

The SERPENT and the BRIDE

THE RECOVERY OF THE HIGHEST GOSPEL

by Ron Kangas

The Lord's recovery is largely a recovery of truths in the Scriptures that have been neglected or even lost throughout the centuries. One aspect of the truth that needs to be recovered is the divine revelation regarding the highest gospel, that is, the highest, fullest, and most complete and accurate understanding of the gospel of God concerning His Son (Rom. 1:1-4). Perhaps the most shallow understanding of the gospel is that which uses John 3:16—often called “the gospel in a nutshell”—to declare that God so loved the world that He gave His Son to die on the cross for our sins so that we would not perish in hell but would have everlasting life in heaven. Such an understanding of the gospel is appallingly low, superficial, and deficient with respect to the truth. As this article will attempt to make clear, God gave His only begotten Son not that we may have everlasting life in a “heavenly mansion” but that we who once were part of the serpent may become the bride. The highest gospel is the wonderful message that those who had been constituted with Satan to become Satan in life, nature, and expression may, in Christ, be constituted with God to become God in life, nature, and expression. The highest gospel is therefore a word concerning the serpent and the bride.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that every one who believes into Him would not perish, but would have eternal life” (John 3:16). It is significant that this verse begins with the word *for*; this indicates that verse 16 is an explanation of verses 14 and 15 and that verse 16 should not be understood in isolation from verses 14 and 15 in particular and from chapter three of John as a whole. If we interpret verse 16 in relation to what this chapter reveals regarding regeneration—the serpent (Satan), the kingdom of God, and the bride as the increase of Christ—we will see that God gave His Son so that we may be delivered from the serpent and be regenerated, transformed, and built up to become the bride.

The World—Fallen Human Beings with a Serpentine Nature

“God so loved the world.” *World* here denotes the totality of fallen, sinful human beings, who constitute the world as a system. To say that God loves the world is to assert that He loves fallen humanity. However, it is crucial that we advance in our understanding of the human condition to realize that fallen human beings are not merely sinful but are actually serpentine in nature. In fact, the Lord's word in verse 14 concerning the bronze serpent lifted up by Moses in the wilderness indicates that in the sight of God fallen persons are serpents, the increase and enlargement of Satan, the serpent. If we would understand this, we need to know the intrinsic significance of the fall of man.

According to the record in Genesis 1, all living things, with the exception of man, were created according to “their kind” (vv. 11-12, 21, 24-25). Man was made not according to his kind but according to God's kind (vv. 26-27). The fact that man was created in the image of God and according to the likeness of God indicates that man was created according to God's kind, not according to man's own kind. Man was created in God's image and according to God's kind as a vessel to receive God, contain God, and express God. As we will see, God's goal was that the man created according to God's kind would receive God into him as life and thus be born of Him to become God-man kind.

We need to be deeply impressed that God made man after His kind and that from God's point of view, *mankind* is a negative term. Strange as it may sound, God did not actually create mankind, and, strictly speaking, there should be no mankind. Although God created every other living thing after its kind, He did not create mankind, that is, man according to man's own kind. Before the fall of man, there was no mankind, only God's kind. When man fell

away from God and began to live according to himself, man became mankind. In this way the man created by God according to God's kind is now mankind, man according to man's own kind.

At this juncture we need to see that when the man created according to God's kind fell away from God and became mankind, man simultaneously became Satan's kind, the devil's kind. Through man's disobedience and consequent fall, the evil nature of Satan, the devil, entered into humankind, causing man to become a creature according to Satan's kind, the devil's kind. Fallen human beings are children of the devil (1 John 3:10) and sons of the evil one (Matt. 13:38), possessing the life and nature of their father, the devil (John 8:44). Sin as the nature of Satan, and even sin as Satan himself, has been injected into so-called mankind, giving rise to a dreadful mutation—fallen mankind as Satan's kind.

To coin a term, we may say that humankind, having become Satan's kind, has been *satanified*. *Satanification* is the process through which the human beings who were created by God according to God's kind were infected with the life and nature of Satan to become Satan's kind as the embodiment and expression of Satan (Matt. 16:23). Satan's evil plot was therefore to satanify the human race.

The suffix *-fy* means "make," "form into," "invest with the attributes of," "make similar to." For Satan to satanify man means that Satan has made man similar to himself. Even more, by investing man with his attributes, Satan has made man one with him and the same as he in life, nature, attributes, and constitution. Of course, Satan continues to have an objective existence apart from humankind. The point here is that by injecting himself into man, Satan has caused a mutation through which man has been constituted with the life and nature of Satan and has been invested with the attributes of Satan to become Satan. Therefore, the world, which according to John 3:16 is loved by God, is not only a world constituted with sinners but is a world constituted with Satan—with fallen mankind as the reproduction of the devil—to be the increase and enlargement of Satan.

All three parts of our tripartite being—spirit, soul, and body (1 Thes. 5:23)—have been drastically affected by this process of satanification. The body, which was created good, has been transmuted to become the flesh (Rom. 7:18). The soul, the organ for expressing God, has been warped and changed into the self (Matt. 16:23-24). The spirit, the organ for contacting and receiving God, has been deadened (Eph. 2:1). As a result, all fallen, tripartite, satanified human beings have become involved with an evil trinity composed of Satan, sin, and the fallen man (the flesh). These are three-in-one and

coordinate together to build up Satan's evil kingdom (Matt. 12:26).

Certain believers, including readers of this article, may be uncomfortable with the notion that Satan dwells in fallen human beings. In fact, some may go so far as to refuse to believe this. Those who are uncomfortable with this idea or who refuse to believe it should ponder two important verses. John 8:44 says,

You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks the lie, he speaks it out of his own possessions; for he is a liar and the father of it.

Satan is a father, and as such he has engendered billions of offspring, who want to do the desires of their father. Satan is the father of lies and the father of sinners, those who are of the devil's kind, possessing the life and nature of Satan to be his increase, enlargement, and expression.

Since the devil is a father, he must have children. Concerning this, 1 John 3:10 says, "In this [the matter of practicing sin] the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest." To live in sin or not live in sin depends upon whose children we are—the children of God or the children of the devil. As those born of the devil to be children of the devil, fallen human beings possess the life of the devil, partake of the nature of the devil, and therefore live in sin automatically and habitually. These children of the devil were not adopted by him to be his children merely in standing or position; on the contrary, they were born of him to be his children in life, nature, constitution, and expression. Thus, they are the same as their father, Satan, not in his perverse fatherhood (which belongs uniquely to him) but in his devilish life and nature. Satan truly dwells in them and is expressed from within them.

In Matthew 16:23-24 we have an instance of such an expression of Satan through one of the Lord's disciples. Because Peter received a revelation from the Father, he could testify concerning the Lord Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). After Peter made this declaration, the Lord Jesus went on to speak about the church, the kingdom, and His death and resurrection, informing the disciples that He would "be killed and on the third day be raised" (v. 21). Unable to bear the thought of the Lord's suffering and death, "Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means happen to You!" (v. 22). In His response, the Lord exposed the Satan who was in Peter: "He turned and said to Peter, Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but

on the things of men” (v. 23). To Peter the Lord said, “Satan!” This clearly indicates that Satan was in Peter and that when Peter set his mind on the things of men, he was Satan in practical expression. The Lord’s word in verse 24 regarding denying the self and taking up the cross indicates that Satan is not only an element in the sinful flesh but is intimately related to and expressed through the self.

The light in the Word is very clear: Fallen human beings are constituted with Satan, they are one with Satan, and they are the expression of Satan.

Moreover, since “he who is called the Devil and Satan” is “the ancient serpent” (Rev. 12:9) and since fallen human beings are children of the devil, having the devil as their father, in the sight of God all fallen and sinful human beings are serpents (Matt. 23:33; 3:7). The highest gospel, which conveys the highest truth, addresses the real situation of the world and exposes the intrinsic significance of man’s fall—the fact that fallen human beings have a serpentine nature and thus are in a condition from which only God can deliver them. This gospel declares that although human beings are utterly fallen and have become satanified constituents of the satanic world system, God nevertheless loves them with the divine love, the love which is the inner substance of God expressed in Christ, the beloved Son. As we will see, God so loves these human beings—vessels designed and created by Him to contain and express Him—that He gave His only begotten Son as a sin offering so that, by believing into Him, they may obtain the life of God, the divine, eternal life, to become His many sons (Heb. 2:10) and thereby be His corporate expression for the fulfillment of His economy according to His heart’s desire.

The Bronze Serpent and the Son of Man

A vital aspect of this highest gospel is unveiled in John 3:14: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” On the one hand, this verse exposes something poisonous concerning Nicodemus, our representative; on the other hand, it unveils something marvelous concerning Christ, our Redeemer.

The Lord referred to an incident in Numbers 21 to indicate to Nicodemus that despite his fine appearance as a religious, moral, and ethical person, he was actually a serpent in the sight of God. When the children of Israel spoke against God and against Moses, the Lord “sent

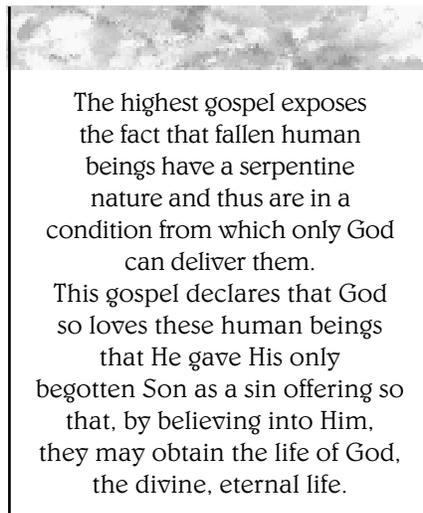
fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died” (v. 6). The people then came to Moses, confessed that they had sinned in their speaking, and asked him to pray to the Lord that He would take away the serpents from among them (v. 7). After Moses prayed, the Lord told him to make “a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live” (v. 8). In compliance with the word of the Lord, “Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the pole; and if a serpent had bitten any man, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived” (v. 9). Here the Lord was showing Nicodemus, who might have regarded himself as an upright man, that no matter how good, pious, and religious he was outwardly, he had the serpentine nature, the nature of Satan, inwardly. As a fallen and sinful human being, Nicodemus had been bitten and poisoned by the serpent, Satan, and therefore had the serpentine life and nature as the constituents of his corrupted tripartite being. Even a person such as Nicodemus

was involved with the satanic trinity of Satan, sin, and the flesh. Therefore, what he needed was not a teacher to give him more doctrinal knowledge but a Redeemer, the One who, in fulfillment of the type of the bronze serpent, would be judged and die on the cross as his Substitute.

This brings us to the most important matter in John 3:14—the bronze serpent as a type of Christ. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” This clearly reveals that in His vicarious death on the cross for our redemption, Christ would be the fulfillment of the type of the bronze

serpent, bearing God’s judgment on our behalf. The bronze serpent had the form of a serpent, but it did not have the poisonous nature of the serpent. By applying this type to Himself, the Lord Jesus was indicating that although He was the Word, God Himself, who had become flesh (1:1, 14) and although He was God manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:15-16), He was in “the likeness of the flesh of sin” (Rom. 8:3), but He did not participate in any way in the flesh of sin. In Him there was no sin (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15).

In type, the bronze serpent was a representative of the people who had been bitten by fiery serpents and who had become serpents in the eyes of God. In order to be forgiven by God, they first needed to be judged by God. However, instead of being judged directly, they were judged in and through the bronze serpent as their representative. They were actual serpents, but the bronze serpent was a serpent only in form, not in nature, for it



The highest gospel exposes the fact that fallen human beings have a serpentine nature and thus are in a condition from which only God can deliver them. This gospel declares that God so loves these human beings that He gave His only begotten Son as a sin offering so that, by believing into Him, they may obtain the life of God, the divine, eternal life.

In the Likeness of the Flesh of Sin

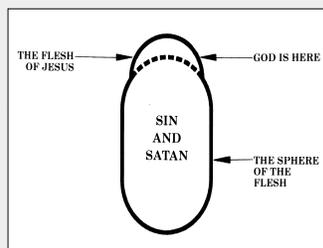
Christ as the Son of God became a man in the likeness of the flesh of sin. The fallen man had sin, but Christ did not have sin (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:21-22). He was in the likeness of the fallen man, but He did not have the fallen nature of the fallen man. When He became flesh, He became a part of the old creation since flesh is a part of the old creation. As a result, His death was the death of the old creation.

We also must realize that God's enemy, Satan, got into man's fallen flesh through the fall. In the fallen flesh of man there was Satan, and with Satan was the satanic system, the world. It was in the likeness of this fallen flesh that Christ died on the cross as a Man. Hence, through His death in the flesh He destroyed the devil, Satan (Heb. 2:14), and judged his world (John 12:31-33).

We have already said that Christ became flesh (John 1:14), and in the flesh (not Christ's flesh) was Satan. If we said that Satan was in the flesh of Christ, this would be heretical. However, some of us may still have a problem regarding the statement that Christ became flesh and in the flesh was Satan. The diagram showing the sphere of the flesh with Satan as personified Sin in it according to Romans 7 may help us.

Based upon Romans 7, we say that Satan and sin are in the flesh. Romans 7 tells us that sin is in our flesh, and in Romans 7 sin is personified. This chapter shows us that sin can deceive and kill people (v. 11), and that it can dwell in people and do things against their will (vv. 17, 20). It is quite alive (v. 9) and exceedingly active; so it must be the evil nature of Satan, the evil one, dwelling, acting, and working in fallen mankind. Sin in Romans 7 is a person. This person is the source of sin, the origin of sin. This Sin who is Satan still remains in our flesh where he lives, works, and moves, even after we have been saved. The sin in our flesh is a person, just as the divine life in our spirit is a Person. This Person who is our life is Christ (Col. 3:4), the embodiment of the Triune God. The Triune God as life is in our spirit, and Satan as sin is in our flesh. If we saved ones are not on the alert, and do not watch and pray, this evil one can instigate us to do sinful things. In our flesh there is lust (Gal. 5:16), and this lust is related to Satan in our flesh.

One day the Word became flesh. Remember that Jesus was not born of a human father, but of a human mother (Matt. 1:18). His humanity is flesh; however, His humanity is not of the male, but of the female. Our flesh is a sinful flesh because it is of the male with the



did not possess the poisonous element of the serpent. Nevertheless, this was sufficient for the bronze serpent to be lifted up as their representative. Likewise, in His death on the cross the Lord Jesus was crucified as a serpent in form. As a result, God condemned sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3), and our serpentine nature was dealt with. Through Christ's death on the cross as our Substitute in the form of the serpent, the evil work of satanification has been nullified, and the way has been opened for those who were children of the devil to become children of God (John 1:12-13).

The Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8), and through His death on the cross in the form of the serpent, the devil was destroyed (Heb. 2:14). There can be no doubt that the Lord Jesus was crucified as the bronze serpent in order to deal with Satan, the devil, the old serpent. When Christ was crucified as the bronze serpent, He crushed the head of the old serpent, fulfilling the prophecy in Genesis 3:15. In this way He destroyed the devil, who had the power of death. It is a marvelous fact that as the Son of Man and through His work in His death on the cross in the form of a serpent, Christ destroyed the devil. From this we see that Christ died in the form of a serpent not only to be our Substitute, bearing God's judgment for us, fallen and serpentine human beings, but that He died in the form of a serpent also to destroy Satan, the devil. Through this marvelous death, satanification has been annulled, and the satanifier has been destroyed.

Furthermore, the world as a satanic system has been judged, and the ruler of this world has been cast out. "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the ruler of this world be cast out" (John 12:31). This indicates that when Christ died on the cross in the form of the serpent, He judged the world and cast out Satan, the ruler of the world. In his evil plot against God and God's economy, Satan as the old serpent had injected himself into man's body, transmuting it into the flesh of sin and causing human beings to become serpents. As we have pointed out, through His death on the cross in the form of the serpent, in the likeness of the flesh of sin, the Lord Jesus destroyed Satan, who is in fallen humankind. In this way the ruler of this world was judged and cast out. Satan thought he was clever in having the Lord Jesus crucified. However, Satan caused himself to be trapped, judged, and cast out.

Because the world system is connected to Satan, having been invented by him, when Satan was judged, the world, of which he is the ruler, was also judged. Satan has formed an evil system, which the New Testament calls *the world*. Through this world system, this satanic cosmos, Satan has systematized fallen, serpentine humankind under his usurping hand. Satan then uses the world to replace God

and to keep the people created by God from fulfilling the purpose of God. However, when the Lord Jesus was crucified as our Substitute in the form of the serpent, He judged not only Satan, the ruler of the world, but also the world system itself.

With all this in view, perhaps we can now have a greater appreciation of what it means to say, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” This does not only mean that Christ died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3), bearing “up our sins in His body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24). It also means that God gave His Son in the sense that He caused Him to be made sin on our behalf (2 Cor. 5:21) and to die on the cross in the form of the serpent so that God could condemn sin in the flesh, destroy Satan, and judge the world.

God’s only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus, came in the likeness of the flesh of sin and died in the form of the serpent. During the last three of His six hours on the cross, Christ was made sin, and in the sight of God, He was in the form of the serpent. He bore God’s righteous judgment for us so that the righteous God could have the ground to righteously justify us, forgive us, and regenerate us to be His children. Now it is possible for us, serpentine as we are in our fallen condition, to receive eternal life by believing into the Son of God (John 3:15).

Blood and Water

Before we consider further what it means to be born of God to receive the life of God, we need to see something exceedingly precious regarding the blood and the water mentioned in John 19:34. “One of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water.” The blood signifies that Christ accomplished redemption for us by dying for our sins. The water signifies that the divine life flowed out of Him who died for us. The blood and water, therefore, signify the two aspects of Christ’s death—the redemptive aspect and the life-releasing and life-imparting aspect. The blood which flowed out of the Lord’s pierced side, typified by the blood of the Passover lamb (Exo. 12:7), is for redemption (Heb. 9:22; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Rom. 3:25). The water that flowed out of His side signifies the life-releasing and life-imparting aspect of His death.

The Lord died on the cross not only as the Lamb of God (John 1:29) to shed His blood for redemption and the forgiveness of sins; He died also as a grain of wheat (12:24) in order to release the divine life within the shell of His humanity so that this life could be imparted into us for our regeneration. On the Lord’s side, His death as symbolized by the water was a life-releasing death; on our side, this aspect of His death was a life-imparting death. To deal with our sins—the expression of the serpentine

female. But the flesh of Jesus is only of the female, not of the male; therefore, His flesh is not sinful. Our flesh is not only flesh but sinful flesh, but the flesh of Christ, having nothing to do with the male, is not sinful flesh. Jesus’ flesh is surely joined to the sinful flesh as the diagram indicates. However, the element of sin is in the sphere of the flesh below the dotted line, but not in the spot above the dotted line. Within the part above the dotted line is God! In the sphere of the flesh below the dotted line is Satan, but in the sphere of the flesh above the dotted line is God. The diagram shows that these two spheres are joined together with a dotted line separating them. Since God was in the sphere of the flesh above the dotted line, sin could not penetrate through this line because God is too strong for His enemy, Satan. Satan was restricted within the realm, the sphere, of the flesh below the dotted line. Satan tried again and again to enter into the flesh of Jesus, but he could not get through. The Spirit even led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After having fasted forty days and forty nights, He was tempted by the devil three times (Matt. 4:1-11). Satan tried three times to enter into the flesh of Jesus, but he could not get through.

The diagram illustrates the two parts of the flesh. The main part is sinful, and the small part is not sinful. In the main part is Satan; in the small part is God. During the thirty-three and a half years of the life of Jesus, Satan was fighting to get through the border line into the flesh of Jesus. However, he could never get through because God was always resisting him, and God is stronger than he is. When the Word became flesh, He joined Himself to the flesh. Then when Christ went to the cross, He put the entire sphere of the flesh to death, which included Satan and sin, by injecting death into it. When Jesus brought His flesh to the cross, He brought Satan and sin which are in the flesh to the cross also, and He injected death into the flesh which included Satan and sin, the flesh to which He had been joined. Satan had no way to reject this death. Hebrews 2:14 tells us that the death of Jesus on the cross destroyed the devil who had the might of death. This marvelous, wonderful, all-inclusive, victorious death killed the flesh in which Satan and sin were residing.

Christ died on the cross as the serpent to destroy the old serpent, the devil (Heb. 2:14). He destroyed Satan by dying in the flesh. Within the flesh was Satan, so when He died in the flesh His death destroyed Satan. His death is all-inclusive. Second Corinthians 5:21 says, “Him (Christ) who did not know sin He (God) made sin on our behalf.” It should have been in the last three hours, from twelve noon to three o’clock in the afternoon (Matt. 27:45), while He was dying the vicarious death for us sinners who are flesh, that God made Christ sin on our behalf, and through His death in His flesh condemned sin (Rom. 8:3) which is in man’s flesh. (Lee, Witness. *God’s New Testament Economy*. Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1986, pp. 43-46.)

nature within us—and to deal with sin—the evil nature of Satan in our flesh—we need the redemptive aspect of Christ’s death signified by the blood. To make us the children of God and the bride of Christ as His increase, we need the life-releasing and life-imparting aspect of Christ’s death signified by the water.

Most Christians, including many Bible teachers and theologians, know only one aspect of Christ’s death, the redemptive aspect. They neither know nor appreciate the life-releasing and life-imparting aspect of Christ’s death. The main reason for this ignorance and lack of appreciation may be the shortage of vision concerning the crucial place of the divine life in God’s eternal purpose. Therefore, it is of vital importance that we see that the Lord’s death has two aspects: the aspect of redemption and the aspect of the release and impartation of life. On the negative side, the death of Christ is to destroy Satan and to take away our sins. On the positive side, the death of Christ is to release and impart the divine life into us. God’s intention is that redemption would be followed by the imparting of life.

Once we are clear about this, we need to see that the life-releasing and life-imparting aspect is primary and that the redemptive aspect is secondary. The secondary aspect, the redemptive aspect, is for the primary aspect, the life-releasing and life-imparting aspect. Redemption is a procedure, but the imparting of life is the goal. If we see only the redemptive aspect but not the life-releasing and life-imparting aspect, this indicates that we see the procedure but not the goal. If we are to know the highest gospel and if we are to have those spiritual experiences in Christ that transform us from the serpent into the bride, we must see that redemption is for impartation, that the blood is for the water. As the Lamb of God Christ died for our sins, and as the grain of wheat He died to release the divine life so that the life in Him could become the life in us to make us the church, God’s new creation in resurrection. The life-releasing and life-imparting aspect of the Lord’s death released the divine life from within Him so that this life could be imparted into us for the producing of the church, which is composed of all those who believe in Him and to whom the divine life has been imparted.

God’s eternal purpose is to impart Himself in His Divine Trinity into us as life and then in this life to produce and build up the church as the Body of Christ to consummate the New Jerusalem as the eternal, corporate expression of the Triune God. Since this is God’s purpose, the main aspect of Christ’s death is the life-releasing and life-imparting aspect. The redemptive aspect, although it is marvelous, is supplementary. God’s goal is that we would have His life for His expression. However, the fall of humankind with the resulting satanification of humanity brought about a great gap in the fulfillment of God’s

eternal purpose. Because of this gap, redemption is necessary as a bridge leading from the fall into God’s purpose. From this we see that redemption, a stopgap procedure, is secondary and supplementary to the main aspect of Christ’s death, the aspect of the release and impartation of life for the building up of the bride of Christ (Gen. 2:21-23; Eph. 5:25-27).

Believing into Christ to Receive Eternal Life

Let us now consider John 3:14 and 15 as a single unit: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that every one who believes into Him may have eternal life.” Recall what happened when Moses lifted up the serpent on the pole: “If a serpent had bitten any man, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived” (Num. 21:9). In the fulfillment of the type of the bronze serpent, the Lord Jesus was lifted up on the cross in the form of the serpent and was judged there on our behalf. Now in the proper preaching of the gospel, Jesus Christ is “openly portrayed crucified” (Gal. 3:1). Then through the hearing of faith, we behold Him not only as the Lamb of God but as the bronze serpent, we believe into Him as the wonderful One who died for us, and we receive eternal life. Just as the serpent-bitten Israelites looked at the bronze serpent and lived, so we who believe into Christ as the One made sin for us look unto Him and live through receiving eternal life, “that which is really life” (1 Tim. 6:19).

Notice that John 3:15 speaks of believing *into* Christ. Believing into Christ is different from both believing Him (6:30) and believing in Him. To believe the Lord is to believe that He is true and real and to acknowledge certain facts about Him objectively. To believe in the Lord is to trust Him and His word and to take Him as the personal object of our faith, of the exercise of our God-given ability to believe. To believe into Christ is to be united to Him, even mingled with Him, on the one hand receiving Him into us and, on the other hand, entering into Him to be one with Him. To be joined to the Lord by believing into Him is actually to enter into an organic union with Him. By believing into Christ we enter into Christ. By faith, which is the Triune God infused into us to be our capacity to believe in Him and in His word, we actually believe ourselves *into* Christ and even become one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). The expression *organic union* describes this kind of oneness. Through our believing into Christ, we have been joined to Christ and have become one with Him. Now we are in Christ, and Christ is in us. This is an organic union, a union in life.

“He who believes into the Son has eternal life” (John 3:36). To have eternal life is not to have everlasting life defined as unending existence in heaven. Rather, to have eternal life is to receive the divine life, the uncreated life

of God, the life which is eternal and divine in nature and also everlasting with respect to time. When used to modify *life*, the word *eternal* denotes not only duration of time, which is everlasting, but also quality, which is absolutely perfect and complete, without shortage or defect. Eternal life is a life on the highest plane, for it is not only the divine life, the life of God, but even the Triune God Himself, uncreated, incorruptible, indestructible, and eternal (Eph. 4:18; John 5:26; Rom. 8:2; Heb. 7:16). Since to be eternal means to be perfect and complete in quality, quantity, time, space, and existence, the eternal life which we have received through believing into the Son of God is perfect and complete in quality, quantity, time, space, and existence. This eternal life is the uncreated life of God, the indestructible and incorruptible life (2 Tim. 1:10). This is the life that is in the Son of God and that is the Son of God (1 John 5:11-12; John 14:6). This is the life with which we, the believers in Christ, have been regenerated and which has become our life (1:12-13; Col. 3:4). This is the life which was in Christ, which was released in His death, and which has been imparted to us, causing us to become children of God and members of the Body of Christ. Once we were serpents, the increase of Satan, subject to the law of the satanic life—the law of sin and of death (Rom. 8:2). Now, through our believing into the One who was lifted up on the cross in the form of a serpent, we have eternal life, the life of God, and may experience the spontaneous operation and liberating power of the law of the divine life (v. 2).

Born of God to Have the Life of God

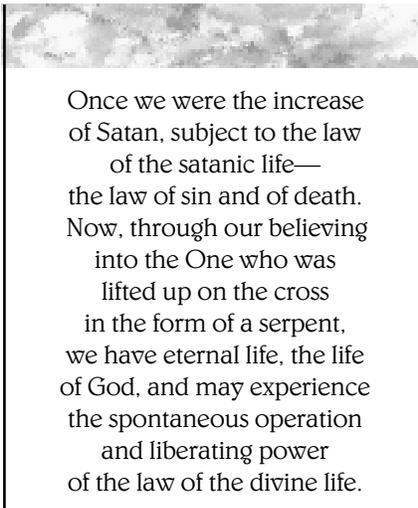
In John 3:3 the Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” To be born anew is to be born from above, from heaven, which is actually to be born from God, who is in heaven. We may use the word *regeneration* to denote the process of being born anew, born from above. To be regenerated is to be born again, that is, born a second time. We were born the first time of our parents to receive the human life in order to live in the human realm, the human kingdom. To be born again, born a second time, is to be born of God to receive the divine life in order to live in the divine realm, the divine kingdom.

Regeneration is not a matter of reforming the human life or of having a new beginning in the natural life. Regeneration is a matter of receiving another life in addition to our natural human life. This other life received through

regeneration is the divine life, the eternal life, the uncreated, indestructible life of God. Being born of our parents caused us to obtain human life, whereas being born of God causes us to receive God’s life. Simply stated, to be regenerated is to be born of God. As those who have been regenerated, born of God, we have the divine life in addition to our human life, and thus we are now children of God (1 John 3:1) with the life and nature of God, our Father.

The New Testament clearly reveals that those who believe into Christ and thereby receive Him into them are born of God to become the children of God. Chapter five of 1 John speaks of those who have been “begotten of Him” (v. 1), “everything that has been begotten of God,” (v. 4), “everyone who is begotten of God” (v. 18), and “he who has been begotten of God” (v. 18). John 1:12-13 says, “As many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, to those who believe into His name, who were begotten not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” This new birth—regeneration—is not of blood, that is, not of the physical life; not of the will of the flesh, that is, not of the will of fallen man after man became flesh and not of the fallen, soulish life; and not of the will of man, that is, not of the will of the man created by God and not of the soulish life of created man. The new birth is of God and is fully related to God.

It is surely the greatest wonder in the universe that human beings—fallen, sinful, satanified human beings—can be born of God to become children of God. Today many are seeking signs, wonders, and miracles, but they do not realize that there is no greater miracle than regeneration. What miracle could be greater than the divine birth, the birth of human beings through regeneration to become God-men, human beings with God born into them? Suppose a dog could be born of its master to receive the human life. To be sure, such an event would attract the attention of the news media; reporters would be eager to investigate the great miracle in which a dog received the human life and nature to become a dog-man. This kind of dog would not simply be a healthy and well-groomed dog; it would be a dog with the life and nature of a human being. Of course, a dog cannot become a dog-man, but through regeneration human beings receive the life of God to become genuine children of God. As astounding as it may seem, through regeneration we have been born of God to become actual God-men. In fact, to be a real Christian is to be a God-man.



Once we were the increase of Satan, subject to the law of the satanic life—the law of sin and of death. Now, through our believing into the One who was lifted up on the cross in the form of a serpent, we have eternal life, the life of God, and may experience the spontaneous operation and liberating power of the law of the divine life.

Although this is amazing, we need to go a step further. For believers in Christ to be born of God means that they become God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. That which is born of a dog is a dog; that which is born of a human being is a human being; and that which is born of God is God in the limited sense of being God in life and in nature, not in the Godhead, not as an object of worship, and not possessing God's incommunicable attributes. It would be utterly blasphemous to say that we can attain to the Godhead or become an object of worship. Nevertheless, it would be a sign of unbelief to deny the reality of the result of regeneration—that human beings become the same as God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead.

If we would have a precise understanding of regeneration, we need to consider the Lord's word in John 3:6: "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." *Spirit* here is the divine Spirit, the Holy Spirit, and *spirit* refers to the human spirit. To be regenerated, born anew, is to be born of the Spirit (v. 8) in our spirit. Regeneration takes place when the divine Spirit comes into the human spirit to enliven it with the divine life. When we were born of God, regenerated, God as the life-giving Spirit came into our spirit and imparted the divine life into our spirit. Our spirit was made by God for this purpose. Furthermore, when our spirit was regenerated by being born of the Spirit, our spirit became a mingled spirit—the regenerated human spirit mingled with the regenerating Spirit to be one spirit. It is in this mingled spirit that we are "one spirit" with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17).

This should help us to realize that when we were regenerated, it was not our whole being, our entire tripartite being, which was regenerated. Rather, it was our spirit, the inmost part of our being, which was born of the Spirit. This means that regeneration took place only in our spirit, not in our soul or body; only one part of our being—our human spirit—was born of God. Therefore, that which is born of the Spirit is the regenerated human spirit.

Born of Water and the Spirit to Enter into the Kingdom of God

In John 3:5 the Lord Jesus says, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." This word affords us a fuller understanding of regeneration and unfolds the relationship between regeneration and the kingdom of God.

Regeneration denotes a new birth involving two elements—water and Spirit. On the negative side, the water terminates us; on the positive side, the Spirit germinates us. Water for termination and Spirit for germination—these two concepts together comprise the whole concept

of regeneration. Regeneration is a process in which people of the old creation are terminated with their entire history and then germinated in and with the divine life to be the new creation.

Our reason for saying that water is for termination is that *water* in verse 5 is a reference to baptism, which is for the termination of the old creation with the sinful, satanified nature of fallen human beings. This is portrayed clearly in the ministry of John the Baptist, a ministry in which water was the central sign. John the Baptist "came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4). Repentance is to have a change of mind issuing in regret, and baptism is to bury the repentant people. A great many came to him and "were baptized by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins" (Matt. 3:6). Central to the practice of baptism by immersion in water is the understanding that to baptize people in this way signifies their death and burial for their termination. Those who present themselves for such a baptism confess that they are fallen, sinful, and worthy only of death and burial so that they may have a new beginning in resurrection by Christ as the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit. Significantly, when John "saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, Offspring of vipers, who prompted you to flee from the coming wrath?" (v. 7). John realized that fallen human beings, especially religionists, are vipers requiring termination. Here a connection is implied between proper baptism and the termination and burial of our fallen person with its serpentine nature. The only way to be delivered from the kingdom of Satan, the realm of satanification, is through the termination signified by baptism.

John went on to say, "I baptize you in water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is stronger than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He Himself will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire" (v. 11). Just as water is the central sign of the ministry of John the Baptist, the Spirit is the central sign of the ministry of Jesus, a ministry to germinate people for the new creation. From all this we see that regeneration requires termination and germination. To be regenerated is to be terminated through the water of baptism and germinated through the Spirit.

A common religious notion is that we are regenerated in order to go to heaven where, it is alleged, we will enjoy everlasting life in heavenly mansions. Such an idea is contrary to the truth. As the Gospel of John clearly and emphatically discloses, regeneration is for the kingdom of God and is the unique entrance into the divine kingdom. Only those who have been terminated and germinated, that is, only those who have been born of water and the Spirit, can enter into the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God is the ruling, the reigning, of God with all its blessing and enjoyment. As the reign of God, the kingdom of God is a divine realm or sphere that can be entered into and realized only by the divine life received through regeneration. Only the divine life is qualified to be in the divine realm, and only the divine life can fulfill the requirements for living in this realm. Thus, in order to participate in the kingdom of God as a divine realm, we need the divine life. Only those who possess the divine life can be in the divine realm and share in the divine kingdom. The kingdom of God is therefore not a material kingdom visible to human sight; rather, it is a kingdom of the divine life as a realm in which God rules in His life. Regeneration is the entrance into the kingdom, and the growth of the divine life within the believers is the development of the kingdom (Mark 4:26-29; 2 Pet. 1:3-11).

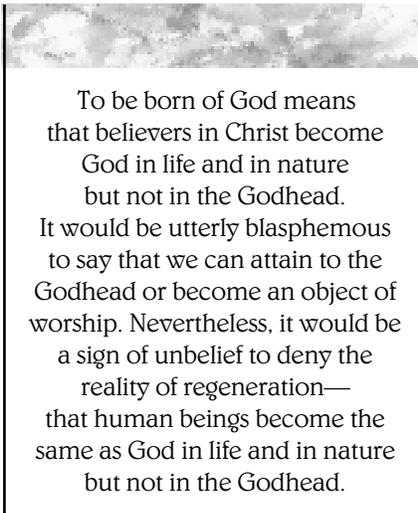
When we were regenerated, we were delivered out of “the authority of darkness”—the kingdom of Satan, the realm of satanification, the sphere of collective living according to the serpentine nature—and we were transferred into the kingdom of the Son of God’s love (Col. 1:13). As indicated by Paul’s expression *the kingdom of the Son of His love*, the kingdom of God is a delightful realm of divine life, light, and love, a sphere where we enjoy the all-inclusive Christ under His universal headship for the fulfillment of God’s economy. Here we grow in the life of God, participate in the nature of God, experience the provisions of God, and care for the heart’s desire of God. In this blessed realm of the kingdom of God, we are saved from the serpent and his evil plot against God, and we are free to become the bride according to God’s eternal purpose.

Living in the Realm of the Divine Species

We have pointed out that the kingdom of God, as a divine realm, is the reign of God. If we would see the kingdom of God, we must be born anew (John 3:3). If we would enter into the kingdom of God, we must be born of water and the Spirit (v. 5). If we are not born anew, we do not have the capacity to see the kingdom of God; rather, we will remain oblivious to its existence and continue to be occupied only with the physical realm. But after we have been born anew in our spirit, we can see, perceive, that there is a sphere, a realm, a reign, which the Bible calls the kingdom of God. We enter this sphere by being born of water and the Spirit. Now we may go on to say that water signifies the death of Christ, into which

we have been baptized (Rom. 6:4), and the Spirit signifies the reality of Christ’s resurrection, in which we are germinated to be a new creation in Him (2 Cor. 5:17). When we die with Christ and are resurrected in Him, we become a new being, possessing eternal life as the source and element of our new being.

We also become a person of a new species, a new kind—God-man kind. The fact that man was created in God’s image and according to God’s likeness indicates that man was created in God’s kind, in God’s species. However, in our fallen condition, we have become mankind and also Satan’s kind. Regeneration involves the termination of fallen mankind and of Satan’s kind and the uplifting of the man created in God’s kind to become God-man kind, those who have been born of God yet remain human and thus are God-men. The expression *God-man kind* means that in Christ we, the believers in Christ, have become a new kind, the God-men who are not mankind or only God’s kind but God-man kind. Through regeneration we have become God-man kind, God-men in the divine species.



To be born of God means that believers in Christ become God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. It would be utterly blasphemous to say that we can attain to the Godhead or become an object of worship. Nevertheless, it would be a sign of unbelief to deny the reality of regeneration—that human beings become the same as God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead.

Now we need to realize that, according to the revelation in the Gospel of John, the kingdom of God is a realm not only of the divine dominion but of the divine species. Just as the vegetable kingdom is a realm of the vegetable species and the animal kingdom is a realm of the animal species, the kingdom of God is a realm of the divine species. In John 3 the kingdom of God refers primarily not to the reign of God but to the species of God. In Christ, God entered into the

human kingdom as the realm of the human species by being born of a woman (Gal. 4:4; Gen. 3:15), becoming man in life and in nature. In Christ we enter into the divine kingdom as the realm of the divine species by being born of God, becoming God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. Since we have been born of the Spirit in our spirit to enter into the kingdom of God as the realm of the divine species, we need to live and walk in the mingled spirit in order to live in this realm in a practical way day by day.

As we live in the realm of the divine species, we may experience the divine things. Here we have the divine life supply—the tree of life and the water of life—for our growth in life. Here we are the beneficiaries of Christ’s heavenly ministry, receiving the divine transmission from the ascended Christ, the One who lives always to intercede for us that we may be saved to the uttermost (Eph. 1:22-23; Heb. 7:25). Based upon God’s judicial

redemption signified by the blood in John 19:34, we experience God's organic salvation, signified by the water that flowed out of His pierced side; in this realm we touch the reality of "much more we will be saved in His life" (Rom. 5:10). The more we live in the realm of the divine species, the more we experience the function of the law of life, the spontaneous and automatic capacity of the Triune God as life within the believers (Rom. 8:2). The function of the law of the divine life refers to its capacity, which is almighty and which causes us to become the reproduction of Christ as the firstborn Son of God for the corporate expression of the Triune God, the Body of Christ, which consummates in the New Jerusalem. It is a marvelous fact that through regeneration we have been transferred into the realm of the divine species, a realm in which there is the unhindered function of the law of the divine life. As we experience this function, we are transformed into the Lord's image from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18), undergoing an organic and metabolic change in our soul through the renewing of our mind (Rom. 12:2). Moreover, as we grow in life and are transformed, we are built up to be the house of God, the church of the living God, the corporate manifestation of God in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:15-16). In this way we are thoroughly saved from the serpent to become the bride.

The Bride, the Increase of Christ

Christ died for us and the Spirit regenerated us so that we may become the bride of Christ as His increase and counterpart for His satisfaction. We were born again not to go to heaven but to become the bride. John 3:29 says, "He who has the bride is the bridegroom," and verse 30 says, "He must increase." The increase in verse 30 is the bride in verse 29; this reveals that in order for Christ to increase, He must have His bride, a living composition of regenerated people. We were delivered from the realm of satanification and were born of God to enter into the kingdom of God as the realm of the divine species so that we might become the bride of Christ. From God's point of view, as made known in John 3, the goal of regeneration is the bride.

If we consider John the Baptist's brief word concerning the bride in the context of chapter three as a whole, we will see that regeneration is the producing of the bride. All regenerated persons are components of the bride, who will be married to the Lord Jesus and enjoy a marvelous marriage union with Him for eternity. Of course, it is correct to say that we have been regenerated so that we may enter into and live in the kingdom of God. However, this is not the ultimate goal. God's goal in destroying the devil, in nullifying the serpentine nature, in releasing the divine life, and in regenerating us in our spirit is that Christ would have a bride. We all need to be enlightened to see that we have been regenerated in

order to become a part of Christ's bride. The significance of regeneration is that our serpentine being is put aside and that we receive the divine life in order to become a new being—God-man kind, God-men in the divine species—so that we may be a part of the bride. If we see this vision as it is unveiled in chapter three of John, our thinking regarding regeneration will be revolutionized and we will be able to declare that we have been born of God for the bride of Christ.

The Gospel of John is actually a book on the increase of Christ. Concerning Christ as the Bridegroom, John the Baptist declared, "He must increase." As the context indicates, this increase is a matter of people, regenerated believers, being added to Christ. Christ, the Bridegroom, needs a bride as His increase. It was to obtain His bride that He died on the cross in the form of a serpent. It was for the bride that the blood and water flowed out from His pierced side. It was for the bride that we were born of God the Spirit in our spirit. John 3 reveals the marvelous truth that Christ gains His bride by destroying the serpent, by terminating the serpentine nature, and by entering into us as the life-giving Spirit through regeneration to make Himself one with us and to make us one with Him so that we may be joined to Him and become a loving couple forever. Now, as regenerated human beings, God-man kind, we are being transformed and built together to become His bride as His increase.

In Revelation 19:7 we see that Christ and His bride as His increase will be married at His coming back: "Let us rejoice and exult, and let us give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." This marriage will be the issue of the completion of God's eternal economy. Then consummately in the new heaven and new earth, the processed and consummated Triune God—the Spirit—and His chosen, redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified people—the bride—will be the New Jerusalem, a universal couple enjoying a delightful married life for eternity. The goal of God's economy, therefore, is to obtain for Christ a bride through His redemption and divine life. For this goal we have been redeemed and regenerated, and for this goal we should live day by day in the realm of the divine species.

The Necessity of Deification

As the bride of Christ, we must be the same as Christ in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. If we realize this, we may also realize that this requires deification. For the ultimate goal of God's economy—the New Jerusalem as a universal couple—deification is necessary.

We may define deification as that process in God's organic salvation, His full salvation in life, through which

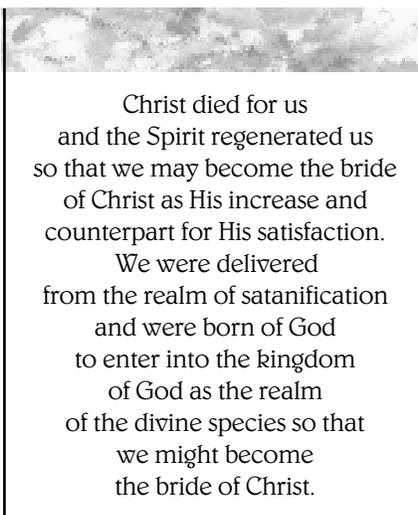
we are regenerated and transformed in Christ to become God in life, in nature, in constitution, and in expression but not in the Godhead and not as an object of worship. Just as Adam could not find his counterpart in anything of the animal life but needed one who came out from him and who was built with his element in order to be bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, so Christ, the real Bridegroom and Husband, needs one who has come out from Him and who is built with His indestructible divine life as the element in order to be bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh. Because Eve was the increase of Adam—the same as Adam in life and in nature—she could be joined to Adam. In the same principle, because the bride is the increase of Christ—the same as Christ in life and in nature—she can be joined to Him in an eternal marriage union. This requires the deification of those who compose the bride; otherwise, the marriage of Christ and His wife would be a strange marriage, with the partners being fundamentally different in life, in nature, in constitution, and in expression. Christ must, and will, marry one who is the same as He is in life and in nature but not in the Godhead.

The eternal marriage of Christ and His bride requires that God become man so that man may become God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. The Bridegroom is the very God who has become man; the bride is composed of redeemed, regenerated, and transformed human beings who have become God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. Because both the Bridegroom and the bride are God-men, possessing divinity and humanity, they can be joined together as one couple. But because the Bridegroom is God with the Godhead and God as an object of worship and because the bride is God only in the limited sense of being constituted with the divine life and the divine nature, for eternity the wife will worship her Husband, the redeeming God Himself with the unique Godhead. How marvelous that, on the one hand, this wife is the same as her Husband and that, on the other hand, this wife worships her Husband as the true and living God.

Deification versus Satanification

Satan's evil plot is to satanify the entire human race, transmuting human beings into serpents to make them his increase and expression, and God's plan is to deify His chosen and redeemed people to make them His increase and expression. Since God will not change His mind concerning His eternal economy and since Satan

will not repent of his counter-economy, there is warfare between the divine will and the satanic will, a warfare between deification and satanification. This warfare began in Genesis 3, it is fully developed in Revelation 12, it will lead to the ultimate war in Revelation 19, and it will issue in the two consummations in Revelation 20—22. As prophesied in Genesis 3:15, there is a conflict, a war, between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. In Revelation 12 we see the war between the universal bright woman and the dragon, the ancient serpent. In Revelation 19 there is the ultimate war, the war at Armageddon, where Christ and His deified bride as His army will defeat Antichrist, the ultimate expression of satanification, and his armies. In Revelation 20 the devil and everything related to his evil kingdom are cast into the lake of fire. This is the termination of satanification. In Revelation 21 and 22 the New Jerusalem, the wife of the Lamb, is gloriously manifested. This is the consummation of deification.



Christ died for us
and the Spirit regenerated us
so that we may become the bride
of Christ as His increase and
counterpart for His satisfaction.
We were delivered
from the realm of satanification
and were born of God
to enter into the kingdom
of God as the realm
of the divine species so that
we might become
the bride of Christ.

In light of the foregoing, we may summarize the intrinsic significance of the entire book of Revelation in two words: *serpent* and *bride*. Revelation mainly unveils how Satan as the old serpent will be fully eliminated (12:9; 20:2, 10) and how Christ's bride, the New Jerusalem, will be fully produced (21:2, 10-27). At present, the universe is in a state of war, and a battle is raging between two active principles—deification and satanification. The serpent is at war with the bride. Because we have the book of Revelation in our hand, we are assured of the outcome of this war. The serpent goes to the lake of fire, and

the bride becomes the New Jerusalem, the wife of the redeeming God.

The gospel we preach today is the good news that God so loved the world, the satanified human race, that He gave His only begotten Son to die on the cross in the form of a serpent so that every one who believes into Him would not perish with Satan in the lake of fire but would receive eternal life through regeneration to become part of the bride of Christ, the wife of the Lamb, the New Jerusalem. As those who preach this gospel, we testify that whereas once we were serpents, now we are becoming the bride. We have been delivered from the serpent, and now we are being transformed and built up to be the bride. This is the highest gospel. May this gospel be recovered among God's redeemed and regenerated people and then proclaimed by them throughout the earth for the defeat of the serpent and the preparation of the bride.

