

...and a Time to Speak

For everything there is a season,
And a time for every purpose under heaven:
...A time to be silent, and a time to speak. (Eccl. 3:1, 7)

Of the many purposes under heaven, the purposes of the old creation produce only vanity. In regard to these purposes, there is nothing new under the sun. All is vanity. There is, however, a singular purpose that is being marvelously and mysteriously carried out. This purpose is the divine purpose, the divine will, the good pleasure of the Triune God. And the purpose of the new creation, which has been produced by the operation of the divine will, is the antithesis of vanity—it is deification.

It is time to speak of God's purpose and plan for the deification of the believers in Christ. The time for silence and shrinking back out of fear of being labeled heretical, cultic, or unorthodox must come to an end, and the Body of Christ must be willing to speak of and discuss the goal of our predestination, because it bears upon the kind of experiences that are available to those who have received the divine life through regeneration and who can daily partake of the divine nature.

It is time to speak because a solid foundation of truth has been laid in regard to justification by faith. With Luther's recovery of justification by faith, a solid foundation was laid: With full assurance of faith, sinners now can draw near to and even be joined to the Triune God. Our assurance is based on the redemptive, substitutionary death of Christ on the cross, which obligated God, according to His righteousness, to forgive and justify us. The purpose of our access into the grace in which we now stand, however, has never been articulated as clearly as the truth of justification by faith. Hence, there is a need to speak further.

Without a clear understanding of the purpose of our predestination and justification, the Body of Christ has become content with a low gospel, one that, in many respects, is bereft of any genuine

hope because it has been linked to physically gratifying believers with a "heavenly mansion" in the next age and, increasingly, with the physical prosperity in this age. Intuitively, we realize that there must be a higher purpose for our salvation, but without the truth of deification, the best unrenewed minds can come up with is a heavenly home personalized to one's taste. What a pathetic anthropocentric understanding of God's motive!

God does not exist for our sake, even for our salvation, much less for our physical gratification and prosperity. He simply is, and His actions are not dictated by our needs but by His heart's desire. While the salvation of many may have been secured and safeguarded by speaking of justification by faith as the gospel, the higher goal of the believers' glorification in and through the operation of the divine life and nature, both in this age and in the next, has gone largely unnoticed. Hence, there is a need to speak further.

At the center of God's heart's desire is a desire for expression. All of God's actions in predestinating us unto sonship in eternity past, in calling and justifying us in time, and ultimately in glorifying us in the future are

pointed toward the believers' being conformed to the image of the Firstborn. The image of the Firstborn is the pattern, and the divine life and nature provide the power and energy to accomplish our conformation to the image and likeness of Christ.

When we see Him, we will be like Him in life and nature but not in the Godhead. We will be God only in this limited sense, never attaining to the Godhead, never assuming His incommunicable attributes, and never being an object of worship. Rather, as divinely constituted members of His Body, we will serve Him as slaves, being sustained and upheld by the flow of the divine life that proceeds out of the throne of God and the Lamb, that is, by virtue of the fact that we have the authority to be children of God by believing into His name.

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The higher goal of God's promised gospel is the believer's deification. It is possible on our part and desirable on God's part that the believers become God in life and nature but not in the Godhead. We can become God! This truth is depicted in many ways throughout the Scriptures: *The believers in Christ are the brothers of Christ; the believers in Christ are the household of God; the believers in Christ are the many grains; the believers in Christ are the branches of Christ as the true vine; the believers in Christ will be the bride of Christ; the believers in Christ are in the local churches, which are signified by the golden lampstands; the overcoming believers will be pillars in the temple of God; the believers in Christ will be the New Jerusalem.*

The process of deification is entirely dependent upon the believers' identification with Christ, who, being the complete God, became a perfect man and who, being a perfect man, was designated God in His humanity out of the resurrection of the dead: *The believers in Christ become God in and through their organic union with Christ; the believers in Christ become God through regeneration; the believers in Christ become God through organic salvation; the believers in Christ become God by eating God; the believers in Christ become God by loving God; the believers in Christ become God through the function of the law of life.*

Not only does the testimony of Scripture confirm our deification; the testimony of church history also speaks of this truth. Throughout this history, many have spoken of this truth. These include Athanasius, Irenaeus, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianus in the East. In the West, Tertullian, Augustine, and Aquinas likewise spoke of this reality. Despite such testimony, the consideration of this truth has been frustrated within Protestantism by two extremes: by those who would offer confused explanations of this reality and by those who would overreact to these confusions, preferring instead a staid and objective understanding of the faith. As a consequence, there is little place for considered, irenic discussion. But this is all the more reason to speak. It is one thing to speak little out of a lack of understanding or appreciation; it is another thing to not speak out of fear of being misunderstood. This is a time to build up by speaking. This is the time to speak because, as much as some do not wish to believe, the truth of deification is not a small matter; it is not a truth that can be cautiously admitted and qualified, only to be subsequently shunned and relegated to the periphery of our faith. It is central; it is the work that remains to be completed; it is the consummation of our faith.

Without deification as the end, there is, in a very real sense, not much experience of the precious and exceedingly great promises that have been allotted to us.

Deification involves the promised operation of the divine life and nature. We have been joined to this life, and we can partake of this nature by participating in God's sonship, God's riches, God's image to bear His likeness, and ultimately God's glory. All of these allotted experiences are available to us as believers because the divine life and nature were imparted into us the moment we believed in Christ. At that time our human spirit was regenerated by the divine Spirit, and we were joined to the Lord. If we see that our deification depends upon the divine life and nature, we also will see that we have been born of God and really are children of God, not merely adopted waifs. And if we truly see that we are children of God, then the river of life will begin to flow from the throne of grace in our regenerated spirit, which is life because of righteousness. Despite all the naysayers, our spirit is God in life and nature: One part of our being has been deified already.

This truth must be spoken because too many of our genuine brothers and sisters in the Lord are laboring to live the Christian life according to self-imposed patterns of behavior, according to outward codes of conduct and ethics, and according to religious laws and the traditions of men, completely ignorant of the hope that is within them. This hope is our pattern, and this pattern is a person, the seed of David who was designated God in His humanity out of the resurrection of the dead. He is the pattern who is operating within us as the law of the Spirit of life, fulfilling both the willing and the working for His good pleasure.

This is the time to begin to speak. The believers' deification is the goal of God's good pleasure. His word, "Let Us make man in Our image, and according to Our likeness," will not return void, and so through divine wisdom and divine prudence we will ultimately be to the praise of the glory of His grace. His deifying grace will be displayed and expressed in us as an eternal source of praise and wonder. Should not we, therefore, begin to speak of these matters together, civilly and honestly, exercising our spirit of power, of love, and of a sober mind? Can we not in the course of such a discussion trust in the operation of the Triune God to reveal anything about which we may be otherwise minded? Can we not allow Him to renew our minds according to things that are true, dignified, righteous, pure, and lovely?

If the mind of Christ is the source of our mutual consideration as we speak together, the truth of deification will be spoken of well. We invite you to join in with us as we speak of becoming God in life and nature but not in the Godhead and not as an object of worship. Agreement is not a prerequisite, only a modicum of nobility.

by the Editors