

Creation, Satanification, Regeneration, Deification

Part 1: Creation for Regeneration

By Ron Kangas

In order to understand the central thought of the divine revelation in the Bible, we need to see the connection between Genesis 1:26 and Revelation 21:10-11. Genesis 1:26 says, “God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.” Revelation 21:10-11 says, “He carried me away in spirit onto a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, as clear as crystal.” The man in Genesis 1 is a corporate created man bearing God’s image for His expression; the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 is a corporate regenerated God-man transformed into the Lord’s image (2 Cor. 3:18) for God’s expression in glory. The fact that the appearance of the holy city and that of the holy God is the same—jasper (Rev. 4:3; 21:11)—indicates that the city is the corporate expression of God. In Genesis there is the potential for the corporate expression of God; in Revelation there is the reality of this expression.

It is God’s eternal purpose to have a corporate expression of Himself in, with, and through His chosen and redeemed people, who were created by Him to become sons born of Him. For the fulfillment of His purpose, God has an economy, a plan and administrative arrangement, to dispense Himself in His Divine Trinity into His redeemed people as their life, their life supply, and their everything. The goal of God’s economy is to make His chosen and redeemed people the same as He is in life and in nature (but not in the Godhead) and to make Himself one with them and them one with Him so that He may be enlarged and expanded in His expression with His divine attributes expressed in enriched and uplifted human virtues.

How can God make His redeemed the same as He is in life and in nature, and how can He make Himself one with them and them one with Him for His corporate expression? This takes place through the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity into the tripartite man. Based on the

creation of humankind in God’s image and according to His likeness, this dispensing is carried out through the process of God’s organic salvation, a process which is founded on Christ’s redemption (the judicial aspect of God’s complete salvation) and which includes regeneration, sanctification, renewing, transformation, conformation, and glorification. Because this process is the means by which the believers in Christ become one with God and even the same as God in life and nature, we use the word *deification* to describe it. Since we express what we are, if we would express God, we must in a very real sense become God, not in the Godhead or as an object of worship but in life, in nature, in constitution, in appearance, and in expression. This involves creation, regeneration, and deification. Creation is for regeneration, regeneration is for deification, and deification is for the corporate expression of the Triune God.

This great divine endeavor is opposed and attacked by Satan, God’s enemy, who in his subtlety has a counterplot to God’s economy. In brief, Satan’s objective is to make created man the same as he is in his evil life and nature. This we may describe as *satanification*—a word that denotes the process of Satan’s making the man created by God for His expression a constitution of Satan for his devilish expression. As we will argue later, the entire human race has been satanified and has become a brood of vipers, children of the devil (Matt. 23:33; 1 John 3:10). Therefore, along with the unveiling of creation, regeneration, and deification, the Scriptures expose the dreadful reality of satanification. This makes it necessary for us, from the standpoint of God’s eternal economy, to pay close attention to four crucial matters, each embodied in a single word: creation, satanification, regeneration, and deification. Hence, the general title for this three-part series, which will cover creation for regeneration (Part 1), satanification and its nullification (Part 2), and regeneration for deification (Part 3). This article will cover Part 1: creation for regeneration.

The Triune God created humankind in His image and according to His likeness for His corporate expression. The only way a God-created human being can express God is to receive the life of God (the divine, uncreated, eternal life) through regeneration and to become God in life and nature through deification. This is God's intention. However, Satan, acting quickly as usual, injected himself into man as sin. This is satanification. Before God's purpose in creation can be realized and before regeneration can take place, the fact of satanification must be addressed and solved; there must be a nullification of satanification. This took place through the death of Christ on the cross as the sin offering, as the One who, in fulfillment of the type of the bronze serpent (Rom. 8:3; John 3:14), came in the likeness of the flesh of sin and was made sin for us so that sin in the flesh might be condemned and the devil, the source of sin, might be destroyed (Heb. 2:14). With the redemption of Christ as the basis, God is now able to dispense Himself into His chosen and redeemed people as life for their regeneration and eventual and gradual deification. In this way Satan's strategy is defeated, and God's purpose is fulfilled. This, in brief, is the thesis that will be developed over the course of this three-part series.

Each of the three parts has its own thesis, a subthesis as it were. The thesis, the basic and controlling thought, of Part 1 is that the creation of humankind in the image of God was for regeneration by the life of God according to the economy of God for the fulfillment of the purpose of God. Central to the development of this idea is that regeneration is necessary not mainly because man has become fallen but because man, by creation, does not have the life of God. In other words, even if humankind had never sinned and had never been satanified, we would still have needed to be regenerated. For us to be created means that we were formed by God to have a human life; for us to be regenerated means that we are born of God to have the divine life. Regeneration, therefore, is not primarily to deal with sin but to fulfill God's purpose apart from the problem of sin. Even if Adam had not sinned, he still would have needed regeneration. Man needs regeneration simply because he is a creature, a human, not merely because he is a sinner. Regeneration fulfills the purpose of creation; hence, creation is for regeneration. This requires detailed study, to which we now turn.

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God's Good Pleasure

We begin, as we must, at the beginning, with God's good pleasure. The book of Ephesians, which was written from the perspective of God's good pleasure, reveals that God predestinated us "unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (1:5), and verse 9 says that God made known to us "the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself." The expression *good pleasure* indicates that God needs pleasure. In fact, as the most living One, God needs the most pleasure. God's good pleasure, the desire of His heart, is what pleases Him. In human terms, God's good pleasure is what makes Him happy by fulfilling the desire deep in His heart. According to the Bible as a whole and Ephesians in particular, what pleases God and makes Him happy is having many sons who are the reproduction and multiplication of His firstborn Son (Rom. 8:29) for His corporate expression, first as the Body of Christ and ultimately as the New Jerusalem.

God delights in His Son: "This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I have found My delight" (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). The many sons (Heb. 2:10), who are the reproduction of the Son (John 12:24)—the same as the Son in life and in nature but not in the Godhead or as an object of worship—are also the Father's delight. Nothing brings

greater joy to the heart of God than for His beloved Son, His only Begotten (3:16), to become the firstborn Son and then be reproduced in the many sons to form the Body of Christ consummating in the New Jerusalem. When this joy is made full, the desire of God's heart will be fulfilled. The desire in God's being motivated the universe, the earth, and humankind. We exist for God's good pleasure.

God's Will, Counsel, Purpose, Economy, and Work

God's good pleasure is related to God's will, counsel, purpose, economy, and work. Ephesians 1 speaks of "the good pleasure of His will" and "the counsel of His will" (vv. 5, 11). God's will is His wish, what He wants to do. His will issues from the desire of His heart, for His will is according to His good pleasure. God's will is therefore an expression of His desire and delight. The universe and everything in it exist because of God's will: "You have

created all things, and because of Your will they were, and were created” (Rev. 4:11). God’s good pleasure, embodied and issuing in His will, is at the heart of the origin of the universe. Having a will according to His good pleasure, God created all things for His will that He might fulfill the desire of His heart. As a book on God’s universal administration, Revelation presents the view that the will of God in His creation is to have the New Jerusalem for His eternal habitation, expression, and satisfaction.

God’s good pleasure, His heart’s desire, is a matter in God’s heart, and out of this good pleasure He made up His mind to accomplish something; this is God’s will. Then according to His will, there was a council among the three of the Triune God in order to make a counsel, that is, a decision, a determined will (Eph. 1:11). God’s counsel is thus the divine resolution consummated in a council of the Divine Trinity. Because the counsel of God’s will was hidden in God, it became a mystery (3:9); however, through the ministry of Paul, God has made “known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself” (1:9).

According to the counsel of His will, the Triune God made a purpose (3:11; Rom. 8:28), and this purpose has become the divine economy (1 Tim. 1:4; Eph. 1:10; 3:9). The eternal purpose (3:11), the purpose of the ages, is the eternal plan that God made in eternity past. God has a plan, a purpose, because He has a will according to His good pleasure. Literally, the Greek word for *purpose* in Ephesians means “a laying out beforehand.” In order to carry out this plan laid out beforehand like a blueprint, God needs an economy—a household administration and arrangement to dispense Himself into His chosen and redeemed people for His corporate expression. God’s will comes out of His good pleasure; God’s purpose is based on His will; and God’s economy is His planned administration and arrangement to carry out His eternal purpose.

God’s work, including His work in creation, with all its multifarious activities is for His economy. This work has as its motive the desire of God’s heart, His good pleasure. God has been working and continues to work to satisfy the desire deep within His own being. Because of this desire, which is embodied in God’s will, all things were created. This means that we were created for God’s good pleasure, will, purpose, and economy.

A Conference among the Three of the Godhead concerning the Creation of Humankind

“God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). *Let Us* indicates that a conference, a council, was held among the three of the Godhead concerning the creation of humankind. In that conference the crucial decision was made to create man “in Our image,

according to Our likeness.” The fact that the decision to create humankind was made by the Triune God reveals that the creation of man was for the purpose of the Triune God. Whereas a common, superficial view of creation asserts that God created man because He wanted someone to love or because He wanted to have fellowship, the Bible reveals that the creation of humankind was for God’s good pleasure, will, purpose, and economy carried out by the divine dispensing of Himself into human vessels.

The conference of the Godhead in Genesis 1:26 is related to the counsel of God’s will in Ephesians 1:11 and to “the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God” in Acts 2:23. Prior to the creation of man, the Triune God held a council in which the three of the Divine Trinity made a counsel concerning how to create man. This counsel was God’s view in His creation of humankind, and this view was His design, His blueprint. Witness Lee expresses the matter this way:

God created man in a certain view, according to a certain design. This view was God’s blueprint....God made a design in His divine counsel. That counsel was the view in which God created man. When God created man, He had a blueprint. That blueprint was His counsel, and that counsel was the view in which He made man. (*Central* 50)

The Image and Likeness of God

One of the greatest revelations not only in the book of Genesis but in the entire Bible is the word concerning image and likeness in Genesis 1:26. Recall that here God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.” Verse 27 goes on to say, “And God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” What is the difference between God’s image and God’s likeness? Initially, we may answer that image refers to something inward, and likeness, to something outward. With respect to the creation of man, image is related to God’s inward being, and likeness, to God’s outward expression.

The image of God is Christ, the Son of God as the expression of the invisible God in the essence of His attributes (Col. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4). Although God is invisible, the Son of God, who is the embodiment of His fullness (Col. 2:9), the effulgence of His glory, and the impress of His substance (Heb. 1:3), is God’s image expressing what He is in His attributes. Since the image of God is Christ, for man to be made in God’s image means that man was made in the image of Christ. This reveals that in His creation of humankind God’s intention was that eventually Christ would enter into man, live in man, and be expressed through man.

As used in Genesis 1:26-27, the word *image* refers especially

to the expression of what God is in His attributes, the most prominent of which are love, light, righteousness, and holiness. God is love and light, and God is righteous and holy. Love is the nature of God's essence, and light is the nature of God's expression. *Righteous* denotes God's way of doing things, and *holy* denotes God's inward nature. God is love in His essence, light in His expression, righteous in His acts, and holy in His nature. God's image is therefore depicted by four words: *love, light, righteousness, and holiness*. Man was made in God's image, and God's image is a matter of love, light, righteousness, and holiness. Thus, for God to create man in His own image means that He created man with the capacity to contain God's love, light, righteousness, and holiness. In God, love, light, righteousness, and holiness are divine attributes; in human beings, love, light, righteousness, and holiness are human virtues. God created us in His image with virtues that give us the capacity to contain and express God in His divine attributes.

The point here is that man was made by God to have love and light and to walk righteously and to be holy. Man has these virtues because he was created in God's image, in the image of God's love, light, righteousness, and holiness. The human virtues created by God are the capacity to contain God's attributes. (Lee, *Luke* 490)

Man was created not only in the inward image of the Triune God but also according to the outward likeness of the Triune God. Whereas *image* refers to God's inward being, *likeness* refers to God's outward form, His outward expression. The likeness of God is the form of God's being (Phil. 2:6), the expression of the essence and nature of God's person (Lee, *Central* 59). "The image is the inward reality of the outward expression, and the likeness is the expression, or the outward appearance, of the image" (Lee, *Luke* 486). For the fulfillment of His good pleasure, His desire for a corporate expression, God made man in His image, His inward being, and according to His likeness, His outward form.

God's Kind, Not Mankind

As we consider the record in Genesis 1, we see that, with the exception of man, all living things were created according to "their kind" (vv. 11-12, 21, 24-25). It is crucial for us to realize that man was not made according

to his kind; rather, man was made according to God's kind (vv. 26-27). We have emphasized the fact that man was created in the image of God and according to His likeness. This means that man was created according to God's kind, not according to man's own kind. God created man in this way so that through His economy man could receive the divine life and divine nature and thereby become God's expression (John 3:16; 1 John 5:11-12; 2 Pet. 1:4).

We need to have the spiritual understanding to realize that God did not actually create mankind. Although God created every other living thing according to its kind, He did not create mankind, that is, man according to man's own kind. Prior to the fall of man, there was no mankind, only man as God's kind. From God's point of view, *mankind* is a negative term, and as far as God's eternal purpose and perspective are concerned, there should be no mankind. As we will see in the second and third installments of this three-part series, when man fell away from God and began to live from himself and according to himself, man became mankind. In this way the man created by God according to God's kind became mankind, man according to his own kind. However, in God's complete salvation, God's elect are regenerated not merely to be restored to the original status of God's kind but to be uplifted to a much higher status and to become a new species—

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God-mankind. Central to our understanding of creation and regeneration is the vital point that God created man according to His kind with the goal that man according to God's kind would be born of God, regenerated, to become God-mankind. God's eternal purpose is fulfilled neither with mankind nor with man according to God's kind but with man regenerated to be God-mankind.

A Corporate Man

The man who was created as God's kind, in God's image and according to God's likeness, was a corporate man. It is significant that Genesis 1:26-27 speaks of God's creating "them," indicating that the man created by God was a corporate man. Genesis 5:1-2 develops this thought: "When God created Adam, He made him in the likeness of God. Male and female He created them, and He blessed them and called their name Adam, on the day

when they were created.” The word *them* in 1:26-27 and words *them*, *their*, and *they* in 5:2 reveal that Adam was a corporate man, a collective man, including all of humankind. God did not create many individual human beings; rather, God created a corporate man in His image and according to His likeness so that this collective man might express Him corporately. The corporate man created as God’s kind is actually a type of the one new man (Eph. 2:15; 4:24; Col. 3:10), a corporate God-man regenerated and transformed to be God-mankind. With both the type in Genesis and the reality in Ephesians and Colossians, we have the same divine thought—that God desires to obtain in, with, and through humanity a corporate expression of Himself. For this we were created, and for this we were regenerated.

God’s Duplication

After God made a corporate man in His image and according to His likeness, He blessed them for the purpose of multiplication. “God blessed them; and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Gen. 1:28). This multiplication of human beings bearing God’s image implies that humankind was created for God’s duplication.

The image of God is related to His duplication, and in Genesis 1:26-27 *image* is for God to be duplicated, to be reproduced, in human beings. This indicates that for humankind to be created in God’s image and according to God’s likeness means that human beings were created in such a way that they can become the duplication of God. God created us in His image with the intention that we would become His reproduction. As a father is reproduced in his children, so God desires to be reproduced in the human beings created by Him in His image. This does not mean, of course, that God can be multiplied in His Godhead or reproduced as the unique object of worship. We can become God’s duplication only in the limited sense of being born of Him to be His genuine children possessing His life and nature but not the Godhead.

Whereas in Genesis 1 we have human beings created in God’s image with the potential for becoming the duplication of God, in the New Testament we have the believers in Christ regenerated and then transformed and conformed to the image of Christ for the actuality and reality of the duplication of God. In this light we need to consider the Lord’s word in John 12:24: “Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” The “grain of wheat” is Christ, God incarnate, as the first God-man. As it is not God’s purpose for this grain to abide alone, Christ died not only to take away the sin of the world (1:29) and to cast out the ruler of the world (12:31) but also to release

the divine life from within the “shell” of His humanity for His increase (3:29-30). This released divine life is signified by the water that flowed from His pierced side (19:34). In His resurrection, through which we were regenerated (1 Pet. 1:3), the life released through His death was imparted into His believers, and they became His brothers. Therefore, the Lord could say to Mary, “Go to My brothers and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God” (John 20:17). These brothers, with whom the Lord is not ashamed to identify Himself (Heb. 2:11), are the duplication of Christ and the reproduction of God. As the duplication of Christ, we are Christ’s brothers; as the reproduction of God, we are God’s sons (v. 10). These brothers, these sons, in the organic (life) aspect of God’s complete salvation (Rom. 5:10), are now undergoing a metabolic process of transformation into and conformation to “the same image” (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29)—the image of the resurrected and glorified Christ as the firstborn Son of God. The ultimate consummation of this process of duplication and reproduction will be the New Jerusalem as the eternal fulfillment of Genesis 1:26. Creation, therefore, is for reproduction through regeneration.

A Vessel to Contain God

God created humankind in His image so that human beings might become His reproduction for His corporate expression. If we would be the reproduction and expression of God, we must contain God and be filled with God. As used in Genesis 1, *image* implies the capacity to contain God, and this brings us to the matter of human beings as vessels to be filled with God.

It is the clear and consistent revelation of the Bible that the man created by God in His image is a vessel to receive God and to contain God. In fact, the basic teaching of the Scriptures concerning humankind is that human beings are vessels created in the image of God to contain God as the unique content. Genesis 2:7 says, “Jehovah God formed man with the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.” That this “living soul” is a vessel is indicated by the word *formed*, a translation of a Hebrew word that suggests the activity of a potter in forming or shaping a vessel. The thought of human beings as vessels is developed throughout the Bible, for example the unveiling in Jeremiah 18:1-10 of God as the Potter and of His people as the clay vessels in the Potter’s hand. That the Potter is sovereign over the human clay is revealed also in Romans: “Does not the potter have authority over the clay to make out of the same lump one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor?” (9:21). Vessels of honor contain the God of honor; this is what makes them honorable. In verse 23 Paul continues by speaking of vessels of mercy: “In order

that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He had before prepared unto glory.” This preparation involved, in addition to God’s selection and predestination, God’s work in creation to form human vessels which, through regeneration and transformation, would be filled with divine content. This content is the treasure spoken of in 2 Corinthians 4:7: “We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not out of us.” Although we were formed with the dust of the ground to become earthen vessels, we were designed to contain the Christ of glory as our treasure. By creation the vessel was formed; by regeneration the vessel is filled.

We need to be deeply impressed with the truth that a human being is a living vessel created for the purpose of containing God and expressing Him. If as vessels we would be filled with God and express God, the divine attributes—in particular, love, light, righteousness, and holiness—must fill, strengthen, uplift, and enrich our human virtues. These virtues are not only part of God’s image in man but also essential characteristics of man as a living vessel. The human virtues are the container, and the divine attributes are the content. When God’s attributes are expressed through our virtues, we are, as God originally intended, vessels unto glory, unto God’s expression.

If we know that we are vessels and if we receive God and contain God for His reproduction and expression, then we fulfill God’s purpose in creation, and our lives are meaningful. However, if we remain empty, or if we try to fill ourselves with things other than God, we fail to fulfill God’s purpose, and our lives will be meaningless. Since a human being is a living vessel created in the image of God, it is human (not religious) to need God. The only way to be genuinely human is to be filled with God in Christ as the Spirit for His corporate expression. For this there is a unique requirement—openness. God needs open human vessels. If the vessel is open, God can fulfill His purpose, but if the vessel is closed, God’s purpose is frustrated. Instead of trying to work for God or do things for Him, we should love Him and keep ourselves open to Him, giving Him all the ground in our being and allowing Him to do in us whatever He wants and whatever

will contribute to the fulfillment of the desire of His heart (Mark 12:30; Eph. 3:17).

A Tripartite Vessel

The human vessel is tripartite—spirit, soul, and body (1 Thes. 5:23; Heb. 4:12). According to the sequence of Genesis 2:7, the first of man’s three parts is the body formed with the dust of the ground to be a person’s outward organ for contacting the physical world.

The human spirit was formed with the breath of God to be a person’s inward organ for contacting, receiving, and containing God. The Hebrew word for *breath* in Genesis 2:7 is translated *spirit* in Proverbs 20:27: “The spirit of man is the lamp of Jehovah, / Searching all the innermost parts of the inner being.” This shows that the breath of life God breathed into man’s body became the human spirit. The

human spirit, however, is neither the Spirit of God nor the eternal life of God but something close both to the Spirit and life of God. It is false to claim that there is a “divine spark,” a “piece of God” in human beings by their very nature. God dwells in man not in virtue of creation but in virtue of regeneration, which takes place in the human spirit. Since the spirit of man is similar to the Spirit of God and the life of God, it can receive the Spirit of God and the life of God.

The soul, the third of a human being’s three parts, was produced by the combination of the human spirit and the human body. As the organ for contacting the psychological world, the soul, in contrast to the body and the spirit, was not formed of a certain element but by the combining of the spirit and the body. Whereas the spirit is the organ for contacting and receiving God, the soul is the organ for expressing God. For this reason, the believers in Christ are first born in their spirit to have the divine life for God’s purpose and then are transformed in their soul to have the reality of the divine image for God’s expression (2 Cor. 3:18).

As is widely recognized, Christians are divided over the issue of trichotomy (that man is of three parts) and dichotomy (that man is of two parts, body and soul). The view of dichotomy is given strong expression in a note in The New Geneva Study Bible: “The common idea that the soul is an organ of this-worldly awareness only, while

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the spirit is a distinct organ of communion with God, brought to light in regeneration, is out of step with biblical teaching” (10). On the contrary, the truth that the human spirit and the human soul, although closely related, are distinct is clearly and emphatically revealed in Scripture. We are spirit and soul and body (1 Thes. 5:23), and our spirit and our soul can be divided by the word of God (Heb. 4:12). The mother of Jesus was clear about this distinction: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has exulted in God my Savior” (Luke 1:46-47). It is dichotomy, not trichotomy, that is “out of step” not only with biblical teaching but with God’s economy and God’s view of humanity.

Dichotomy is dangerous. Those who adhere to this doctrine deny the existence of the human spirit as an organ distinct from the soul. Such a denial has serious implications. Consider the following:

“Who among men knows the things of man, except the spirit of man which is in him?” (1 Cor. 2:11). To deny the existence of the human spirit is to deny a crucial part of our God-created humanity.

“Thus declares Jehovah, who stretches forth the heavens and lays the foundations of the earth and forms the spirit of man within him” (Zech. 12:1). Here the spirit of man ranks with the heavens and the earth in significance. The heavens are for the earth, the earth is for man, and man with his spirit is for God and His good pleasure. Those who deny the human spirit can know neither the meaning of human life nor the eternal purpose of God.

“That which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). To deny the existence of the human spirit leads to a misunderstanding of the nature and experience of regeneration and may even entail a repudiation of the biblical truth that the believers in Christ have been born of God in the spirit to become genuine children of God, possessing His life and nature.

“The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:16). To deny the human spirit is to deny the witnessing of the Spirit with our spirit that we are children of God regenerated by Him.

“The Lord be with your spirit” (2 Tim. 4:22). To deny the existence of the human spirit is to be ignorant of where Christ dwells within a regenerated person (cf. Eph. 2:22).

“He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17). To deny the human spirit is to deny the organic union of the believers with the Triune God in Christ and thus to nullify the subjective experience of the processed and consummated Triune God revealed in the New Testament (Eph. 3:16-17).

God created us with a spirit with the intention that one day we would believe into Christ the Son of God and thereby be regenerated in our spirit to become children of God for the fulfillment of God’s purpose in creation. The spirit within the God-created man is the unique organ for contacting, receiving, and containing God. For the spirit to function in this way, it must be regenerated. The spirit of man was made by God so that, according to God’s economy, the human spirit could be born of God. This is another indication that creation is for regeneration.

Creation and the Grafted Life

The Bible reveals that the relationship which God desires to have with His chosen and redeemed people is that He and they become one. The words of the Lord Jesus in John 15:5—“I am the vine; you are the branches”—reveal that God’s desire is for the divine life and the human life to be joined together to become one life. This kind of oneness is an organic union, a union in life. What God wants is to join Himself to His people in such a way that He and they become one organic entity.

God’s yearning to enter into an organic union with human beings is revealed in His creation of humankind. God created us in His own image so that He could be one with us. God made us to be vessels because He longs to come into us and fill us with Himself in order to be one with us. God formed a spirit within us because He is Spirit (John 4:24) and desires to regenerate our spirit and thereby become one spirit with us. Creation is for an organic union based upon regeneration.

In describing the life union God intends to have with His people, we are pleased to use a marvelous expression—*the grafted life* (Rom. 11:17-24). The concept of the divine life and the human life being grafted together as one life is profound, mysterious, and foreign to human thought; however, this is precisely what God desires, and this is the reason for our existence.

In grafting, two similar lives are joined and then grow together organically. Grafting is predicated upon similarity; it can take place and be effective only if the lives to be joined are similar. Because the created human life is similar to the uncreated divine life and because the human life resembles the divine life, the human life and the divine life can be joined, grafted, together and then grow together organically.

This grafting takes place in our spirit, not in our soul. We have pointed out that the breath of life breathed into man’s body became the human spirit and that the human spirit is not the life of God or the Spirit of God but is very close to God’s life and God’s Spirit. Because our

spirit was created with the breath of life, our spirit can become one spirit with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17).

Contrary to the notion of certain Christian teachers, the grafted life God desires is not an exchanged life but the mingling of the divine life with the human life. The Lord does not require that we give up our inferior life in exchange for His superior life. He does not expect us to yield our human life to Him so that He can replace it with His life. In the grafted life of which we are speaking, there is no exchange or trade of lives. Instead of exchange there is the dispensing of the divine life into the human life and the mingling of the divine life with the human life. As we are grafted together with God in Christ, the human life is by no means eliminated; rather, the human life is strengthened, uplifted, and enriched by the divine life.

The Lord is the vine, and we are the branches that have been grafted into Him, and now He and we are joined in an organic union, living a grafted life in which we and He have one life and one living. As branches, we the believers in Christ retain our essential characteristics, but our life is enriched and transformed by being grafted into the divine life, the highest life, our God-created faculties are uplifted to the highest level, and our human virtues are filled with and strengthened by the divine attributes. As we abide in Christ as the true vine, living in this wonderful and mysterious organic union with the Triune God in spirit, the divine life saturates our tripartite being and conforms us to the image of Christ as the firstborn Son of God for God's eternal, corporate expression.

The Human Vessel Placed in Front of the Tree of Life

If we understand the divine thought concerning the grafted life, we will be able to appreciate the significance of the tree of life in Genesis 2:9: "Out of the ground Jehovah God caused to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, as well as the tree of life in the middle of the garden." Nothing is more central and crucial to the relationship between God and humankind than the tree of life, which in a very real sense is the center of the universe. The tree of life signifies the Triune God embodied in Christ to be life in the form of food. The fact that God placed man in front of the tree of life

indicates that, in His creation of man, God wanted man to receive Him as life by eating Him organically and then digesting and assimilating Him metabolically, with the result that God, being dispensed into man, would become the constituent of man's regenerated being.

The tree of life in Genesis is a figure signifying God in Christ as our life. The New Testament reveals that Christ is the fulfillment of this figure. On the one hand, He is a tree (John 15:1); on the other hand, He Himself is life (14:6). Hence, Christ is the tree of life. In chapter six of the Gospel of John, Christ as the tree of life is unveiled as the bread of life. Since life is in Christ the Son of God (1 John 5:11-12), the only way we can have life is by having the Son. "He who has the Son has the life" (v. 12).

The life conveys a remarkable revelation: Only the life of God (Eph. 4:18) is life. In the sight of God, only His life is life; other kinds of life should be regarded as non-life. For this reason, when the life of God is mentioned in the New Testament, it is treated as if it is the unique life (John 1:4; 10:10; 11:25; 14:6). This life is the eternal, uncreated, indestructible life. Such a life is the first and basic attribute of God, and it is the content of God (1:4). This life is also the outflow of God, for when the Triune God flows forth in Christ as the Spirit to be dispensed into His chosen ones, He flows forth as life (Rev. 22:1).

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After God created man in His image and according to His likeness as a tripartite vessel to contain Him and express Him, God placed this vessel before the tree of life. This is a matter of the greatest significance for a number of reasons.

First, God's placing man before the tree of life indicates that man did not receive the life of God at the time of creation. As created by God, man did not possess God's life but had only a pure and upright created human life. We need to be very clear concerning this and reject the erroneous idea that in creation man had God's life but then lost possession of this life through the fall. No, humankind did not have God's life to begin with, and even prior to and apart from the fall needed to receive God in Christ as life symbolized by the tree of life.

Furthermore, when God placed man in front of the tree

of life, He was indicating that His intention was to dispense Himself into man as life in the form of food. God has made known this intention through His word, but sadly this has been concealed from most Christians, including many theologians and religious professionals. What a great blessing it is to know the desire of God and to touch the longing deep within His being to dispense, to impart, to transfuse, Himself as life into the human beings created by Him.

God's placing man close to the tree of life also reveals that God's eternal purpose, the purpose for which He created the universe and humankind, can be fulfilled only through His life. In order to carry out the purpose of God, we must obtain the life of God signified by the tree of life. Although man was made in God's image and was formed as a tripartite vessel to contain God, apart from the life of God man at his best is empty and unable to carry out God's purpose in creation. Life is God's means to fulfill His purpose.

This brings us to what is, arguably, the most important matter related to God's placing man in front of the tree of life. This action reveals that the man created by God in His image, although unfallen, needed to be regenerated. Here we have a remarkable and striking point: It was necessary for this perfect God-created man, this pure and upright vessel made in God's image, to be born of God, to be born again. Why do we human beings need to be regenerated? We need to be regenerated not mainly or merely because we are sinful; we need to be regenerated because we are human and, being human, do not have the life of God. The only way to receive the life of God is to be born of God. The fundamental meaning of regeneration is this: to be born of God is to receive another life in addition to the created human life, and this other life is the eternal life, the divine life, the life of God. God created us with the intention of regenerating us. This is why He placed His precious human vessel in front of the tree of life. God's purpose in creation required regeneration, even if human beings had never fallen.

Creation and the New Creation

According to the revelation in the New Testament, regeneration is intrinsically related to the new creation, for when one is regenerated by the Spirit through believing into Christ, this one becomes a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). We introduce this thought at this juncture because we must now go on to see that God's creation is for the new creation and that God's intention in His creation of man was that man would receive the divine life and be regenerated to become the new creation.

In the Bible there are two creations—the old (or first) creation and the new creation. There is nothing of God's life

and nature involved with any aspect of the old creation. This means that God is not in the old creation. Although creation came into existence by the word and mighty power of the living God, He Himself does not reside within it. It came into being through Him and it displays His wisdom and power, but it does not contain Him. Whereas the old creation does not have the divine life and the divine nature, the new creation has God within it as its life, nature, and expression. The old creation is therefore an empty vessel having no content of God, but the new creation as a corporate vessel has God as its content. The new creation is new because God is wrought into it.

The old creation is for the new creation. God created humankind as a vessel to contain Him; this is man as the old creation—man created by God. But God's eternal purpose is that this human vessel would be filled and saturated with Him for His expression; this is man as the new creation—man constituted with God.

God's goal in His economy is to produce the new creation out of the old creation. Actually, this was God's intention from eternity, when He chose us in Christ and marked us out before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4-5). His desire, even before the existence of any created thing, was to make His chosen and marked-out ones a new creation, that is, to produce a divine-human species, human beings not only created in God's image but also filled and saturated with God's life and nature. For this purpose God created all things, including humankind in His image. If we understand creation in this light, we will see that the creation of all things according to God's will was not an end in itself but a means to an end. God worked to produce the old creation, and He continues to work on the old creation; however, God works on the old creation not for the old creation but to have the new creation.

Now we need to ask how God produces the new creation out of the old creation. God carries out this tremendous endeavor by working Himself in Christ into His chosen and redeemed people. This is the central work of God. God's central work is neither the work of creation nor the work of redemption. The central work of God is God's work in Christ to dispense Himself in His Divine Trinity into the tripartite humankind created by Him in His image and according to His likeness. This, too, is a matter of God's good pleasure. The desire of God's heart, which has become His will and purpose, is to work Himself, by His dispensing, into the very fiber of our being. This work is the focal point of the operation of the Triune God in the universe. The material with which God is working on the old creation to produce the new creation is Himself, for He is working *Himself* into us, making *Himself* our inward elements. God is determined to do this; we were designed and created by Him for this; and neither

God nor we can be satisfied until this work has been completed and God's desire for a new creation has been fully realized.

From God's point of view, the new creation is produced by His working Himself into us. From our point of view, the new creation is produced by our being renewed in the divine life (Rom. 12:2; Col. 3:10). The beginning of the process of renewal for the new creation is regeneration. God's eternal purpose is to have the new creation first by creating us and then by regenerating us. If the human beings created by God are not regenerated by Him, they cannot become a new creation. Even in a pre-fallen condition, humankind was the old creation, not having the life and nature of God and therefore needing to be regenerated by God. Only through regeneration, the divine birth in the spirit, are the life and nature of God dispensed into us to make us new. Thus, God's way to produce the new creation is first to regenerate us. Once again we see that human beings need regeneration not merely because they are fallen but because they are human.

Regeneration, however, is only the beginning of the process of being renewed (2 Cor. 4:16). Because God desires to produce a new creation out of the old creation, we who were born as part of the old creation and reborn to be part of the new creation need to be thoroughly and absolutely renewed so that we may become the new creation of God. As we are being renewed, the mingled spirit, the renewing Spirit (Titus 3:5) mingled with the regenerated human spirit, is spreading into our mind to renew our entire being (Eph. 4:23). As we are being renewed, the Spirit of God infuses God's attributes into our inward parts, enriching and uplifting our human virtues with His divine attributes, which are forever new and everlasting and unfading (Rev. 21:5).

In this process, renewing, creation, regeneration, and deification are brought together. To be renewed is to have God's element added into our being and to make us the same as God in His newness. For us to become new means that we become divine, that we become God in life and in nature. Newness is actually God Himself; therefore, for us to become new means that we become God in His attribute of newness by having God wrought into us. As God, who is forever new and who never becomes old,

works His ever-new essence into us, we are constituted with God and thereby become God as a new creation in Christ.

Creation is for regeneration, and regeneration is for deification, which we may understand as the process of becoming the same as God in His newness for the new creation. This new creation, in its ultimate and consummate manifestation, is the New Jerusalem. As the culmination of creation, regeneration, and deification, the New Jerusalem is the corporate new man, the composition of God's created, regenerated, and renewed people. This is what God had in mind when He declared, "Let Us make man."

Creatures of God Becoming Sons of God

In order to bring forth the new creation out of the old creation, God must regenerate sons possessing His life and nature, for the new creation is the totality of the divine sonship, the aggregate of God's sons (Gal. 6:15; 3:27; 4:5-7). The new creation, being composed of sons, is a corporate sonship. If God is to have this new creation, this corporate sonship, He must have a way, in His economy, to cause His creatures to become His sons. God's way to change human beings as creatures of God into human beings as sons of God is to cause His creatures to be regenerated.

God's eternal purpose is to have the new creation first by creating us and then by regenerating us. If the human beings created by God are not regenerated by Him, they cannot become a new creation. Even in a pre-fallen condition, humankind was the old creation, not having the life and nature of God and therefore needing to be regenerated by God.

We must utterly reject the notion that human beings are sons of God by creation and not by regeneration. Nevertheless, some may use Luke 3:38 as a basis for arguing that we are sons of God with the life and nature of God simply by virtue of our creation. This verse, the conclusion in the genealogy in Luke, says, "The son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God." Used with respect to Adam, the phrase *the son of God* does not mean that Adam was regenerated of God to possess the life and nature of God. Adam is called *the son of God* not because he was born of God but because he was created by God. God was his origin, and for this reason alone he was a son of God.

The thought here is similar to that in Acts 17:28: "For in Him we live and move and are, as even some poets among you have said, For we are also His race." In the

same way that Adam is called the son of God, humankind is called “the race of God” (v. 29). Human beings are God’s race simply and merely because they were created by God, not because they have been born of God through regeneration. Since God is the Creator, the unique source of all things and all persons, He is the Father of all human beings in a natural sense (Mal. 2:10). This is intrinsically different from God being the Father of the believers in Christ in the spiritual sense of causing them to be reborn in their spirit and thereby to become His regenerated (not merely created) sons possessing His life and nature.

Central to our understanding of creation for regeneration is the distinction between *the race of God* in Acts 17:29 and the *sons of God* in Galatians 3:26. Theologians who teach that every human being is a son of God may assume that Paul’s word in Acts 17:28-29 lends credence to this erroneous view. As we have pointed out, as the Creator, source, and origin of humankind, God is the Father of all in the limited sense of producing humankind by breathing the breath of life into the human body, causing man to become a living soul (Gen. 2:7), and thereby producing humankind as His race, that is, the created race, the race of God in creation. However, *the race of God* emphatically does not mean that the human beings produced in creation were simultaneously born of God and became the race of God in regeneration. Although all human beings are sons of God and members of the race of God by creation, certain human beings—those who believe in Christ and receive eternal life (John 3:15)—become the sons of God by regeneration.

To be produced by God in creation is one thing; to be born of God in regeneration is a very different thing. All human beings are the race of God in the sense of having been produced by God through creation; however, only the believers in Christ are the sons of God in the sense of having been born of Him through regeneration. Furthermore, human beings as the created race of God have neither the life of God nor the nature of God, but the believers in Christ as the sons of God through faith in Christ have both the life of God and the nature of God. God is their Father not only in creation but also in regeneration (John 20:17). The race of God came into being through creation so that the sons of God might come into being through regeneration. The creation of God’s race is for the birth of God’s sons.

Ephesians 1:4-5 says, “Even as He [the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—v. 3] chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love, predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.” Verse 5 does not say “predestinating us unto creaturehood”—it says “predestinating us unto

sonship.” God does not want mere creatures possessing the created natural human life; He wants sons possessing the uncreated, eternal divine life. For the fulfillment of this desire in Himself, God predestinated us to be sons of God before we were created. God’s will, according to which He created all things for His good pleasure, is to have a multitude of sons for His corporate expression. Creation is the procedure, but sonship is the goal. God’s intention in creation was to produce sons of God through regeneration. With such a goal in view, God knew that the human beings created by Him as creatures in His image would need to be reborn, regenerated, by Him to become His sons for His expression. Therefore, we were created so that we could be regenerated.

The aim of this first installment of a three-part series has been to delineate the profound truth that creation is for regeneration. The connection between creation and regeneration here propounded may entail a reconsideration on the part of some of the meaning and intrinsic significance of both creation and regeneration. Why did God create all things? Why do we, human beings created in God’s image and according to His likeness, need to be born again, regenerated of Him? Of course, we all are fallen and in ourselves we are a constitution of sin, and such a wretched condition cries out for amelioration. For this reason, many suppose that regeneration is necessary because we are sinful. This is surely true, but it is only partially true. Clinging to a half, or partial, truth may hinder us from seeing the full truth. If we would know the complete truth concerning creation and regeneration, we need to know the purpose of creation and the meaning of regeneration. God’s goal in His creation of all things is to have divine-human sons for His eternal, corporate expression, and for this we were created by Him and became His creatures. But God’s creatures are not God’s sons. Sonship requires more than creation—it requires regeneration. Thus, we, God’s human creatures, need to be born again, not merely because we are fallen and sinful but mainly because we are human. As created human beings we lack the divine life necessary for the fulfillment of the divine purpose, and the way to receive this life is not to be created by God but to be born of God. We were created to be re-created, born to be reborn, because creation is for regeneration. LFC

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