective truth, a truth concerning God in Himself apart from human perception. However, in John 6 this very God, embodied in Christ the Son, is our food—bread for us to taste, eat, digest, and assimilate. This is a subjective truth, a truth concerning what the Triune God is to us in our spiritual experience.

Whereas the Bible is balanced regarding objective and subjective truths, many Christians are not balanced. Some emphasize objective truths almost to the exclusion of subjective truths. They fear and revere the Triune God in His absolute sovereignty, but they seem neither to know nor experience the Lord who is with their spirit (2 Tim. 4:22). At the opposite extreme are those who are naturally subjective and, having no interest in or regard for objective, doctrinal truth, care only to cultivate pietistic sentiments or pursue mystical experiences.

According to our observation and study, those who are enamored of systematic theology, especially traditional trinitarian theology, tend to overemphasize objective truths and deemphasize subjective truths. For the most part, the God of the theologians is merely an objective God, a God "out there." In its balance the Bible reveals that the Triune God is not only objective in His transcendence but also subjective to the believers in their experience. The Bible reveals not only the objective God but also *the subjective God*—the true and living Triune God who is real to us in our spiritual experience, that is, the Divine Trinity who, as the indwelling One, is life and everything to us in our experience and enjoyment of Him.

It is the object of this essay to consider, admittedly in an initial and preliminary way, the divine revelation in the Word of God concerning the subjective God, the Divine Trinity in Christian experience. The New Testament indicates that God cannot be satisfied merely with a multitude of redeemed people who worship Him in an objective way. Rather, He can be satisfied only with a corporate entity—the New Jerusalem—composed of His chosen, redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, renewed, transformed, built up, conformed, and glorified people, who know Him subjectively and have Him as the intrinsic constituent of their being. The sovereign God desires to become our inner life, the content of our human vessel, which was created by Him for the purpose of receiving Him, containing Him, and expressing Him. Without compromising His sovereignty and without diminishing His status as the unique object of our worship, the Triune God intends, for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose, to become the subjective Trinity to us in our experience and enjoyment of Him.

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In developing this thesis, I will first present sixteen principles that govern our understanding and experience of the subjective God. Then I will consider God's desire to dispense Himself into the believers in Christ, the creation of human beings as vessels to contain the Triune God, the distinction between the unprocessed God and the processed God, the biblical testimony concerning the subjective God, the subjective God as grace and love, the Triune God as life and life supply to His redeemed people, the subjective Triune God in the Body of Christ and the New Jerusalem, our need to "buy" the subjective God, and Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3, the *locus classicus* regarding our experience of the subjective God for the fulfillment of God's economy.

Principles Related to Knowing the Subjective God

If we would have the proper understanding of the subjective God revealed in the Word of God, we need to adhere to at least sixteen basic principles.

1. We need to recognize and accept the objective, propositional truth concerning God presented in the Scriptures. All truth claims regarding the subjective God, or the Triune God in our spiritual experience, must correspond to the divine truth in the Holy Word. Our concern here may be with the subjective God, but we must not ascribe to the notion that subjectivity is truth. Our statements about God must correspond to the objective, doctrinal truth regarding God. Biblical truth is measured neither by one's spiritual experience nor by the extent to which it is perceived to cohere with a theological system to which one is committed. Our belief in and experience of the Divine Trinity must be based upon and be according to the written Word of God. No spiritual experience, in particular no experience which claims to involve the Triune God revealed in the Word and embodied in Christ, can be regarded as valid if it contradicts the divine revelation in the Scriptures.
2. The complete truth unveiled in the Bible should be accepted without bias or preference and without attempting to form that truth into a theological system. Nowhere in the Scriptures are we enjoined to systematize the divine revelation. Recognizing the twofoldness of divine truth,

we should simply accept all biblical truths, including those that are seemingly opposed to other truths, without yielding to the temptation of trying to systematize the truth of God. Govett is instructive here:

It is the glory of man's intellect to produce oneness. His aim is to trace different results to one principle, to clear it of ambiguity, to show how, through varied appearances, one law holds. Anything that stands in the way of the completeness of this, he eludes or denies....It is not so with God. (3)

In our study of the Bible, therefore, we should not prefer one aspect of the truth to another; we should not ignore or evade any aspect of the truth; and we should not try to organize the truths into a system. We should allow the Word to speak for itself concerning the Triune God, and then we should embrace all the truth concerning Him.

3. In our Christian life we need to be rich both in our knowledge of revealed truth and in our experience of the truth revealed. Of crucial importance here is the fact that the unveiling of the truth in the Word concerning the Divine Trinity is not mainly for theological study but primarily for spiritual experience. The goal of our knowledge of the truth about the objective Trinity should be the experience of the subjective Trinity. Conversely, our experience of the Triune God should be based upon and according to the proper knowledge of the truth.

4. In our study of the Scriptures, we need to be balanced with respect to the objective and subjective truths in the Bible. We need to know the truth concerning who and what the Triune God is essentially in His transcendent self-existence and also the truth concerning what He is to us in our experience of Him. The following hymn, written by Witness Lee, illustrates this balance:

- 1 Objective and subjective Christ is to us.
In heaven He's pleading objectively thus;
Subjectively now in His members He lives
And inwardly to them His being He gives.
- 2 In heaven He sits at the right hand of God,
Where as the High Priest He presented His blood;
Our Advocate, bearing our burdens above,
Our Surety, He careth for us in His love.
- 3 He now is the Spirit, our spirit within;
He's there as our life, all things bringing with Him;
He's there as our strength and our grace every hour,
Our Paraclete in us, sustaining with pow'r.
- 4 In heaven for us He's the glorified man,
The Forerunner entered, fulfilling God's plan;
Man into God bringing and making him one
With God in the heav'nlies, in Him as the Son.

- 5 In us all the fullness of God dwells in Him;
As Spirit He brings God Himself thus within,
Revealing and making God real unto us,
God one with us building in life glorious.
- 6 The Savior ascended in heaven now dwells,
And soon He's returning for us His Word tells;
Deliverer indwelling, He now in us lives,
And soon will transfigure, His glory to give.
- 7 The day soon is coming when heaven and earth
Will mingle in one in that city of worth;
Objective and subjective will in that day
Be mingled within us in glory for aye. (*Hymns* 491)

5. As we have indicated, we need to be balanced in our appreciation of God both in His transcendence and in His immanence, even in His indwelling. With David we need to praise God for His greatness and majesty:

Blessed art Thou, O LORD God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Thine, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Thine is the dominion, O LORD, and Thou dost exalt Thyself as head over all. Both riches and honor come from Thee, and Thou dost rule over all, and in Thy hand is power and might; and it lies in Thy hand to make great, and to strengthen everyone. Now therefore, our God, we thank Thee, and praise Thy glorious name. (1 Chron. 29:10-13)

We also need to confess with Solomon, "Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain Thee" (1 Kings 8:27). Nevertheless, we need to realize that, in Christ, the Triune God has somehow become small enough to enter into us and live in us. He is the true bread—the bread of God, the bread of life, the living bread—for us to eat, digest, and assimilate; He is the real beverage—the living water that quenches our thirst—for us to drink. The very God who transcends us, the One whom the highest heaven cannot contain, dwells in us and thus is contained by us. On the one hand, the Potter, the sovereign God, has authority over the clay to make whatever vessels He chooses; on the other hand, this same God is pleased to become the content of the vessels created by Him to contain Him.

6. We need to know the Scriptures in the way of spirit and life, not merely according to the letter. The letter, even of the Scriptures, kills, whereas the Spirit gives life (2 Cor. 3:6). The Bible is a book not only of truth but also of life, and thus it conveys both the thought of God and the life of God. The Lord Jesus said, "The words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (John 6:63). This indicates that in our study of the Bible we should not be content only to understand the thought but should exercise to touch the elements of spirit and life in the Word.

7. Our experience of the Triune God is uniquely through the person of Christ and is based on the concrete historical events of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Apart from the redeeming death and life-imparting resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is impossible for God to enter into us to be our life and content. To meet God apart from Christ is to meet Him not in a receivable form but as a consuming fire. There is no direct experience of God in the sense of approaching Him, contacting Him, or receiving Him apart from Christ. Likewise, apart from Christ's redemption, which satisfied the requirements of God's righteousness, holiness, and glory, God cannot come into us. Our contact with God is through Christ, and His contact with us is in Christ. Any alleged experiences of the subjective God that are not based on the person and work of Christ are a deceit and a counterfeit. It is through Christ alone that we are in the Triune God and the Triune God is in us.

8. To have the proper biblical experience of the subjective God, we must utterly repudiate the erroneous, even heretical, idea of the innate divinity of human beings. This is the belief that we are born with God buried and concealed in the depths of the self and need not the full salvation described in the New Testament but only enlightenment and self-knowledge to perceive and release our intrinsic divinity. This concept, common to gnosticism and certain schools of mysticism, claims that there is a "divine spark," a minute particle of divinity, within every person and that the highest spiritual experience is the union of this spark, this particle, with its source in God. Such a notion is utterly contrary to the Word of God, which reveals that although we were designed and created by God to contain Him, we do not have God in us by nature. The only way to have God in us subjectively is to be born, regenerated, of Him in our spirit (John 3:6) to become His children possessing His life and nature (1:12-13).

9. The three of the Divine Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—are distinct, but They are not separate. To claim that there are *three separate persons* in the Godhead is to teach tritheism. The word *person*, W. H. Griffith Thomas cautions, "must not be pressed too far, or it will lead to Tritheism," and although we use this term "to denote distinctions in the Godhead, we do not imply distinctions which amount to separateness, but distinctions which are associated with essential mutual co-inherence or inclusiveness" (31). Because of the coinherence among the three of the Triune God, one never acts apart from the others. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit always act as one and work together; not one of the three ever acts independently. Wherever one is, the others are also. For instance, the entire Triune God, not just the Son, was involved in the incarnation (John 1:14; Gal. 4:4; Matt. 1:20; John 8:29). The principle is the same with the Lord's living and work in His humanity, His redeeming death on the cross, His life-imparting resurrection, and His all-transcending ascension.

This principle still obtains with regard to God's becoming the subjective Trinity to us in our experience: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit all dwell in the believers in Christ. The Father is in us (Eph. 4:6); the Son is in us (John 14:20; Col. 1:27; 2 Cor. 13:5); and the Spirit is in us (John 14:17). For any one of the three to be in us implies that all three are in us. In Galatians 2:20 Paul says, "Christ...lives in me," and in 4:19 he speaks of Christ being formed in us. Since Christ is separate neither from the Father nor from the Spirit, for Christ to live in us and to be formed in us implies that the entire Triune God is involved in Christ's living in us and in His being formed in us.

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10. Scripture statements concerning the indwelling of the Divine Trinity should be taken at face value, that is, accepted as literal statements of truth. In 2 Corinthians 13:5 Paul asks a pointed question: "Do you not realize about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you...?" Sadly, many do not realize this and some even oppose it, going so far as to use Scripture to fight against Scripture. One student of theology advanced the following argument: According to Luke 24:39 the resurrected Christ has a body of flesh and bones. How, then, is it possible for Christ to really be in us? Since Christ, who still has a body, cannot actually be in us, those verses which speak of Christ living in us should not be taken literally. Christ is in us through the Holy Spirit; the Spirit dwells in us as Christ's representative, but Christ Himself is not in us.

What we have here is a glaring failure to accept the twofoldness of divine truth concerning Christ. The Scriptures tell us that the resurrected Christ has a body of flesh and bones, and the Scriptures also tell us that Jesus Christ is in us. We should not prefer one truth to the other, and we should not hold to one truth and deny the other. Nevertheless, those who receive the objective truths of the Bible but avoid the subjective truths may find it easy to confess that Christ has a body objectively but difficult to believe that Christ dwells in them subjectively. The Bible clearly and emphatically tells us that all three of the Divine Trinity are in us, and the Word means what it says.

11. The Bible reveals that God is triune both in His essence

and in His economy. In other words, the Scriptures unveil both an essential Trinity and an economical Trinity. The essential Trinity refers to the essence of the Triune God for His existence. Essentially the Father, the Son, and the Spirit coexist and coinhere eternally at the same time and in the same way without succession. Among the three of the Godhead, there is distinction but no separation. The Father is distinct from the Son and the Spirit; the Son is distinct from the Spirit and the Father; and the Spirit is distinct from the Father and the Son. However, we cannot, and we must not, say that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are separate, for they coinhere, that is, they dwell in one another. In their coexistence the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are distinctly three, but in their coinherence they are inseparably one. Because the Father, the Son, and the Spirit coexist in the way of coinherence, they are distinct but not separate. The economical Trinity refers to the Triune God in the steps, or stages, of His move to carry out His economy for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose. In God's economy, God's administrative arrangement, the Father has purposed in the Son and with the Spirit (Eph. 1:4-6—the first step); the Son has accomplished the Father's purpose by the Spirit and with the Father (vv. 7-12—the second step); and the Spirit, with the Father and the Son, applies what the Son has accomplished according to the Father's purpose (vv. 13-14—the third step). While God's economy is being carried out in these three successive steps by the economical Trinity, the essential Trinity—the eternal coexistence and coinherence of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in the Godhead—remains intact and is not jeopardized.

12. Our knowledge and experience of the subjective God are possible only through the Spirit, who makes the Triune God in Christ real to us and applies Him to us. The processed and consummated Triune God reaches us as the Spirit. If God were only the Father and the Son, He would not be able to enter into us. It is only as the Spirit that the Triune God can enter into our spirit. When the Spirit came into our spirit at the time of our regeneration, all three of the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—came with Him. According to John 16:13-15 the indwelling Spirit imparts to us the things of Christ the Son, who has received everything from the Father. The Triune God reaches us, enters into us, and dwells in us as the Spirit. The Spirit, being distinct but inseparable from the Father and Son, brings with Him both the Father, who is embodied in the Son, and the Son, who is the expression of the Father. To have the Spirit indwelling us is therefore to have the entire Triune God in a subjective way.

13. The experience of the Divine Trinity is according to God's economy. In the New Testament particular emphasis is placed on the revelation of the Triune God in His economy (Eph. 1:10; 3:9; 1 Tim. 1:3-4). The word *economy* is a transliteration of the Greek word *oikonomia*, which is

composed of two Greek words: *oikos*, meaning "house," and *nomos*, meaning "law." *Oikonomia*, therefore, denotes household regulations or household management. This word is used in the New Testament to denote God's household management, His administrative arrangement to carry out His purpose for His good pleasure (Eph. 1:4-6, 9-11). God's good pleasure is the desire of His heart, and God's will is of this desire. According to His good pleasure God, in a council among the Divine Trinity, made a counsel, a determined will. Then according to this counsel, this determined will, God made a purpose, and this purpose has become His economy, His plan or arrangement.

In the New Testament the Triune God is revealed primarily in relation to the divine economy. If we would know Him, we must know Him in His economy. As indicated above, in God's economy, in God's administrative arrangement, the Father takes the first step (purposing), the Son takes the second step (accomplishing), and the Spirit takes the third step (applying). God's economy is developed *from* the Father, *in* the Son, and *through* the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14). Here we see that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, while coexisting and coinhering eternally in the Godhead, pass through three stages, all the while coexisting and coinhering in the process of the divine economy.

14. If we would have the proper experience and understanding of the subjective God, we need to have a vision of the central work of God. Although the work of the Triune God is universally vast and all-embracing, extending from eternity to eternity, the central work of God is to work Himself into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people. The central work of God is a matter of the processed and consummated Triune God being wrought into tripartite human beings, who are composed of spirit, soul, and body (1 Thes. 5:23). God's good pleasure, which has become His will and purpose, is to work Himself, by His dispensing, into the believers' tripartite being. This work is the center, the focal point, of the divine operation in the universe. Since God desires to work *Himself* into His people, the material with which He works is nothing other than Himself. For God to work Himself into us means that His intention is to make Himself our inward elements. In this central work God has a unique goal—to have a corporate expression of Himself in Christ, initially through the Body of Christ and ultimately through the New Jerusalem. Today, Christ and His believers are the Body of Christ, the corporate Christ (1 Cor. 12:12). Eventually, the Body of Christ will consummate in the New Jerusalem. For eternity in the new heaven and new earth, the corporate expression of the Triune God, the issue of His central work, will be the New Jerusalem—the ultimate consummation of the mingling of the processed and consummated Triune God with His chosen, redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, renewed, transformed, built up, conformed, and glorified tripartite

people. This is the goal of God's central work. In order to reach this goal, He needs to become the subjective Trinity to us, and we need to know Him, enjoy Him, and experience Him as the subjective God.

15. The proper and normal experience of the subjective God is in and for the Body of Christ. Knowing and experiencing the Triune God as the subjective God takes place in a unique context—the reality of the Body of Christ. This means that, according to the New Testament, enjoying the subjective God is a Body matter, a matter in and for the Body of Christ. Isolated individuals cannot know God adequately, because the revelation of the Triune God is given to the Body, and the experience of the Triune God is in the Body and for the building up of the Body.

Individualistic mysticism is foreign to the Scriptures. In the Old Testament the seers of the divine revelation were vital parts of and were integrated with God's people. What they saw concerning God was for the people of God. The principle is the same in the New Testament. The divine revelation was given to the apostles for the Body of Christ, not for their individualistic spirituality. Furthermore, only by being one with the Body of Christ in a practical way can the believers receive and appropriate the apostolic revelation. The proper and genuine experience of the Triune God unfolded in His revelation takes place in the Body and is for the benefit of the Body. If we would have the proper experience of the Triune God as the subjective God, we must be in the Body, live in the reality of the Body, preserve the oneness of the Body, and care for the growth and building up of the Body. In this present age the proper and unique context for us to know the Triune God in a subjective way is through "His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23).

16. In studying the Bible, we need to realize that the Bible was written according to a particular governing principle, and this principle is that the Triune God is working Himself into His chosen and redeemed people as their life, their life supply, and their everything. We should use this principle as the key to open every book of the Bible and to discern every portion of the Scriptures. The whole Bible was written according to the principle of the Triune God wrought into His people, and the application of this principle in interpreting the Word and in understanding the biblical revelation is endless (Lee, *Vision* 164-168). The more we apply this principle in our reading of the Word, the richer will be our knowledge and experience of the Triune God as the subjective God.

God's Desire to Become the Subjective God

The book of Ephesians reveals that it is God's good pleasure to become the subjective God to His chosen and redeemed people by dispensing Himself into them. Ephesians was

written from the perspective of God's good pleasure. Ephesians 1:5 speaks of "the good pleasure of His will," and verse 9 says that God made known to us "the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure." The phrase *good pleasure* in Ephesians 1, which indicates that God needs pleasure, refers to God's heart's desire, His heart's delight. God's good pleasure is what God likes, what pleases Him, what makes Him happy. According to the revelation in the Bible as a whole and in the book of Ephesians in particular, God's good pleasure is to dispense Himself into His chosen and redeemed people in order to produce an organism, the church as the Body of Christ, for His eternal corporate expression. Nothing makes God happier than to become the subjective God to us through the divine dispensing.

God becomes the subjective God to us by dispensing Himself into us. Whereas God's economy is His plan and arrangement according to His heart's desire, God's dispensing is His imparting Himself to us according to His plan and arrangement. Actually, God's goal in His economy is to dispense Himself, as the Father in the Son through the Spirit, into His chosen and redeemed people. The Triune God desires to dispense Himself into—to distribute and impart Himself to—His chosen and redeemed

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people as their life and their everything to produce and build up the Body of Christ, which consummates in the New Jerusalem. This divine dispensing is carried out through the Father's choosing and predestinating (Eph. 1:4-5), through the Son's redeeming (v. 7), and through the Spirit's sealing (v. 13), which applies the Divine Trinity to our inner being, causing us to be permeated and saturated with the element of God.

The more the Triune God becomes subjective to us through His dispensing, the more we are constituted into God's inheritance. Ephesians 1:11 says that "we were designated as an inheritance," and verse 18 speaks of "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." God has a rich and glorious inheritance, and this inheritance is *in* the saints, the redeemed and regenerated children of God. God's inheritance in the saints is nothing less and

nothing else than the very God who has been dispensed into and wrought into His people in order to become the constituent of their inner being, the “treasure in earthen vessels” (2 Cor. 4:7). If God were to remain merely objective and transcendent, not imparting Himself to us, our being would be devoid of divine content, and He would have no inheritance. In order to inherit Himself as the treasure in us, He needs to become subjective to us by dispensing Himself into us, working Himself into our tripartite being, our spirit and soul and body (1 Thes. 5:23).

Vessels to Contain the Subjective God

God desires to dispense Himself into us, and we were created and designed by God as vessels to receive and contain this dispensing (Gen. 2:7; Rom. 9:20-23; 2 Tim. 2:20-21; 2 Cor. 4:7). If we see this, we will realize that it is human (not religious) to need God and to have Him as the unique content of our inner being.

We can contain God and be filled with Him because we have a particular organ—the human spirit—whose function is to contact God, receive God, and contain God. Zechariah 12:1 ranks the human spirit with the heavens and the earth in importance: “Thus declares the LORD who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him.” The heavens are for the earth; the earth is for man; and man with his spirit is for God and God’s economy. Genesis 2:7 says, “The LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” The Hebrew word for *breath* here is rendered *spirit* in Proverbs 20:27: “The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD.” This indicates that the breath of life breathed into man’s body became the spirit of man. Here it is important to note that the breath of life which became the human spirit is neither God Himself nor something of God’s eternal life but an organ to receive God as life. If the breath of life were actually something of God—the divine element itself or a divine “spark” or particle of God—human beings would be divine by nature. As originally created by God, we are not divine and we have nothing divine within us. To know this is to recognize the crucial distinction between God and the human spirit as an organ that can contain God, the distinction between the life of God and the breath of life, which became the human spirit—an organ which is something close to eternal life but is not eternal life itself.

Because God desires to become subjective to us and intends that we contain Him, He created us as tripartite vessels, vessels having not only a body and a soul but also a spirit, something very close to the Spirit of God, so that we would be able to contact, receive, and contain God. God’s desire to dispense Himself into us is therefore matched by our God-created capacity to contain Him.

The Subjective God as the Processed God

Surprising as it may seem to some readers, at this juncture we need to consider who is the God who wants to dispense Himself into us and thereby become the subjective God in us. This God is not the self-existing, ever-existing, coinhering Triune God as He exists eternally and immutably in Himself apart from the process through which He has passed in Christ’s incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. The unprocessed God, cannot enter into us, much less work Himself into our tripartite being. The God who is now operating within the believers, endeavoring to dispense Himself into them and thereby saturate them with Himself, is the processed and consummated Triune God (see “The Processed and Consummated Triune God,” Vol. I, No. 2, pp. 4-16).

Without question, God is eternally immutable in His essence, but in Christ He has been processed and consummated in His economy to become “the Spirit” (John 7:39), the consummated compound Spirit typified by the anointing ointment in Exodus 30:23-25. This Spirit is “the anointing” (1 John 2:20, 27)—the moving of the indwelling processed and consummated Triune God in our regenerated spirit. As the Spirit, the Triune God is working Himself into us by anointing Himself into us. The more we are anointed by Him, the more He is wrought into our being, mingling Himself with us, constituting Himself into us, making Himself one with us and us one with Him, and causing us to be the same as He is in life, in nature, in constitution, and in expression but not in the Godhead. This is the processed and consummated Triune God becoming the subjective God, the Divine Trinity in Christian spiritual experience.

Biblical Testimony concerning the Subjective God

A host of New Testament portions bear witness to the reality of the subjective God. Only a few representative examples can be considered here.

Ephesians 1:3 is a crucial portion concerning our experience of the Divine Trinity: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ.” In this verse the Father is the source of the spiritual blessings, the Spirit is the nature and essence of the spiritual blessings, and Christ the Son is the sphere, the element, and the means of the spiritual blessings. In a very real sense, these blessings are nothing less than Christ Himself. The Father has blessed us with Christ, that is, He has imparted, dispensed, the all-inclusive Christ to us as our blessing. This is not a mere outward, objective blessing but an inward, subjective blessing, a blessing which affects our intrinsic being and causes us to be reconstituted with the Triune God for His corporate expression, the church, “His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (v. 23). This process is revealed in

verses 4 through 14, where we see the Father's selection and predestination for God's eternal purpose, the Son's redemption for the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose, and the Spirit's sealing and pledging for the application of God's eternal purpose. This is the Triune God wrought into us in His economy to become the subjective God for the producing and building up of the Body of Christ.

In Ephesians 2:18 we have a further unveiling of the Trinity in spiritual experience: "For through Him [Christ] we both have access in one Spirit unto the Father." This means that through the Son and in the Spirit we can approach the Father. Through Christ the Son, who died on the cross to abolish the ordinances and to create in Himself the one new man of two peoples, and in the Spirit, who is the processed and consummated Triune God reaching us in our experience, we have access unto the Father. "Through God the Son who is the Accomplisher, the means, and in God the Spirit who is the Executor, the application, we have access unto God the Father who is the Originator, the source of our enjoyment" (Lee, *Living* 53).

Two passages that are closely related to Ephesians 2:18 are 1 Peter 1:2 and Luke 15:3-32, both of which unveil the Triune God in the initial experience of God's full salvation. First Peter 1:2 says, "Chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father in the sanctification of the Spirit unto the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." This is a revelation of the operation of the Divine Trinity for the believers' participation in the Triune God. The Father as the source foreknew us. Then the Spirit sanctifies us, not for justification and transformation, which come later, but for repentance. In our initial experience of God's salvation, the Spirit sanctifies us in the sense of convicting us, separating us, and bringing us back to God. This is followed by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ, indicating Christ's redemption. Through the Father's foreknowledge, the Spirit's sanctification, and the Son's redemption, the believers in Christ may begin to have a subjective, personal, and enjoyable relationship with the Triune God.

The three parables in Luke 15:3-32 present a complete picture of the operation of the Triune God in saving sinners through His love. In these parables the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son portray one lost person in three aspects. The first parable (vv. 4-7) concerns the Son's seeking and finding as the good Shepherd, who came to accomplish an all-inclusive redemption for us on the cross. The second parable (vv. 8-10) concerns the Spirit's (the woman signifies the Spirit) sweeping and enlightening to convict us of sin and to bring us to repentance. The third parable (vv. 11-32) concerns the Father who, based on the work of the Son and the Spirit, receives the repentant and returning sinner. In this parable the father, who was waiting for his

son's return, saw his son "while he was still a long way off," and "he ran and fell on his neck and kissed him affectionately" (v. 20). Then the father said to his slaves, "Bring out quickly the best robe and put it on him" (v. 22). This signifies God the Father clothing us with Christ as our righteousness and declaring us righteous in Him. Following this, the father ordered the slaves to "bring the fattened calf" and slaughter it so that they could "eat and be merry" (v. 23). The fattened calf signifies the rich Christ (Eph. 3:8) slain on the cross for the believer's participation and enjoyment. Here we have a lovely portrait of the Father covering sinners with Christ objectively and feeding them with Christ subjectively. This is a marvelous picture of the coordination among the Son, the Spirit, and the Father, typified respectively by the shepherd, the woman, and the father, in saving sinners and bringing them into the experience and enjoyment of the Triune God.

In John 14:7-20 we see the Triune God dispensing Himself into the believers. Verses 7 through 14 reveal that the Son is the embodiment of the Father seen among the believers. When Philip asked the Lord Jesus to show them the Father, the Lord said to him, "Have I been so long a time with you, and you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (v. 9). The Lord went on to say, "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me?" (v. 10a). This is the coinhering relationship between the Father and the Son—the Son in the Father and the Father in the Son. In verse 11a the Lord said, "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me." Since the Son is the embodiment of the Father and since the Son dwells in the Father and the Father dwells in the Son, to see the Son is to see the Father. This, however, is objective, for the Son is simply among the believers. For the believers' subjective experience of Christ as the embodiment of the Father, the Son needs to be realized as the Spirit to abide in the believers. This is unveiled in verses 15 through 20. In verses 16 through 18 Christ the Son said:

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever, even the Spirit of

The Father has imparted,
dispensed, the all-inclusive Christ
to us as our blessing.

This is not a mere outward,
objective blessing but an inward,
subjective blessing, a blessing which
affects our intrinsic being and
causes us to be reconstituted
with the Triune God for His
corporate expression, the church.

reality, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him; but you know Him, because He abides with you and shall be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you.

If we pay close attention to the pronouns in these verses, we will see that the “another Comforter,” “the Spirit of reality,” is none other than Christ Himself. The “He” who is the Spirit of reality in verse 17 becomes the “I” who is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in verse 18. The second Comforter is the first Comforter as the Spirit. This reveals that Christ in the flesh has become the pneumatic Christ (John 20:22), the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b), the indwelling Spirit of reality. The Christ who is the embodiment and expression of the Father now dwells in us as the Spirit of reality. As John 14:20 indicates, this is a reality known and experienced in Christ’s resurrection: “In that day [the day of the Lord’s resurrection—20:19] you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” For our present purpose it is sufficient to concentrate on the last three words—*I in you*. This “I” is Christ the Son who is the embodiment of the Father and who is realized as the Spirit. This Christ is now in the believers, and for Him to dwell in us means that the entire Triune God dwells in us. This is the subjective God, the Triune God living in us for our experience and enjoyment of Him according to His dispensing for the carrying out of His eternal economy.

A further revelation of the divine dispensing, or transmission, of the Divine Trinity into the believers is found in John 16:13-15:

When He, the Spirit of reality, comes, He will guide you into all the reality; for He will not speak from Himself, but what He hears He will speak....He will glorify Me, for He will receive of Mine and will declare it to you. All that the Father has is Mine; for this reason I have said that He receives of Mine and will declare it to you.

Verse 13 tells us that the Spirit of reality will guide, usher, us into all the reality of the Triune God in Christ. The Spirit accomplishes this through His involvement in the remarkable divine transmission from the Triune God to the believers: the transmission from the Father to the Son, from the Son to the Spirit, and from the Spirit to us. All that the Father is and has is embodied in the Son (Col. 2:9), His expression, and all that the Son is, has, and has obtained and attained is declared, imparted, transmitted, as reality to us. The Father transmits what He has to the Son; what the Son has is transmitted to the Spirit; and then what the Spirit has received of the Son is disclosed to the believers. This disclosing, which is actually a marvelous divine dispensing, causes the processed and consummated Triune God to be dispensed into, wrought into, and mingled with the believers to make them the Body of Christ and, ultimately, the New Jerusalem. This is the Triune God transmitted into the

believers to become in them the subjective God for His eternal corporate expression.

Another testimony to the reality of the subjective God is Paul’s word in Galatians 4:4-6:

When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under law, that He might redeem those under law that we might receive the sonship. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father!

These verses speak of the Triune God’s producing many sons for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit work together for God’s goal—to gain many sons for His expression. For this, we need the two “sending forths” by the Father. First, the Father “sent forth His Son,” who accomplished redemption for us on the cross, redeeming us from the law that we might receive the sonship with the divine life and nature for the divine expression. Second, the Father “sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts,” imparting the divine life into us in order to make us His sons in reality. “His redemption obtained the sonship, and now His indwelling Spirit is bringing us into the reality of the sonship” (Lee, *Living* 55).

Galatians 4:6 and Romans 8:15 are parallel verses. Whereas Galatians 4:6 says that “God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father!” Romans 8:15 says that we “have received a spirit of sonship in which we cry, Abba, Father!” When the Spirit of the Son came into our spirit, the “kernel,” the central part of our heart, our spirit became a spirit of sonship. Hence, the spirit of sonship is our regenerated human spirit mingled with the Spirit of the Son of God. The Triune God has become subjective to us to such an extent that our regenerated spirit and the divine Spirit have been mingled as one (1 Cor. 6:17), and now the divine sonship is being realized by us in our subjective experience in the depths of our being. This means that in the center of our being we are deeply and intrinsically one with the subjective God. “What oneness, O my Lord, is this— / Two spirits intertwine! / Thy Spirit in our spirit lives, / And ours abides in Thine!” (*Hymns* 680).

Let us now go on to examine two “sister portions” concerning the Triune God becoming subjective to us in our experience. The first of these portions is Jude 20 and 21: “But you, beloved, building up yourselves upon your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” Here Jude is not teaching theology; he is encouraging the believers to enjoy the Divine Trinity. These verses indicate that all three of the Trinity are involved in our daily Christian life in a practical and experiential way. Day by day we need to pray in the Holy Spirit, keep ourselves in the love of God the

Father, and await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, unto eternal life, the life of the Triune God. This is to build up ourselves upon our “most holy faith.” This faith is a “great blessing given to us from God, of God, and even with God,” a faith which has come to us “with all that God is, with all that God has passed through, with all that God has accomplished in Christ and through the Spirit” (Lee, *Jude* 18). Upon the faith which involves the Triune God we build up ourselves in and through the Triune God in whom we dwell and who dwells in us. From this we see that the entire blessed Trinity is employed and enjoyed by the believers by their praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping themselves in the love of God, and awaiting the mercy of the Lord unto eternal life. To pray, to keep, and to await in this way is to enjoy the subjective God.

The “sister portion” to Jude 20 and 21 is 2 Corinthians 13:14: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” As in Jude, the Divine Trinity here is not for objective theology but for subjective enjoyment. The “fellowship of the Holy Spirit” equals “praying in the Holy Spirit”; the love of God is parallel to keeping ourselves in the love of God; and “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ” corresponds to “the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ.” To enjoy the Divine Trinity as the subjective God is to participate in the love of God, the grace of Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Since I have been greatly helped by the writings of Witness Lee on this matter, it is appropriate to quote him:

Love is God the Father, grace as the outflow of love is Christ the Son, and the fellowship is the transmission of the Holy Spirit to transmit what the Son is as grace and what the Father is as love. The Holy Spirit transmits the divine riches into our being, and this transmission is the fellowship. Today we have the Divine Trinity operating in us in such a wonderful way. (*Living* 131)

According to 1 John 2:20 and 27 the Triune God is operating in us as the anointing. Verse 20 says, “You have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know.” Verse 27 continues, “As for you, the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone teach you; but as His anointing teaches you concerning all things and is true and is not a lie, and even as it has taught you, abide in Him.” The anointing is the moving of the indwelling Triune God experienced and enjoyed by us. As the moving of the processed and consummated Triune God as the Spirit within us, the anointing teaches us concerning the Triune God and even teaches us the Triune God Himself. According to the whole context of 1 John, the things which the anointing teaches us are the things concerning the Triune God. This means that the Triune God is teaching us Himself by moving within us as the anointing. The more the Triune

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regenerated spirit and the divine Spirit
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and now the divine sonship is being
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in the depths of our being.
In the center of our being
we are deeply and intrinsically
one with the subjective God.

God anoints Himself into us, the more we know Him. This is a subjective knowing of the subjective God through the subjective Trinity as the anointing. Apart from the inner anointing with its teaching, the Triune God would remain merely objective to us, not a living, experienced subjective reality in the divine dispensing according to the divine economy. We should not be satisfied to know God only in an outward, doctrinal way as the objective God but should seek, through His anointing, to know Him in an inward, experiential way as the subjective God.

The Subjective God as Grace and Love

The New Testament speaks frequently of grace and love, but not many readers of the Word may realize that both grace and love involve the subjective God.

There is merit in the traditional definition of grace as “unmerited favor,” but it is an inadequate description of the grace revealed in the New Testament. “Grace in its highest definition is / God in the Son to be enjoyed by us; / It is not only something done or giv’n, / But God Himself, our portion glorious” (*Hymns* 453). Yes, grace truly is the Triune God Himself, for the Triune God is a God of grace. The Bible speaks of “the God of all grace” (1 Pet. 5:10), “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 13:14), and “the Spirit of grace” (Heb. 10:29). This indicates clearly that grace is nothing less than the processed and consummated Triune God dispensed into us. Hence, grace is not mere “unmerited favor”—it is the Triune God giving Himself to us by dispensing Himself into us to do everything in us and to be everything to us. This marvelous grace is with our spirit (Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23).

Paul had a rich experience of the subjective God as grace. In response to his threefold petition concerning “a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan” (2 Cor. 12:7), the Lord said to him, “My grace is sufficient for you” (v. 9). This sufficient grace is surely more than unmerited favor—something too outward and objective to comfort one with a piercing “thorn”; it is the Triune God in Christ as a sweet and soothing inward supply—something

subjective and experiential, fully sufficient to enable Paul to endure his “thorn.” According to 1 Corinthians 15:10 Paul enjoyed the Lord as grace to such a degree that he could say, “By the grace of God I am what I am...yet not I but the grace of God which is with me.” For Paul to say, “By the grace of God I am what I am,” means that the Triune God as grace became Paul’s intrinsic constitution, giving him his true identity in Christ and causing him to have a rich portion of the unique New Testament ministry. For Paul to say, “Yet not I but the grace of God which is with me,” indicates, as a comparison with Galatians 2:20 makes evident, that the grace which was with Paul was the Christ who lived in him. First Corinthians 15 reveals that the Christ who became Paul’s grace was the resurrected, indwelling, pneumatic Christ, the Christ who is the life-giving Spirit. “This grace, which is the living Christ Himself, / Is what we need and must experience; / Lord, may we know this grace and by it live, / Thyself increasingly as grace to sense” (*Hymns* 453).

Just as grace is the Triune God experienced by us, so love is the Triune God dispensed into us. God Himself is love (1 John 4:8, 16). Love is God’s essence, His inner substance. The Bible tells us that the Triune God is a God of love, for it speaks of the love of God (2 Cor. 13:14; Rom. 5:5; 8:39), the love of Christ (2 Cor. 5:14; Eph. 3:19), and the love of the Spirit (Rom. 15:30). Romans 5:5 assures us that “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts.” Significantly, the book of Romans mentions the love of God (8:39), the love of Christ (8:35), and the love of the Spirit (15:30). The love of God which has been dispensed into us—“poured out in our hearts”—is therefore the Triune God as love. From this we see that the Triune God has become the subjective God to us not only as the grace which is with our spirit but also as the love which is in our heart. The more we realize this, the more we will be able to echo the words of the apostle John: “We know and have believed the love which God has in us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him” (1 John 4:16). Because the Triune God as love is the loving essence within us, not only can we love—we can even *be* love itself. God is love, and we have been begotten of Him to be His children, and as children of God we are the same as God our Father in life and in nature. This means that, among other things, we are in the process of becoming the same as God in His love. God is love, and we, His children, can also be love, for through His dispensing we are being filled and constituted with the Triune God of love.

The Subjective God as Our Life

The Triune God intends to become subjective to us to such an extent that He becomes our life. God is a God of life and is actually life itself. The Father has life in Himself (John 5:26a), and the Son, as the embodiment of the Father,

has life in Himself (v. 26b). The Spirit is called the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2); He is also called the life-giving Spirit for imparting life to the believers in Christ (1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 3:6).

The Triune God is life, and He desires to dispense Himself as life to His redeemed people. The thought of the Triune God being life to humankind runs throughout the entire divine revelation. It is indicated by the fact that the Bible mentions the tree of life—signifying God in Christ as life to humankind—both at the beginning in Genesis (2:9) and at the end in Revelation (22:2, 14, 19). God created us as vessels with the intention of working Himself into us to become life to us. The human life is the container, and the divine life is the content dispensed into and expressed through the human life as the container. As human beings we were designed and created by God to contain Him as life, and apart from the divine life as its content, human life is vain. Because of the fall, humankind was cut off from the tree of life and thereby estranged from the life of God (Gen. 3:22, 24; Eph. 4:17-19). But God, in His rich mercy and out of His great love with which He loved us even when we were dead in trespasses and sins, gave His only begotten Son to die on the cross for our redemption and open the way to the tree of life, thereby making it possible for us to receive eternal life. This eternal life is not perpetual existence in a future state of bliss; it is God Himself as life imparted to us for our present, as well as future, enjoyment. Through the redemption accomplished by Christ, we have access, even the right, to the tree of life: “Blessed are those who wash their robes that they may have right to the tree of life (Rev. 22:14a). Christ’s redemption brings us back to God as life.

Colossians 3:4 speaks of “Christ our life.” Christ is God, and as God He is life. Because the life that God is, is in Christ (John 1:4), the Lord Jesus could say that He is life and that He came that we might have life (11:25; 14:6; 10:10). “This is the testimony, that God gave to us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life” (1 John 5:11-12). Because we have Christ, we have life, and now Christ dwells in us as “our life.” For Christ to be our life means that He has become subjective to us to the uttermost. Nothing is more subjective to us than our life. Our life is inseparable from our person, for our life is actually we ourselves. To say that Christ has become our life means that Christ has become us. As life He has become subjective to us to the extent that He has become us. “Since our life cannot be separated from us and since Christ is our life, He cannot be separated from us. Because our life is our self and because Christ is our life, we may say that, in this sense, Christ has become us” (Lee, *Conclusion* 544).

Our experience of Christ as life began with our divine

birth, our regeneration, at which time we were born of God the Spirit in our spirit to become children of God possessing the life and nature of God (John 3:6; 1:12-13). When we were begotten of God, God's seed entered into us and now "His seed abides" in us (1 John 3:9). This seed is not simply God's life—it is God Himself as life. Through regeneration God has become an organic life seed abiding in our inner being. The divine life is a divine seed abiding in every regenerated believer. A note in the Recovery Version on *begotten of Him* in 1 John 2:29 is worthy of consideration:

John's writings on the mysteries of the eternal divine life stress very much the divine birth (3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18; John 1:12-13), which is our regeneration (John 3:3, 5). It is the greatest wonder in the entire universe that human beings could be begotten of God and sinners could be made children of God! Through such an amazing divine birth we have received the divine life, which is the eternal life (1:2), as the divine seed sown into our being (3:9). Out of this seed all the riches of the divine life grow from within us.

The riches of the divine life—the vast spiritual wealth of the Triune God—grow from within us according to the law of the divine life (Rom. 8:2; Heb. 8:10). Every life has a law, a natural power with certain inclinations and spontaneous activities, and the divine life is no exception. The higher a particular kind of life is, the higher is the law, the automatic function, of that life. God's life is the highest life, and the law of God's life is the highest law. The Triune God, who has been processed and consummated and dispensed into us as life, is Himself the law of the divine life in our regenerated spirit. This law of life, the law of the Spirit of life, is the automatic and spontaneous capacity of the Triune God as life within the believers in Christ. Now the Triune God is operating in us according to the law of His own life, the divine, eternal, uncreated life. Without giving us His life with its law, God would have no way to carry out His economy, which is to dispense Himself into our being that our being might be constituted with His being to become His corporate expression for eternity. Such an enterprise can be carried out only by God putting Himself into us as the divine life and then functioning within us according to the law of the divine life. The law of God's life does not function mainly in the negative sense of regulating us from doing wrong; rather, it functions primarily in the positive sense of conforming us to the image of Christ and thereby making us a reproduction of Christ, the firstborn Son of God, in life, nature, constitution, and expression but not in the Godhead.

In essence the law of the divine life is God in Christ as the life-giving Spirit, and in function it has the capacity to constitute us living, organic, functioning members of the Body of Christ. The function of the law of the life of God actually refers to its capacity. In this law there is the almighty, divine capacity. This capacity can make us, the

children of God who are begotten of God, the same as our Father in His life and nature; it can also empower us to live out, to express in our daily living, the processed and consummated Triune God who dwells in our regenerated spirit. Furthermore, the capacity of the law of the divine life can constitute us to be the Body of Christ with all its abilities and functions. From this we see that the fulfillment of God's desire to have an eternal, corporate expression of Himself in Christ—the firstborn Son with the believers as His many sons—depends on God's being profoundly subjective to us as life and on His operating within us as the law of life.

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the law of God's life is the highest law.
The Triune God, who has been processed
and consummated and dispensed
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This law of life, the law of the Spirit of life,
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within the believers in Christ.

The Triune God is not only our life; He is also our life supply as the bread of life. We need to eat Him. That God is our food, signified by the tree of life and the bread of life, indicates that we need Him as our life supply and will ever be dependent on Him for sustenance and for the maintenance of our spiritual being. Whereas the principle of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is independence from God, the principle of the tree of life is dependence upon God. Our need to eat God, even in eternity, testifies that we are dependent on Him. If we see this, we will realize that we cannot live without Him. We need to eat Him, digest Him, and assimilate Him in order to live because of Him (John 6:57).

Some may argue that it is erroneous, even blasphemous, to suggest that God can be eaten, digested, and assimilated by His redeemed people. However, it is erroneous to deny the biblical revelation that God is edible and that we can, in fact we must, eat Him and digest Him so that we may be constituted with Him and thereby express Him. John 6 reveals that the Lord Jesus, who is the very God, is edible. In this chapter the Lord speaks clearly and emphatically concerning Himself as the true bread, the bread of God, the bread of life, the living bread, and the heavenly bread, the bread that came down out of heaven for the nourishment of humankind. Starkly, frankly, and directly He told us that we can have eternal life only by eating Him. We need to remember that the One who uttered these words in John 6 is the One unveiled in John 1—the Word who was with God, who was

God, and who became flesh and tabernacled among us, full of grace and reality. Since the Lord Jesus Christ is God, for Him to say that He is edible means that God Himself is edible. Therefore, we have a strong basis for declaring that God is edible and that we can eat Him, digest Him, and assimilate Him.

The more we eat, digest, and assimilate God, the more He becomes the subjective God to us, for He is constituted into us, mingled with us, and expressed through us. Eating always involves mingling. Before we eat our food, the food is objective to us; however, through our eating—through our actually taking the food into us and enjoying it—the food becomes subjectively related to us in a metabolic way. Eventually, the food is digested, assimilated, and wrought into us. As a result, we become mingled with our food. After this mingling takes place, we express the food which has become part of us. The principle is the same with eating, digesting, and assimilating God as our food. We are mingled with God; we are constituted with God, who has been wrought into us and has become subjective; and we express the God who has been metabolically dispensed into us in order to saturate us, permeate us, make Himself one with us, and even become us. Then the Triune God is expressed in us and through us. This is the glorification of the processed and consummated subjective Triune God through those who live by Him because they eat Him, digest Him, and assimilate Him.

We need not only to eat God as the bread of life but also to drink Him as the water of life. God's desire to dispense Himself into us as our all-inclusive beverage can be seen in the many biblical references to living water. In this divine dispensing the Father is the fountain, the Son is the spring, and the Spirit is the flow. As the source, the origin, the Father is the fountain of living waters (Jer. 2:13). As the embodiment and expression of the Father, the Son is the spring, the emergence of the fountain, that gushes up in the believers into eternal life (John 4:14). As the flow, the Spirit is the river of water of life (Rev. 22:1; John 7:37-39). This is the Triune God dispensing Himself into us as our life supply—God the Father as the fountain, God the Son as the spring, and God the Spirit as the river.

This rich dispensing is portrayed in Psalm 36:8-9a: "They drink their fill of the abundance of Thy house; / And Thou dost give them to drink of the river of Thy delights. / For with Thee is the fountain of life." *River* refers to the Spirit as the flowing of the life for our enjoyment; *fountain* refers to the Father as the source of life for our participation; and abundance refers to Christ in His unsearchable riches—in particular, as the reality of all the Old Testament offerings. In Him we have access to the fountain and have the right to drink of the river of God's delights.

The psalmist's word about drinking of the river that issues from the fountain of life is fulfilled in John 4, where the Lord Jesus ministered the living water to a Samaritan woman. In His conversation with her, the Lord indicated that she needed the living Son of God to become a spring of water welling up within her. First He said, "If you knew the gift of God...you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water" (v. 10). The gift of God includes both the Son of God and the life of God, which is embodied in the Son. Our thirst can be satisfied only by the One whom the Father has given to us as eternal life. Therefore, the Lord Jesus could say to the Samaritan woman, "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever; but the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water gushing up into eternal life" (v. 14). Regarding this enjoyment of the water which the Lord gives us, there is a balance between objective truth and subjective experience. First, we must recognize that, as the gift of God, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, in whom only is eternal life, and we must believe into Him, thereby having "life in His name" (John 20:31). Then we need to drink—to take into us subjectively for our participation, experience, and enjoyment—the water—the divine, satisfying, thirst-quenching life—which He alone can give. As those who have believed into Him (3:15) and received Him (1:12), we, the believers in Christ, can testify that He has become in us a spring of water welling up into eternal life. According to Revelation 21:6 in eternity and for eternity we, the sons of God as parts of the New Jerusalem, will enjoy Christ as "the spring of the water of life."

The Subjective God in His Corporate Expression

The Triune God is subjective not only in the believers personally but also in His corporate expression, presently in the Body of Christ and eternally in the New Jerusalem.

In Romans 8 we see the dispensing of the Triune God into the believers' tripartite being. Based upon His righteousness, He first dispenses Himself into our spirit, the center of our being, causing the spirit to become life (v. 10). From this center He spreads into our soul, represented by our mind, and saturates it with life (v. 6), and then He, as the indwelling Spirit, imparts life into our mortal bodies (v. 11). Through such a dispensing our entire tripartite being is filled with the Triune God as life. This dispensing is not for our individualistic spirituality but for the building up of the Body and for the practice of the Body life described in Romans 12. Only by experiencing the dispensing of the Divine Trinity unveiled in chapter eight can we have the reality of the Body revealed in chapter twelve. The tripartite believers who are filled with the processed and consummated Triune God as life in Romans 8 now become the living members of the Body in Romans 12. The spirit which is life in 8:10 becomes the

burning spirit in 12:11; the mind which is life in 8:6 becomes the renewed mind in 12:2; and the body into which life is imparted in 8:11 becomes the body which is presented in 12:1. A presented body, a renewed mind, and a burning spirit—all are for the Body as the corporate expression of the Triune God.

Paul also speaks of the Body in 1 Corinthians 12, a chapter that presents a vision of the moving of the Triune God in the believers to build up the Body of Christ for the expression of God. In verses 4 through 6 we have the Divine Trinity in the divine operations, ministries, and gifts: “There are distinctions of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are distinctions of ministries, yet the same Lord; and there are distinctions of operations, but the same God, who operates all things in all.” The gifts are by the Spirit, the ministries are for the Lord, and the operations are of God. Here we see that the Triune God is involved in three things—gifts, ministries, and operations. The gifts by the Spirit are to carry out the ministries for the Lord, and the ministries for the Lord are to accomplish the operations of God. However, we should focus our attention not on the distinctions of gifts, ministries, and operations but on “the same Spirit,” “the same Lord,” and “the same God”; that is, we should concentrate on and open ourselves to the moving of the Triune God in us for the building up of the Body of Christ.

The Body is actually a corporate Christ: “For even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ” (v. 12). A note on the phrase *the Christ* in the Recovery Version is worthy of study:

Referring to the corporate Christ, composed of Christ Himself as the Head and the church as His Body with all the believers as members. All the believers of Christ are organically united with Him and constituted with His life and element and have thus become His Body, an organism, to express Him. Hence, He is not only the Head but also the Body. As our physical body has many members yet is one, so is this Christ.

If we would be a part of the Body as the corporate Christ, we need to become Christ in the sense that we are filled with Christ, saturated with Christ, and constituted with Christ. It is for this purpose that we “were all given to drink one Spirit” (v. 13). The more we drink the life-giving Spirit, who is the reality of the all-inclusive Christ in resurrection, the deeper is our oneness with Him (6:17), the more we become Him, and the more we are in reality the corporate Christ as the corporate expression of the subjective God.

The deepest and most intrinsic revelation of the Triune

God in the Body of Christ is found in the book of Ephesians. Chapter one reveals that the church, the Body of Christ, is the product, the outcome, of the dispensing of the Triune God and of the transmission of the empowering God. In verses 4 through 14 we have the divine dispensing and in verses 19 through 23, the divine transmission. First, the Body is the outcome of the dispensing of the Father’s holy nature into His chosen people that they may be separated unto Him from the world and sanctified with His holiness. The Father has chosen us to “be holy” (v. 4), and this requires not only an objective change in position but also a subjective change in disposition. To be holy as God the Father is holy is to have His holy nature dispensed into us and wrought into our being. Second, the Body is the issue of the Son’s dispensing of the divine element into the Father’s chosen and predestinated people. In Christ we have redemption, and in Him as the sphere and the element we become God’s inheritance. Because we have been redeemed in Christ, He is the element in which we are made God’s treasure, His inheritance. Third, the Body is the product of the Spirit’s dispensing of the divine essence into those chosen by God the Father and redeemed by God the Son. The believers have been “sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise” (v. 13). On the one hand, the Spirit has sealed us once for

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all, and thus we bear a permanent mark which testifies that we belong to God. On the other hand, the Spirit is continually sealing us in the sense of gradually permeating us and saturating us with God until the redemption of our body (4:30). The last part of Ephesians 1 reveals that the church is also the product of the divine transmission. Paul prayed that we would see the transmission of the great power of God to the believers—the power that operated in Christ in raising Him from the dead, in seating Him at the Father’s right hand far above all, in subjecting all things under His feet, and in giving Him to be the Head over all things to the church, His Body. Verse 19 says that the surpassing greatness of this power is “toward us who believe,” and verse 22 says that Christ is Head over all things “to the church.” *Toward us* and *to the church* both imply a transmission of the divine power in Christ to the church, which is “His Body, the fullness of the One who

fills all in all" (v. 23). The dispensing of the Divine Trinity and the transmission of the divine power are for the producing of the Body of Christ, the corporate expression of the subjective God.

Whereas Ephesians 1 speaks of the producing of the Body, Ephesians 4 speaks of the constitution of the Body. Verses 4 through 6 say, "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." Here we have the Triune God—the Spirit, the Lord, and the Father—and the Body. The Body is an organic constitution produced by the mingling of the Triune God with the believers. The result of this mingling is the Body. The believers, who are redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, renewed, and transformed by God, are the outward framework of the Body; the processed and consummated Triune God is the inward substance of the Body. The Father is the source, the Son is the element, the Spirit is the essence, and the believers are the framework. The union and mingling of the Triune God and the believers issues in an organic constitution—the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ, therefore, is the result of the processed and consummated Triune God becoming the subjective God to the believers, being wrought into them, blended with them, mingled with them, and thus becoming utterly one with them to make them His corporate expression.

The Body of Christ will consummate in the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem, a unique, organic constitution, is a living composition of the processed and consummated Triune God mingled with His chosen, redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, renewed, transformed, built up, conformed, and glorified tripartite people. By the time the New Jerusalem is fully manifested in the new heaven and new earth, the Triune God will have been thoroughly wrought into His redeemed people as their Creator, Redeemer, and Regenerator to give them a triune existence—the existence of those who have been created, redeemed, and regenerated. The Triune God will also be wrought into them as the triune entrance, the triune constitution, the triune living, the triune enjoyment, and the triune expression. Therefore, instead of being a material city, the New Jerusalem will be an organic composition of the processed and consummated Triune God wrought into, mingled with, and expressed through His redeemed tripartite people. This will be the ultimate expression of the subjective God, "the holy city, / Full of God's bright glory! / It is God's complete expression / In humanity" (*Hymns* 906).

"Buying" the Subjective God

The unveiling of the New Jerusalem in the book of Revelation is a sign that, in the end, God will prevail over

everything and everyone that frustrates His intention to have a corporate expression of Himself. However, as the Lord's word to the church in Laodicea indicates (Rev. 3:14-22), today's church is far short of God's goal because the church lacks the reality of the subjective God. Speaking not to individuals but to the church, the Lord Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" (v. 20a). This verse exposes a most deplorable situation—the Lord is outside the church seeking to enter in and become the subjective Christ to the believers. In *The Orthodoxy of the Church* Watchman Nee remarks:

It is indeed strange that the Lord is the Head of the church, or shall we say the origin of the church, yet He is standing outside the door of the church!...This is really a terrible condition. If the Lord is outside the door of the church, what kind of church is this? (89)

It is a church that is devoid of the subjective God, a church utterly lacking the sweet, enjoyable fellowship with the indwelling, pneumatic Christ. Therefore, the Lord goes on to say, "If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, then I will come in to him and dine with him and he with Me" (v. 20b). This is the objective Christ, who is outside the door of the church, becoming subjectively real and enjoyable to the one who opens to Him and lets Him in. Watchman Nee writes concerning this:

In the Bible there are two lines in regard to the truth....One is subjective, and the other is objective; one concerns experience, and the other concerns faith....Everyone who is seeking the Lord must be balanced by both truths. One shows me that I am perfect in Christ, and the other shows me that the inner working of the Holy Spirit causes me to become perfect....If you open the door, "I will come in." This means that the objective becomes the subjective; that is, He will change what you have of the objective into the subjective. (89)

This is the God who is objective to the church becoming the subjective God in the church.

A further indication both of the Lord's desire to become subjectively real to us and of our need to be constituted with the Triune God is found in verse 18: "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined by fire that you may be rich, and white garments that you may be clothed and that the shame of your nakedness may not be manifested, and eyesalve to anoint your eyes that you may see." Gold signifies the nature of God the Father; white garments signify Christ living in and through us a life that expresses God and is approved by Him; and the eyesalve signifies the anointing Spirit (1 John 2:27), who is Christ Himself as the life-giving Spirit operating in us to enlighten us and give us spiritual understanding. This is the Triune God applied to us, gained by us, experienced by

us, wrought into us, and even “bought” by us. The Lord counsels us, saying, “Buy from Me.” To buy something is to pay a price to acquire that thing. If we would “buy” the subjective God, we must be willing to pay the price to obtain the Triune God as gold, white garments, and eyesalve, that is, to partake of the divine nature by living faith, to have the pneumatic Christ “stitched” into and expressed through our soul as our second garment (subjective righteousness as the “wedding garment”—Matt. 22:11; Rev. 19:8), and to experience the anointing of the Spirit to heal our blindness and dispel our darkness. God has determined and His Word has revealed that sooner or later all the children of God must buy the subjective Triune God as their intrinsic constituent. God’s people desperately need the subjective God. Blessed are those who, for the building up of the Body of Christ and the consummation of the New Jerusalem, are willing now to pay the price to gain God as gold, garments, and eyesalve.

A Prayer concerning the Subjective God

If we are willing to buy the subjective God, we will echo Paul’s prayer concerning the subjective God:

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father...that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man, that Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be full of strength to apprehend with all the saints what the breadth and length and height and depth are and to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:14-19)

This prayer reveals our need to be strengthened by God the Father through God the Spirit so that Christ, God the Son, may have a way to make His home in our hearts, occupying our inner being that we may have an abundance, an overflow, of the unsearchable riches of Christ to be the full, corporate expression of the Triune God.

As he prayed for the Triune God to become the subjective God in the believers for the Body of Christ, Paul bowed his knees *unto the Father*, indicating that he appealed to the Father as the unique source. Paul prayed that *according to the riches of His glory*—the expression of God in His rich attributes—the Father would strengthen us *with power*—resurrection power, transcending power, subduing power, and overruling power. Such a strengthening is *through His Spirit*, through the indwelling Spirit mingled with the believers’ regenerated spirit. *Into* indicates a transmission, and *the inner man* refers to our regenerated spirit, our real person, where we live according to the divine

revelation (1:15-18) and where we experience the subjective God for the Body. *That Christ may make His home in your hearts*: With respect to our experience of the subjective God, this clause bears a particular significance. Christ, the embodiment of the fullness of God (Col. 2:9; John 1:16), is unsearchably rich (Eph. 3:8) and universally extensive (v. 18). The heart is a composition of the three parts of the soul—mind, emotion, and will—plus the conscience, a function of the human spirit. For the pneumatic Christ to make His home in our hearts means that He penetrates, permeates, saturates, and occupies every part of our inner being, gradually becoming fully settled and making His home there. The result is that we are *filled unto all the fullness of God*. *Filled* points to a condition of actually being fully saturated and thoroughly constituted with the subjective Triune God. *Unto* indicates the result of being filled, and this result is *the fullness of God*—the church, the Body of Christ, as the expanded, enlarged, corporate expression of the processed and consummated Triune God.

It is to have such an expression of Himself that the self-existing, ever-existing, coexisting, coinhering Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—desires to become, in His economy and through His dispensing, the subjective God to His redeemed and regenerated people. Oh, that the believers in Christ, the children of God, would see this and join Paul to bow their knees and pray to be constituted with the subjective God for His consummate and eternal corporate expression! **AF**

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