

Creation, Satanification, Regeneration, Deification

Part 3: Regeneration for Deification, Regeneration as Deification

by Ron Kangas

As a book concerned with Christ as the center of God's administration according to His economy (1:1; 5:6), John's Revelation refers frequently to the throne of God and to God as the One sitting on the throne. "Immediately I was in spirit; and behold, there was a throne set in heaven, and upon the throne there was One sitting; and He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance" (4:2-3). Here we see the throne of divine authority, the throne on which the redeeming God is sitting (22:1) to carry out His administration by exercising His sovereignty over everyone and everything. God's throne is not only for God to reign but also for God to accomplish His eternal purpose (Eph. 1:9, 11; 3:11; Rom. 8:28), which is intrinsically related to His will. Speaking of the will of God and conjoining God's will to God's creation, Revelation 4:11 says, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power, for You have created all things, and because of Your will they were, and were created." As a God of purpose with a will according to His good pleasure (Eph. 1:5, 9, 11), God created all things for His will that He might accomplish and fulfill His purpose. The universe with all things therein was created because God has a will. God's will, as unveiled in Ephesians and Romans, is to have a corporate expression of Himself in Christ as the firstborn Son of God with the believers as the many sons of God. Whereas we all are God's creatures by creation, the believers in Christ, God's chosen and redeemed people, become sons of God through regeneration. If God's purpose is to be carried out, creation must be followed by regeneration, through which creatures of God become children of God. As we shall attempt to point out in this article, regeneration is for deification—the process by which the believers in Christ become God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead and not as objects of worship. Not only is regeneration *for* deification—regeneration is deification, at least as the

first step in God's organic salvation (followed by sanctification, renewing, transformation, conformation, and glorification). Thus, we have three terms of crucial significance—*creation, regeneration, and deification*.

Regrettably, God has an enemy, Satan the devil, who defies Him, opposes His purpose, and contradicts His will (Isa. 14:12-14). The satanic will is set against the divine will, and the devilish counterplot, against the eternal plan and purpose of God. As a result, there exists in the universe a conflict of wills, the conflict between the will of God and the will of Satan. Spiritual warfare has its source in this conflict between the divine will and the satanic will. In his perverse attempt to thwart God's will and to counteract God's purpose in creating humankind, Satan, at the time of the fall of humanity, injected himself as sin into man's tripartite being, corrupting the body, transmuting the soul, and deadening the spirit. In this way the devil, an evil father (John 8:44), engendered a race of his own children, serpents sired by the ancient serpent and the same as their devilish father in life and nature. The process by which the creatures of God became children of the devil is denoted by the expression *satanification*. Now there are four matters requiring our attention—creation, satanification, regeneration, and deification—matters that we began to consider in the first two articles in this three-part series—"Creation for Regeneration" and "Satanification and Its Nullification."

In the first article we pointed out that the Triune God created humankind in His image and according to His likeness for His corporate expression. In Genesis 1 there is the potential for the corporate expression of God, and in Revelation 21 and 22 there is the reality of this expression. The only way a human being created by God can express God is to receive the life of God through regeneration by God and then continue to become God

through deification. This great divine endeavor is opposed and attacked by God's enemy, whose evil objective is to make human beings the same as he is in his sinful life and nature. *Satanification* specifies the process of Satan's making the man created by God for His divine expression a constitution of Satan for his devilish expression. Before God's purpose in creation can be realized through regeneration and deification, there must be a nullification of *satanification*. This took place through the death of Christ on the cross as the One who, fulfilling the type of the bronze serpent (John 3:14), came in the likeness of the flesh of sin and was made sin on our behalf (Rom. 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21) so that sin might be condemned and the devil might be destroyed (Heb. 2:14). The Son of God has been manifested to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). Now with His accomplished, judicial redemption as the righteous basis, God can dis-

pendense Himself into His chosen and redeemed people as their life for their regeneration and deification, leading to a glorious consummation—the New Jerusalem, the fulfillment of God's will, as His eternal habitation for His satisfaction and expression. As a testimony of the victory of God and the defeat of His enemy, at the end of Revelation the devil is hurled into the lake of fire, and the New Jerusalem comes down "out of heaven from God, having the glory of God" (21:10-11). In this way, Satan's plot is foiled, and God's purpose is fulfilled. Taken as a unit, this paragraph summarizes the thesis of this three-part series of articles.

Each part has its own subthesis, its basic and controlling thought. The thesis of Part 1 is that the creation of humanity in the image of God was for regeneration by the life of God for the corporate expression of God. The thesis of Part 2 is that Satan, in his craftiness, devised a strategy to ruin humankind by injecting his evil life and nature into humanity, thereby *satanifying* everyone. But through the incarnation and redemptive death of Christ, God in Christ has defeated Satan and nullified his agenda of *satanification*. The thesis of Part 3 is that, with redemption as the solid, unshakable foundation, God is now free, according to His righteousness, to regenerate and thereby begin to deify His redeemed, justified, reconciled elect. This regeneration for deification and regeneration as deification will fulfill God's purpose in creation.

*Before God's purpose
in creation can be
realized through
regeneration
and deification, there
must be a nullification
of satanification.
This took place
through the death of
Christ on the cross.*

Misunderstandings concerning Regeneration

In order to see that regeneration is for deification and that regeneration actually is the beginning of deification, we must have an accurate understanding of regeneration. Sadly, even tragically, there is widespread misunderstanding concerning the meaning and significance of regeneration. Some examples of erroneous or inaccurate teaching concerning regeneration require attention.

An Inner Re-creating of Fallen Human Nature

Regeneration or, new birth, is an inner re-creating of fallen human nature by the gracious sovereign action of the Holy Spirit. (Jn. 3:5-8) Regeneration in Christ changes the disposition from the lawless, God-less, self seeking, (Rom. 3:9-18; 8:7) which dominates man in Adam, into one of trust and love, of

repentance for past rebelliousness and unbelief, and loving compliance with God's law henceforth. (*Modern Reformation* 28)

This definition of regeneration is a natural human concept, one contrary to the divine revelation. This erroneous thought takes fallen human nature, not God's eternal purpose, as the point of departure and then defines regeneration as the mere re-creation of our fallen nature. In this view, regeneration is nothing more than a restoration of human nature to its original created condition; nothing is said concerning the receiving of the divine life, the most crucial element in the new birth. Another mistake is connecting regeneration to compliance with God's law, thus making the law of God rather than the life of God the main criterion. Accordingly, regeneration is defined as reformation and not as a new birth in which one becomes a new species, a child of God. This kind of understanding distracts believers from God's economy to self-improvement or moral development, thus frustrating the growth of God within the members of the Body of Christ.

Mere Analogy

"Spiritual birth cannot be strictly and literally the same in nature and mode with natural birth. It must be a mere analogy" (Webb 184-185). "Mere analogy," not a divine

reality: what a grievous departure from the Word of God! Claiming that spiritual birth, regeneration, does not involve an actual birth through which the life and nature of God are imparted to those who believe into Christ, this statement denies the biblical truth that the believers have actually been born of God to become children of God possessing the life and nature of God. Whereas for some, regeneration is a mere analogy, for God regeneration is a divine reality which involves the dispensing of the divine life and nature into the believers. Those who receive Christ, who believe in His name, are given authority to become children of God, begotten of God. Theologians have no right to regard as analogy what God regards as truth.

Renovation

“The concept [regeneration] is of God renovating the heart, the core of a person’s being, by implanting a new principle of desire, purpose, and action, a dispositional dynamic that finds expression in positive response to the gospel and its Christ” (Packer 157). A number of things are troublesome here, the first of which is the word *renovating*. To renovate means “to restore to an earlier condition,” “to restore to a former better state.” Understood as renovation, regeneration is supposed to denote a restoration of something to a previous condition superior to the present condition. What state or condition could this be? The only answer, given the limitations of this definition, is the original state of humankind at the moment of creation. Another problem is that we are told that regeneration is a renovation of the heart, that is, the restoration of the heart to a former and better state. Although one result of regeneration is that the Lord gives us a new heart, regeneration takes place not in the heart but in the spirit, as the Lord’s word in John 3:6 plainly reveals. To define regeneration in relation to the heart and not the spirit is seriously to miss the mark and to both misinform and misdirect the reader. Furthermore, it is alleged that regeneration implants “a new principle of desire, purpose, and action” and that this new principle is called “a dispositional dynamic.” Whatever this “new principle,” this “dispositional dynamic,” is supposed to be, it evidently is unrelated to the divine life, the eternal life, the life of God; otherwise, the divine life

would have been mentioned and the new principle and dynamic defined in relation to it.

Regeneration is not restoration—regeneration is a new creation in which one receives the divine life and becomes a person different from the humanity both in creation and in the fall. Thus, regeneration is not restoration to a previous state of existence; rather, regeneration brings one into a new plane of existence, very different from and much higher than the existence of humanity in God’s creation. When a human being is born, the infant is not restored to a previous, preferable state of existence but enters into a totally new realm of being. In like manner, when a believer in Christ is born of God, the believer is not restored to a previous condition of unfallen existence but enters into a totally new realm of being—the realm of the kingdom of God, of the household of God, of the new creation.

A Denial of Deification

Is regeneration deification?...Is any child of God conscious that he ceases to be human and becomes divine when he undergoes conversion?...The regenerated child of God is either human or divine. If he continues human, then he was not really begotten....If he becomes divine in regeneration, then conversion is annihilation of identity. (Webb 184)

*Whereas for some,
regeneration is a
mere analogy, for God
regeneration is a divine
reality which involves
the dispensing of the
divine life and nature
into the believers.
Theologians have no
right to regard
as analogy what God
regards as truth.*

Here we have a composite of error, misconception, and false antithesis. The statement assumes that a child of God cannot be both human and divine, that being human nullifies being divine and vice versa, and that regeneration does not involve an actual begetting, even though the Bible reveals that it does (John 1:12-13).

In response to this casuistic avoidance of the truth, we begin with an affirmation: Yes, regeneration is deification—in the sense of God’s causing the believers in Christ to become divine in life and in nature but not in the Godhead or as an object of worship. Just as a human child has the life and nature of his human father but not the status, person, or fatherhood of his father, so a child of God has the life and nature of the divine Father but not the status, person, or fatherhood of the Father. A child born of human beings is human because,

through generation, this child has the human life and the human nature. A child of God is divine because, through regeneration, this child has the divine life and the divine nature. In this limited and restricted sense, we become divine through regeneration. However, we do not cease to be human as a result of our regeneration. On the contrary, we remain human, but now we have the divine life in addition to the natural human life, and in this way we are divine as well as human, retaining our personal identity both as creatures of God and as sons of the Father.

The statement quoted above posits a false antithesis in saying that the “regenerated child of God is either human or divine”; the truth is that a regenerated child of God is both human and divine. We have been born, begotten, of God, yet we shall forever remain human beings with a personal human identity. It is incorrect to assert that regeneration, defined as a genuine begetting by God, must of necessity entail the annihilation of our human identity. According to the divine revelation in the Scriptures, a child of God is one who has been begotten of God to have the life and nature of God. Such a God-begotten child is divine as well as human, for this child is a divinely human being, a God-man, the same in life and in nature but not in standing as the first God-man, the firstborn Son of God (Rom. 8:29).

The Meaning of Regeneration

Let us now begin to consider, from the Scriptures, the meaning of regeneration.

Regeneration—Receiving the Life of God to Be a Child of God

The Bible reveals that to be regenerated—to be born again, born of God—is to receive another life—the eternal life—in addition to our natural human life. Regeneration, therefore, is not the renovation of our previous life; regeneration is a process by which, through believing into the Son of God (John 3:15-16), we receive the life of God to become children of God.

To say that we receive another life and that this life is the life of God is to say that we receive a particular kind of life. This life is God’s life, designated in the New Testament by the Greek word *zoe*. “For just as the Father has life [*zoe*]

in Himself, so He gave to the Son to also have life [*zoe*] in Himself” (5:26). The Spirit is “the Spirit of life [*zoe*]” (Rom. 8:2). “This is the testimony, that God gave to us eternal life [*zoe*] and this life [*zoe*] is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life [*zoe*]; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life [*zoe*]” (1 John 5:11-12). The Father is the source of *zoe*; the Son is the embodiment of *zoe*, and He came that we may have *zoe* and have it abundantly (John 10:10); and the Spirit gives *zoe* (6:63; 1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:6). Having been born of God to have the life, the *zoe*, of God, we may know that we “have eternal life [*zoe*]” (1 John 5:13). Being born of God in our spirit (not in our heart) to receive the life of God and become children of God: this is the essential biblical meaning of regeneration. To speak of regeneration without mentioning the life of God is to misaim concerning regeneration and to lead others astray.

Termination and Germination

According to the Bible, regeneration involves both termination and germination as signified by the words *water* and *Spirit* in John 3:5, where *water* refers to burial in baptism and *Spirit* points to birth in spirit. In regeneration our fallen human nature is not re-created. Instead, the fallen, sinful human nature, which has been poisoned with the element of Satan the serpent (v. 14), is judged by God—terminated through the cross of Christ and buried in baptism (where water signifies termination, not regeneration). Regeneration is also a matter of germination, because regeneration is a spiritual birth in which we receive the life of God—the divine, eternal, indestructible life—in addition to our natural, created, human life. Through regeneration the Spirit of God brings the divine life with the divine nature into a believer’s human spirit (faith is logically prior to regeneration, v. 16), causing it to be enlivened, born of God. To be regenerated is to be born of the Spirit in our spirit (v. 6). Just as our first birth—the natural birth through our parents—caused us to obtain human life, so our second birth—the spiritual birth in our spirit through the Spirit of God—causes us to obtain divine life. God has put His life into our spirit. This is regeneration.

In much traditional theological teaching, we are told that we must

Regeneration is not the renovation of our previous life; regeneration is a process by which, through believing into the Son of God, we receive the life of God to become children of God.

be born again because we are fallen and sinful. This, however, is only part of the truth. Actually, regeneration is necessary for two reasons. The first, and lesser, reason that we need to be regenerated is because our human life has been corrupted through the fall, having become wicked, evil, and sinful, contaminated by the nature of Satan within us, and thus cannot be changed or improved (Jer. 17:9; Rom. 7:18; Jer. 13:23). Therefore, we need to be regenerated and receive another life. This is the truth, and it must be heralded with faithfulness, earnestness, and power.

The second, greater, and primary reason that we need to be regenerated is simply because, as human beings with a human life, we do not have the divine life. This means that we need to be regenerated not simply because we are *sinful*—we need to be regenerated simply because we are *human*. And as humans, we are creatures of God but not children of God. When we were created by God, we obtained only a created human life, not the uncreated divine life. Thus, we were God's creatures but not God's children. Since God's intention in His creation of humankind was that human beings would receive eternal life (signified by the tree of life, Gen. 2:9) and fulfill His purpose by the exercise of this life, we would have needed regeneration even if we had not sinned and our human life had not become evil and corrupt. Regeneration is necessary because it is the means by which we obtain the eternal life of God for the fulfillment of the eternal purpose of God. Even if there had been no satanification, regeneration would still have been necessary for deification, for God's purpose is first to have creatures and then to make these creatures His sons through regeneration for and as deification. If we see the intrinsic significance of regeneration and if we realize that, according to God's economy, we were created to be regenerated, born to be reborn, we shall understand that human beings need to be born of God because they are human and not just because they are sinful.

We must emphasize the fact that to be regenerated is to receive another life—the divine, eternal, uncreated life of God—in addition to our original human life. We can obtain eternal life only by being born of God. Regeneration takes place when the Spirit of God imparts the life of God into the human spirit created by God. If we grasp this vital

The primary reason that we need to be regenerated is simply because, as human beings with a human life, we do not have the divine life. We need to be regenerated not simply because we are sinful—we need to be regenerated simply because we are human.

matter and acknowledge what regeneration truly is, we shall realize that we must be born of God because we do not have the life of God. To realize this is to understand regeneration not just from the viewpoint of fallen humanity but from the transcendent perspective of the living God. Now we can see that the goal of regeneration is not mainly to deal with our fallen human life but primarily to bring the divine life into us for God's eternal purpose. This, according to the Word of God, is the meaning of regeneration.

Many regenerated children of God have been faithful to testify boldly regarding this:

To become a partaker of the divine nature is the greatest blessing that can come to any man this side of heaven....When I was born of my mother, I got a nature from my mother, and I got life from her; but in Boston, seventeen years after-

ward, I was born from above; I got life from God, a new life, distinct and separate from the natural life. I got a life that is as everlasting as God's life; a life that there is no end to; eternal life. (Moody 89, 91)

Regeneration is a birth relationship with God, instantaneous and indissoluble....Unless [we] really see the meaning of this birth relationship with God, progress in the Christian life will be slow and uncertain....Could Christians but remember that the life they receive at regeneration is Uncreated Life—God's Life that can never change, and that He calls them His own children, they would cease to permit their fluctuating emotions to determine their STANDING before God. When a sinner is willing to admit his sinful, lost condition, and definitely turns to God from sin—appropriating the Life of God in Christ Jesus—that very instant he becomes a child of God, and through all Eternity will be a child of God; for he is put within the sphere of Eternal Life; therefore he now possesses in his spirit, a Life that will remain there as long as God lives. (See John 1:12; Rom. 8:16, 17.) This is what regeneration means. (McDonough 67)

From all eternity God purposed to have a family circle of His *very own*, not only created but *also generated* by His own life, incorporating His own seed....In order to obtain this personal, organic family relationship, God conceived the infinitely vast and infinitely wise plan of creation *plus*

redemption through the new birth, in order to bring “many sons to glory” (Heb. 2:10)....Christ is the Prototype after which all other sons are being fashioned. In John 1:12-13 we learn that the plan of redemption was inaugurated to set up a *unique and original generative method* by which these “many sons” would be born and progressively disciplined by a sanctifying process in order to bring them to glory....This is God’s purpose in the plan of redemption—to produce, by means of the new birth, an entirely new and unique species, exact replicas of His Son....They are to be exact copies of Him, true genotypes, *as utterly like Him as it is possible for the finite to be like the Infinite.* (Billheimer 36-37)

John’s writings on the mysteries of the eternal divine life stress very much the divine birth ([1 John] 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18; John 1:12-13), which is our regeneration (John 3:3, 5). It is the greatest wonder in the entire universe that human beings could be begotten of God and sinners could be made children of God! Through such an amazing divine birth we have received the divine life, which is the eternal life (1:2), as the divine seed sown into our being (3:9). Out of this seed all the riches of the divine life grow from within us. (Recovery Version, 1 John 2:29, note 7)

To be born of the Spirit is a tremendous matter, for it means to be actually born of God. Because we have been created by God, we are God’s creatures, and because we are fallen, we are sinners. Nevertheless, we, creatures and sinners, have been born of God....As astounding as it may seem, through regeneration we have received the life and nature of God.

This understanding of regeneration shatters the natural concept....[God’s] intention in His economy is to regenerate us, to cause us to be sons of God born of Him. This matter is unspeakably great.

...Certainly there is no greater wonder in the whole universe than that sinful men by being regenerated can become sons of God. Many today are seeking wonders and miracles. But they do not realize that there is no greater miracle than regeneration. By regeneration fallen people become sons of God. In His salvation God has made us, fallen sinners, divine sons.

*Having been justified
by faith in Christ,
we are regenerated,
born again, by believing
into Him. Justification
and the righteous
judicial standing it
affords are not the aim
of God’s salvation;
God’s goal in His
salvation is that we
would have God’s life.*

...To be regenerated is simply to be born of God. In regeneration, God as the life-giving Spirit comes into our spirit to regenerate us with His life and nature. This is the reason the Lord Jesus said, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). That which is born of the Spirit of God is our regenerated spirit. At the time of our regeneration, God’s Spirit came into our deadened spirit to enliven it with the divine life and nature and thereby to make us sons of God. What a marvelous fact it is that we are sons of God! (Lee, *Galatians* 279-281)

The Results of Regeneration

If we are enlightened to see not only the meaning of regeneration but also the results, or the issue, of regeneration, we shall be able to see that regeneration is for deification and that regeneration is deification.

A Life Relationship with God

Through regeneration the believers are enlivened with the indissoluble divine life and are brought into a life relationship with God. This means that through regeneration we are brought into an organic relationship with God, which is a relationship in the divine life. For this reason, we are called “children of God” (1 John 3:1), an appellation which, not as a metaphor but as a literal denotation of what we are, defines our relationship with God in life. Contrary to what is supposed by some, our relationship with God is not merely objective and judicial but also subjective and organic, that is, in the vitality and activity of life. Justification, according to Paul’s understanding in Romans 5:18 is “justification of life,” indicating that life (*zoe*) is the goal of God’s salvation. We have been justified in order to be regenerated. In a truly biblical *ordo salutis*, justification is logically prior to regeneration. Having been justified by faith in Christ, we are regenerated, born again, by believing into Him. Justification and the righteous judicial standing it affords are not the aim of God’s salvation; God’s goal in His salvation is that we would have God’s life on the basis of justification:

Justification is not an end in itself; it is for life. Through justification we have come up to the standard of God’s righteousness and correspond with it, so that now He can

impart His life to us. Justification changes our outward position; life changes our inward disposition. Justification unto life indicates that life is the focus of this chapter [Romans 5] and that the organic union of life is an issue of justification. (Recovery Version, Rom. 5:18, note 2)

The expression *organic union* is of crucial significance, for it denotes a relationship in the divine life between Christ and His believers through regeneration based upon justification. This relationship in life is signified by the vine in John 15: Christ Himself is the true vine, and we, the regenerated ones, are the branches. We are in Him, and we are part of Him organically. Although we may lose our fellowship with the Lord, we cannot ever lose our life relationship with Him. Once we have been reborn, we can never be unborn; for eternity we shall have an organic relationship with the Triune God in the divine life which we have received of Him through regeneration.

Our Spirit Being Life

In contrast to writings which claim that regeneration is a renovation of the heart, the New Testament clearly reveals that regeneration, the new birth, takes place in our spirit, which was created by God for this very purpose (Zech. 12:1). To be regenerated is to be born of the Spirit of God in our spirit (John 3:5-6); hence, that which is born of the Spirit of God is our spirit. “Regeneration is a birth of the Spirit, God’s Spirit, that brings forth spirit, our regenerated spirit” (Lee, *Conclusion* 934). The focal point of regeneration is neither the heart nor the soul but the spirit. Regeneration is accomplished in the human spirit by the Holy Spirit with God’s life, the uncreated, eternal life.

This brings us to an astounding point articulated in Romans 8:10: “But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness.” The righteousness—God in Christ as the Spirit—that we received in God’s justification is the basis, in our experience, for God’s regeneration. Christ as our righteousness has not only been reckoned to our account judicially and objectively, but Christ as our righteousness has entered into our spirit organically and subjectively. This righteousness issues in life (5:18, 21). As a result, our *spirit is life*; this is what Romans 8:10 says.

Our spirit has not only been enlivened, our spirit is not merely living, and our spirit does not just have life; our spirit is life itself. “When we believed in Christ, He as the divine Spirit of life came into our spirit and mingled Himself with it; the two spirits thereby have become one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). Now our spirit is not merely living but is life” (Recovery Version, Rom. 8:10, note 6). The Greek word for *life* in this verse is *zoe*, and *zoe*, we should recall, designates the life of God, the divine, eternal life. This life is not simply something of God—this life is God. We are constrained to conclude, therefore, that for our spirit to be life, *zoe*, means that our spirit has, in a very real sense, become divine. This indicates that regeneration is for deification and, even the more, that regeneration is deification. When we were born of God, regenerated by the Spirit of God, we, in our spirit, became the same as God in life.

The Law of the Spirit of Life

Through regeneration we have the divine life, and now our regenerated spirit is life, and in this life, which we have and which our spirit is, is “the law of the Spirit of life”—the law of life (Rom. 8:2). Every life has a life essence, a life shape, and a life law. The law of a particular kind of life is the innate capacity, the automatic function, and the spontaneous operation of that life. The higher a given life is, the higher is the law of its life.

Because the life of God is the highest life, the law of this life is the highest law. When we were born of God, the law of the life of God began to operate within us according to its innate capacity. The primary activity of the law of life within us is not to regulate us but to govern our growth and development in the divine life until we reach maturity and are qualified to exercise the privileges of mature sons of God. Just as a human life develops from gestation to maturity by the power of the law of human life, so the divine life within us will eventually grow to maturity by the power, ability, and capacity of the divine life. The law of life has as its principal objective our being conformed to the image of the firstborn Son of God (v. 29).

If we are enlightened to see what the law of life is and to know that this law is in us, we shall be able, perhaps gradually, to realize that

In contrast to writings which claim that regeneration is a renovation of the heart, the New Testament clearly reveals that regeneration takes place in our spirit. To be regenerated is to be born of the Spirit of God in our spirit.

the Christian life, the life of the children of God, is lived not by self-effort but by the law of life. As we walk in the mingled spirit, our regenerated spirit mingled with the life-giving Spirit, the righteous requirements of God's law will be fulfilled in us automatically and without effort (v. 4). These requirements are not "consciously kept by us through our outward endeavoring but [are] spontaneously and unconsciously fulfilled in us by the inward working of the Spirit of life" (Recovery Version, v. 4, note 1).

Children of God

One of the most marvelous results of regeneration is that those who have believed into Christ, the Son of God, and have received Him into them are born of God to become genuine children of God possessing the life and nature of God. "Since regeneration means to be born of God, it automatically causes us to become the children of God (John 1:12-13)" (Lee, *Regeneration* 11). God is truly our Father, and we are truly His children. "Now we are children of God" (1 John 3:2). Because we have received Christ and have been begotten of God, the Father has given us "the authority to become children of God" (John 1:12-13); this authority is the divine life we have received through regeneration. "Upon receiving Christ as Savior, believing sinners become children of God....The only way to become a member of God's family is by being born into it....This involves the receiving of life, or regeneration" (Lightner 203). The plain statements of Scripture tell us directly that those who have been born of God, regenerated, are children of God. "The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16).

Regrettably, some theologians regard regeneration as nothing more than a parable or metaphor. "Regeneration is a New Testament concept that grew, it seems, out of a parabolic picture-phrase that Jesus used to show Nicodemus the inwardness and depth of the change that even religious Jews must undergo if they were ever to see and enter the kingdom of God, and so have eternal life" (Packer 157). According to this opinion, when Jesus said to Nicodemus, "You must be born anew" (John 3:7), He was not actually referring to any kind of spiritual birth; He was employing a

"parabolic picture-phrase" to single out a deep, inward need. In keeping with this understanding, the word *born* in verses 3 and 5 through 8 does not really mean born, and thus one is not actually "born of the Spirit" (vv. 6, 8). Surely it is preferable to receive the Lord's word at face value. Just as "born of the flesh is flesh" is not a parable, so "born of the Spirit is spirit" is not a metaphor. In the sight of God, is physical birth more real than spiritual birth? Certainly not! Regeneration is a reality, we are children of God in truth, and God really is our Father.

Others deny the reality of regeneration as a divine birth producing divine children by appealing to their understanding of adoption and then proceed to insist that instead of being born of God, the believers have been adopted by Him. We admit that in biblical usage adoption (*sonship* is the preferred translation of the Greek word) "means to be placed as an adult son in God's family, with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of sonship" (Lightner 203). Understood in this way, adoption does not conflict with regeneration but is predicated upon it. Before we can become adult sons, we must be born as children. The Bible nowhere says that we are children of God by adoption; rather, the Word consistently tells us that the believers in Christ are children of God, born of Him.

Let us consider, as a comparison, the fact that the devil is a father who has sired evil, sinful children. The Lord Jesus Himself knows that the devil is a father and that those born of him are his children: "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father" (John 8:44). "Because the devil is the father of sinners, sinners are children of the devil (1 John 3:10). The devil is the old serpent (Rev. 12:9; 20:2), and sinners also are serpents, the generation of vipers (Matt. 23:33; 3:7)" (Recovery Version, John 8:44, note 1). Whereas some might dismiss this as mere metaphor, it is surely more in keeping with the divine revelation, especially with the words of the Son of God Himself, to understand this to be a fact. The devil is a father, and he does have children. How were these children brought into being? Did the enemy of God, desiring to have a family of his own, adopt the entire human race and make them his children by adoption? To say the least, this is an absurd suggestion. The devil did not adopt children; he fathered, begot,

One of the most marvelous results of regeneration is that those who have believed into Christ, the Son of God, and have received Him into them are born of God to become genuine children of God possessing the life and nature of God.

engendered, children—children of the devil, in the word of the apostle John—and his children are the same as he is in life, in nature, in constitution, and in expression. This is a dreadful actuality, and the Lord Jesus died on the cross as our sin offering in the form of a serpent (Rom. 8:3; John 3:14) in order to destroy the devil and nullify his counterplot against God's economy, his evil program of universal satanification. Are we to suppose that the devil can be a father and that God cannot? Are we to believe that Satan can beget children but God the Father can do nothing more than adopt children? Such a concept is both unworthy of God and contrary to the truth. The revealed truth is that we who once were serpents, children of the devil, have believed into Christ, the Son of Man who died for our redemption and deliverance, and that by believing into Him we have received Him as the divine, eternal life. In and through this life we have been born of God to become children of God, who are blessed to partake of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4) and thereby to become God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. Once we were the reproduction of Satan, but now, in Christ and based on His redemption, we are the increase of God (John 12:24).

A New Being, a New Man

As the children of God, we are a new being, a new man. Regeneration is the beginning of the new man within us (Col. 3:10-11). Every birth produces a being. When a child is born, a living being is brought forth. The principle is the same in the divine birth, regeneration. When we were born of the Spirit in our spirit and the divine life was dispensed into our spirit, we became a new being, a new man. Formerly, in Adam, we were part of the old man (Rom. 6:6); now, in Christ, we are part of the new man (Eph. 2:15; 4:24). The divine life received through regeneration is a new element, and as this element (an attribute of the ever-new God Himself) mingles with our spirit, it becomes the new man within us. As a result, our regenerated spirit, mingled with the indwelling Christ as the life-giving Spirit, is our inner man (3:16), and this inner man is part of the new man.

Actually, however, in our present complicated condition and in our daily living we are a "double man." "Every one

*The divine life
received through
regeneration
is a new element,
and as this element
(an attribute of the
ever-new God Himself)
mingles with our spirit,
it becomes the
new man within us.*

of us who has been regenerated is a double man. We are on the one hand the old, fallen man in Adam, and we are on the other hand the new, regenerated man in Christ" (Lee, *Regeneration* 5). This two-fold situation notwithstanding, we have been born of God, and this divine birth is the beginning of the process in which we become an altogether new being, a new man, in the divine life.

Light in the Lord

As a result of regeneration, we are also "light in the Lord" and "children of light" (Eph. 5:8). "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). Light is the nature of God's expression, or the nature of God in His expression. As God Himself is light, so we, the children of God, are children of light, born of God, who is light, by believing into Christ as the light of the world, the embodiment of the divine light (John 12:35-36; 8:12).

We are not only children of light—we are light itself. First John 1:5 says that God is light, and Ephesians 5:8 says that we are light. In John 8:12 the Lord Jesus declares, "I am the light of the world," and in Matthew 5:14 He says, "You are the light of the world." These verses indicate that, in a very real and wonderful sense, we become what God is as light. We are God (divine) in life and in nature and as light, the nature of God, in His expression. How did we become, with Christ and in Christ, the light of the world, even as He is the light of the world? The word of the Lord Jesus in John 12 reveals that we become light by being born of the very God who is light. Jesus came as a "light into the world" (v. 46), and those who "believe into the light...become sons of light" (v. 36). Having been born of God who is light, we are light in the Lord!

We are light not in ourselves but in the Lord. "You were once darkness but are now light in the Lord" (Eph. 5:8). Before we were justified by faith and regenerated by life, we were not only in darkness, but we actually were darkness. "As light is the nature of God in His expression, so darkness is the nature of Satan in his evil works ([1 John] 3:8). Thank God that He has delivered us out of the satanic darkness into the divine light (Acts 26:18; 1 Pet. 2:9) (Recovery Version, 1 John 1:5, note 4). In His great mercy, God "delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom

of the Son of His love,” where we enjoy our share of the all-inclusive Christ as “the allotted portion of the saints in the light” (Col. 1:12-13). We are children of light in the realm of light, yet even more is true—we are light. “As light is God, so darkness is Satan. We were darkness because we were one with Satan. Now we are light because we are one with God in the Lord” (Recovery Version, Eph. 5:8, note 1). We are light only in the Lord, never in ourselves. The felicitous phrase *in the Lord* points to our organic union with Christ in the divine life. He is light, even God as light, and in the organic union with Him, we are light, and we even are God in His nature expressed as light.

Now we need to “walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:8), walking “in the light as He is in the light” (1 John 1:7) and bearing “the fruit of the light” which “consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth” (Eph. 5:9). The fruit of the light, which is good in nature, righteous in procedure, and real in expression, involves the Triune God experienced by us and living in us:

The fruit of the light in goodness, righteousness, and truth is related to the Triune God. Goodness denotes God the Father, for the only one who is good is God (Matt. 19:17). Righteousness denotes God the Son, for Christ came to accomplish God’s purpose according to God’s righteous procedure (Rom. 5:17-18, 21). Truth denotes God the Spirit, for He is the Spirit of reality (John 14:17). Truth also denotes the expression of the fruit in the light. (Recovery Version, Eph. 5:9, note 1)

The Species of God—God-mankind

Those who are children of God, born of God to have the life of God, are the species of God-mankind. The word *species* is used with precision; it denotes a class of living organisms grouped by virtue of their common attributes. Because we have been born of God to have the life and nature of God, we, within the confines of God’s economy, are the species of God sharing certain attributes in common (e.g., life, light, love, righteousness, holiness, and glory). Of course, we do not, and never shall, share the incommunicable divine attributes, such as self-existence, omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence.

In His complete salvation, God’s chosen and redeemed people are not restored to the original human status of being God’s kind; rather, they are regenerated to be uplifted to a much higher status and to become a new species—God-mankind.

To elucidate further, we need to discern the difference between God’s kind and mankind. Genesis 1 reveals that, with the exception of man, all living things were created according to “their kind” (vv. 11-12, 21, 24-25). Man was not made according to his kind but according to God’s kind (vv. 26-27), for man was created in the image of God and according to the likeness of God. Thus, man was created not according to man’s own kind but according to God’s kind. Actually, God did not create mankind, that is, man according to himself, man according to his own kind, and prior to the fall of man, there was no mankind, only man as God’s kind. From God’s perspective, *mankind* is a negative term, and in God’s economy there should be no mankind. When man fell away from God and began to live from himself and according to himself, man became mankind. (At the same time, man, having been poisoned by the nature of Satan which had been injected into him and then transmitted to his offspring, also became Satan’s kind.) In this way the man created by God according to God’s kind became mankind, man according to his own kind.

In His complete salvation, God’s chosen and redeemed people are not restored to the original human status of being God’s kind; rather, they are regenerated to be uplifted to a much higher status and to become a new species—God-mankind. This is in keeping with God’s original intention, His eternal purpose, to have the human beings created by Him according to His kind be regenerated by Him to become God-mankind. In creation man was created as a certain species—God’s kind; in regeneration God’s redeemed people are regenerated to become another, higher, species—God-mankind, the divine-human species.

We do not speak recklessly as some do who advance the so-called “little gods” theology. The children of God, as members of the household of God, are, in Christ and according to God’s economy, in God’s class only in the restricted sense of sharing the divine life, the divine nature, and other communicable divine attributes. We shall never attain to the Godhead; thus, in an absolute sense, God will remain eternally in a class of His own, for only He is the self-existing, ever-existing God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, co-existing and co-inhering in the Godhead from

eternity to eternity. Nevertheless, this glorious, almighty God—unique in His Godhood—will delight in being expressed corporately in and through the new species brought forth in His life through regeneration—the many sons of God, the many God-men, the many brothers of Christ, among whom He, as the Firstborn, will have the preeminence forever.

Entering into and Becoming Part of the Kingdom of God

In John 3:3 the Lord Jesus said, “Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” In verse 5 He went on to say, “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” The Lord’s word sets forth a vital and intrinsic connection between regeneration and the kingdom of God.

Throughout the Bible as a whole, the kingdom of God is God’s reign in a general way over the entire universe. God’s throne is established above all, and He rules over all; therefore, the whole universe with everyone and everything in it is the kingdom of God. God rules His creation by His power and authority. As these verses from John 3 indicate, the kingdom of God is not only God’s rule in a general way but also in a particular way—in the sense of life. Viewed from the perspective of life, the kingdom of God is a realm of life in which God’s rule is by Himself as life. If one is to enter into the kingdom of God as a sphere where God rules in life, one must be born of God to have the life of God. Then, and only then, one can enter into the kingdom of God.

Actually, it is not unusual to speak of a kingdom in relation to a certain kind of life, because a kingdom is always related to life. The plant kingdom is the totality of the plant life with its activities, and the animal kingdom, of the animal life with its activities. Likewise, the human kingdom is the totality of human life and human activities. Here we see a principle: a kingdom is constituted with a particular kind of life, and only those who share this life can enter into, participate in, and be a part of this kingdom. In order to enter into and become a part of a certain kind of kingdom, sharing in the life and participating in the activities of that kingdom, one must first have the life of that

kingdom. This principle obtains with the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the totality of the life of God and all its activities. In order to enter into the kingdom of God, one must be born of God to have the life of God, which is the life of the kingdom of God and the life in the kingdom of God. Because we have been regenerated to have the divine life, we are qualified to enter into and be a part of the divine kingdom. This indicates that the only way to enter into the kingdom of God is to be born into this kingdom. On the one hand, the goal of regeneration is the kingdom of God; on the other hand, regeneration is the way to enter into the kingdom of God as the reign of God’s rule in life. From the point of view of regeneration, the goal is the kingdom; from the point of view of the kingdom, the means of entering is regeneration.

The kingdom of God as the realm where God rules in life is the realm of the divine species. All those who are of the species of God are in and are part of the kingdom of God. We, the regenerated believers, are God’s species in God’s kingdom of life:

The kingdom of God is the reign of God. This divine reign is a realm, not only of the divine dominion but also of the divine species, in which are all the divine things....God became flesh to enter into the human species, and man becomes God in His life and nature, but

not in His divine Godhead, to enter into His divine species. In John 3 the kingdom of God refers more to the species of God than to the reign of God....To enter into the divine realm, the realm of the divine species, we need to be born of God to have the divine nature and life....That man was created in the image of God and after His likeness indicates that man was created in God’s kind, in God’s species.... God created man, not after man’s kind, but in God’s image and after God’s likeness to be God’s kind....The believers, who are born of God by regeneration to be His children in His life and nature but not in His Godhead (John 1:12-13), are more in God’s kind than Adam was. Adam had only the appearance of God without the inward reality, the divine life. We have the reality of the divine life within us and we are being transformed and conformed to the Lord’s image in our entire being. It is logical to say that all the children

*The kingdom of God
is a realm of life
in which God’s rule
is by Himself as life.
If one is to enter into
the kingdom of God
as a sphere
where God rules
in life, one
must be born
of God to have
the life of God.*

of God are in the divine realm of the divine species....We are God-men in the divine species, that is, in the kingdom of God. (Lee, *John* 123-124)

Indwelt by the Triune God

As the species of God, we live in God and in the kingdom of God (John 14:20; 15:4). At the same time, the Triune God dwells in us. God the Father is in us (Eph. 4:6); Christ the Son is in us (Col. 1:27; Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5); and the Spirit is in us (John 14:17). The marvelous, indwelling Triune God is dispensing Himself into us (2 Cor. 13:14; Rom. 8:11) and is making His home in us, strengthening us into our inner man and filling us unto all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:16-19). Since the three of the Divine Trinity are distinct but inseparable, where one is, the others are also. All three are in us, in particular, in our regenerated spirit, which is the dwelling place of God (2:22).

How did the Triune God—God embodied in Christ and realized as the life-giving Spirit—get into us? Without exaggeration or distortion, we may say that God has been born into us. When we were regenerated by believing into Christ and receiving Him, the Triune God in His Divine Trinity was born into our being. This is according to the principle of incarnation. We should not say that the believers are incarnations of God in the unique sense in which Christ was and is; instead, we should say that, in keeping with the principle of incarnation, we are the continuation of the unique incarnation. The point here is that we have God in us. The Triune God is not merely with us and close to us; He is in us, for He has been born into us. Every time a human being is born of God, God is born into a human being.

One Spirit with the Lord

Another result of regeneration is that we are now one spirit with the Lord. “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17). We have emphasized the fact that regeneration takes place in the human spirit and that to be regenerated is to be born of the Spirit in our spirit. When our spirit was born of the Spirit of God with the life of God, the Spirit with the divine life was mingled with our enlivened spirit. As a result, our spirit became a mingled spirit—the regenerated spirit of man mingled with the regenerating Spirit of

God. In this mingled spirit we enjoy an organic union with the Lord, and we are one spirit with Him. Because of regeneration, we are in Him, He is in us, and we are one spirit with Him. How deep and how intimate is our oneness with the Lord!

The New Creation

In total, the result of regeneration is a new creation. “Neither is circumcision anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation is what matters” (Gal. 6:15). “So then if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away; behold, they have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). The believers have been made a new creation by being regenerated. Regeneration has caused us to become a new creation, an organic entity that contains the element of God. Whereas the old creation, though brought into existence by God, has nothing of God in it, the new creation does have God within it. Because we have been born of God, we have God in us, and because we have God, the element of the new creation, in us, we are a new creation.

We need to be impressed with the fact that regeneration is intrinsically related to the new creation, for when we were regenerated by the Spirit through our believing into Christ and receiving Him into us, we became a new creation in Him. As a result, outwardly we remain the old creation, but within this old creation there is a new creation. The old creation, we hasten to point out, is for the new creation. God created humankind after His own kind to be a vessel to contain Him. This is man in the old creation. According to God’s eternal purpose, this old-creation vessel should be filled with God and thereby become a new-creation being, filled and saturated with God for His expression. This is man as the new creation.

Beginning with regeneration, God is now progressing toward His goal of producing the new creation out of the old creation. This was God’s goal in eternity past, and for this He created us in His image to express Him and as vessels to contain Him. Creation, therefore, was never intended to be an end in itself but a means to an end. Creation is for regeneration, and regeneration is for the new creation. We were generated as the

When our spirit was born of the Spirit of God with the life of God, the Spirit with the divine life was mingled with our enlivened spirit. As a result, our spirit became a mingled spirit—the regenerated spirit of man mingled with the regenerating Spirit of God.

old creation in order to be regenerated as the new creation. Now that we have been regenerated for this purpose, God continues to produce the new creation out of the old creation by working Himself in Christ into our being, spreading from our regenerated, mingled spirit into our mind, emotion, and will, filling, saturating, and permeating us with Himself for His corporate expression. In eternity in the new heaven and new earth, there will be the New Jerusalem—the new creation as the goal of creation and the ultimate issue of regeneration.

Regenerated by God to Become God

This brings us to the climactic point: We have been regenerated by God to become God in life, in nature, in constitution, in appearance, and in expression but not in the Godhead and not as an object of worship. Creation is for regeneration, regeneration is for deification, and regeneration is deification. Consider, as a reminder, the meaning of regeneration. To be regenerated is to be born of God to have another life, the divine life, in addition to our natural, created, human life. This implies and entails deification:

The primary thing we receive through regeneration is the life of God. All of the capabilities, functions, and activities of a living being originate with its life. Even its appearance and outward expression are determined by its life. God has the highest life. All that God is and all that is in God are in the life of God. The nature of God is also contained in the life of God. This life we have received through regeneration. (Lee, *Conclusion* 1411).

This life is by definition divine, and it divinizes all those who receive and possess it. The divine life makes us divine persons. We who have been born of God are divine because we have been born of the divine life. In this life are the nature of God and the communicable attributes of God. We have been born of God, we have the life of God, and we are God, all without being God in His Godhead or Godhood. This one matter of being born of God to have the life of God, therefore, should be sufficient to convince us that regeneration is for deification and is itself the beginning of our deification.

But consider, as a further review, the various results, or issues, of regeneration: our life relationship with God, our regenerated spirit being life itself, having the law of life, being children of God possessing the life and nature of God, becoming a new being—a new man, being light in the Lord, becoming the species of God—mankind, entering into and becoming part of the kingdom of God, being indwelt by the Triune God, being one spirit with the Lord, and becoming a new creation in Christ. Every aspect involves deification, the process by which the believers in Christ become God in life and in nature for this expression.

Expression: This is what God has always wanted, and this is His good pleasure. What will please God and make Him happy for eternity is to have a corporate expression of Himself. God will always delight in Christ, the only begotten Son in the Godhead, as His expression. And He will also delight in the firstborn Son and the many sons as His corporate expression. In order to have sons, God first had to have human beings, and He brought them forth through creation, making them in His image and according to His kind. Creation is for regeneration to produce children of God who will eventually mature to become sons of God for the expression of God. Regeneration is for deification, and regeneration is deification. Only God can express God; thus, in order to express God we must become God, not in the Godhead but in life and in nature. Thus, not even deification is an end in itself; deification is for expression—the corporate expression of the Triune God of glory. One day, all the chosen, redeemed, regenerated children of God will become mature, deified sons of God—sanctified, renewed, transformed, conformed, and glorified. Then we shall be to the praise of His glory, and the desire of God’s heart will have complete, ultimate, and consummate fulfillment. In Christ, may all the children of God become God for the glory of God. **AC**

Works Cited

- Billheimer, Paul E. *Destined for the Throne*. Fort Washington: Christian Literature Crusade, 1975.
- “Glossary of Terms.” *Modern Reformation* (September/October 1993): 28.
- Lee, Witness. *The Conclusion of the New Testament*. Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1986.
- . *Crystallization-study of the Gospel of John*. Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1996.
- . Footnotes. Recovery Version. Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1991.
- . *Life-study of Galatians*. Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1990.
- . *What Is Regeneration?* Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1980.
- Lightner, Robert P. *Handbook of Evangelical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1995.
- McDonough, Mary E. *God’s Plan of Redemption*. Anaheim: Living Stream Books, 1999.
- Moody, D. L. “Ye Must Be Born Again.” *How and When Do We Become Children of God?* Eds. W. Hoste and R. M’Elheran. London: The Book Society, n.d.
- Packer, J. I. *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs*. Wheaton: Tyndale, 1993.
- Webb, Robert Alexander. *The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947.