

A Panoramic View of the GOSPEL of JOHN

by Ron Kangas

The Gospel of John is simply profound; it is simple in its profundity and profound in its simplicity. The words of the psalmist addressed to God in Psalm 92:5 can be rightly applied to this Gospel: “So very deep are Your thoughts!” Although the language of John’s Gospel, a book of mysteries,¹ is elementary in its simplicity, the thoughts, being expressions of the mind of God Himself, are exceedingly deep. Sadly, many readers of the Gospel of John, who seem to peruse the text with tunnel vision, are impressed with its simplicity but not with its depth; for them, the message of the book is encapsulated in 3:16, 1:12-13, 10:10, and 20:31. Oblivious to the basic thought of John, unaware of matters such as life and building, the divine and mystical realm, and the divine-human incorporation, and misled by the notion that the Father’s house in chapter fourteen refers to heaven, these readers are often content with a superficial understanding of this most profound New Testament book. With the hope that some students of the Word of God are willing to reconsider the traditional, limited view of the Gospel of John and to open themselves, in the words of the hymn, to more light and truth breaking forth from God’s Word, I will attempt in a two-part article to present a panoramic view of the vast revelation embodied in and conveyed through John’s Gospel. It is no exaggeration to assert, as I certainly do, that every point requires volumes of commentary and explication; nevertheless, for the purpose of surveying the immense span of the revelation in this Gospel, I will endeavor to limit myself to brief, succinct remarks. What follows will, at best, be a series of glimpses at marvelous spiritual scenes. Before we begin our survey, however, I need to define what I regard as the basic thought of the Gospel of John—the thought that is central to the structure of the book and that contains its primary message. Once we are clear about this central thought, we will begin to view the astounding panorama of the divine revelation portrayed in this simple, yet profound and mysterious book.

The Basic Thought of the Gospel of John

The Gospel of John records the coming and going of Christ and its results. This Gospel speaks of Christ’s coming to us in His incarnation and His going to God the Father through death and resurrection in order to bring God into us and to bring us into God for the producing of a mutual dwelling place for the Triune God and His redeemed people. The basic thought of the Gospel of John, therefore, is that of God in Christ coming into man through incarnation and of redeemed man in Christ being brought into God through resurrection for the building up of a mutual abode—the Father’s house—for the Triune God and His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people. In brief, John shows us that the Triune God in Christ comes into man and brings man in Christ into God for God’s eternal building.

By His coming through incarnation to be the God-man, the complete God and a perfect man, divinity and humanity, in one wonderful person, the Lord Jesus brought the Triune God into humanity. Then He, the God-man Jesus, lived as a man on earth, denying His natural, human life and living the divine life in His human life for the expression of God the Father. As He lived such a remarkable, unprecedented life, He did not act



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in His own name, do His own will, speak His own word, carry out His own work, or seek His own glory. Rather, He lived by the Father and expressed the Father for the glory of the Father. Eventually, at the time appointed by the Father, the Lord Jesus died on the cross for our redemption and for the release of the divine life that was confined within the shell of His humanity, solving all the problems between man and God and removing all the barriers that kept man from coming to God. Thus, by His going through death and resurrection, He brought man into God, and by so doing He caused man to be one with God and enabled man to live in God and even to become, in

God and with God, a mutual dwelling place for the redeeming God and His redeemed people. In simple terms, we may say that the Gospel of John is concerned with the coming and going of Christ for the building up of God's dwelling place, signified by the Father's house in chapter fourteen. This is the basic thought of the Gospel of John.


This thought is embedded in the structure of the book. As we consider this structure, we need to realize that the Gospel of John is divided into two main sections. The first section consists of chapters one through twelve, and the second section consists of chapters fourteen through twenty-one, with chapter thirteen serving as a turning point that divides this Gospel into these two parts. (John 13:1 indicates that a great turn was about to take place: "Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come for Him to depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the uttermost.") The first section reveals that Christ came "from with" the Father through incarnation to bring God into us, His believers, and the second section reveals that Christ went to the Father through death and resurrection to bring us into God. In the latter section, chapter fourteen is of crucial importance, for it reveals that Christ, who coinheres (that is, mutually indwells) with the Father was about to go to the Father through death and resurrection and thereby be the way for us to come into the Father and to be in the Father by being in the Son.

Significantly, in both sections of the Gospel of John there is a particular mention of the Father's house. In chapter two the Father's house is the incarnated Christ, the Word who became flesh and tabernacled among us (1:14). In chapter fourteen the Father's house is no longer Christ alone in His incarnation but Christ in His resurrection with all His believers, the members of His mystical Body, as the many abodes, the many dwelling places (vv. 2, 23). Now in the Father's house every believer in Christ, every child of God begotten of God and possessing the life and nature of God, not only has a place but is a place and not only has an abode but is an abode.

Contrary to the traditional understanding of John 14, Christ's coming and going are matters not of places but of persons. Of course, Christ through incarnation came into the world, but His goal was not merely to come to earth as a place but to come to persons, to human beings, on the earth. In the same principle, Christ's going through death and resurrection was not to bring us to a place but to a person, God the Father. If we would be faithful to the revelation in the Gospel of John and adhere to its basic thought, we must abandon any preoccupation with place, especially the preoccupation with the superstitious notion of the Father's house as heaven, and devote our attention to the divine emphasis on person. To be sure, the person—God—is infinitely more important than a place, especially a physical place supposedly designed and built for our eternal comfort, pleasure, delight, and satisfaction. It absolutely is not the Lord's intention to bring us to another place, a better place, called heaven. Instead, His intention has always been to bring us to and into a person, the Father. Now, because we are in Christ and Christ is in us, we may be with Him where He is, and He is in the Father.



Christ came
"from with" the
Father through
incarnation to
bring God
into us,
His believers,
and He went
to the Father
through death
and resurrection
to bring us
into God.





The New Testament may be regarded as a book concerning Christ and the church. Since Christ is life and the church is God's building, the New Testament also is a book of life and building.



To emphasize this point, I wish to say that since the Lord is in the Father and since we are in Christ the Lord, spontaneously we also are in the Father. Furthermore, by being in the Father by virtue of being in the Son, who is in the Father, we are in the Father's house, His organic, divine-human dwelling place, and we are even abodes in this mutual dwelling place of the Triune God and the tripartite man in Christ.

The notion of going to heaven and spending eternity there in a custom-built "mansion," especially as this concept is habitually presented in messages and writings on John 14, is inconsistent with the basic thought of the Gospel of John and does not comport with this Gospel as a whole. In John 14 there is no thought concerning the believers' going to heaven to live in some kind of heavenly abode (although this thought is frequently injected into the text by preachers and expositors). With the divine revelation as our basis, we can assert with confidence that it is not the intention of the Lord Jesus to prepare a place for us in heaven and to bring us there one day, presumably at His coming back. This may be the thought of the natural man, who cannot know the things of God, or of the religious person, who often has a warped understanding of divine things, but it is not the thought of God. God's eternal intention, according to the desire of His heart, is, in Christ, to come into us, making Himself one with us, and, in Christ, to bring us into Him, making us one with Him so that we and He may have a mutual abode, with the Triune God dwelling in us and with us dwelling in the Triune God. Although this thought is alien to the natural and religious mind, it is the basic thought not only of the Gospel of John but of the entire Bible.

Life and Building in the Gospel of John

The New Testament may be regarded as a book concerning Christ and the church, the great mystery (Eph. 5:32). Since Christ is life (John 14:6; 1 John 5:11-12; Col. 3:4) and the church is God's building (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 2:21-22; 4:16), we may also say that the New Testament is a book of life and building, a formulation that is particularly appropriate with respect to the Gospel of John, as life and building is a central theme in this book. God's creation is focused on life (Gen. 2:8-9), and God's goal in His creation is a building constituted of precious materials (vv. 10-12; 1 Cor. 3:12; Rev. 21:11, 14, 18-21). The Gospel of John reveals that life is in Christ, the Word of God (1:4), that Christ came that we might have life (10:10), that Christ Himself is life (14:6), and that Christ is the bread of life (6:35). Furthermore, Christ has the water of life (4:14), He gives life (5:21), and He lives in us as our life (14:19). This Gospel also unveils the building (1:14; 2:19-21; 14:2, 23; 17:11, 21-23). For the divine building, the believers, who are represented by Peter, are stones (1:42). We have been redeemed and regenerated for God's building, and we are now being transformed for God's building.

The theme of life and building is reflected in the basic structure of chapter two with its two main sections devoted respectively to the changing of death into life (vv. 1-11) and the building of the house of God (vv. 12-22). In this chapter we see life's principle—to change death into life—and life's purpose—to build the house of God. The reason we speak of life's principle at this juncture is that, referring to the Lord's changing water (death) into wine (life), verse 11 says, "This beginning of signs Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee." Because the first mentioning of a matter in the Scriptures sets forth the principle of that matter, the first sign in the Gospel of John (a book of signs, 20:30-31) sets forth the principle of all the following signs, and this principle is to change death into life. Therefore, we may speak of the principle of life. The Gospel of John was written that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, we may have life in His name (20:31). This life is eternal life (3:15), the divine, uncreated life of God. According to John, the principle of such a life is to change death into life.

Life's purpose is to build the house of God. This is the intrinsic significance of the second portion of John 2. Life is for building, the corporate expression of the Triune God,

and building is by life. It was for the purpose of presenting such a revelation of life and building that John put together the incidents of the Lord's changing water into wine and His cleansing of the temple. The wine, the life, is for the temple, the building, the Father's house.

This life is the resurrection life of Christ, as signified by *the third day* (v. 1) and *in three days* (v. 19). The third day is the day of resurrection (1 Cor. 15:4). It is only through resurrection life that death is changed into life for the building up of the Father's house. It was in and through Christ's resurrection that the temple of His physical body was enlarged to become the temple of His mystical Body, signified by the Father's house.

My Father's house in 14:2 must be understood in light of *My Father's house* in 2:16. In like manner, the revelation in chapter fourteen must be understood in light of the revelation in chapter two. This means that the basis for interpreting the Lord's word in John 14 is set forth in John 2—the principle of life and the purpose of life. God's intention is to build up a mutual abode for Himself and His redeemed and regenerated people through Christ's resurrection and in Christ as the resurrection life. Such an intention has nothing to do with the heavenly mansion of traditional Christian theology. In fact, the notion of a heavenly house with suites of rooms for all individual believers is utterly incompatible with these matters of life and building. Whatever this notion of a heavenly house is alleged to be, it is not something dependent upon the believers' experience of the changing of death into life for the building up of God's dwelling place. The traditional, religious teaching about a heavenly mansion is incompatible with the biblical, and specifically Johannine, theme of life and building. The proper understanding of the Father's house, we are pleased to say, is fully in accord with the divine thought in the divine Word regarding life and building. If we are clear concerning life and building as set forth in John 2, we will be clear that the Father's house in John 14 is neither heaven nor a mansion but a building in resurrection as the mutual abode of God and His redeemed and regenerated people.

The revelation of life and building in the Gospel of John is in harmony with one of the great visions in the holy Scriptures—the vision of God's building, the unveiling of the desire of God's heart to have a dwelling place for Himself and His chosen and redeemed people. Only by knowing God's building as unveiled in the Bible can we have the proper understanding of the Father's house in John 14. Therefore, it would be helpful at this juncture to present the essential biblical truth concerning God's building.

The place to begin is with Jacob's dream at Bethel recorded in Genesis 28. According to the account in this chapter, Jacob poured oil upon a stone and called it Bethel (*Bethel* means "the house of God"), indicating that God's building is composed of oil and stone, with oil signifying God as the Spirit reaching His people and stone signifying God's transformed people (1 Pet. 2:5). This points to the mingling of God with His people for His building. At Bethel we also have the gate of heaven with the ladder set up on earth and reaching heaven (John 1:51). This ladder brings heaven to earth and joins earth to heaven. It is of great significance that eventually Jacob declared, "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Gen. 28:17). As we consider the details in Genesis 28, we can realize that here God reveals for the first time that He intends to build Himself with man into a corporate dwelling place by bringing heaven to earth and joining earth to heaven. God's desire, therefore, is to have a dwelling place, a building, a Bethel, on earth.

This desire is given fuller expression in Exodus. If we get into the depths of the revelation in Exodus, we will see that God's building is the desire of God's heart (25:8; Eph. 1:5, 9) and the goal of God's salvation (Exo. 40:2-3; cf. 1:11). The central thought of Exodus is that Christ is the redemption, salvation, and supply of God's people and the



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The desire of
God's heart
can be satisfied
only by a house
built in Christ
with the believers
in Christ on earth
in this age and
consummating
in the New
Jerusalem on the
new earth in
and for eternity.



means for them to worship and serve God so that in Him they may be built up with God as a mutual dwelling place.

The tabernacle in Exodus was actually a partial realization of the dream at Bethel; that is, the tabernacle was Bethel, the house of God, God's dwelling place on earth. With the tabernacle we also have the mingling of divinity with humanity as signified by acacia wood (humanity) overlaid with gold (divinity). With the tabernacle we also have the offerings signifying Christ as the Lamb of God for our redemption so that we may be qualified to enter into and become part of God's building—Christ as the way into the Father's house (John 14:6, 2).

The temple built in the good land of Canaan was the continuation of the tabernacle; the tabernacle, we may say, became the temple, the house of God (1 Kings 6:1). As God's house, the temple was the enlargement of the tabernacle (Exo. 26:15-16, 18; 1 Kings 6:2, 20). The temple was founded upon a foundation of stone (v. 37) and was built of stone (transformed humanity), cedar (humanity in resurrection), and fir (humanity through death) overlaid with gold (divinity). Once again we have, in type, the mingling of divinity with humanity for God's building.

Bethel, the tabernacle, and the temple are all types which have their fulfillment in Christ as revealed in the Gospel of John. John 1:51 is the fulfillment of Bethel; John 1:14 is the fulfillment of the tabernacle; and John 2:19-22 is the fulfillment of the temple. Christ, the Son of Man, is the ladder joining earth to heaven and bringing heaven down to earth for the building of God's abode. Christ, the Word becoming flesh, is the reality of the tabernacle as God's building. The principle is the same with the temple. In 1:14 and 2:19-22 Christ Himself, the mingling of God and man in one person, was God's building. God's desire, however, is to enlarge this building into a corporate building. For this, Christ, the real tabernacle and the real temple, had to fall into the ground and die as a grain of wheat (12:24) so that, in resurrection, the one grain would be reproduced and multiplied into many grains. These many grains are the many brothers of Christ in chapter twenty and the many abodes in chapter fourteen. The thought here is that Christ, the individual building, passes through death and enters into resurrection in order to produce, even to become, a corporate building. In this way the Father's house in John 2 becomes the Father's house in John 14.

If we read John 14 in light of the divine revelation in the Scriptures concerning God's dwelling place, we will see that the Father's house is His corporate dwelling place, the church, the Body of Christ, the house of the living God. This house, this dwelling place of God and man in Christ, is the fulfillment not only of Jacob's dream but also of the desire of the Father's heart. The desire of God's heart cannot be fulfilled by a house in heaven; God's deep longing can be satisfied only by a house—the Father's house—built in Christ with the believers in Christ on earth in this age and consummating in the New Jerusalem on the new earth in and for eternity. The Gospel of John, as a book of life and building, is focused on God's desire to have a dwelling place, a spiritual house, a mutual abode, with His redeemed people. It is a blessing to see this.

The Fulfillment of the Tabernacle and the Offerings

The Gospel of John is a book not only of truth but also of reality (8:32; 18:37; 1:14, 17; 14:6), in particular of Christ as the reality of the tabernacle and the offerings. For Christ to be the reality of the tabernacle and the offerings means that He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament types of the tabernacle and the offerings. That Christ is such a fulfillment and reality is one of the central revelations in the Gospel of John, a subject worthy of consideration in light of the Scriptures as a whole.

According to the record in the holy Word, the reality of the universe is Christ as the

tabernacle and the offerings (1:14, 29; 14:6, 20, 23) As the God-man, Christ is the tabernacle to be the dwelling place for God and man and the offerings for man to enter into God. Christ, who is the reality of the tabernacle and the offerings, is the reality and content of the universe (vv. 14, 17). God in Christ has passed through a process to become the tabernacle, a mutual abode, for God and man (v. 14). Through Christ as the offerings, we can dwell in God, and God can dwell in us (15:4); this is the reality of the universe and the content of the Bible.

In the Gospel of John, an abstract of the entire Bible, we have the fulfillment of the tabernacle and the offerings (1:14, 29). The reality of the universe—Christ as the tabernacle and the offerings—is the content of the Bible, and the whole Bible is condensed into one book, the Gospel of John (vv. 17, 29). Christ as the tabernacle brings God to man, and Christ as the offerings brings man to God so that man may be united, mingled, and incorporated with God. Christ is the tabernacle, the dwelling place, for us to approach God, contact God, enter into God, and experience God. Christ is the offerings for us to enter into God and enjoy God (14:6). It is a wonderful revelation that Christ is the reality of the tabernacle and the offerings and that now we can enter into Him, enjoy Him, and be mingled with Him. The center and reality of the Gospel of John is the mutual abode for God and His redeemed people; this mutual abode is the enlarged, universal, divine-human incorporation (vv. 20, 23; 15:4).

The tabernacle with its furnishings is a type of Christ. Regarding the tabernacle, John 1:14 says, “The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us.” For Christ, the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead, to be the tabernacle indicates that, in Christ, God is enterable and that He desires that, through Christ, we enter into Him and dwell in Him, even as He dwells in us (15:4). As the reality of the tabernacle in the Old Testament, Christ is also the reality of the table of the bread of the Presence, which signifies Christ as our life supply; of the lampstand, which indicates that Christ is the shining light in God’s dwelling place; of the incense altar, which signifies Christ as the Intercessor to maintain the relationship between God and His people; and of the ark, which typifies Christ, the God-man with divinity and humanity, as the embodiment and expression of all that God is and, hence, the true testimony of God. If we read the Gospel of John with spiritual insight and understanding, we will see Christ not only as the reality of the tabernacle but also as the reality of the table of the bread of the Presence, the lampstand, the incense altar, and the ark. What was a type in the Old Testament, especially in Exodus, is a reality in the Gospel of John.

Just as the tabernacle is a type of Christ, the offerings also are types of Christ, and the will of God is to have Christ as the replacement for all the offerings in the Old Testament so that we may enjoy Him as everything for the building up of the Body of Christ (Heb. 10:5-10; Rom. 12:2, 4-5). The sin offering typifies Christ as the One who was made sin for us and who died on the cross to deal with the sinful nature of our fallen being (Lev. 4:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 8:3; John 1:29; 3:14). The trespass offering typifies Christ as the One who bore our sins in His own body and was judged by God on the cross to deal with our sinful deeds that we might be forgiven of our sinful conduct (Lev. 5:6; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18; Isa. 53:5-6, 10-11; John 4:15-18). The burnt offering, which was wholly for God’s satisfaction, typifies Christ as God’s pleasure and satisfaction, the One whose living on earth was absolutely for God (Lev. 1:3; Num. 28:3-4; John 7:16-18). The meal offering typifies Christ in His perfect humanity as food for God and for those who have fellowship with God and serve Him (Lev. 2:1, 4; John 7:46; 18:38; 19:4, 6). The peace offering typifies Christ as the Peacemaker, the One who became the peace and the fellowship between us and God by dying for us, enabling us to enjoy Christ with God and to have fellowship with God in Christ for our mutual satisfaction with God (Lev. 3:1; Eph. 2:14-15; John 12:1-3; 20:21). The wave offering typifies Christ as the resurrected One in love (Lev. 7:30; 10:15). The heave offering typifies the powerful Christ in ascension and exaltation (7:32; Exo. 29:27; Eph. 1:21).



Christ as the tabernacle brings God to man, and Christ as the offerings brings man to God so that man may be united, mingled, and incorporated with God.





The drink offering typifies Christ as the One poured out as wine before God for His satisfaction and also as the One who saturates us with Himself as heavenly wine to be poured out for God's enjoyment and satisfaction (Exo. 29:40; Num. 28:7-10; Isa. 53:12; Phil. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:6; Judg. 9:13).

We need to experience Christ and to be constituted with Christ as the reality of the offerings (John 1:29; 16:13; 1 John 5:6). The offerings, as grace to us, solve our problems and bridge the gap between us and God (John 1:29, 14, 16-17; 14:6). The offerings are good for us to enjoy God, to be mingled with God, and to have God assimilated into our being to become our constituent (Gal. 4:19; Eph. 3:17; Col. 3:10-11). The offerings are the way for us to enter into God and become part of the divine-human incorporation (John 14:6, 20). When we experience Christ as the reality of the offerings, He becomes our genuineness and sincerity so that we may worship the Father in spirit and in truthfulness (4:23-24). The offerings are not only sacrifices to solve our problems but also presents to God for His enjoyment (Num. 28:2). Through Christ as the offerings, we and God, God and we, have a mutual enjoyment, the fellowship of co-enjoyment (Deut. 12:7).

It is crucial for us to realize that God's intention in His economy is that Christ be everything; for God wants nothing except Christ, and in His sight nothing counts except Christ.

We are constituted with Christ as the reality of the offerings by experiencing Christ as the Spirit of reality, who guides us into all the reality (John 1:14, 17b; 14:16-18; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 5:6), especially of Christ as the fulfillment and the replacement of all the offerings (Heb. 10:5-10). The Spirit of reality, the life-giving Spirit, is the reality of all that Christ is (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 5:6; 1 Cor. 15:45). Since the Spirit of reality is actually Christ Himself, the Spirit of reality is the Spirit of Christ (John 14:6; Rom. 8:9). Through the Spirit of reality as the reality of Christ, we can experience Christ and be constituted with Christ as the reality of the fulfillment of the offerings for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose to produce, in Christ, a mutual dwelling place for the Triune God and His redeemed tripartite people.

The All-inclusive Christ

Christ's being the reality of the tabernacle and the offerings points to another marvelous revelation in the Gospel of John that the Christ revealed in this Gospel is the all-inclusive Christ. To say that Christ is all-inclusive, not only the Son of God and the Savior, is to say that He is the reality of God, of man, and of every positive thing in the universe. To see this is to understand that the all-inclusive Christ is the center and circumference, the centrality and universality, of God's purpose and economy (Col. 1:15-18). To be sure, it is the will of God that we know, experience, enjoy, and express this all-inclusive Christ (v. 9).

It is crucial for us to see a vision concerning the all-inclusive Christ and to realize that God's intention in His economy is that Christ be everything; for God wants nothing except Christ, and in His sight nothing counts except Christ (Matt. 17:5). As an aid to such a vision and realization, it should be helpful to consider, if only briefly, the exceedingly rich and profound revelation of the person and work of Christ from eternity past, on the bridge of time, and into eternity future.

From eternity to eternity, Christ is Jehovah, the Triune God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exo. 3:2-6, 14; John 8:58; Isa. 9:6; John 14:9-11; 1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17). In the divine economy He is the portion of the saints, the One who is (Col. 1:12; John 8:58; 14:6; 6:35; 8:12; 10:9; Heb. 11:6). In creation He is the Word through whom all things came into being, and all things were created in Him, through Him, and unto Him (John 1:1-3; Heb. 11:3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2-3). In His incarnation He brought the infinite God into the finite man to unite and mingle the Triune God with the tripartite man. Thus, He is God manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16), Jesus, Emmanuel (Matt. 1:21, 23), the second man, and the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45, 47).



In His human living He expressed in His humanity the bountiful God in His rich attributes through His aromatic virtues (Matt. 13:54-56; Luke 7:49; 8:25). He took the form of a slave, serving God and men (Phil. 2:7; Mark 10:45), and He was the faithful Witness of God (Rev. 1:5; 3:14).

In His all-inclusive death He died with a sevenfold status: as the Lamb of God (John 1:29), as a man in the flesh (Rom. 8:3); as the bronze serpent (John 3:14), as the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45), as the Firstborn of all creation (Col. 1:15), as the Peacemaker (Eph. 2:14-15), and as the grain of wheat (John 12:24).

In His all-conquering resurrection He became the first in resurrection as the Head of the Body (1 Cor. 15:20; Col. 1:18). Also, He was designated in His humanity to be the firstborn Son of God, the Head of the Body (Rom. 1:3-4; 8:29). In His resurrection He imparted the divine life into the believers for their regeneration to make them the members of His Body (John 12:24; 1 Pet. 1:3; cf. Gen. 2:22), and He became the life-giving Spirit to be the content and reality of the Body (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17; Col. 3:10-11).

In His all-transcending ascension God exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name (Acts 2:33; Eph. 1:20-21; Phil. 2:9). He transcended Hades, the earth, the air, and all the heavens (Eph. 1:20-21; 4:8-10; Heb. 4:14; 7:26; cf. Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6). He is now being transmitted as resurrecting power, ascending power, subjecting power, and heading-up power into the church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (Eph. 1:19-23). He is the Lord and the Christ (Acts 2:36), the Leader (of all the kings) and Savior (5:31), the High Priest (Heb. 4:14; 7:26; 9:11), the Mediator and surety of the new covenant (9:15; 7:22), the Minister in the heavenly Holy of Holies (8:2), the Paraclete (Advocate) of the New Testament believers (1 John 2:1; John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7), and the New Testament believers' Intercessor at the right hand of God and within them as well (Rom. 8:34, 26).

In His organic salvation Christ as the life-giving Spirit is everything to the believers (1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 4:7; Eph. 3:8). He is our life (John 14:6; Col. 3:4; Rom. 8:2, 10, 6, 11), our necessities, and our enjoyment (John 8:12; 6:51, 57; 1 Cor. 10:3-4; John 20:22; Gal. 3:27; John 15:7; Col. 2:16-17; Matt. 11:28). This wonderful Christ is God's power and God's wisdom to us (1 Cor. 1:24, 30), and in the intensified work of His organic salvation, He is the sevenfold intensified Spirit to produce the overcomers and consummate the New Jerusalem (Rev. 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6; cf. 1:10; 2:7).

In His coming back Christ will be the Son of Man (Matt. 26:64; Rev. 14:14). In addition, He will be the morning star to the overcomers (22:16), the Bridegroom to the church (Matt. 25:1; 9:15; John 3:29), the Savior to Israel (Rom. 11:26; Zech. 12:10), and a Judge to the Gentiles (Acts 17:31; Matt. 25:31-46). Furthermore, He will be another Angel to take possession of the earth (Rev. 10:1-7). Then in His kingdom He will be the Son of Man and the King (Matt. 13:41; Rev. 20:4, 6; 2:26-27).

Consummately, in the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth, Christ will be everything to His chosen, regenerated, transformed, and glorified tripartite people: He will be the Lamb (22:1), the Husband (19:7; 21:2, 9), the temple (v. 22), the lamp (v. 23), the spring of the water of life (v. 6), the tree of life (22:2, 14, 19), the Son of Man (John 1:51), and the Shepherd (Rev. 7:17).

In the Bible as a whole, since Christ is unveiled as such an all-inclusive One, it should not be surprising that in the Gospel of John in particular He is revealed and presented as the all-inclusive Christ. In John's Gospel Christ is the Word who was with God and who is God (1:1), the One through whom all things came into being (v. 3), the



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true light (v. 9), the tabernacle (v. 14), the only begotten Son of God (v. 18), the Lamb of God (vv. 29, 36), the Son of Man as the heavenly ladder (v. 51), the temple (2:19), the bronze serpent (3:14), the Bridegroom (v. 29), the well (4:11-14), the Christ (v. 29), the Savior of the world (v. 42), the bread of life as the bread of God (6:48, 33), the riven rock (7:37), the light of life (8:12), the door and the pasture (10:9), the Shepherd (v. 11), the resurrection and the life (11:25), the grain of wheat (12:24), the way and the reality (14:6), the Comforter (v. 16), the true vine (15:1), the breath of life (20:22), and, above all else, the I Am (8:24, 28, 58). This is the Christ concerning whom we need to have the most excellent knowledge (Phil. 3:8) that we may appreciate Him, love Him, experience Him, enjoy Him, express Him, and be one with Him for the glory of the Father.

All that Christ is, and all that He is to us, He is as life (John 1:4). The all-inclusive Christ as life is signified by a very particular type of Christ—the pomegranate mentioned as an item of the produce of the good land (Deut. 8:8). The good land, the land of Canaan, is a type of the all-inclusive Christ, and the produce of the land typifies various aspects of Christ for our enjoyment, among which is the pomegranate. In the Bible pomegranates signify the fullness of life, the abundance and beauty of life, and the expression of the riches of life (Exo. 28:33-34; 1 Kings 7:18-20; S. S. 4:3, 13). A ripe pomegranate with its seeds gives the impression of the fullness, abundance, and beauty of life. Because this is the Christ we behold in the Gospel of John—a Christ in whom is life, who is Himself life, and who came that we may have life—we may say that the all-inclusive Christ in this Gospel is a pomegranate full of life. “In this life are all His riches, / All His nature, love and light” (*Hymns*, #602).

Christ versus Religion

Regrettably, religion stands in opposition to the all-inclusive Christ, and for this reason the Gospel of John, like the Gospel of Matthew, shows us that Christ is versus religion. Seeing the line of Christ versus religion in Matthew will help us to detect the same line in John.

The Gospel of Matthew reveals that Christ is versus religion and that the things concerning Christ are outside the sphere of religion. To have a religion is to worship God, to serve God, and to do certain things to please God, yet without Christ. Thus, to be religious means to do something for God without Christ and without the Spirit (9:14-17). We need to be impressed with the fact that Christ did not come to establish an earthly religion of rituals and dead religious practices but a heavenly kingdom of life with Himself, the all-inclusive One, as the full enjoyment of His followers that they might become the constituents of His kingdom (21:42-46). A survey on the theme of Christ versus religion in Matthew substantiates this assertion.

As the Physician and the Bridegroom, Christ is versus religion (9:12, 15). In dealing with the self-righteous and dissenting Pharisees, who were of the old religion, the Lord Jesus indicated that He was a Physician who had come to heal the sick (vv. 9-13). In dealing with the fasting and dissenting disciples of John, who were of the new religion, He revealed Himself as the Bridegroom who had come to take the bride (vv. 14-15).

Old wineskins signify religious forms, rituals, and practices; all religions are old wineskins (v. 17). To put new wine into old wineskins is to put Christ as the exciting life into any kind of religion. We need to experience and enjoy Christ as the Forgiver, the Physician, the Bridegroom, the new garment, and the new wine so that we may be the fresh wineskin, the corporate Christ, to contain Him (vv. 1-17).

In 10:16-33 the Lord Jesus exposed the Sanhedrin and the synagogues as being opposed to God's economy. He indicated that there were wolves in the synagogues,

and He spoke of the synagogue of Satan; this proves that the synagogue had become satanic (v. 16; Rev. 2:9; 3:9). The religious world and the political world are the same in opposing the kingdom of the heavens, for both are under the usurping hand of the enemy; nevertheless, the heavenly King intends to establish His kingdom on earth within the territory of religion and politics.

After the Lord called people to rest from striving to keep the law and to follow religious regulations, He deliberately broke the regulation concerning the Sabbath (Matt. 11:28—12:8) by bringing His hungry disciples into the grainfields so that they could be satisfied and enter into rest. As the real David, the greater temple, and the Lord of the Sabbath, He could do whatever He liked on the Sabbath, and whatever He did was justified by Himself (vv. 3-8). On the Sabbath the Lord Jesus restored a man's withered hand, likening this man to a sheep (vv. 9-14) and indicating that He cared not for religious regulations but for the healing of His members and for the rescue of His fallen sheep. Christ cares for Himself as the Head of the Body and for the members of His Body.

In 15:1-20 we see that the Lord Jesus does not care for religious tradition but cares for inward reality. The heavenly ruling of the kingdom requires inward reality, not mere outward practice, in that it deals with the condition of the heart (vv. 11-20). Since the Lord cares for inward reality, not outward practice, we also should care for inward reality, that is, for the inward experience of Christ.

In 16:6-12 the Lord Jesus warned His disciples concerning religious leaven. The teaching of both the Pharisees and the Sadducees was likened to leaven, which was not to be seen among God's people (vv. 6, 12; Exo. 13:7). As we are enjoying Christ as the bread of heaven sent by God, we must beware of religious leaven, which comes from Satan.

The revelation concerning Christ with His church was given outside of religion, in a place with a clear atmosphere (Matt. 16:13-19). If we are under the influence of religious leaven, we cannot be clear regarding Christ and the church; this revelation is hidden from religious people. The living God is in contrast to dead religion; Christ is the embodiment of the living God, having nothing to do with dead religion (v. 16).

The Lord's rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees in 23:1-36 affords an accurate picture of today's religion; the kingdom life and the kingdom people are the opposite of what is exposed here. The Lord Jesus stayed away from Jerusalem to lodge in Bethany (21:12-17). In Jerusalem He was rejected by the religious leaders, but in Bethany He was welcomed by His lovers. Today's religion is a Jerusalem to the Lord Jesus, not His lodging place; the lovers of Christ are in Bethany, not in Jerusalem. The religionists hated the Lord Jesus and wanted to kill Him, but His lovers took the opportunity to express their love for Him (26:1-13).

The situation regarding Christ versus religion and religion being against Christ is virtually the same in John as it is in Matthew. However, whereas in Matthew religion opposes Christ as the King, in John religion opposes Christ as life. This is portrayed with striking clarity in chapters five, six, nine, ten, and fifteen.

In chapter five the religionists opposed the Lord Jesus for two reasons—He healed a person on the Sabbath, and He indicated that He was equal with God. To a man who had suffered a debilitating illness of thirty-eight years, the Lord Jesus said, "Rise, take up your mat and walk. And immediately the man became well, and he took up his mat and walked" (vv. 8-9). The day on which this occurred was the Sabbath, and for this reason the religionists "said to the one who had been healed, It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your mat" (v. 10). Christ's enlivening of the sick man violated the religious regulations regarding keeping the Sabbath, and this prompted those who cared more for the ritual of Sabbath keeping than for the healing of a sick



The Lord Jesus does not care for religious tradition but for inward reality. Since the Lord cares for inward reality, not outward practice, we also should care for the inward experience of Christ.





According to the revelation in chapter six, the Lord Jesus had no desire to fulfill the people's desire for a prophet or king but to offer Himself to them as food to satisfy their spiritual hunger.



man to begin their opposition. Upon hearing that it was Jesus who had healed, enlivened, this suffering one on the Sabbath, the religionists “persecuted Jesus and sought to kill Him, because He did these things on the Sabbath” (v. 16).

Verse 17 goes on to say, “But Jesus answered them, My Father is working until now, and I also am working.” Although “God’s work in creation was finished (Gen. 2:1-3),...the Father and the Son were still working for redemption and building” (Recovery Version, John 5:17, note 1). The Son, who was one with the Father, who sought the Father’s will, and who did the Father’s will, knew that, for the carrying out of His economy, the Father was still working; therefore, the Son also was working. The Lord’s testimony concerning the Father’s working and the Son’s working, indicating His equality with the Father in the Godhead and His oneness with the Father in the divine operation, aroused further hostility from the religionists, who “sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath but also called God His own Father, making Himself equal with God” (v. 18). “Because of their religious concept, they thought that to kill those who would not keep their religious ritual was to offer service to God (16:2). This is Satan’s poisoning of people with religion, causing them to murder, just as he poisons people with sin” (Recovery Version, 5:18, note 1).

The religious opposition in chapter six is more subtle. Those who saw “the sign which He did” in miraculously feeding thousands of people, said, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world” (v. 14). Their intention was “to come and take Him by force to make Him King” (v. 15). As we will see, according to the revelation in this chapter, the Lord Jesus had no desire to fulfill the people’s desire for a prophet or king but to offer Himself to them as food to satisfy their spiritual hunger. This intention is embodied in the revelation in verses 32 through 59, where the Lord presents Himself as “the true bread out of heaven” (v. 32)—the bread of life (vv. 35, 48), the living bread (v. 51), and the bread of God (v. 33). In verse 51 the bread becomes the flesh: “The bread which I will give is My flesh, given for the life of the world.” In order to receive the Lord’s feeding, signified by *the bread*, we must receive the benefit of the Lord’s redeeming, signified by *My flesh*.

The Lord continued by uttering even more startling words, saying that unless we eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, we do not have life in ourselves (v. 53); that the one who eats His flesh and drinks His blood has eternal life (v. 54); that His flesh is true food and His blood is true drink (v. 55); that those who eat His flesh and drink His blood abide in Him and have Him abiding in them (v. 56); that the one who eats Him will live because of Him (v. 57). “He said these things in a synagogue as He taught in Capernaum” (v. 59), and it was too much for the religionists to take. In fact, many of the Lord’s disciples were stumbled at His word (v. 60) and thus “went back to what they left behind and no longer walked with Him” (v. 66). Only a remnant remained with Him, consisting of those who, represented by Peter, could say, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life” (v. 68). The crowd craved a prophet or a king, and those in the synagogue preferred teachings that suited their traditional concepts, but, by God’s sovereign mercy, a few stayed with Him, for they realized that by receiving His words of eternal life, they could feed on Him as the bread of life.

Chapters nine and ten form a unit, with chapter nine describing the healing on the Sabbath of a man born blind and the religious persecution it aroused and chapter ten providing the interpretation of the spiritual significance of the events in chapter nine. The giving of sight to the blind man took place on the Sabbath (v. 14). “It seems that the Lord again purposely did a sign on the Sabbath to expose the vanity of religious ritual. In any case, this strengthened religion’s opposition, for He had already done a sign on the Sabbath (5:10, 16)” (Recovery Version, 9:14, note 1). The one who had received his sight was brought to the Pharisees, who questioned him repeatedly about his experience (vv. 13-34). The result of their interrogation and the ensuing controversy was

that “they cast him out” (v. 34), that is, they excommunicated him from the synagogue. The one who was cast out was a man who had been blind but could now see; the ones who cast him out could see but actually were blind. This is clearly revealed in the Lord’s judgment on the blind religionists: “For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind” (v. 39). When the Pharisees asked Him, “We are not blind also, are we?”, the Lord answered, “If you were blind, you would not have sin; but now that you say, We see; your sin remains” (vv. 40-41).

The sheepfold in 10:1 corresponds to the synagogue in 9:22. Both signify Judaism as a religion. In chapter ten the man born blind is identified as one of the Lord’s sheep, whom He called by name and led forth out of the fold, out of religion, to the pasture, which signifies Christ Himself as the feeding place for the sheep (v. 9). Now in the pasture, under the care of the Lord Jesus as the good Shepherd, who laid down His life for the sheep, there is one flock with one Shepherd (v. 16). The fold (the synagogue) stands in opposition to the flock (the church of God). Eventually, through its continued opposition to Christ and to His representatives, the synagogue became, in the Lord’s own words, “a synagogue of Satan” (Rev. 2:9).

By the Lord’s mercy, some of us, who formerly were the blind ones in the “synagogue,” can testify, “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see” (John 9:25). As a result of seeing the wonderful all-inclusive Christ as the unique Head of the Body and of discerning the difference between religion and the divine economy, we were led out of the fold and into the pasture to enjoy Christ, the one Shepherd, with the one flock.

In chapter fifteen Christ, the true vine, is opposed, even hated, by the religious world. “I am the true vine,” the Lord Jesus declared in verse 1, “and My Father is the husbandman.” “This true vine (the Son) with its branches (the believers in the Son) is the organism of the Triune God in God’s economy. This organism grows with His riches and expresses His divine life” (Recovery Version, 15:1, note 1). To live as a branch abiding in Christ as the true vine is to live in the flow of the divine life, to abide in Christ’s love, to have His joy in us and to have our joy made full, and to bear fruit through the outflow of the divine life for the glorification of the Father in the Son. Such is the corporate life of the branches (the believers abiding in Christ) in the true vine as the organism of the Divine Trinity in the divine economy. It is a dreadful fact, however, that the religious world hates this vine and persecutes it (15:18—16:4). Proof that the world here is the religious world is found in 15:25, which quotes a statement that is “written in their law”: “They hated Me without cause.” The religious world hates the believers as the branches in the vine (vv. 18-19), and it hates the Son, the true vine, and the Father, who is the Husbandman nourishing, nurturing, and cultivating the vine for His own glorification. “He who hates Me hates My Father also....Now they have both seen and hated both and Me and My Father” (vv. 23-24). Eventually, this religious hatred will result in murder: “An hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God” (16:2). This exposes the fact that, especially in the Gospel of John, religion is the enemy of Christ as life. The principle is the same today: religion opposes Christ and hates the true vine.

The Lord’s God-man Living

The Lord Jesus Christ is the God-man—the complete God and the perfect man—and His living on earth was the living of a God-man. For the Lord Jesus to live the life of a God-man means that, although He had a perfect and sinless human life, He did not live by His human life but, on the contrary, rejected Himself, denied His natural human life, and lived the divine life in His human life for the expression of divinity in humanity. This is the clear and consistent picture of the Lord’s God-man living portrayed throughout the Gospel of John.



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Instead of pursuing His own agenda and boasting of His work—practices common among Christian workers today—the Lord’s intention in His daily living was to finish the work of the One who sent Him.



In 4:32 the Lord told His disciples, who were urging Him to eat, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” Because, as usual, they could not understand His words, He explained, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work” (v. 34). He did not seek or do His own will; rather, denying His own will and human preferences and standing on the position of a sent one, an apostle, He did the will of the One who sent Him. To do the Father’s will was food to Him; His inner being was supplied and nourished with a food the natural or religious person knows nothing about. Moreover, His food was to finish the Father’s work, not His own work. This qualified Him to say to the Father in the prayer recorded in chapter seventeen, “I have glorified You on earth, finishing the work which You have given Me to do” (v. 4). Instead of pursuing His own agenda and boasting of His personal work—practices common among Christian workers today—the Lord’s intention in His daily living was to finish the work of the One who sent Him. This is how He lived, and this is what He did.

“The Son can do nothing from Himself except what He sees the Father doing, for whatever that One does, these things the Son also does in like manner” (5:19). Our Lord did not act from Himself; He did not do anything according to Himself or initiate anything by Himself. Instead, He denied Himself utterly, and taking the Father as the unique source, He did whatever, in His fellowship with the Father, He saw the Father doing. As He testified in verse 17, “My Father is working until now, and I also am working.” His working was an “also” working, a labor in which He did everything by the Father as the source, never acting independently or doing things presumptuously. For this reason, His living was “in like manner,” for it was altogether in harmony with whatever the Father was doing.

We have a similar word in verse 30: “I can do nothing from Myself; as I hear, I judge, and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will but the will of Him who sent Me.” This is another indication that Christ always rejected Himself and died to Himself. He, and only He, could say, “I do not seek My own will.” This was the reason He could assure His disciples that “the ruler of the world,” who was coming, had nothing, no ground, in Him (14:30). Because the Lord Jesus did nothing from Himself but always denied Himself, He was, and is, the only person in whom Satan, the ruler of the world, has no ground.

“I have come in the name of My Father” (5:43). Those who come in their own name live and act according to their own person. The Lord, by contrast, did not come in His own name; that is, He did not live according to His own person but according to the person of the Father who was in Him. Here we see that the Son, by coming not in His own name but in the name of His Father, denied His human person and took the Father as His person. “The Son being in the name of the Father is equivalent to the Son being the Father; hence, He is called the Father (Isa. 9:6). This proves that the Son and the Father are one” (Recovery Version, John 5:43, note 1).

“I have come down from heaven not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me” (6:38). The Lord’s motive and intention were always pure, since He was never motivated by self-interest or driven by His own “will to power” to achieve something for His own interests.

In verse 57, after saying that the living Father had sent Him, the Lord Jesus went on to say, “I live because of the Father.” His doing the Father’s will and finishing the Father’s work issued from His living because of the Father. The Father was the source not only of His work but also of His living. This indicates that the Lord Jesus, in His humanity, lived according to the principle of the tree of life—dependence. By denying Himself and taking the Father, not the self, as His unique source, He lived a life of absolute dependence on the Father in every way, living because of the Father.

When the Lord's brothers, motivated by their unbelief, were tempting Him to make Himself known openly, He said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready" (7:6). Timing is important to God, and the Lord Jesus lived according to this precept, doing nothing according to the natural sense of correct timing. He did the Father's will in the Father's way and in the Father's time.

At this juncture we need to see that the Lord Jesus did not speak from Himself; therefore, His teaching did not proceed from Himself as the source. "I have not spoken from Myself; but the Father who sent Me, He Himself has given Me commandment, what to say and what to speak....The things therefore that I speak, even as the Father has said to Me, so I speak" (12:49-50). He reiterated this in 14:24: "The word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me." To those who marveled at His teaching, He said, "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me" (7:16). His teaching was of God as the source, and He did not speak from Himself (v. 17). His word in verse 18 is marvelous: "He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of Him who sent Him, this One is true, and unrighteousness is not in Him." Today's religious world is filled with those who speak out from themselves and for their own glory, seeking glory for themselves by exhibiting themselves in their speaking. Such is the speaking of those who seek their own glory, not the glory that is from the only God (5:44). The Lord's speaking was radically different; that is, it was from a different source. Because He sought the glory of the Father who sent Him, He did not speak from Himself; hence, He did not seek His own glory. As the only One who speaks in this way, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

"When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am, and that I do nothing from Myself, but as My Father has taught Me, I speak these things" (8:28). Jesus, the Son of God, is Jehovah God incarnated to be our Savior. Nevertheless, as the God-man He did nothing from Himself as the source; rather, He was taught by the Father who dwells in Him concerning what He should speak. Once again we see that the Lord Jesus rejected Himself and lived because of the Father, speaking the words of the Father, not His own words.

In everything that He said and did, the Lord Jesus was one with the Father. Therefore, He could proclaim, "I and the Father are one" (10:30). The oneness between the Father and the Son is the oneness of coinherence, of mutual indwelling, of the Father dwelling in the Son and of the Son dwelling in the Father. In verse 38 the Lord speaks explicitly concerning this oneness: "Even if you do not believe Me, believe the works so that you may come to know and continue to know that the Father is in Me and I am in the Father." The revelation of the coinhering oneness between the Father and the Son is developed further in 14:10-11: "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me." We have pointed out that the Lord Jesus did not speak from Himself but spoke according to the Father's commandment. Now we can see from these verses that the Lord's speaking was an expression of His life of coinherence with the Father; He was in the Father and the Father was in Him, and He spoke according to the Father's speaking within Him. This is the speaking in the oneness of the divine coinherence.

The Lord referred to this oneness when He prayed that we, the believers, would be one even as the Father and the Son are one: "That they may be one even as We are" (17:11). The implication of this prayer is that the genuine oneness of the believers is the enlargement and expansion of the coinhering oneness of the Father and the Son. The Lord Jesus lived in this coinhering oneness, and He lived this oneness. This is the God-man living.



The implication of the Lord's prayer in chapter seventeen is that the genuine oneness of the believers is the enlargement and expansion of the coinhering oneness of the Father and the Son.





The Two Aspects of Christ's Death

The Lord's death has two main aspects—the redeeming aspect and the life-releasing aspect. In the redeeming aspect of His death, the Lord Jesus died as the Lamb of God and as a serpent in form to fulfill the type of the bronze serpent; in the life-releasing aspect, He died as a grain of wheat.

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (1:29). As the Lamb of God Christ died to take away sin from the human race, as indicated by *of the world*. Although Satan had injected his poisonous, sinful nature into humanity, the Lamb of God died to deal with the totality of sin and thus to take away sin from humankind. This means that Christ died as the Lamb of God to deal with both sin and sins. According to 1 Corinthians 15:3, 1 Peter 2:24, and Hebrews 9:28 Christ died for our sins. According to Romans 8:3, 2 Corinthians 5:21, and Hebrews 9:26 Christ's redemptive death also dealt with sin, that is, with the element of sin which, as fallen human beings, has been constituted into us, causing us to become a flesh of sin.

In the Gospel of John, a book that reveals the fulfillment of the tabernacle and the offerings, the Lamb of God bears a particular significance:

In the Gospel of John the Lamb of God signifies the Word in the flesh (John 1:1, 14) as the fulfillment of all the Old Testament offerings to accomplish God's full redemption. Christ is the totality of all the offerings....With Christ as all the offerings we have God's full redemption. Through Christ as the Lamb of God fulfilling all the offerings we may enter into God and participate in the divine life and nature (John 3:14-15; 2 Pet. 1:4). Because of Christ as the Lamb of God, we are well able, even enabled, to enter into God. We may boldly come into God, knowing that He does not have the right to reject us, because we come through His Lamb. We have full redemption in Christ, and therefore we are enabled to enter into God to enjoy all that He is. (Lee, *Conclusion* 302)

In the redeeming aspect of His death, the Lord Jesus died as the Lamb of God and as a serpent in form to fulfill the type of the bronze serpent; in the life-releasing aspect, He died as a grain of wheat.

Whereas John 1:29 speaks of the Lamb, 3:14 speaks of the serpent: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” This refers to an incident, recorded in Numbers 21, that was sovereignly prepared by God to reveal a particular type of Christ and to show us that we, who in our fallen condition are serpentine beings, need to appreciate Christ as the One who died in the form, the likeness, of the serpent and also in the likeness of the flesh of sin. A note in the Recovery Version of the New Testament explains this difficult matter in a careful and accurate way:

In Gen. 3 Satan, the serpent, injected his nature into man's flesh. When the children of Israel sinned against God, they were bitten by serpents (Num. 21:4-9). God told Moses to lift up a bronze serpent on their behalf for God's judgment, that by looking upon that bronze serpent all might live. That was a type. Here, in this verse, the Lord Jesus applied that type to Himself, indicating that when He was in the flesh, He was in “the likeness of the flesh of sin” (Rom. 8:3), which likeness is equal to the form of the bronze serpent. The bronze serpent had the form of the serpent but was without the serpent's poison. Christ was made in “the likeness of the flesh of sin,” but He did not participate in any way in the sin of the flesh (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15). When He was lifted up in the flesh on the cross, by His death Satan, the old serpent, was dealt with (12:31-33; 2:14). This means that the serpentine nature within fallen man has been dealt with. (John 3:14, note 1)

It is a fact that in His death for our redemption Christ was a serpent in form. As a result, through the crucifixion of Christ, God solved not only the problem of sin but also the problem of sin in the flesh. As Romans 8:3 reveals, “God, sending His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” First John 3:8 says, “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might



destroy the works of the devil.” This destruction took place by means of Christ’s death on the cross, through which He condemned sin, which had been initiated by Satan, and destroyed the sinful nature of the devil.

Although all genuine Christians believe that Christ died on the cross for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Pet. 2:24), having offered one sacrifice for sins (Heb. 10:12), not many know the meaning of the crucifixion of Christ as it relates to sin and Satan. The cross dealt not only with our sins, our many transgressions and acts of disobedience, but also with sin, with the principle and power of the sin that dwells in our flesh. In dealing with sin, Christ not only bore our sins in His body but also was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). Because God sent Christ in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin (Rom. 8:3), when He was on the cross, He was made sin for us. In the sight of God, He was condemned and crucified as sin, and because He was our Substitute, God regarded Him as if He was sin itself. This means that when Christ died on the cross, He was crucified not only as our Redeemer but also as the sin offering.

Through incarnation God sent His Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin. Then through the death of Christ on the cross, God condemned sin in the flesh. Therefore, through the redeeming death of Christ, we have not only the forgiveness of sins but also the deliverance from the power of indwelling sin.

Romans 8:3 is confirmed and illustrated by John 3:14. As noted above, the bronze serpent lifted up on a pole by Moses in the wilderness was a type of Christ coming in the likeness of the flesh of sin. The bronze serpent was not actually a poisonous serpent; on the contrary, it was a serpent in form but not in nature, a serpent of bronze made in the likeness of an actual serpent. For the purpose of substitution (in typology), it was sufficient that it be made in the form and likeness of a serpent. When in John 3:14 the Lord Jesus applied this type to Himself, He was indicating that He would become the fulfillment of this type by being lifted up on the cross and being made sin for us. Christ died for us as the fulfillment of the type of the bronze serpent.

In His incarnation Christ came in the likeness of the flesh of sin, becoming the same as sinful human beings in appearance, without having the sinful nature within Him. As such a One, He died on our behalf to condemn sin in the flesh. While He was on the cross, God dealt with Him, for our sake, as if He was the embodiment of sin. In the sight of God, Christ was in the form of a serpent because He was in the likeness of the flesh of sin. We praise the Lord that He died as our Substitute in the form of a serpent in order to nullify the serpentine nature within us!

Christ’s death on the cross was also the means by which God destroyed the devil. When Christ was lifted up in the form of a serpent and in the likeness of the flesh of sin, Satan was destroyed and cast out. As John 12:31-33 demonstrates, the casting out of the ruler of this world is connected to the death of Christ on the cross. Through incarnation the Lord Jesus put on the likeness of the flesh of sin, and then He brought this flesh to the cross and crucified it. In this way, Satan, who had injected himself as sin into humankind, was destroyed, annulled, brought to nought. Therefore, Hebrews 2:14 testifies that Christ partook of blood and flesh for the purpose of destroying the devil.

This should cause us to have a deeper appreciation of John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that everyone who believes into Him would not perish, but would have eternal life.” *World* here denotes the totality of fallen, sinful human beings who constitute the world as a system and who have been “satanified” to become serpents, the same as the devil, the serpent, in life and in nature. God’s only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus, came in the likeness of the flesh of



God destroyed the devil by Christ’s death on the cross. When Christ was lifted up in the form of a serpent and in the likeness of the flesh of sin, Satan was destroyed and cast out.





In this Gospel
the death
of Christ
is not only
a matter of
redemption but
of the release
of the divine
life for the
dispensing of
this released
divine life into
the believers.



sin and died in the form of the serpent, fulfilling the type of the bronze serpent. For God to so love the world “that He gave His only begotten Son” does not only mean that Christ died for our sins; it also means that God gave His Son in the sense that He sent Him in the likeness of the flesh of sin, made Him sin on our behalf, and gave Him up to die on the cross in the form of the serpent so that God could condemn sin and destroy Satan.

Contrary to the concept of many, if not most, believers, redemption is not an end in itself; rather, redemption is a judicial procedure carried out by God according to His righteousness in order to recover His chosen people to His original intention. This divine intention, the eternal purpose of God, is that we would receive the Triune God in Christ as our life, be filled with Him, and express Him that we might represent Him on earth. Redemption does not circumvent God’s purpose—it brings us back to God for the fulfillment of His purpose. Since the Gospel of John is a book of life centered on eternal life for God’s building, it is not surprising to learn that in this Gospel the death of Christ is not only a matter of redemption but of the release of the divine life for the dispensing of this released divine life into the believers (3:15).

With this in mind, we may turn now to the life-releasing aspect of Christ’s death mentioned in John 12:24: “Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” The divine life, the eternal, uncreated, indestructible life of the Triune God, was concealed and confined within the “shell” of the Lord’s humanity, and for this reason He likened Himself to a grain of wheat falling into the ground and dying to release the life within it and thereby reproduce itself. If He had loved His soul-life and had saved it by not dying on the cross for us (v. 25), there would have been no way for the divine life in His human shell to be released. Thankfully, He hated His “soul-life in this world” (v. 25), and thus, for the fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose, He fell into the ground and died:

The Lord Jesus fell into the ground and died so that His divine element, His divine life, might be released from within the shell of His humanity to produce many believers in resurrection (1 Pet. 1:3), just as a grain of wheat has its life element released by falling into the ground and growing up out of the ground to bear much fruit, that is, to bring forth many grains. The Lord Jesus, as a grain of wheat falling into the ground, lost His soul-life through death so that He might release His divine life in resurrection to the many grains. (Lee, *Conclusion* 780)

In chapter ten we have another reference to the life-releasing aspect of the Lord’s death. “I am the good Shepherd,” He testifies, and “the good Shepherd lays down His life [i.e., soul-life] for the sheep” (v. 11). He came that His sheep “may have life and may have it abundantly” (v. 10), but this life, the eternal life, was confined within the Lord’s humanity, and in order for this life to be released and imparted into the sheep, He had to lay down His soul-life for the sheep (v. 15). He laid down His soul-life so that we, the sheep, may have eternal life:

As a man, the Lord has the psuche life, the human life, and as God, He has the zoe life, the divine life. He laid down His soul, His psuche life, His human life, to accomplish redemption for His sheep (vv. 15, 17-18) that they may share His zoe life, His divine life (v. 10b), the eternal life (v. 28), by which they can be formed into one flock under Himself as the one Shepherd. As the good Shepherd, He feeds His sheep with the divine life in this way and for this purpose. (Recovery Version, John 10:11, note 1)


On the one hand, the Lord died as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. On the other hand, He died as a grain of wheat to release the divine life. Both aspects of His death are combined in Him as the good Shepherd. He died for our redemption, laying down His soul-life for us, and He died also to release the divine life so that, in

His resurrection, it could be imparted to, dispensed into, the sheep. Thus, in John we see the Lamb, the Shepherd, and the flock as the issue of Christ's redeeming and life-imparting death.

We conclude this first part of the article with a consideration of the two aspects of Christ's death as portrayed by the signs in John 19. Verse 34 says, "One of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water." The spiritual significance of this is truly amazing. "Blood is for redemption, to deal with sins (1:29; Heb. 9:22) for the purchasing of the church (Acts 20:28). Water is for imparting life, to deal with death (12:24; 3:14-15) for the producing of the church (Eph. 5:29-30)" (Recovery Version, John 19:34, note 1). On the negative side, the Lord's death took away our sins; on the positive side, His death released the divine life so that we could receive it by believing into Him (3:15-16). That the blood preceded the water signifies that the redemptive aspect of His death is for the life-releasing aspect and that the life-releasing aspect is based upon the redemptive aspect.

Whereas the divine life is signified by the water in 19:34, it is signified by the bone in verse 36. Because the Lord Jesus had already died, the soldiers did not break His legs (v. 33). This was not an accident. "These things happened that the Scripture might be fulfilled: 'No bone of His shall be broken'" (v. 36). Here *bone* signifies the Lord's unbreakable, indestructible resurrection life:

In the Scripture the first mention of a bone is in Gen. 2:21-23; there it was a rib taken out of Adam for the producing and building of Eve as a match for Adam. Eve was a type of the church, which is produced and built with the Lord's resurrection life released out of Him. Hence, the bone is a symbol, a figure, of the Lord's resurrection life, which nothing can break. The Lord's side was pierced, but not one of His bones was broken. This signifies that although the Lord's physical life was terminated, His resurrection life, the very divine life, could not be hurt or damaged by anything. This is the life with which the church is produced and built; it is also the eternal life, which we have obtained by believing into Him (3:36). (Recovery Version, John 19:36, note 2)

As the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus died to take away our sin, and as the grain of wheat, He died to release the divine life. Thus, out of His pierced side flowed blood and water—blood for redemption and water for regeneration. The life that was released through His death is the resurrection life, and as we will see in the second part of this article, this is the life that, in His resurrection and by Himself as the life-giving Spirit, has been dispensed into us to make us the church—the flock of God, the house of God, and the kingdom of God. 

Notes

¹"All of John's writings are concerned with mysteries. His Gospel, his Epistles, and his Revelation are full of mysteries....Christ is mysterious not only in His deity, but also in His divine work. Therefore, the Gospel of John speaks of the mysteries of Christ's person and work" (Lee, *Fulfillment* 12-13).

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