

# THE CORPORATE EXPRESSION OF THE PNEUMATIC CHRIST IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: THE KINGDOM OF GOD

by Ron Kangas

**T**he Gospel of John bears emphatic witness to the truth that Jesus Christ, the eternal, only begotten Son of God, has come in the flesh. This Gospel also reveals that in and by His resurrection this wonderful One became the pneumatic Christ, the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b), the Spirit who was “not yet” (John 7:39) until Jesus was glorified through resurrection. If we would participate in God’s New Testament economy, we must know the pneumatic Christ as He is unveiled in John’s Gospel. To know the pneumatic Christ is to know a crucial truth concerning the person, work, and ministry of Christ. It is also to know that the Spirit as the pneumatic Christ is the reality of Christ’s resurrection, that the pneumatic Christ is the Spirit of reality, who guides us into all reality (14:16-17; 15:26; 16:13-15), and that it is only as the Spirit of reality that Christ can dwell in us. Only by knowing the pneumatic Christ can we experience, enjoy, and live the all-inclusive Christ presented in the Gospel of John, and only by experiencing and enjoying the pneumatic Christ can we become the corporate expression of Christ.

This article, the continuation of a series on the pneumatic Christ in the Gospel of John, is the first of several short essays on the corporate expression of the pneumatic Christ in this Gospel. In the three previous issues of this quarterly, we considered, from the Gospel of John, the revelation of the pneumatic Christ, the experience of the pneumatic Christ, and our living the pneumatic Christ. According to the divine revelation in the New Testament, all this is for the unique goal of God’s economy—the eternal, consummate corporate expression of Christ. The Gospel of John reveals not only that Christ in the flesh has become the pneumatic Christ for our experience and living but also that the pneumatic Christ has a corporate expression of several aspects, including the kingdom, the bride, the flock, the grains, the house, the vine, and the

child. Here we will consider the first of these aspects—the kingdom of God.

## The Reign of God

In order to carry out His eternal purpose by acting without hindrance to fulfill the desire of His heart, God must have a kingdom where He can exercise His authority. The kingdom of God is the reign of God, the rule of God, the sphere wherein God exercises His governmental authority. That the kingdom of God is the reign of God is indicated clearly in Revelation 11:15: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever.” For God to have a kingdom is for Him to have dominion: “Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, / And Thy dominion endures throughout all generations” (Psa. 145:13). Here *Thy kingdom* is the equivalent of *Thy dominion*. Even proud, self-exalting Nebuchanezzar, after a period of insanity, came to recognize that the heavens rule, and thus he could say of the reigning God,

His dominion is an everlasting dominion, / And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. / And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, / But He does according to His will in the host of heaven / And among the inhabitants of earth; / And no one can ward off His hand / Or say to Him, ‘What hast Thou done?’ (Dan. 4:34b-35)

In its basic significance, therefore, the kingdom of God is the reign of God.

The kingdom of God is God’s reign both in a general way and in a particular way (Lee, *Conclusion* 2545-2562). As God’s reign in a general way, the kingdom of God is God’s reign, with His authority and power, over the entire

universe and over everything and everyone in it. This means that in a general and objective way God rules the heavens, the earth, all created things, and all the nations and peoples of humankind. The reign of God as thus defined is coextensive with God's existence. God's existence is from eternity to eternity, without beginning or ending, and God's kingdom, His universal and eternal reign, is likewise from eternity to eternity, without beginning or ending (Heb. 1:8; Psa. 145:13; Dan. 4:3b).

As God's reign in a particular way, the kingdom of God is God's reign by Himself as life. This way of God's reigning is not outward but inward, not objective but subjective, and not by the exercise of power but by the sense of life.

**E**very kingdom involves a certain kind of life. Plants in the plant kingdom have the plant life, animals in the animal kingdom have the animal life, and human beings in the human kingdom have the human life. In the same principle, those who are in the divine kingdom have the divine life. If we would enter into the kingdom of God and if we would become part of the kingdom of God, we must have the life of God. To be under the reign of God objectively, it is sufficient to be born to have the created, human life; however, to be under the reign of God subjectively requires that we be reborn, regenerated, to have the uncreated, divine life. Then we are ruled not only by God's authority outwardly but also by God's life inwardly.

The reign of God in the way of life is with Christ as the seed of life, the seed of the kingdom sown by Himself as the Sower (Matt. 13:3-8, 18-23). Commenting on verse 3—"The sower went out to sow"—Witness Lee remarks,

The sower here signifies the Lord Jesus (Matt. 13:37), who was the Son of God coming to sow Himself as the seed of life (Mark 4:26) in His word (v. 14) into men's hearts that He might grow and live in them and be expressed from within them. The kingdom of God is actually the God-man, Jesus Christ, sown as the seed of life into His believers. After this seed has been sown into them, it will grow in them and eventually develop into a kingdom. (*Conclusion* 2551)

This development is described in the parable of the seed in Mark 4:26-29, a parable which reveals that in the sense of life the kingdom of God is a seed which is sown into the earth and grows until it reaches maturity:

And He said, So is the kingdom of God: as if a man cast seed on the earth, and sleeps and rises night and day, and seed sprouts and lengthens—how, he does not know. The earth bears fruit by itself: first a blade, then an ear, then full grain in the ear. But when the fruit is ripe, immediately he sends forth the sickle, because the harvest has come.

The man and the seed are both Christ, and we, the believers in Christ, are the earth into which He sows Himself as the seed. As Christ as the kingdom seed grows in us, God reigns in us by life, and the kingdom develops within us until, with our maturity in the divine life, it is manifested in splendor. "Therefore, the kingdom is the Lord Jesus as the seed of life who has been sown into us and who grows in us until He reaches maturity at the time of harvest. When the crop is ripe, there will be the harvest, the full manifestation of the kingdom" (*Conclusion* 2552).

### The Enlargement of the Pneumatic Christ

In addition to being Christ as the seed of life sown into our being, the kingdom of God today is also the enlargement of the pneumatic Christ. This enlargement is related to the two becomings of Christ: to Christ, the Son of God, becoming flesh through incarnation (John 1:1, 14, 18) and to Christ, the God-man in the flesh, becoming the pneumatic Christ, the life-giving Spirit, through resurrection (1 Cor. 15:45b).

The kingdom of God is actually the wonderful person of Christ Himself. He Himself is the reality of the kingdom. Consider the Lord's word in Luke 17:20-21:

And when He was questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, Behold, here it is! or, There! For behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.

**V**erses 22 through 24, which refer to Christ coming back in glory as the Son of Man, prove that the kingdom of God is Christ Himself. The words *The kingdom of God does not come with observation* indicate that the kingdom of God is not material but spiritual, even divine and mystical, for the kingdom is Christ, both in His first coming and in His second coming. *The kingdom of God is in the midst of you* clearly reveals that the kingdom of God is Christ Himself. *You* points to the questioning Pharisees, and the kingdom which was in their midst was the Lord Jesus, who was among them. Hence, the kingdom of God is Christ Himself, who was in the midst of the Pharisees and who will come in glory. Since He is the kingdom of God, wherever He is, there the kingdom of God is also. In the days of His flesh, that is, in the first stage of His full ministry—the stage of incarnation—Christ Himself was the kingdom of God.

For us today, the kingdom of God in the sense of life is not Christ in the stage of incarnation but Christ in the stage of inclusion, that is, in the stage of His being the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit. The Christ who was the kingdom of God in the days of His flesh has become the pneumatic Christ in and through His resurrection. Now He continues to be

the reality of the kingdom; however, He is the kingdom of God not as the Christ in the flesh but as the Christ who has been pneumatized to become the holy breath, the holy pneuma, the life-giving Spirit (John 20:22; 14:16-20). In His first becoming, His becoming flesh, He was the kingdom of God, and in His second becoming, His becoming the Spirit, He is still the kingdom of God. In our experience today, the kingdom of God is the indwelling, pneumatic Christ, the Lord Spirit who is one spirit with us (1 Cor. 6:17).

When Christ was in the flesh, He could not be in the disciples; rather, He could only be among them. Therefore, the kingdom of God, which was Christ Himself in the flesh, could only be among them. But now Christ is the pneumatic Christ, the Spirit, and as such He is not merely with us but also in us. Therefore, the kingdom of God, which is the pneumatic Christ, Christ Himself as the Spirit, is now within us.

As indicated by the parables of the sower and the seed, the seed of the kingdom (which also is the pneumatic Christ) is growing, increasing, expanding, within us. This means that the pneumatic Christ as the reality of the kingdom of God is expanding within us, causing the kingdom of God in the sense of life to become the enlargement of the pneumatic Christ. First, the kingdom of God was Christ personally in the flesh, and then the kingdom of God became the pneumatic Christ Himself, Christ personally as the Spirit. Now the kingdom of God is in the process of becoming the expansion and enlargement of the pneumatic Christ, for now the kingdom of God is not limited to the pneumatic Christ Himself but includes both Christ and the believers, who, together, are a great, corporate Christ (1 Cor. 12:12). This corporate Christ, as the corporate expression of the pneumatic Christ, is the kingdom of God in life—the enlargement of the pneumatic Christ.

The view of the kingdom as the enlargement of Christ is presented in Daniel 2. In his dream of a great human image, Nebuchadnezzar saw that a stone was cut without hands, that it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and that it crushed the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold. Then the stone that struck the image “became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” (v. 35b). This refers to the kingdom of God: “In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these

kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever” (v. 44). The stone that was cut without human hands is Christ, who was “cut” by God through His crucifixion and resurrection. After He was “cut” by being put to death on the cross, He was “cut out” in resurrection to be the cornerstone and the crushing stone (Matt. 21:42, 44b). The fact that the stone becomes a great mountain and that this mountain is the kingdom indicates that the kingdom is the increase, the expansion and enlargement, of Christ as the crushing stone. When Christ comes back with His overcomers, the kingdom of God as the enlargement of the pneumatic Christ will become a great mountain that fills the whole earth.

**F**rom this we see that as the corporate expression of the pneumatic Christ, the kingdom of God in the sense of life is, like the church, the enlargement of Christ, His increase (John 3:30). Both the church and the kingdom are the corporate Christ, the increase of Christ:

The church today is Christ’s increase in life, but the eternal kingdom of God is Christ’s increase in administration. In life Christ increases to become the church; in administration Christ increases to become the eternal kingdom of God. Hence, Christ is not only the church but also the kingdom of God. Both the church and the kingdom are His increase. (Lee, *Daniel* 18)

### **The Realm of the Divine Species**

We have pointed out that the kingdom of God is the reign of God both in a general sense by the exercise of divine authority over the universe and in a particular sense by the development of the divine life within the believers. In this latter sense, the kingdom of God has become the enlargement of the pneumatic Christ. Now we need to see that the kingdom of God is the realm of the divine species. As the reign of God objectively and subjectively and as the enlargement of the pneumatic Christ, the kingdom of God is a realm, and this realm is not only of the divine dominion but also of the divine species. “The vegetable kingdom is a realm of the vegetable species, and the animal kingdom is a realm of the animal species. In the same way, the kingdom of God is a realm of the divine species” (Lee, John 123). In John 3 the kingdom of God, being intrinsically related to the believers’ regeneration, refers more to the species of God than to the objective reign, or rule, of God. The crucial point here is this: To be in the kingdom of God in the

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sense of life and to become part of the kingdom of God as the enlargement of the pneumatic Christ require that we be born of God to become the species of God. As children of God begotten of God (John 1:12-13) we are the species of God and as such we are in, and even are a part of, the kingdom of God as the realm of the divine species.

This means that in a very real but limited sense we, the believers in Christ, have become God. We have become God in the real sense in that, being the children of God, we are God (divine) in life and in nature. We become God in the limited sense in that we do not become God in the Godhead, or as an object of worship, or as in any way possessing God's incommunicable attributes. This is another way of saying that God became man so that man might become God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. Through Christ's incarnation God entered into the human species and was generated to become a man in life and in nature. Through Christ's resurrection we enter into the divine species and are regenerated to become God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. "God became flesh to enter into the human species, and man becomes God in His life and nature, but not in His divine Godhead, to enter into His divine species" (Lee, *John* 123).

Through regeneration, that is, through our second birth, we have entered into the kingdom of God to become the species of God. Now we are God-men, children of God in the kingdom of God, in the realm of the divine species.

This astounding fact receives eloquent testimony in Paul E. Billheimer's important book (with a foreword by Billy Graham) *Destined for the Throne*. At this juncture it is worthwhile to quote extensively from chapter two, "God's Purpose for the Church: Supreme Rank":

Created originally in the image of God, redeemed humanity has been elevated by means of a *divinely conceived genetic process* known as the new birth to the highest rank of all created beings....This union [in 1 Corinthians 6:17] goes beyond a mere formal, functional, or idealistic harmony or rapport. It is an organic unity, an "organic relationship of personalities" (Sauer). Through the new birth we become bona fide members of the original cosmic family (Eph. 3:15), actual generated sons of God (1 John 3:2), "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4), begotten by Him...and bearing His heredity. Thus, through the new birth—and I speak reverently—we become the "next of kin" to the Trinity, a kind of "extension" of the Godhead....Here is a completely new, unique, and exclusive order of beings which may be called a "new species."...Nothing can ever dim the fact that infinity separates the Creator from the created....But from all eternity God purposed to have a family circle of His

*very own*, not only created but *also generated* by His own life....Christ is the divine Prototype after which this new species is being made. They are to be exact copies of Him, true genotypes, *as utterly like Him as it is possible for the finite to be like the Infinite*. As sons of God, begotten by Him, incorporating into their fundamental being and nature the very "genes" of God, they rank above all other created beings and are elevated to the most sublime height possible short of becoming members of the Trinity itself....God has exalted redeemed humanity to such a sublime rank that it is impossible for Him to elevate them any further without bringing them into the inner circle of the Godhead itself. (33, 35, 36, 37, 38)

**I**t is wise to avoid a knee-jerk critical reaction to the suggestion, made above, that the children of God are a new species in the kingdom of God as the realm of the divine species. *Divinely conceived genetic process, original cosmic family, "next of kin" to the Trinity, a kind of "extension" of the Godhead, a completely new, unique, and exclusive order of beings, organic relationship of personalities, and exact copies of Him, true genotypes*—these expressions are used with scrupulousness and precision and deserve careful consideration and thoughtful examination in light of an unbiased study of the divine revelation in the Bible. There is more in the Word of God than has been dreamed of in traditional theology, and we dare not use the latter to nullify the former. It surely would be beneficial and profitable for earnest, seeking believers to reconsider what it means to be born of God to become children of God in the kingdom of God. Regarding the proper understanding of biblical terms related to the divine species, Billheimer offers the following worthy advice:

Although the inspired words of the Biblical vocabulary are so pregnant with unequivocal meaning, the natural mind is overwhelmed by their implications and is tempted to qualify them by treating them as fantasy, purely as symbols, or as figures of speech. This is the way unbelief frequently emasculates the Word of God.... Doubtless the reality behind the Biblical terms is far beyond the capacity of human imagination, *yet these terms are valid as far as the mind can comprehend*. To accept them as less than a faithful representation of heavenly reality is to rob them of their content. (39)

### Entering into the Kingdom of God

As indicated above, we enter into the kingdom of God—the enlargement of the pneumatic Christ and the realm of the divine species—through regeneration. The Lord Himself makes this emphatically clear in John 3, where He reveals that if we would enter into the divine realm, the kingdom of God as the realm of the divine species, we need to be born of God to have the life and nature of God. To be regenerated—to be born anew, born of

God—is to receive another life, the divine life, in addition to our natural, human life. Just as possessing the human life is the requirement for entering into the human kingdom, the realm of the human species, so possessing the divine life is the requirement for entering into the divine kingdom, the realm of the divine species. Entrance into the kingdom of the divine life requires that we receive the divine life, and we receive the divine life through the divine birth, that is, through regeneration.

In John 3:3 the Lord Jesus said, speaking to an elderly religious person, “Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” In verse 5 He went on to say, “Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Verse 3 speaks of seeing the kingdom, and verse 5, of entering into the kingdom. In order to see, to perceive, the kingdom of God, we must have the life of the kingdom of God through regeneration. Recall that the Lord told the Pharisees that the kingdom of God does not come “with observation” (Luke 17:20). The kingdom is not physical, and its existence and reality cannot be discerned by natural, human sight. To see the kingdom of God we must be born anew; that is, we must be born of the Spirit in our spirit (John 3:6) by believing into Christ (vv. 15-16) and receiving the pneumatic Christ into our spirit to become God-men, those who possess the divine life and nature, who are part of the increase of the pneumatic Christ, and who live under the inner rule of the divine life in the realm of the divine species.

The religious people to whom the Lord was speaking in Luke 17 and John 3 were blind; they could not see the kingdom, which was actually present with them in the person of Christ Himself. The situation is the same today. Religious blindness hinders many, including pastors and bishops, from seeing the kingdom of God. To them the Lord would continue to say, “Unless you are born anew, you cannot see.”

Whereas we see the kingdom of God by being born anew, we actually enter into the kingdom by being born of water and the Spirit. In verse 5 *water* signifies the death of Christ, into which we have been baptized (Rom. 6:4-6), and *Spirit* signifies resurrection, through which we have been regenerated (1 Pet. 1:3). Water is to terminate, to bury, the people of the old creation, and the Spirit is to

germinate, to resurrect, people in the new creation. Only by being terminated and germinated in this way can we enter into the kingdom of God as the enlargement of the pneumatic Christ and as the realm of the divine species.

To experience this termination and germination is to experience the deliverance and the transfer described in Colossians 1:13. In this verse Paul says that the Father has “delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.” Before we were terminated and

germinated, we were in darkness; we were in the kingdom of Satan (Matt. 12:26), under the authority of Satan (Acts 26:18), and under the authority of darkness. Now, having been delivered and transferred by the Father through redemption and regeneration, we are in the kingdom of the Son of God’s love, enjoying our “share of the allotted portion of the saints in the light” (Col. 1:12). In this divine realm we are under the rule of God in life, we are the expansion of the pneumatic Christ in His administration, we partake of the benefits and fulfill the responsibilities of children of God in the realm of the divine species, and we experience and enjoy our portion of the all-inclusive Christ typified by the land of Canaan with its rich produce. In this pleasant realm, our King, the pneumatic Christ, reigns in life, and we reign in Him through the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness (Rom. 5:17, 21). In this happy sphere we bask under the shining of the transfigured and glorified Jesus, restful in the realization that the reality of the kingdom of God is the shining of Jesus over us, in us, and through us, and submissive to the inner ruling of His heavenly illumination (Matt. 16:28; 17:2; Mark 9:1). This delightful realm is the kingdom of God, the corporate expression of the pneumatic Christ. **LC**

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