

GOD— HIS MANIFESTATION

by Witness Lee

God's good pleasure, God's heart's desire, is to have many sons for the expression of His Son so that He may be expressed in the Son through the Spirit. For this purpose, God has manifested Himself, first in Christ as an individual expression in the flesh and then in the church, the Body of Christ, as the enlarged corporate expression in the flesh. Ultimately, God will be manifested in the New Jerusalem as the consummated corporate expression in the new heaven and new earth. In this message we shall consider God's manifestation in these three stages.

In Christ as an Individual Expression in the Flesh

God's manifestation was first in Christ as an individual expression in the flesh. Concerning this, Colossians 2:9 says, "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." In this verse *fullness* does not refer to the riches of God; instead, it refers to the expression of the riches of God. What dwells in Christ is the expression of the riches of what God is. We need to see that the fullness of the Godhead is the expression of the Godhead and that this expression is in Christ individually. Christ is the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead. This means that the fullness of the Triune God dwells in Christ in a bodily form. The fact that the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily means that it dwells in Him in a way that is both real and practical. This implies the physical body which Christ put on in His humanity. It indicates that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ as the One who has a human body. Before His incarnation, the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Him as the eternal Word, but it did not dwell in Him bodily. After He became incarnate, the fullness of the Godhead began to dwell in Him in a bodily way. Thus, He is the manifestation of God, the individual expression of God, in the flesh. The expression *the fullness of the Godhead* refers to the entire Godhead, to the complete God, including the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Because the Godhead comprises the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, it would not be correct to say that the fullness of the Godhead includes only God the Son and not also God the Father and God the Spirit. 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. As the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead, Christ is not only the Son of God but the entire God.

John 1:1 and 14 also reveal that God was manifested in Christ as an individual expression in the flesh. Verse 1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." In verse 14, this Word, which is God, became flesh. This refers to the incarnated Christ. In the beginning He was not only with God but He is the very God. The incarnated Christ is God manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). John 1 further says, "No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (v. 18). This tells us that Christ, being the only begotten Son of God, is the expression of God. No one has ever seen God, yet He declares God. The Father is the invisible God, the hidden God; Christ is the manifested God.

When we say that Christ is the Word, we are saying that He is the expression of God. I may have a great deal of feeling within me, but if I have no words, my feelings cannot be expressed. But when my feelings are expressed in words, then you are able to understand them. Christ is the Word of God. Although no one knows God, Christ as the Word speaks for God, defines God, and even declares God. Because God is abstract, mysterious, and invisible, there is the need for God to be the Word in order to explain Himself, define Himself, and reveal Himself. The Word in John 1:1 refers to the defined God, the explained and expressed God, the God revealed and made known to human beings. This Word is our Lord Jesus Christ, the living Word of God. The Word is the embodiment of the Triune God. Although the Triune God is mysterious, He is nonetheless embodied in the Word. The Word is the definition, explanation, and expression of the mysterious and invisible God. The Triune God embodied in the Word is explained, defined, and expressed.

In John 1:14, the Word, the embodiment of the Triune God, became flesh. In the incarnated Christ God is expressed in a man in the flesh. This is according to God's plan. God's plan is to manifest Himself in man and through man in the flesh. John 1:14 continues to say that the Word, after becoming flesh "tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only Begotten from the Father), full of grace and reality." This indicates that the Word was incarnated to declare God. As the manifestation of God, Christ declared God in a way that was full of grace and reality. He declared God by presenting Himself as grace

and reality. God, the very God of enjoyment, becomes grace and reality to us in Christ for our enjoyment. Through enjoying Him we gain Him as grace and reality. He declares God to man in the way of enjoyment.

When we enjoy God in Christ as grace and realize Him in Christ as reality, we find the unsearchable riches of Christ. John 1:16 says, “Of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.” In the incarnated Christ dwells all the fullness, the expression of the riches of God (Col. 2:9). Through His incarnation in Christ, we can receive the riches of grace and reality out of His divine fullness.

Christ as the Father’s only begotten Son declared God by the Word, life, light, grace, and reality (John 1:1, 4, 9, 14). The Word is God expressed, life is God imparted, light is God shining, grace is God enjoyed, and reality is God realized. It is by these things that God is declared in the Son as His individual expression. Christ explained, defined, declared, and expressed God by being the Word incarnated to be life and light to man with grace and reality for man’s enjoyment. It is in this way that God was declared to man in the Son.

**In the Church—
the Body of Christ—
as the Enlarged Corporate
Expression in the Flesh**

We have pointed out that the fullness of God is the expression of God. According to John 1:16, the fullness of God came with Christ, who is the embodiment of God’s fullness. With Christ, the expression of God was an individual matter. This expression needs to be enlarged from an individual to a corporate expression. The church is to be the enlarged corporate expression of God in the flesh. This means that the church should be the fullness, the expression of God, in a corporate way. In the church God is expressed not through an individual but corporately through the Body of Christ. Because the fullness of God is embodied in the church, the church is the corporate expression of the Triune God. First Timothy 3:15 and 16 indicate that God is manifested in the church—the Body of Christ—as the enlarged corporate expression in the flesh:

The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth. And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh, / Justified in the Spirit, / Seen by angels, / Preached among the nations, / Believed on in the world, / Taken up in glory.

In Greek the antecedent of *who* is omitted but easily

recognized, that is, Christ who was God manifested in the flesh as the mystery of godliness. The transition from “the mystery...” to “who” implies that Christ as the manifestation of God in the flesh is the mystery of godliness (Col. 1:27; Gal. 2:20). This mystery of godliness is the living of a proper church, and such a living is also the manifestation of God in the flesh. These verses imply that not only Christ Himself as the Head but also the church as the Body is the manifestation of God in the flesh. When a church grows in Christ with the growth of God (Col. 2:19), it will function as the house and household of the living God for His move on the earth and as the supporting pillar and holding base of the truth, bearing the divine reality of Christ and His Body as a testimony to the world. Then the church becomes the continuation of Christ’s manifestation of God in the flesh. This is the great mystery of godliness—Christ lived out of the church as the manifestation of God in the flesh.

In 1 Timothy 3:15, the Greek word for *house* may also be translated “household.” The household, the family, of God is the house of God. The house and the household are one

thing—the assembly of the believers (Eph. 2:19; Heb. 3:6). The reality of this house as the dwelling place of the living God is in our spirit (Eph. 2:22). We need to live in our spirit so that God can be manifested in this house as the living God. The church, as the house and household of the living God, is the pillar and base of the truth. The pillar

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supports the building, and the base holds the pillar. The church is such a supporting pillar and holding base of the truth. The truth is the reality, referring to the real things which are revealed in the New Testament concerning Christ and the church according to God’s New Testament economy. This economy is composed of Christ as the mystery of God (Col. 2:2) and the church as the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:4). Christ and the church, the Head and the Body, are the contents of the reality of God’s New Testament economy. The church as the house and household of the living God is both the pillar which bears the truth, the reality of God’s New Testament economy, and the base which upholds the pillar.

Such a church is the continuation, the enlargement and expansion of God manifested in the flesh. This manifestation of God is the church as the house of God and the pillar and base of the truth. The church is, then, the increase, the enlargement, of the manifestation of God in the flesh. This is God manifested in the flesh in a wider way. This is according to the New Testament principle of incarnation, which is God manifested in the flesh. First Timothy 3:16

begins with the words, “And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness.” The conjunction *and* here indicates that the speaking about the church in verse 15 is not finished yet and that the church is something even more than the house of the living God and the pillar and base of the truth. The church is also the mystery of godliness. According to the context, godliness refers to the living of God in the church, that is, God as life lived out in the church to be expressed. The church life is the expression of God. Both Christ and the church, the Head and the Body, are the mystery of godliness, expressing God in the flesh.

In the New Jerusalem as the Consummate Corporate Expression in the New Creation

The final stage of God’s manifestation will be in the New Jerusalem as the consummated corporate expression in the new creation. Revelation 21:1-3 says,

I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and the sea is no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice out of the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will tabernacle with them.

In eternity past God purposed to have a corporate expression so that He might be fully expressed and glorified (Eph. 3:9-11; 1:9-11). For this, He created the heavens, the earth, and mankind. Eventually, the old heaven and the old earth will pass away through fire and be renewed into the new heaven and new earth (2 Pet. 3:10-13) into which the New Jerusalem will come for God’s eternal expression.

The Holy City

The New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth will be the holy city, “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb. 12:22). The designation “holy city” signifies that the New Jerusalem is a city sanctified and separated unto God for fulfilling His purpose. It is both sanctified and separated unto God positionally and sanctified and saturated with God dispositionally. It is holy both extrinsically and intrinsically. It is an entity, entirely and thoroughly holy, that fits in with God’s holy nature for God’s expression to fulfill His heart’s desire. Today the church, as the manifestation of God in the flesh, is the house of God, whereas in the new heaven and new earth the New Jerusalem, as the manifestation of God in the new creation, will be the city of God. The city is much bigger than the house, signifying that the New Jerusalem, as the manifestation of God in His new creation, will be the enlargement and consummation of the church to express God in eternity. As the old Jerusalem was the center and capital of God’s kingdom in the nation of Israel, the New

Jerusalem will be the administrative center of the eternal kingdom of God in the new universe for the manifestation of God for the ages to come.

At the beginning of the Scriptures in God’s old creation there was a garden, the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:8). At the end of the Scriptures in God’s new creation there will be a city, the city of the New Jerusalem. The garden and the city at the two ends of the Scriptures reflect each other, with the tree of life which is in both of them as the link (v. 9; Rev. 22:2). The garden was the issue of God’s creation; whereas the city will be the consummation of God’s building, a building which God has been carrying out through all the dispensations: the dispensation of the patriarchs, the dispensation of the law, the dispensation of grace, and the dispensation of the kingdom, of the old creation. Out of His old creation through all the dispensations, God has been doing His building work in the way of regeneration and resurrection. The ultimate result and the ultimate consummation of this building work will be the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth as God’s manifestation in His new creation for eternity. It is not a creation by God’s divine power in the way to call things not being as being; rather, it is a building by God’s divine life in the way to regenerate the things which exist with the resurrection life that they may be one with God in His divine life and nature for His expression.

The Bride of the Lamb and the Tabernacle of God

The New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth is the bride, the wife (21:9) of the Lamb Christ as His counterpart (John 3:29) and the tabernacle of God as His habitation (Rev. 21:3). Christ and God are one. They are one God, but triune. And the tabernacle is one entity with two aspects to meet the different needs of its Triune God. To Christ, the Lamb, the Redeemer, the New Jerusalem is His bride as His counterpart for His satisfaction. To God, the Originator, the Creator, the New Jerusalem is His tabernacle as His habitation for His rest. As the bride of the Lamb, the New Jerusalem comes out of Christ, her Husband, and becomes His counterpart, just as Eve came out of Adam, her husband, and became his counterpart (Gen. 2:21-24). She is prepared by participating in the riches of the life and nature of Christ the Lamb. As the tabernacle of God, the New Jerusalem is built by God with what He is. It is wholly constituted of the nature of God to be His habitation.

In both the Old and the New Testaments God likens His chosen people to a spouse (Isa. 54:6; Jer. 3:1; Ezek. 16:8; Hosea 2:19; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:31-32) and a dwelling place for Himself (Exo. 29:45-46; Num. 5:3; Ezek. 43:7-9; Psa. 68:18; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; 1 Tim. 3:15). The spouse is for His satisfaction in love, and the dwelling place is for His rest in expression. Both aspects will be

ultimately consummated in the New Jerusalem. In her, God will have the fullest satisfaction in love and the uttermost rest in expression for eternity.

Its Components

Revelation 21:12 says that on the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel, and verse 14 tells us that on the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem are the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The twelve tribes represent the Old Testament saints, and the twelve apostles, the New Testament saints. This indicates that all the saints of both the Old Testament and New Testament are the components, the constituents, of the New Jerusalem for God's expression. All the saints are God's regenerated and transformed children. They are the sons of God spoken of in verse 7, having God's life and nature, different from the peoples spoken of in verse 3, who are the nations around the New Jerusalem in verse 24 and 22:2. The New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth will be the aggregate of all the sons of God, who have been redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, transformed, and glorified for the building of the New Jerusalem as God's consummate manifestation for eternity.

Its Base

Revelation 21:18 says, "The city was pure gold, like clear glass," and Revelation 21:21 says, "The street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass." Since the street of the city is gold, gold must be the base of the city, on which is the street. Gold, in typology, signifies God in His divine nature. The divine nature of God is the base of the city. This indicates that the New Jerusalem is wholly constituted of the nature of God, which is pure and transparent as the pure and transparent glass without any mixture, with which and in which nothing can be covered. This affords God a pure and transparent expression for His consummate manifestation in the New Jerusalem.

Its Gates

Revelation 21:13 and 21 tell us that the New Jerusalem has "on the east three gates, and on the north three gates, and on the south three gates, and on the west three gates....And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was, respectively, of one pearl." Pearl signifies Christ with His life-releasing death and His life-secreting resurrection to cause the sinners to be regenerated with His divine life that they may become parts of the New Jerusalem as its entrance. This entrance brings in the

blending (signified by the number twelve) of the Triune God (signified by the number three) with the created man (signified by the number four, implied in the four times of three gates) for the manifestation of the Triune God.

Its Wall and the Foundation of Its Wall

Revelation 21:18-20 tells us that the building material of its wall was jasper and that the foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with twelve precious stones, the first of which was also jasper. Jasper, with its dark green color, a sign of being rich in life, signifies the appearance of the very God who is rich in life. This indicates that the New Jerusalem is built with all the redeemed saints who have been transformed into precious stones (1 Cor. 3:12; 1 Pet. 2:2-5), the leading category of which is jasper, bearing the very appearance of their God who is rich in life, and shining with the light like a most precious stone, even jasper stone, clear as crystal, for the expression of the transforming God in His manifestation in the new creation for eternity. The transformation of the saints, from their natural being into precious stones, which signify the riches of

Christ in different splendors with the appearance of God's life in its richness, is done by the Spirit. The New Jerusalem is composed of three categories of precious materials: gold, signifying God in His divine nature; pearls, signifying Christ in His life-releasing death and life-secreting resurrection; and precious stones, signifying the Spirit in His

transforming work. God is embodied in Christ (Col. 2:9), and Christ is realized as the Spirit (John 14:16-20). The three are one, especially in the believers' experience of life. God's nature is His divine life which is the very life Christ released through His death and is secreting in His resurrection into His believers. With this life the Spirit transforms the believers, making them precious materials for the building of the New Jerusalem to express the processed Triune God in what the three of the Godhead are and have done, in His marvelous manifestation in the ages to come in eternity.

Its Temple

In Revelation 21:22 the apostle John tells us that he saw no temple in the New Jerusalem, for the temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. Since God and the Lamb are the temple, they could not dwell in it, and it is not their dwelling place. It is the dwelling place of all the redeemed saints who serve the Triune God by dwelling in Him. On the one hand, the New Jerusalem, which is composed of all the redeemed saints, as the habitation of God,

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is the tabernacle; on the other hand, the New Jerusalem, which is constituted of the processed Triune God, as the dwelling place of all the redeemed saints, is the temple. Thus, the New Jerusalem is the mutual dwelling of both the redeeming God and His redeemed. It is both the tabernacle and the temple; the tabernacle is the redeemed, and the temple is the redeeming God. This indicates strongly that the redeeming God is mingled with His redeemed, through the processes He has gone through and the procedures they have shared in, for His expression in His eternal manifestation.

Its Glory and Its Light

Revelation 21:11 and 23 tell us that the New Jerusalem has the glory of God and that her light was like a most precious stone, as jasper stone, clear as crystal. It has no need of the sun or of the moon that they should shine in it, for the glory of God illumines it, and its lamp is the Lamb. The glory of God, which is God expressed, illumines the New Jerusalem. Hence, the glory of God, with God as its substance, essence, and elements, is the light of the New Jerusalem, which shines in the Lamb as its lamp. The expressed glory of God, or the God of glory expressed, is the light shining in Christ as the lamp through the jasper wall of the New Jerusalem like the most precious jasper, which bears God's appearance rich in life. The appearance of God rich in life goes with the shining for God's expression in His final and consummated manifestation.

Its Throne

Revelation 22:1 and 3 tell us that the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in the New Jerusalem and that a river of water of life proceeds out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. According to the context of this portion of the Word, the throne of God and of the Lamb is the center of the New Jerusalem, on which the redeeming God, as indicated by the expression *of God and of the Lamb*, carries out His administration, based upon His redemption, in His eternal kingdom in the new heaven and new earth, to keep everything in the universe in the order that serves the purpose for His expression in His eternal manifestation. This is the goal of His redemption.

Its Street

Revelation 21:21 says, "The street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass," and Revelation 22:1 says that a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeds out of the throne of God and of the Lamb in the middle of the street of the city. The street signifies the way, and the street being pure gold indicates that the nature of God is the way in the New Jerusalem. Everything in the New Jerusalem, which is constituted of God in His nature, is according to the divine nature and corresponds to it. Hence, the river of

water of life, which is the Spirit as the consummation of the Triune God, proceeds in the middle of this street and is bright as crystal, without any opaqueness and obscureness. Because it is one street that proceeds out of the throne to reach all the twelve gates of the city, it should be a spiral that passes through the entire city. In this way the one street, proceeding out of one throne, is able to reach and serve the twelve gates, indicating that the genuine oneness is kept in the holy city. The redeemed came into the city through twelve gates from four directions, but they all are gathered into one street which is according to the nature of God and corresponds to it.

Its Supply

Revelation 22:1-2 says, "A river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb in the middle of its street. And on this side and on that side of the river was the tree of life, producing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit each month." The river of water of life, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, signifies the Spirit as the consummation of the processed Triune God, flowing out of God and the Lamb. In the flow of the river is the water of life with the tree of life as a vine going on the two sides of the river. The water of life signifies the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2) as the spiritual drink (Rev. 21:6), and the tree of life signifies Christ as the spiritual food (22:14) to supply the entire New Jerusalem, which is composed of all the saints, the sons of God, that they may be nourished and sustained forever. This kind of supply with the Spirit as the spiritual drink and Christ as the spiritual food began in the individual manifestation of God in John 7:33-39 and 6:35, 51. This supply indicates that the processed Triune God is the supply of the New Jerusalem and that this supply is the dispensing of the redeeming God into His redeemed for His expression in His eternal manifestation. The river of the water of life with the tree of life growing in it comes out of the throne of God's administration and flows in the middle of the golden street. This indicates that the divine supply for the New Jerusalem is related to the authority (throne) and nature (gold) of God. Apart from God's authority and God's nature there is no possibility for God to have an expression in His manifestation.

The Mingling of God with Man

According to the intrinsic significance of all the above points, the New Jerusalem is really a marvelous mingling of the processed Triune God with His chosen, redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, transformed, conformed, built, and glorified tripartite people for His glorious and utmost expression in His consummated manifestation for eternity, in the new creation of resurrection, no longer in the natural flesh, as His individual manifestation in Christ and His corporate manifestation were in the past. **AC**