

THE ONLY TRUE GOD— THE GOD OF LIFE

by Ron Kangas



This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Him whom You have sent, Jesus Christ—John 17:3.

Knowing God is a matter of life. Here *life* denotes the eternal life—the divine, uncreated, unlimited, unchangeable, indestructible life of the Triune God (Eph. 4:18; John 5:26; Rom. 8:2). Because in the sight of God only His life is life and only the life of God can be counted as life, when the life of God is mentioned in the New Testament, it is regarded as the unique life (John 1:4; 10:10; 11:25; 14:6). Unless we have the life of God by having the Son of God in whom this life is embodied and expressed (1 John 5:11-12), we do not have life, for only the life of God is “that which is really life” (1 Tim. 6:19). Therefore, the life of God is the unique life, the one kind of life that can be designated *the* life. Only this life is divine and eternal. For the life of God to be divine means that it is of God, that it has the nature of God, and that it is transcendent and distinct; for the life of God to be eternal means that it is uncreated, that it is without beginning and ending, and that it is self-existing, ever-existing, and unchanging. This divine, eternal life, in contrast to all forms of created life, is immortal and unchangeable, remaining forever the same no matter what kind of blow, attack, or destruction it undergoes. “Therefore, from the standpoint of eternity only the life of God is life. According to the divine and eternal nature of the life of God, God’s life is the unique life” (Lee, *Conclusion* 74).

This life, the divine life, has a special function—to cause us to know God. To know the only true God we must have the only true life, that is, the eternal life. As those who have been born of God to become children of God possessing the life of God, we have, as a marvelous provision of the new covenant, the capacity to know God (Heb. 8:10-11). “Through the life of God within us, we can touch the nature of God. When we touch the nature of God, we touch God Himself; in other words, we know

God Himself” (Lee, *Knowledge* 144). In this way we know God in life, by life, and through life.¹

A part from the divine life, we cannot know God, for God Himself is life (John 11:25; 14:6; Col. 3:4). This tremendous fact is, tragically, neglected by the vast majority of believers today and is noticeably absent from theological writings devoted to the knowledge of God in general and to the attributes of God in particular. Although the divine life rightly may be considered the primary attribute of God, the divine life is rarely, if ever, given the attention it deserves. The truth that God created human beings as tripartite vessels to receive, contain, and express the divine life is neglected, and the revelation that the purpose of God is carried out by the life of God dispensed into His chosen and redeemed people is ignored. Furthermore, the words *eternal life* in verses such as John 3:16 are commonly, and mistakenly, understood as referring to everlasting existence in heaven, a theological error of great magnitude. Ignorance regarding eternal life results in ignorance concerning the only true God, the One who is life. If we do not know the only true God, we cannot have life, and if we do not have life—the eternal life of God in the Son of God—we cannot know the only true God. All that the Triune God is to us for our experience and enjoyment of Him according to the desire of His heart is intrinsically and vitally related first to His being life in Himself and then, based upon His redemption, to His being life in us. He is life, we have received Him as life (v. 15), and by this life we can know Him.

Because of the centrality of the divine life in the carrying out of the divine economy and because of the widespread neglect and depreciation of the function of this life in the experience of the Christian and in the knowledge of God, this article takes both as its foundation and as its goal the knowledge of God by the life of God. The perspective from which I will survey various elements of the truth concerning God is the perspective of the eternal life and its ability to cause us to know God, with the intention to

attempt to advance the knowledge of God through the function of the life of God and to encourage serious believers to consider what the Bible reveals concerning knowing God in the way of life.

“God said to Moses, I AM WHO I AM”—Exo. 3:14

The only true God, the God of life, is Jehovah, the I Am. After the meaning of the name *Jehovah* was disclosed to Moses, God went on to tell him, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, I AM has sent me to you....Jehovah, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you” (vv. 14-15). Whereas *Elohim* (God)² is used to speak of God the Creator in relation to His creatures, *Jehovah*, the name of intimacy, refers to God in His relationship with His people.³ “Every time the word *Jehovah God* is used, it denotes God having a relationship with man. Every time the word *God* is used, it implies His power and His relationship with the creation” (Nee 9:264).

Crucial to the proper understanding of the name *Jehovah* is the fact that this name is intrinsically related to being and to life. Stone remarks,

The name *Jehovah* is derived from the Hebrew verb *havah*, “to be,” or “being.” This word is almost exactly like the Hebrew verb *chavah*, “to live,” or “life.” One can readily see the connection between being and life. Thus when we read the name Jehovah...we think in terms of being or existence and life, and we must think of Jehovah as the Being who is absolutely self-existent, the One who in Himself possesses essential life, permanent existence. (19)

This brings us to a matter of extraordinary significance: As the I Am, whose name is actually the verb *to be*, God is the unique, self-existing, and ever-existing One, the One who does not rely upon another for His existence. Only He is qualified to say, “I am,” that is, to have the verb *to be* applied to Himself in an absolute sense, for only He is self-existent, and thus His being depends on nothing apart from Himself. This means that Jehovah God “within His own being possesses the essence of life” (“Jehovah—I Am” 1). Therefore, what may be called the “is-ness” of God “is expressive both of His presence and His existence. *He is* in a sense in which no other being is. *He is*, and the cause of His being is in Himself. *He is because He is*” (1). Strictly speaking, Jehovah is the only One who is, the only One who has the reality of being; He is the unique, self-existent being.

According to the full revelation in the Scriptures, we should have at least a threefold response to the truth concerning God—Jehovah—as I Am. For light on the first

aspect of this response, we need to consider Hebrews 11:6: “Without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing to Him, for he who comes forward to God must believe that He is.” “Only faith can make God happy, and faith is to believe that God is” (Lee, *Romans* 77). To believe that God is, is to believe that He is the I Am, the self-existing, ever-existing God, the One who has within Himself the reality of being and who Himself is life. A corollary of believing that God is, that He alone is the I Am, is realizing and confessing that, in a very real sense, we are not and that nothing else truly is. Of course, along with all other created things, we have actual existence, but compared to God, we do not have real existence because our existence is derivative, dependent, and ephemeral. For this reason, we do not exist, or have our being, in the same sense in which God is; He exists in and of Himself, but we exist in total dependence upon Him. We should therefore avoid the gross sin of the idolatrous Belshazzar, who was subject to Daniel’s indictment: “You have exalted yourself against the Lord of the heavens....the God in whose hand is your breath and to whom all your ways belong, you have not honored” (Dan. 5:23). To exalt ourselves in such an outrageous manner is to deny that God is and to proclaim, with satanic pride and self-confidence, that we are. Genuine faith brings us to the opposite conclusion: He is, and we are not. In an absolute sense, nothing in the universe is—nothing is real—for only God is. “This is the very essence of the short word *believe that God is*. To believe that God is implies that you are not. He must be the only One, the unique One, in everything, and we must be nothing in everything” (75).

The One who is—the I Am—has been manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16) as the Lord Jesus Christ. “You shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). The name *Jesus* means “Jehovah the Savior,” or “the salvation of Jehovah.” This wonderful person is the salvation offered to us by God. Jesus is Jehovah our salvation, Jehovah the Savior. When we call on His name, either to be saved initially or to experience His riches continually (Rom. 10:12-13), we are calling on Jehovah our Savior, Jehovah our salvation. What we are actually doing is declaring that Jesus is Jehovah. Jesus is Jehovah God come in the flesh.

Contrary to Christ-denying heresies, the Lord Jesus Christ is not a divine being created by Jehovah—Jesus Christ is Jehovah. For this reason, He, and He alone, could say, “I am.” “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). “I am the good Shepherd” (10:11). “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25). “I am the way and the reality and the life” (14:6). As He was being arrested in the garden, the Lord Jesus uttered the words, “I am” (18:5). “When therefore He said to them, I am, they drew back and fell to the ground” (v. 6). This is the One who could testify, “Before Abraham came into being, I

am” (8:58). One’s eternal destiny will be determined by whether or not he believes in Jesus Christ as the I Am. It was the I Am who warned us, saying, “Unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins” (v. 24). Thus, we must believe that God is, and we must believe also that Jesus Christ is the I Am, Jehovah, the God who is.

This self-existing I Am, being the reality of every positive thing in the universe, is the all-inclusive One, and thus He is everything we need. He says, “I am,” and then we, by faith, complete the sentence by filling in whatever we need, as if we were supplying the amount on a signed check previously made out to us. Do we need light? The I Am is light. Do we need love? The I Am is love. Do we need righteousness, holiness, and humility? The I Am is righteousness, holiness, humility, and everything, for He, the I Am who has come in human flesh, is the reality of God, of man, and of every positive thing in the universe. To have the I Am by having the Son of God as the embodiment of the I Am is to have the One who is and the One who is everything to us in our experience and enjoyment of Him.

**“From eternity to eternity,
You are God”—Psa. 90:2**

Jehovah God—the I Am—is the One who has life in Himself, who Himself is life, and who is thereby the eternal God (Rom. 16:26). He lives, and He lives forever. According to Revelation, the four living creatures give glory and honor and thanks “to Him who lives forever and ever” (4:9), the twenty-four elders worship “Him who lives forever and ever” (v. 10), and Christ as another Angel swears “by Him who lives forever and ever” (10:6). All persons, things, and matters, not in themselves possessing the life that is really life, cannot be said to truly live, but the Lord lives (Psa. 18:46).⁴ He, the King of the ages, is incorruptible (1 Tim. 1:17), and He “alone has immortality” (6:16). The Greek word for “immortality” is *athanasia*, which means “deathless, denoting freedom from death.” Such immortality, freedom from death, is an essential element of God’s being; He alone possesses immortality in Himself and is not in any way subject to death or corruption. Therefore, a unique characteristic of God is that He lives eternally. In the words of the psalmist, “A thousand years in Your sight / Are like yesterday when it passes by / And like a watch in the night” (Psa. 90:4).

That the eternal, ever-living God can become our personal experience and enjoyment is indicated by the account of Abraham’s contact with God in Genesis 21:33. “Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba, and there

he called on the name of Jehovah, the Eternal God.” In Hebrew “the Eternal God” is *El Olam*, which, according to Ryrie, comes from a form meaning “the God of Eternity.” The Hebrew word *olam* means “eternity” or “eternal”; however, the root of this word means “conceal,” “hide,” or “veil from sight,” suggesting that God, the eternal One, is secret and mysterious (Lee, *Genesis* 749). God is the eternal One and also the secret and mysterious One. As the eternal God (Isa. 40:28), He is the King who transcends time. “Time is usually considered to be a part of created reality; and since God transcends his creation, he thus transcends its time limitations” (Cottrell 250).

Although the eternal God is transcendent and mysterious, we can contact Him, as Abraham did, and experience Him as our life. Regarding this, Witness Lee observes:

The God whom Abraham experienced...is the same as the One revealed in John 1:1, 4: “In the beginning was the Word...and the Word was God...in Him was life.” This life is the very El Olam. The mysterious God in eternity is

our eternal life. Eternal life is a divine Person who is so concealed, veiled, hidden, mysterious, secret, and yet so real, ever-existing, and ever-living, without beginning or ending. The title El Olam implies eternal life. Here God was... experienced by [Abraham] as the ever-living, secret, mysterious One who is the eternal life. In other words, in Gen-

esis 21 Abraham experienced God as the eternal life.... Abraham could testify to the whole universe that he was experiencing the hidden, ever-living One as his mysterious life. (*Genesis* 749)

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“We have set our hope on the living God”—1 Tim. 4:10

The eternal God—the God who has life in Himself and who lives forever and ever—is the living God. “That God is the *living* God is one of the more profound characteristics of his nature, and it is also one of the more common themes of Scripture” (Cottrell 388). God’s people “heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire” (Deut. 5:26). King Darius, recognizing Daniel as a servant of the living God (Dan. 6:20) and realizing that the true God was the God of Daniel, could say of Him,

He is the living God / And enduring forever; / And His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed, / and His dominion will be unto the end. / He delivers and rescues, / And He does signs and wonders / In heaven and on

earth; / It is He who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. (vv. 26-27)

In Matthew 16:16 Peter, receiving revelation from the Father, exclaimed regarding Christ, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” According to the context of the entire Gospel of Matthew, “the living God is in contrast to dead religion. The Lord is the embodiment of the living God, having nothing to do with dead religion” (Recovery Version, v. 16, note 2). This living God dwells in the genuine church—the church of the living God (1 Tim. 3:15), where the believers, as recipients of the ministry of the new covenant, may experience the Spirit of the living God (2 Cor. 3:3) and the living and operative word of God “piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit” (Heb. 4:12). Because Hebrews contains and conveys the word of righteousness and sounds out repeated warnings related to remaining in God’s New Testament economy, this Epistle warns us that it is “a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (10:31); yet Hebrews also assures us that we may be purified in our conscience from dead works to serve the living God (9:14). Although this living God is omnipresent, He, the living One, has in a very real sense localized Himself in “the city of the living God” (12:22). In the church as the city of God, we may come to know Christ as He is manifested in Revelation 1:17 and 18: “I am the First and the Last and the living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever.” This living One desires to be expressed in His livingness in local churches that are living even as He is living.

The very Christ who walks in the midst of the churches, who is the Head of the churches and to whom the churches belong, is the living One. Hence, the churches also, as the expression of His Body, should be living, fresh, and strong. (Recovery Version, v. 18, note 1)

The living God, the Son of the living God, and the Spirit of the living God (2 Cor. 3:3)—these terms clearly and emphatically reveal that the Triune God is living; everything related to Him is living. His word is living, and His church, His corporate expression, is also living. How can we claim to know the only true God unless we know Him as the living God? This living One is revealed in and conveyed by the Word, but He will not be contained in or imprisoned by theological systems, for they cannot adequately represent Him. Moreover, He eventually breaks through all religious rituals and traditions, for they cannot match Him in His dynamic move to fulfill His eternal purpose. To know God as the living God, we ourselves must be living. Death is abhorrent to Him.

“With You is the fountain of life”—Psa. 36:9

God’s being the fountain of life is rich in significance. To

know God as the fountain of life is, first, to know Him as the unique source of life—the Originator, the Initiator, the Planner, and the Designer. In Paul’s words, “Out from Him...are all things” (Rom. 11:36). “To us there is one God, the Father, out from whom are all things” (1 Cor. 8:6). If we know God in this way, we will not presume in ourselves to initiate anything; rather, we will honor Him as the unique source and not allow anything to originate from ourselves, coming to Him as the fountain and as the Father. This was the primary lesson that Abraham learned; after long years of waiting and after numerous failures he finally came to know God the Father, God the fountain, as the unique source:

For God to be the Father means that God is the Creator, the unique Initiator....Abraham knew God as the Father. This kind of knowledge is not a knowledge in doctrine. It is a knowledge in which one is brought to the point of confessing, “God, I am not the source. You are the source of everything, and You are my source. Without You, I cannot have a beginning.” (Nee 35:8-9)

If we know God the Father as our unique source, we will know also that source determines outcome, that origin determines destination. Whatever does not originate with and proceed out of God as the fountain, the only legitimate source, will be terminated. “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up” (Matt. 15:13).

Because God is the fountain of life, life is the content of God. The Father has life in Himself (John 5:26); this reveals that life is the content of God the Father. The Father, whose content is life, “gave to the Son to also have life in Himself” (v. 26), and now the Son, who is the embodiment of the Father, has life as His content. The fact that the Spirit is called “the Spirit of life” (Rom. 8:2) indicates that the content of the Spirit is life. We see from this that the Triune God is a God of life and that the content of the Triune God is life. “In this life are all His riches, / All His nature, love and light” (*Hymns*, #602). This means that all the wealth of the eternal being of God is in the eternal life of God:

This life contains all the fullness of the Godhead, which is all that God is. All that God is, is in this life. God’s being God hinges on this life. Therefore this life is the content of God, the fullness of the Godhead. When we receive this life, we receive the content of God, and we receive all that is in God. This life within us is what God is. Today it is in this life that God becomes our all and is our all; it in this life that God becomes our God and is our God. Since this life in Christ is the fullness of the Godhead and the content of God Himself, so also in us it is the fullness of the Godhead and the content of God Himself. (Lee, *Knowledge* 13-14)

It is God's intention, based upon the redemption accomplished by Christ, that the content of His being—life—would become the content of our being. In order for such a marvelous, even miraculous, transmission to take place, the life in God must flow out of God in Christ and become the life in us. As indicated by the fountain of life in Psalm 36:9, life is not only the content of God—life is also the outflow, the flowing out, of God. According to His eternal, divine nature, God is life; in Himself and with respect to Himself, God is life. However, unless He flows out, the God of life cannot be life to us and in us.

We thank the Lord that, using the picture of a river, the Bible clearly and emphatically reveals that God has flowed out Himself in Christ to become our life (Col. 3:4). This river flowed in Genesis 2:10; it continued to flow throughout the Scriptures (Psa. 46:4; 72:8; Ezek. 47:1-12; John 4:14; 7:38); and, according to the view depicted in Revelation 22:1, it will flow for eternity in the New Jerusalem. "O God, Thou art the source of life, / Divine, and rich and free! / As living water flowing out / Unto eternity! / In love Thou in the Son didst flow / Among the human race; / Thou dost as Spirit also flow / Within us thru Thy grace" (*Hymns, #12*). How wonderful! "Thus the life we receive from God is the flowing out of God Himself. This life flowing into us, from our side, is the flowing in of God, and from God's side, it is the flowing out of God" (Lee, *Knowledge* 12-13).

The outflow of God as the fountain of life involves the divine dispensing, a central item in the Scriptures concerning God's economy. God created us as tripartite vessels (Gen. 2:7; 1 Thes. 5:23) in order to dispense Himself into us as life so that, being filled and saturated with the God of life, we may become His corporate expression. The Father, who has life in Himself, is embodied in the Son, who is life (John 11:25), and all that the Son is, is imparted to us by the Spirit of reality (16:13-14), who is the Spirit of life. Thus, the Triune God of life, in His economy, reaches us as the Spirit and indwells us as the Spirit, and by His indwelling He dispenses the divine life into our entire being. That the entire Divine Trinity participates in the divine dispensing is evident by Paul's word in Romans 8:11: "If the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you." Here we have the three of the triune Godhead—the Spirit, the One who raised Jesus from the dead (the

Father), and Christ Jesus (the Son). In particular, the Spirit, who is the realization of Christ as the embodiment of the Father, gives life—that is, dispenses life—into our mortal bodies. Earlier in this chapter we read that since Christ is in us, our spirit is life because of righteousness (v. 10), and our mind, if it is set on the spirit,⁵ is also life. Through the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity, God, the fountain of life, becomes life to us and in us, causing our entire tripartite being to be enlivened and permeated with eternal life.

According to the divine revelation in the Word of God, the outflow of God as the fountain of life through the divine dispensing is related to the operation of the Triune God in the economy of God.⁶ This operation is portrayed in the various biblical references to living water. The Father is the fountain, the Son is the spring, and the Spirit is the river, or the flow (John 4:14; 7:37-39; Rev. 7:17; 21:6; 22:1). As the source, the Father is the fountain; as the embodiment and expression of the Father, the Son is the spring, the emergence of the fountain, that gushes up into eternal life; and as the flow, the Spirit is the river of living water. This

is precisely what is presented to us in Psalm 36:8-9—God the Father is the fountain of life, the fountain of living water, God the Son is the fatness of the Father's house, and the Spirit is the river of God's pleasures. The fountain emerges in the spring, and the spring becomes the river for our delight. This is the Triune God—the Father as the fountain,

the Son as the spring, and the Spirit as the river—dispensed into us as our life and our life supply.

The proper and normal response of a genuine believer to the dispensing of the Triune God as the fountain, the spring, and the river is to drink of the Spirit. This drinking is depicted in Psalm 36:8: "You cause them to drink of the river of Your pleasures." The fountain of life becomes the river of God's pleasures for our experience and enjoyment of God in His flowing and dispensing. God, in His sovereign mercy, causes us to drink of the Spirit, who is the river of His pleasures, the flowing of God Himself in Christ as the Spirit to be our great, even ecstatic, delight as we open to Him, believe in Him, receive Him, and call upon Him.

The word in Psalm 36 about drinking the river that issues from the fountain of life is fulfilled in John 4, where the Lord Jesus ministered the living water to a Samaritan woman. As He spoke with her, He indicated that she needed Him, the Son of God, to become in her a fountain of water gushing up into eternal life. He said to her, "If

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you knew the gift of God...you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water" (v. 10). This gift of God includes both the life of God and the Son of God, in whom the life of God is embodied. Because our thirst—our deep longing and desire—can be satisfied only by the One whom the Father has given as eternal life, the Lord could say to the Samaritan woman, "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever; but the water that I will give him will become in him a fountain of water gushing up into eternal life" (v. 14).

If we would experience the living water becoming in us a gushing fountain, we must do three things. We need to recognize that, as the gift of God, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and we need to believe into Him, thereby having "life in His name" (20:31). Then we need to drink the Spirit, taking the Spirit of life into us subjectively for our participation, experience, and enjoyment.

Those who have received Him by believing into Him (3:15; 1:12) know and testify that He has become in them a fountain of water that, even now, is gushing up into eternal life.

We are drinking of the river that flows out of the spring, and this spring is the very embodiment of the fountain. God the Father is embodied in the Son, the Son is flowing by the Spirit, and the Spirit reaches us as the living water for our enjoyment. This is God dispensing Himself into our being to make us the same as He is. (Lee, *Economy* 38)

In eternity and for eternity, as the sons of God and the components of the New Jerusalem, we will enjoy the spring of the water of life (Rev. 21:6) and drink of the river of water of life (22:1).⁷

Paul refers to drinking of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 10:4: "All drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank of a spiritual rock which followed them, and the rock was Christ." The spiritual drink in this verse refers to the living water that flowed out of the cleft rock in Exodus 17:6; this water, this drink, typifies the Spirit, who flowed out of the crucified and resurrected Christ, as our all-inclusive drink (John 7:37-39). Christ as the living, spiritual rock was smitten by the authority of God's law so that the water of life in resurrection could flow out of Him and into His redeemed people for them to drink. Whereas the blood for our judicial redemption saves us from the guilt of sin, the water of life in resurrection for our organic salvation saves us from the power of sin. How meaningful it is that out from the Lord's pierced side flowed blood for our redemption and water, signifying life, for our regeneration and our salvation in the divine life (John 19:34; Rom. 5:10).

In 1 Corinthians 12:13 Paul speaks emphatically about drinking the one Spirit: "In one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit." On the one hand, we are in the Spirit through baptism in the one Spirit; on the other hand, the Spirit is in us through our drinking the one Spirit:

To be baptized in the Spirit is to get into the Spirit and to be lost in Him; to drink the Spirit is to take the Spirit in and to have our being saturated with Him. By these two procedures we are mingled with the Spirit. To be baptized in the Spirit is the initiation of the mingling and is once for all. To drink the Spirit is the continuation and accomplishment of the mingling and is perpetual, forever. This requires us to call on the Lord continually and draw water with joy from Him as the fountain of living water (Isa. 12:3-4; John 4:10, 14). (Recovery Version, 1 Cor. 12:13, note 5)

At this point we need to see that the fountain of life is intrinsically related to light. After declaring that the fountain of life is with God, the psalmist goes on to testify, "In Your light we see light" (Psa. 36:9). Both in the divine revelation and in the experience of the believers, life and light always go together. Where life is, there is light, and where light is, there is life (John 1:1-7); this is a principle in the Bible. Where light shines, life enters (2 Cor. 4:6), and where life is manifested, light shines. On the one hand, the divine light shines and brings in life: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). On the other hand, the divine life is manifested, and light shines (1 John 1:1-2, 5). Actually life and light are inseparable. John 3:15-16 reveals that if we believe into the Son of God, we will have eternal life; however, John 12:36, referring to Christ as the light of the world and the light of life (8:12), says that we should believe into the light so that we may become sons of light—light in the Lord (Eph. 5:8).

According to Psalm 36:9 light is both objective and subjective. First, we enter into the realm of God's light, or, more exactly, the realm of God as light, and then, being in the light, we see light. "Your light"—this is the light that belongs to God, the light that is God Himself in His expression. "See light"—this is the experience of the objective light in the realm of light entering into us subjectively and causing us to see the divine reality (Matt. 5:8). The more we know God as the fountain of life, the more we will know Him as light, abide in this light, and see light.

Psalm 36 indicates that although God is omnipresent, in a very real sense He is also localized. First, the universal God became localized in Christ, the Son of God, the manifestation of God in the flesh. The incarnation was

the localization of God. As the manifestation of God is enlarged from the individual Christ (John 1:14) to the corporate Christ (1 Cor. 12:12), God is localized in the church, the house of God, His dwelling place (1 Tim. 3:15). The experience of God as life and light is first in the Son of God individually and then in the sons of God corporately. The fountain of life is in the house of God, and only those who “are saturated with the fatness” of God’s house are qualified to drink at the fountain of life and see light in the realm of light.

Although God is the fountain of life,⁸ to a large extent His people have forsaken Him and have turned to idolatrous replacements of the God of life. Expressing the feeling deep in God’s heart, Jeremiah 2:13 says, “My people have committed two evils: / They have forsaken Me, / The fountain of living waters, / To hew out for themselves cisterns, / Broken cisterns, / Which hold no water.” Some forsake Him by indulging in worldly amusement and sinful pleasures; others forsake Him to engage in religious or “spiritual” activities, caring more for work than God Himself, or they may turn from Him to drink from the broken cisterns of systematic theology, never enjoying the fountain of life in the house of God. What a tragedy! Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus, in His mercy and compassion in this age of grace, continues to sound out a call: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37-38).

“...that we should not base our confidence on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead”—2 Cor. 1:9

The only true God, the God of life, is both the God of creation and the God of resurrection. As the God of creation, He is the One who “calls the things not being as being,” and as the God of resurrection, He is the One “who gives life to the dead” (Rom. 4:17). This was the God whom Abraham knew and experienced. When Isaac was born, Abraham believed in and experienced God as the One who calls things not being as being. God had promised to make of Abraham a great nation—the kingdom of God composed of the nation of Israel as God’s kingdom in the Old Testament, the church as God’s kingdom in the New Testament, the millennial kingdom in the coming age, and the new heaven and the new earth for eternity (Gen. 12:1-2; Matt. 21:43; 16:18-19; Rom. 14:17; Rev. 11:15; 22:5). Eventually, Abraham believed that God was able to work something into him

to bring forth from him the required seed (Gen. 15:6). However, in Genesis 16 Abraham exercised his flesh, his natural strength, to produce Ishmael; this was a serious offense against God and His economy. In Genesis 17 God commanded Abraham to cut off his flesh, to terminate his natural strength, so that God could come in and bring forth Isaac by His grace for the fulfillment of His purpose. Thus, Isaac was born through the operation of the God who calls things not being as being. Years later, when Abraham received Isaac back after offering him to God as a burnt offering on the altar, he believed in and experienced God as the One who gives life to the dead (Heb. 11:17-19; Gen. 22:1-19). After Isaac was offered, he was returned to Abraham in resurrection. As a result, in his experience Abraham came to know God as the One who gives life to the dead, as the God of resurrection.

If we intend to know God according to the function of the eternal life within our regenerated spirit, we also will need to know Him as the God of resurrection. This is the God whom Paul experienced in 2 Corinthians:

“Indeed we ourselves had the response of death in ourselves, that we should not base our confidence on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead” (1:9). Paul considered himself a dead person, one who was always being delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake and for God’s purpose (4:11). Not having any confidence in himself, he

depended absolutely upon resurrection life (John 11:25)—the divine life that passes through death and is victorious over it. This life is actually the God of resurrection Himself. Because Paul knew God in this way, he could testify, saying, “Knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will make us stand before Him with you” (2 Cor. 4:14).

We need to be impressed with the fact that the God of resurrection is the God who raises the dead. Paul could say, “I die daily” (1 Cor. 15:31), by which he meant that daily he faced death, risked death, and died to self (2 Cor. 11:23; Rom. 8:36). If we do not undergo the experiences of death—the experiences of the cross—we cannot experience Christ as the resurrection life or know God as the God of resurrection. The working of the cross terminates our self and shatters our confidence in our self so that we may experience God in resurrection, basing our confidence on Him. With this in view, God is working through the cross to terminate us, to bring us to an end. Once we have been brought to an end, we will no longer trust in ourselves—we will trust in the God of resurrection.

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Furthermore, our natural ability must be dealt with by the cross and brought into resurrection (Matt. 16:24; Phil. 3:10). Natural ability acts on its own, not according to God's will, and thus is lawless. Also, natural ability seeks its own glory and satisfies its own desire instead of seeking the glory of God and endeavoring to satisfy the heart's desire of God. But after our natural ability has been dealt with by the cross, it becomes useful in resurrection for our service to the Lord. This kind of dealing requires our willingness to be conformed to the mold of Christ's death that we may "attain to the out-resurrection from the dead" (v. 11), being brought out of the old creation and into the new creation where everyone and everything is full of the divine element (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; Rev. 21:5):

To arrive at the out-resurrection indicates that our entire being has been gradually and continually resurrected. God first resurrected our deadened spirit (Eph. 2:5-6); then from our spirit He proceeds to resurrect our soul (Rom. 8:6) and our mortal body (Rom. 8:11), until our whole being—spirit, soul, and body—is fully resurrected out of our old being by and with His life....Hence, the out-resurrection should be the goal and destination of our Christian life. We can reach this goal only by being conformed to the death of Christ, by living a crucified life. In the death of Christ we are processed in resurrection from the old creation to the new. (Recovery Version, Phil. 3:11, note 2)

In a very real sense, the genuine Christian life is a process of resurrection and a process of knowing the only true God, the God of life, as the God of resurrection.

“...the Father of lights, with whom is no variation or shadow cast by turning”—James 1:17

This verse from James speaks of God's immutability. For the only true God, the God of life, to be immutable means that He is not changeable or variable. “God never changes either in His being or essence or in His character and nature....God never alters His purposes nor changes His nature” (Lightner 93). Morey remarks,

The Christian God is in stark contrast to the gods of the heathen, who were *mutable* and hence always changing....In the Christian view, God is immutable, changeless, consistent, faithful, dependable, the same yesterday, today, and forever in His existence, being, and attributes. (92-93)

In his devotional study of the divine attributes, Tozer observes, “To say that God is immutable is to say that He never differs from Himself. The concept of a growing or developing God is not found in the Scriptures” (55). In Packer's succinct expression, “God does not change in the least particular” (77).⁹

According to the Bible, the true God is immutable in His essence, attributes, promises, and purpose. God's immutable essence is unalterable; it remains forever the same. The God who reveals Himself as I Am—the self-existing, ever-existing One—speaks of Himself as the One “who is and who was and who is coming” (Rev. 1:4). “There never was a time when He was not; there never will come a time when He shall cease to be. God has neither evolved, grown, nor improved. All that He is today, He has ever been, and ever will be” (Pink 37). The immutable divine essence is in stark contrast to the changeable, perishing creation (Psa. 102:25-27). By nature God is immutable—by nature creation is mutable. “Herein we may perceive the infinite distance which separates the highest creature from the Creator” (Pink 38). God is immutable also in His promises. God is not capricious; in Him there is no fickleness, arbitrariness, or inconstancy. Because He is immutable in His promises, with Him there is no variation or shadow cast by turning. The God who is immutable keeps His word and honors His covenant. Furthermore, God is immutable in His purpose (Psa. 33:11; Isa. 14:24; 46:9-10), carrying out His perfect will according to His good pleasure.

Although God is immutable in His essence, attributes, promises, and purpose, He is not static, inactive, or unresponsive. God is “not trapped into being either static or dynamic....While in His relationship to the world He is the dynamic sovereign Lord of history, in His existence, being, and attributes, He is changeless” (Morey 94). God is both unchanging and exceedingly living, vital, and active; hence, He possesses what may be called “dynamic immutability.” Such an immutability can be likened to the flowing river of water of life in Revelation 22:1, which affords us a picture of the immutable yet active Triune God. Out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, the redeeming God, flows the river of water of life—a symbol of the Spirit of the flowing God (John 7:37-39). As we have pointed out, the God of life is the fountain of living waters (Jer. 2:13). The Father as the fountain is embodied and expressed in the Son, and through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the living waters have been released (John 19:34). As we drink of the Spirit as the river of water of life, this water first becomes in us a fountain gushing up into eternal life, and then it becomes rivers of living water streaming out of our innermost being. This river, which flows eternally, portrays both the immutability and the dynamic vitality of God in dispensing Himself into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people.

This, we may be assured, is a balanced view of the immutability of the only true God. In Himself God is unchanging, for His essence is invariable, His nature is unalterable, and He can become neither more nor less than what He is. However, as we will now go on to see,

this immutable, active, and vital God of life has, in Christ, passed through a process in order to become, according to His economy, the processed and consummated God.

At this juncture, and in keeping with the principle of the twofoldness of the divine truth,¹⁰ we need to consider two complementary truths: that in His essence God is immutable and that in His economy God has been processed.¹¹ The word *process* may be defined as a series of progressive and interdependent steps by which a goal is reached or an end is attained. Although this process involves a sequence of events and experiences in time, it does not entail any change in the essence of God. Here we need to make a crucial distinction. God's immutability is related to His *being*, but God's process is related to His *becoming*, both of which are revealed in the Scriptures as two aspects of the truth regarding God in His essential and eternal Godhead and in His economy. Whereas the divine essence is a matter of God's being, the divine economy, with its processes, is a matter of God's becoming.

The Bible does affirm a 'becoming' within the Godhead. But it does so on its own terms and in its own way: the eternal Logos becomes flesh (John 1:14), that is, becomes the God-man by assuming human nature in the Incarnation. (Henry 362)

We believe in the immutability of the Triune God in His essence, and we believe also that in Christ the Triune God has passed through a process for the carrying out of His economy.

If we would have a balanced view of the Triune God—a view that includes both the being and the becoming of God—we must accept without bias or preference the biblical testimony both of God's essence and God's economy, both of God's being and God's becoming.

In the Christian view divine becoming is a climactic reality that contrasts at once with ancient Greek notions of abstract being and becoming, and with modern process theology's misconceptions of divine becoming that postulate change in the very nature of God. (369)

Upholding the twofoldness of the divine truth, we believe in the immutability of the Triune God in His essence, and we believe also that in Christ the Triune God has passed through a process for the carrying out of His economy.

"The Word became flesh"—John 1:14

The New Testament reveals the two becomings of Christ. The first becoming is the Word, who is God, becoming

flesh. Orthodox or fundamental Christians, when speaking of the incarnation, usually say that the Word becoming flesh refers to God the Son becoming a man, and this assertion is correct as far as it goes. According to the New Testament, however, the incarnation is a matter of the Word, who is God (John 1:1), becoming flesh. This God, who is the Word, is not a partial God, not one-third of God, but the entire God—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. To be sure, the Son of God was incarnated, but by becoming flesh He was not separated from the Father and the Spirit, for the Son came with the Father (8:29) and by the Spirit (Matt. 1:18, 20). Thus, when the Word became flesh, the entire Triune God was incarnated.¹²

Through incarnation, Christ, in His person and work, brought the infinite God into the finite man.¹³ For God to be infinite means that He is free from all limitations and that everything related to His being is without measure or quantity. As the infinite God Christ is self-existing and ever-existing—the great I Am (John 8:58, 24, 28; 18:6). As the infinite God Christ is eternal, immortal,

immutable, and unchangeable (Micah 5:2; 1 Tim. 6:16; Heb. 1:8-12; 6:17). As the infinite God Christ is omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, and unlimited in all His attributes. As the infinite God Christ is the effulgence of God's glory. Such an infinite God, through incarnation, was brought into the finite man. As a finite man Christ in the flesh was limited

in space and time (John 7:6), and He was neither omnipotent nor omnipresent. As a finite man Christ in the flesh was limited in knowledge (Matt. 24:36; Luke 2:40, 52; cf. John 7:15; Mark 6:1-3), He had a natural, human life (John 10:11, 15, 17), He lived a dependent existence (Matt. 14:19; John 6:57), and He could be put to death (1 Pet. 3:18). As a finite man Christ in the flesh did not manifest the glory of His divinity but concealed it within the shell of His humanity (John 12:23-24). From the foregoing we must conclude that Christ is both the infinite God and a finite man. God is infinite and man is finite, yet in Christ the two became one. This is truly wonderful and mysterious.

Regarding the incarnation of Christ, the New Testament does not actually say that the Son of God was incarnated; rather, it says that God was manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). God was manifested in the flesh not only as the Son but as the entire God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Hence, the entire God and not only the Son of God was incarnated. Christ in incarnation is the entire God manifested in the flesh.

This is supported by Colossians 2:9: “In Him [Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” *All the fullness of the Godhead* refers to the entire Godhead, to the complete God. Since the Godhead comprises the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, the fullness of the Godhead must be the fullness of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. That all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily means that the entire God is embodied in Him; the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all embodied in Him. Moreover, for Christ to be the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead means that the fullness of the Triune God dwells in Christ in bodily form, implying the physical body which Christ put on in His humanity. This indicates that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ as the One who has a human body. Before Christ’s incarnation the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Him as the eternal Word, but this fullness did not dwell in Him bodily. “From the time that Christ became incarnate, clothed with a human body, the fullness of the Godhead began to dwell in Him in a bodily way; and in His glorified body (Phil. 3:21) now and forever it dwells” (Recovery Version, Col. 2:9, note 3).

“The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit”—1 Cor. 15:45

In the stage of His first becoming, Christ, the God-man, passed through human living and died on the cross, shedding His precious blood for our redemption.¹⁴ Then in resurrection Christ, the last Adam, became a life-giving Spirit; now the Lord is the Spirit, even the Lord Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17-18).¹⁵

Christ’s first becoming took place when He, the Word, who is the complete God, became flesh; His second becoming took place when He, the last Adam, became a life-giving Spirit. The last Adam is Christ in incarnation and in redemption, and the life-giving Spirit is Christ in resurrection. Adam, the first man, was the head of the old creation. When God created him, he became a living soul (Gen. 2:7); that is, he became a person, a human being. Christ’s being the last Adam implies a termination and conclusion of the old creation; thus, the old creation ends with a man, the last Adam. In His redemptive death on the cross, Christ, the last Adam, died as a man in the old creation. For this reason Romans 6:6 says that our old man was crucified with Him. Because the Lord Jesus died on the cross as a man, the last Adam, in the old creation, our old man was dealt with through His death. As the last Adam, Christ was the conclusion of the old man, and when He was crucified, we were crucified with Him (Gal. 2:20).

We have emphasized the fact that in incarnation Christ became flesh for redemption (John 1:14, 29); now we need to place equal emphasis on the fact that as the last Adam—the One who became flesh—

Christ became the life-giving Spirit in resurrection and through the process of resurrection. This life-giving Spirit is none other than the Spirit who gives life (2 Cor. 3:6).

First Corinthians 15 deals with resurrection; the entire chapter is devoted to resurrection. By this we know that it was in and through resurrection that Christ, the last Adam, became the life-giving Spirit. Verse 45 tells us that the first man Adam became a living soul; this was through creation. This verse continues by saying that the last Adam, Christ in the flesh, became a life-giving Spirit; this was through resurrection.¹⁶ Because Christ as the last Adam became the life-giving Spirit through resurrection, He is now the life-giving Spirit ready for us to receive Him by opening our being and calling upon His name.

Another way of speaking of Christ as the life-giving Spirit in resurrection is to say that for Christ resurrection was a transfiguration. Christ’s resurrection was His transfiguration from the flesh to the life-giving Spirit. Once He was Christ in the flesh—Christ in His incarnation; now He is the transfigured Christ, the pneumatic Christ—Christ in His resurrection:

When Christ came through incarnation, He came with the Father and by the Spirit. After coming in incarnation, He took a further step to pass through death and enter into resurrection. This is the process that we call Christ’s transfiguration from the flesh into the Spirit. By going through this process of transfiguration, the Lord Jesus, who came in incarnation with the Father and by the Spirit, became the Spirit as the ultimate consummation of the Triune God. Therefore, Christ’s resurrection was His transfiguration—the transfiguration into the life-giving Spirit to enter into His believers. (Lee, *Conclusion* 799)

The transfigured Christ, the pneumatic Christ, is the Spirit, even the Lord Spirit. “The Lord is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17). The Spirit here is the Spirit mentioned in verse 6, which tells us that the letter kills but the Spirit gives life. The Lord in verse 17, according to the context of chapters two and three, is Christ the Lord (2:12, 14-15, 17; 3:3-4, 14, 16; 4:5). This reveals clearly that Christ in resurrection is the Spirit. Therefore, in 3:18 Paul uses the compound title “Lord Spirit” when referring to Christ, into whose image we are being transformed from glory to glory. This compound title is yet another confirmation that the Lord Christ is the Spirit and that the Spirit is the Lord Christ.

What is revealed concerning Christ as the life-giving Spirit in 1 and 2 Corinthians is corroborated by the Gospel of John, which, in its entirety and taken as a whole, reveals that Christ as the Word, the eternal God, passed through the processes of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection to become the Spirit of reality, the holy

pneuma, or holy breath, that He might dwell in the believers. As we know, the Word became flesh through incarnation to be the Lamb of God for our redemption. However, this Gospel reveals that Christ died not only as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world (1:29) but also as the One typified by the bronze serpent (3:14) and as a grain of wheat (12:24). Just as the bronze serpent in Numbers 21:4-9 had the form of a serpent but not the poisonous nature of a serpent, so Christ was in the likeness of the flesh of sin but did not have the nature of sin (Rom. 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21). When Christ died as the Lamb of God and as the One in the form of a serpent, sin was taken away, our sinful, serpentine nature was dealt with, the world was judged, and Satan, “the ruler of this world,” was cast out (John 12:31). These aspects of Christ’s all-inclusive death solved all the problems in the universe and removed all the barriers between us and God, opening the way for the believers to be in Christ and, in virtue of being in Christ, to be with Him where He is, that is, in the Father.

In chapter fourteen the Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples about His going through death and His coming again in resurrection to indwell them as the Spirit of reality. In verses 16 and 17 He said, “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever, even the Spirit of reality, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him; but you know Him, because He abides with you and shall be in you.” It is significant that the Lord used the word *another* and spoke of *another Comforter*. This indicates that a Comforter—the Lord Jesus in the flesh—was already present; thus, the Lord, the One speaking to them, was a Comforter. If He were not a Comforter, He would not have spoken of *another* Comforter. We need to pay close attention to the Lord’s word here and study verses 16 through 20 carefully. If we do this under the enlightening of the Holy Spirit, we will see that the *another Comforter*, the second Comforter, is actually the first Comforter, Christ the incarnated Word, the only begotten Son of God, as the Spirit. In verse 17 the Lord said that the Spirit of reality would be in the disciples, and in the following verse He went on to say, “I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you.” The crucial point is this: The *He* who is the Spirit of reality in verse 17 becomes the *I* in verse 18, and this *I* is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. This reveals that through the processes of death and resurrection the Lord Jesus, God manifest in the flesh, would become the Spirit of reality, and as such a Spirit, another Comforter, He would dwell in them. “In

that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you” (v. 20).

That day in verse 20 refers to the day of the Lord’s resurrection (20:19), the day on which the Lord’s word in chapter fourteen was fulfilled. As the resurrected One—the One who had become the life-giving Spirit, the Spirit of reality, and another Comforter, and also as the One with a resurrected body of flesh and bones—the Lord Jesus manifested Himself to them, breathed into them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (v. 22). After taking the first step in incarnation to become flesh to be the Lamb of God for our redemption, He took the second step in resurrection to become the life-giving Spirit, the Spirit of reality, for our regeneration (3:3-8; 1 Pet. 1:3). Now He can be in us, and He is within us, as our life and our everything for the fulfillment of God’s economy:

As the last Adam in the flesh, through the process of death and resurrection He became a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). As He is the embodiment of the Father, so the Spirit is the realization, the reality, of Him. It is as the

Spirit that He was breathed into the disciples. It is as the Spirit that He is received into His believers and flows out of them as rivers of living water (7:38-39). It is as the Spirit that through His death and resurrection He came back to the disciples, entered into them as their Comforter, and began to abide in them (14:16-17). It is as the Spirit

that He can live in the disciples and enable them to live by and with Him (14:19). It is as the Spirit that He can abide in the disciples and enable them to abide in Him (14:20; 15:4-5). It is as the Spirit that He can come with the Father to His lover and make an abode with him (14:23). It is as the Spirit that He can cause all that He is and has to be fully realized by the disciples. (Recovery Version, John 20:22, note 1)

The *another Comforter*, the Spirit of reality, in John 14 is the life-giving Spirit in 1 Corinthians 15 and the Lord who is the Spirit and the Lord Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3. This is the Christ—the pneumatic Christ—who, as the embodiment and expression of the only true God, the God of life, dwells in us to be our life, our life supply, and our everything.

“The Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified”—John 7:39

The truth concerning the Triune God’s passing through, in Christ, a process for the carrying out of the divine

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economy is indicated by certain terms used in the New Testament to denote and describe the eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:14): “the Spirit of Jesus” (Acts 16:7), “the Spirit of Christ” (Rom. 8:9), “the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:19), “the Spirit of life” (Rom. 8:2), “the Spirit” (John 7:39; Gal. 3:14; Rev. 22:17), and “the seven Spirits” (1:4).

According to the Greek text of John 7:39, the Spirit was “not yet” because “Jesus had not yet been glorified.” This certainly does not mean that the Spirit of God did not exist eternally; the Spirit is the eternal Spirit, and thus He always was and always will be. To say, as John 7:39 does in fact say, that “the Spirit was not yet” means that with respect to the process of the Triune God in His economy (not in His immutable Godhead) the Spirit as the all-inclusive Spirit of Jesus Christ was “not yet” until Jesus was glorified through His resurrection. This all-inclusive Spirit is “the compound Spirit” typified by the holy anointing oil in Exodus 30:22-33.

“Not yet” implies a process in time. At present something is “not yet,” but at some point in the future it will be. We should note that there are two “not yet’s” in John 7:39; the Spirit was “not yet,” and Jesus had “not yet” been glorified. The first “not yet” is vitally related to and dependent upon the second.¹⁷ In order for the Spirit who was “not yet” to become the Spirit who is, Jesus, who was “not yet” glorified, had to be glorified in His resurrection. The Gospel of John speaks much about this (12:23; 13:31-32), and the Lord Jesus prayed for this during the night prior to His death. “Glorify Me along with Yourself, Father, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (17:5). The Father answered the prayer of His Son by raising Him from the dead, thereby glorifying Him (Acts 3:13, 15; Luke 24:46; Heb. 2:9; Eph. 1:20-22; Phil. 2:9-11). “Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father” (Rom. 6:4). When the Lord Jesus died on the cross, the element of the divine glory that was concealed and confined within the shell of His humanity, His flesh, was released. Then in His resurrection this glory permeated His crucified humanity, uplifting and transfiguring it so that, by the Spirit of holiness, Christ in His humanity could be designated the Son of God “out of the resurrection of the dead” (1:4). On the day of the Lord’s resurrection, the day on which He was transfigured into the life-giving Spirit, the Spirit of God with divinity became “the Spirit,” the all-inclusive Spirit, the Spirit who, in Andrew Murray’s felicitous expression, is “the Spirit of the glorified Jesus”:

God has given a twofold revelation of Himself, first as God in the Old Testament, then as Father in the New. We know how the Son, who had from eternity been with the Father, entered upon a new stage of existence when He became flesh. When He returned to Heaven, He was still

the same only-begotten Son of God, and yet not altogether the same. For He was now also, as Son of Man, the first-begotten from the dead, clothed with that glorified humanity which He had perfected and sanctified for Himself. And just so the Spirit of God as poured out at Pentecost was indeed something new....When poured out at Pentecost, He came as the Spirit of the glorified Jesus, the Spirit of the Incarnate, crucified, and exalted Christ, the bearer and communicator to us, not of the life of God as such, but of that life as it had been interwoven into human nature in the person of Christ Jesus....And of this Spirit, as He dwelt in Jesus in the flesh, and can dwell in us in the flesh too, it is distinctly and literally true; the Holy Spirit was not yet. The Spirit of the glorified Jesus, the Son of man become the Son of God—He could not be until Jesus was glorified....From His nature, as it was glorified in the resurrection and ascension, His Spirit came forth as the Spirit of His human life, glorified into the union with the Divine, to make us partakers of all that he had personally wrought out and acquired, of Himself and His glorified life....And in virtue of His having perfected in Himself a new holy human nature on our behalf, He could now communicate what previously had no existence—a life at once human and Divine....Of this Spirit it is most fully true, “The Spirit was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” (38-39)

“This is the true God and eternal life”—1 John 5:20

We will conclude this essay as we began—with a word about knowing the only true God, the God of life, in the way of life and by means of eternal life—the life of the Triune God dispensed into us and operating within us. As the book of 1 John makes evident, knowing the true God according to the function of the eternal life is intrinsically related to the coming of the Son of God and to His giving us an understanding that we might know Him who is true. As we consider this, it would be helpful to quote 1 John 5:20 in its entirety and then comment briefly on its central elements.

“And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding that we might know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.” Frequently in this Epistle on the fellowship of the divine life, the apostle John uses the word *know* in an experiential way. “We know that we know Him” (2:3). “In this we know that we are in Him” (v. 5). “You know Him who is from the beginning” (vv. 13, 14). “You know the Father” (v. 13). “All of you know” (v. 20). “You know it [the truth]” (v. 21). “You know that He is righteous” (v. 29). “We know that if He is manifested, we will be like Him because we will see Him even as He is” (3:2). “You know that He was manifested that He might take away sins” (v. 5). “We know that we have passed out of death into life” (v. 14). “We know love”

(v. 16). “We will know that we are of the truth” (v. 19). “We know that He abides in us” (v. 24). “You know the Spirit of God” (4:2). “We know the Spirit of truth” (v. 6). “We know that we abide in Him and He in us” (v. 13), “We know...the love which God has in us” (v. 16). “We know that we love the children of God” (5:2). “You may know that you have eternal life” (v. 13). “If we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him” (v. 15). “We know that everyone who is begotten of God does not sin” (v. 18). “We know that we are of God” (v. 19).

All of this prepares us for the final and climactic “we know” in 5:20, a verse that is a crucial conclusion to this Epistle: “We know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding that we might know Him who is true.” The Son of God has come to us through the steps of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, and He has given us an understanding, the ability to know the true God. We have received eternal life in the Son (vv. 11-12), and the Spirit of reality has come into our being. Now with our regenerated spirit, with our renewed and enlightened mind, and by the Spirit of reality—the Spirit who is the reality (v. 6)—we can “know Him who is true”—the genuine and real God.

John goes on to say, “We are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ.” We know Him who is true—the true One—not merely in an objective way by studying the divine revelation in the Scriptures; we know Him also in a subjective way by being in Him and by having Him in us. Objectively, we know that God is true by reading the Bible; subjectively, we know the true One by living a life of coinherence with Him, a life of mutual abiding according to the Lord’s word in John 15:4. Furthermore, although in an objective, doctrinal sense the true One and His Son Jesus Christ are two and thus are distinct within the eternal Godhead, in a subjective, experiential sense, They are one, as evidenced by the words “in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ.” Because the Father and the Son are inseparable both in the Godhead and in God’s economy, if we confess the Son, we have the Father also (1 John 2:23), and then we may “abide in the Son and in the Father” (v. 24). According to the revelation in 5:20, to be in Him who is true is to be in His Son Jesus Christ, and to be in His Son Jesus Christ is to be in Him who is true. This is to know the true God by being in Him.

John concludes 5:20 by saying, “This is the true God and eternal life.” Why does John say, “This is,” and to what

does “this” refer? And why does John use “this” to refer both to the true God and to eternal life? The first two questions can be answered simultaneously. “This” refers to the true One and His Son Jesus Christ who, in our experience of dwelling in the Triune God, are one. We may say that doctrinally the true One and His Son Jesus Christ may be regarded as two but that experientially we know that They are one. Because to be in the true One is to be in the Lord Jesus Christ, in our experience the true One and the Lord Jesus Christ are one. In like manner, the fact that “this” refers not only to the true One and to His Son Jesus Christ, who are one in our experience, but also to “the true God and eternal life,” which reveals that the true God and eternal life are one. Hence, the true One, His Son Jesus Christ, the true God, and eternal life are all one splendid, accessible, experiential divine reality to and in the believers in Christ.

In our experience based upon divinely-revealed truth, the true One becomes to us the true God, and Jesus Christ becomes to us eternal life. If we were not in Him who is true, He would still be true in Himself, but He would not be true in us experientially, and if we were not in His Son Jesus Christ, Christ would still be eternal life in Himself, but He would not be eternal life in us experientially. As a result, we could not know the true God. However, through the grace of God in His salvation and by the divine life that we have received by believing into the

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Son of God, we have an understanding. With this understanding we know Him who is true, and we know that we are in Him who is true and in His Son Jesus Christ. “This is the true God and eternal life.” Both in the divine revelation and in our experience, this is the only true God—the God of life. **AF**

Notes

¹In the *Life-study of 1 John*, Witness Lee writes,

In order to know God, the divine Person, we need the divine life.

Because as believers we have been born of the divine life [John 1:12-13; 3:3-6, 15], we are able to know God. In order to know a certain thing, you need to have the life of that thing. For example, a dog cannot know human beings, because a dog does not have a human life. It takes human life to know human beings. The principle is the same with knowing God. The Lord has given us eternal life [John 10:28], the divine life, the life of God. The life of God certainly is able to know God. Therefore, the

life of God, which has been given to us, has the ability to know God and the things of God...We have received the divine life, for we have been born of Him. Just as a child can know his father because he has the father's life, so we can know God because we have God's life. Having the divine life, we have the ability to know God. Because we have the life of God, we are able to experience God, enjoy God, and possess God. (349-350)

²The *Central Line of the Divine Revelation* states,

Elohim, a plural noun in Hebrew, implies the notions of the strong One and faithfulness, hence, the faithful, strong One. Our God is strong and faithful. He is strong in strength and faithful in word. Whatever He does, shows forth His strength. Whatever He says, He will keep. He is the strong, faithful One. *Elohim* is a uni-plural noun. The plurality of the word *Elohim* implies the Divine Trinity (Gen. 1:26a; 3:22a; 11:7a; Isa. 6:8a; John 17:11b, 22b; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14). This title [denotes] the unique yet triune God. (Lee 12)

³Kuhn states:

The name *Yahweh* or *Jehovah* was given a larger interpretation and a deeper significance with the call of Moses. It was revealed as an intensely personal name....As such, its disclosure highlights the Old Testament insistence upon the possibility of the Deity's being known as a person. (44)

⁴Cottrell states,

Such a truth may seem so self-evident that it is regarded as unworthy of mention. At first we may be tempted simply to equate it with the fact of God's existence: "God lives" means "God exists." Certainly the fact that God lives includes the fact of his existence, but it means much more than this. It is a much richer and fuller affirmation. It refers to God's existence as Spirit, as a personal being who is dynamic and active. It refers not just to the fact that he exists but to the fact that he exists *for his people*, ready to come to their aid and to act in their defense and to bless them for his name's sake. (388)

⁵The spirit here is the mingled spirit, the divine Spirit mingled with the regenerated human spirit. Not only has the regenerated spirit of the believers in Christ become life itself—it is also joined to (1 Cor. 6:17) and mingled with the Spirit who gives life (2 Cor. 3:6) to become the mingled spirit, which is both human and divine. In the experience of the believers, this is the first step in their becoming God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead. Since God alone is life, for our spirit to become life by being mingled with God is for us to become the same as God in life. It is in this limited way that the believers are deified without violating the Creator-creature distinction or compromising the uniqueness of the eternal immutable Godhead. For further elucidation, see *Affirmation & Critique*, VII.2, October 2002.

⁶Milolaski is surely correct when he says, "All that is Christian hinges on the truth of biblical revelation that God is one, eternal, personal, and triune" (59). That God is uniquely one is the basic truth in the Scriptures concerning God. The one God—the only true God—is both eternal and personal. He is also triune—triune in His being (Matt. 28:19), in His economy (Rev. 1:4-5), and in His dispensing (2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 3:16-17). The one God is triune; He is three-one—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. All three are God, all three are eternal, all three exist at the same time (that is, coexist), and all three coinhere (that is, dwell in one another mutually). This is God as the One who is triune in His being. He is also triune in His economy, in His arrangement, according to His good pleasure, to work Himself into His chosen and redeemed people to make them His corporate expression. Whereas the essential aspect of the Trinity—God as triune in His eternal, divine being—is revealed in Matthew 28:19, the economical aspect of the Trinity—the operation of the Triune God in carrying out His economy—is unveiled in Revelation 1:4-5. God's economy is accomplished by His dispensing; therefore, God is triune not only in His inner being and in His economy but also in His dispensing. This is what we find in 2 Corinthians 13:14, where the grace of Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit are with us, and in Ephesians 3:16-17, where the Father is strengthening us with power by His Spirit into our inner man so that Christ may make His home in our hearts. "Whereas the essential Trinity refers to the essence of the Triune God for His existence, the economical Trinity refers to His plan for His move" (Lee, *Points* 10). In the outworking of the divine economy, the Father made the plan, the Son came to accomplish this plan with the Father and by the Spirit, and now the Spirit comes as the Son and with the Father (John 14:26; 15:26) to apply all that the Son has accomplished. "In this way, while the divine economy of the Divine Trinity is being carried out, the divine existence of the Divine Trinity, His eternal coexistence and coinherence, remains intact and is not jeopardized" (10).

⁷Those who "draw water with rejoicing / From the springs of salvation" (Isa. 12:3) often express their joy by singing. Consider the sweet words of Bernard of Clairvaux:

Jesus, Thou Joy of loving hearts,
Thou Fount of life, Thou Light of men,
From the best bliss that earth imparts,
We turn unfilled to Thee again.

We taste Thee, O Thou living Bread,
And long to feast upon Thee still;
We drink of Thee, the Fountain-head,
And thirst our souls from Thee to fill! (*Hymns*, #205)

The chorus of a hymn written by an anonymous author on satisfaction with Christ also gives expression to the delight of enjoying Christ by drinking the Spirit:

Drinking at the Fountain that never runs dry,
Drinking at the Fountain of life am I;
Finding joy and pleasure
In abounding measure,

I am drinking at the Fountain of life. (*Hymns*, #322)

⁸In the *Life-study of Jeremiah*, Witness Lee says,

God's intention in His economy is to be the fountain, the source, of living waters to satisfy His chosen people for their enjoyment. The goal of this enjoyment is to produce the church as God's increase, God's enlargement, to be God's fullness for His expression. This is the heart's desire, the good pleasure (Eph. 1:5, 9), of God in His economy. (17)

⁹Packer proceeds to define divine immutability in six ways, pointing out that God's life, God's character, God's truth, God's ways, God's purposes, and God's Son do not change (77-81).

¹⁰Govett states,

The twofoldness of truth as offered to our view in Holy Writ is one strong argument of its not being the work of man. It is the glory of man's intellect to produce *oneness*....But it is not so with God. In nature He is continually acting with two seemingly opposed principles....It is not then to be wondered at, if two seemingly opposed principles are found placed side by side in the Scripture....It is not necessary to reconcile them before

we are bound to receive and act upon the two. It is enough that the Word of God distinctly affirms them both....Both, then, are to be received whether we can reconcile them or no. Their claim on our reception is not that we can unite them, but that God has testified

both....Opposite views of truth arise from different parts of the subject being viewed at different times....Thus does God try His people. Will they trust Him when He affirms that view of truth which runs counter to their temperaments and intellectual bias? Or will they trample on one of His sayings in their zeal for the other? The humble, child-like saint will acknowledge and receive both; for his Father, who cannot err, testifies both. (3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11)

¹¹Concerning the term *process*, Robichaux notes,

A clarification is perhaps in order, particularly as regards the term *process*. What we are advancing here is not akin to process theology, which views God as intrinsically in process and thus eternally undergoing change; rather, we affirm that God is immutable in His eternal, triune essence. Yet according to the revelation in the Bible, God has undergone a process insofar as He has become a man, lived a human life, died a human death, resurrected with a human body, and ascended to heaven as a glorified man. This is basic to our Christian faith. But for some reason this process of God, this humanizing of

God, so to speak, is held conceptually as being separate from God's identity, as though the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the God-man is distinct from God's being. Christian faith, however, demands that we identify Christ's humanity with His divinity and see Him as at once both God and man. (7)

¹²To deny this biblical truth is to separate (not merely distinguish) the Son from the Father and the Spirit and thereby to fall into the heresy of tritheism—the notion, usually held unconsciously, that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, being separate, are three Gods.

¹³As we consider the person of Christ, the God-man, we need to avoid Christological heresies: the heresy of Docetism, which denied Christ's humanity, claiming that Jesus appeared human but really was only divine; the heresy of Ebionism, which denied Christ's complete deity, claiming that Christ was not preexistent and that He had the Spirit only after His baptism; the heresy of Arianism, which denied Christ's complete deity, claiming that Christ was the first and highest created being; the heresy of Apollinarianism, which denied the completeness of Christ's humanity, claiming that the divine

Logos took the place of Christ's human spirit; the heresy of Nestorianism, which denied the unity of Christ's person, claiming that Christ's divine and human natures were not organically united and that Christ's having two natures meant that He was two persons; and the heresy of Eutychianism, which denied the distinction of Christ's two natures, claiming that the human

nature was swallowed up by the divine nature to create a new third nature.

¹⁴Acts 20:28 speaks of "the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood." Here *His* refers to *God* and indicates that God had blood with which to obtain, acquire, purchase, the church. Through incarnation God, the Creator, the eternal One, became mingled with man, with the result that He was no longer only God but a God-man, who had blood and was able to die for us. When the God-man died on the cross for our redemption, He died not only as man but also as God. Therefore, the blood that has redeemed fallen human beings is the blood of Jesus, the Son of God (1 John 1:7). As fallen human beings, we need genuine human blood for our redemption, and as a man the Lord Jesus shed human blood to redeem us. Since the Lord is the Son of God, even God Himself, with His blood there is the element of divinity, which ensures the eternal efficacy of His blood. As a man He had genuine human blood, and as God He has the element that gives His blood eternal efficacy. The apostle John testifies of this efficacy in 1 John 1:7: "The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from every sin." The name *Jesus* denotes the Lord's humanity, which is needed for the shedding of the redeeming blood. The title *His Son*

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denotes the Lord's divinity, which is needed for the eternal efficacy of the redeeming blood. *The blood of Jesus His Son* indicates that this blood is the proper blood of a genuine man for redeeming God's fallen creatures, with the divine surety as its eternal efficacy, an efficacy that is all-prevailing in space and everlasting in time. It is a marvelous fact that the Lord Jesus died on the cross as the God-man. The blood He shed was the blood not only of the man Jesus but also the blood of the God-man. Therefore, His blood, through which God obtained the church, is God's own blood.

¹⁵To teach this scriptural truth is not to fall into the heresy of modalism—the false teaching that the three of the Godhead—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—instead of coexisting and coinhering eternally, are merely three temporary modes of the manifestation of God. For a modalist, the unique God manifests Himself in three different modes, or stages, with God appearing first as the Father, then as the Son, and finally as the Spirit. We have always repudiated this heresy. For example, Witness Lee says,

Modalism claims that the Father ended with the Son's coming and that the Son ceased with the Spirit's coming. The modalists say that the Three of the Godhead exist respectively in three consecutive stages. They do not believe in the coexistence and coinherence of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Unlike them, we believe in the coexistence and coinherence of the Three of the Godhead; that is, we believe that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit all exist essentially at the same time and under the same conditions. However, in the divine economy, the Three work and are manifested respectively in three consecutive stages. Yet even in Their economical works and manifestations the Three still remain essentially in Their coexistence and coinherence. The Father chose us in the Son and by the Spirit (Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:2a). The Son accomplished redemption for us with the Father and by the Spirit (John 8:29; Heb. 9:14). The Spirit works in us as the Son (John 14:26; 2 Cor. 3:17) with the Father (John 15:26). Their works and manifestations are economical, but Their coexistence and coinherence are eternal. All the three are eternal essentially. (*Conclusion 30*)

Sadly, certain of our critics whose writings display a lack of proper and thorough knowledge persist in identifying us as modalists. A recent example is found in "Who Is the God of the Cults?" (hereafter, "Cults") by H. Wayne House. In its opening synopsis "Cults" says,

The historic Christian church has maintained essential unity for two millennia concerning the nature of God, as proclaimed in creeds, sermons, and books. As revealed in Holy Scripture, God is unlimited in His attributes, yet personal in His relationship with His creation. Moreover, this infinite-personal Deity is indivisible in both His nature and His essence, yet eternally and simultaneously existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Various false religions...have repudiated this true knowledge of God presented in the Bible, substituting human reason for divine revelation. These errors generally consist of moving to extremes. God is viewed as either personal and finite, or impersonal and infinite. Others maintain that God must be plural in His essence (many gods) if He is eternally Father, Son and Holy Spirit, or one in His personhood (modalism), revealing Himself successively as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit if He is truly one God. (1)

In the section devoted to belief in modalism, "Cults" asserts,

The Local Church (or, as they would prefer, "the local churches" or "the Lord's Recovery") is another group that seems to share a modalistic view of God. I say "seems" because there is some ambiguity on how they perceive the Trinity. The late Witness Lee [recall the quotation in the preceding paragraph] tended to speak of God in modalistic terms. Some within the Local Church have made an impassioned apologetic for the church's orthodoxy in this area. (3)

In the notes, "Cults" cites two references from the writings of Witness Lee, mentions a booklet penned by this writer, and then recommends certain sources known for biased criticism. A few comments are called for here. First, the fact that "Cults" lists us with cults in an article that purports to discuss the God of the cults indicates that "Cults," by associating us with cults, intends to give the impression that our theology is heretical, if not cultic. The pejorative use of *impassioned* to characterize our apologetic suggests that our writings should be viewed as emotional and passionate rather than clear, reasoned, and sagacious. "Cults" quotes Witness Lee as saying, "Thus the three Persons of the Trinity become the three successive stages in the process of God's economy" (6). Here "Cults" makes a critical error, regarding "become" as meaning "are merely" or, in modalistic terms, "are nothing more" than temporal stages. In truth, however, "become" used with respect to "the three Persons of the Trinity" presupposes the previous and simultaneous existence of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit who, in the outworking of God's economy, function in stages. It is questionable, therefore, whether "Cults" is based upon direct, thorough, balanced, complete, and unbiased examination of our writings on the Triune God in both His essence and in His economy. "Cults," after classifying our theology with that propagated by heretical cultists, proceeds to waffle regarding our theology, thereby avoiding respectable theological analysis and dialogue.

¹⁶This assertion does not deny the fact that Christ was resurrected with a body of flesh and bones, as Luke 24:36-39 reveals. The resurrected Christ was not a phantom or a specter; He was able to eat broiled fish (vv. 41-43), and He had a body that could be touched (John 20:26-28). In resurrection Christ has a body of flesh and bones, and He is also the life-giving Spirit. It is beyond our capacity to reconcile, much less systematize, these two aspects of a twofold truth. Since both are revealed in the Word, we should believe and receive both, not emphasizing one at the expense of the other.

If Christ were not the life-giving Spirit, He could not enter into us and indwell us. The Bible is emphatic concerning the truth that Jesus Christ is in us (Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Col. 1:27), and the Bible is equally emphatic in its revelation that Christ has a glorified body (Phil. 3:21). How, then, can Christ live in us and make His home in our hearts (Eph. 3:17), since He has a body of flesh and bones? The only answer that is in concert with the Scriptures is that Christ lives in us as the life-giving Spirit. Let it be noted that the New Testament does not say that “Christ lives in us through the Spirit,” or that “Christ indwells us in the Holy Spirit,” or that “Christ is in us by the Spirit”—expressions frequently used to avoid confrontation with or to explain away the plain truth in the verses that speak to us of the indwelling Christ. The resurrected Christ has a glorified body, and with this body He is on the throne in the heavens. The resurrected Christ is also the life-giving Spirit, and as the Spirit He lives in us.

¹⁷Andrew Murray notes:

The glorifying of Jesus and the streaming forth of His Spirit are intimately connected; in vital organic union the two are inseparably linked. If we would have, not only the Spirit of God, but this Spirit of Christ, which ‘was not yet,’ but now is, the Spirit of the glorified Jesus, it is specially with the glorified Jesus we must believingly deal. (40)

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